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MELTING INTO THE MARGINS: THE DIS-APPEARANCE OF NORMALITY

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MELTING INTO THE MARGINS: THE DIS-APPEARANCE OF NORMALITY

By

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Melting Into The Margins: The Dis-appearance of Normality

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ABSTRACT

Melting into the Margins intervenes in the academic and media debate about normality: the white nuclear family and white middle class men. This thesis traces the emergence of the contemporary discourse which suggests that the normal is being displaced into the margins, away from the centre, 'disproved' as a lived condition and shown to be 'untrue' as an ideological concept and examines the implications and effects of this discourse. A new discourse of the normal is deemed necessary by the academic disciplines of masculinity and family studies because they argue that we live in a new age of tolerance, equality, meritocracy and plurality. The disciplines of masculinity and family studies that this thesis critiques argue that in this new age and new society the 'old' idea of a white, middle class, gendered, heterosexual normality is becoming unworkable and obsolete. This thesis examines the new discourse itself and its archive (Foucault, 1972), in the form of contemporary representations of white men and the white, middle class, heterosexual nuclear family. Beginning with the idea that white men were traditionally and historically invisible this thesis argues that this was never so and that the centre of our society has always been visible. This thesis offers a critique of the current project from the academy and from the media that proposes to 'make-the-centre-visible' in order to 'prove' that normality does not exist. I argue that this project, which exposes failure, doubt and abnormality beneath the surface appearance of the normal is a project set up by white middle class people for white middle class people. The new project, its discourse and archive attempt to demonstrate that *no-one* has any extra-ordinary power in our society because of race, gender or class. This thesis argues that this demonstration evidenced in the academy and the media takes an extreme anti-essentialist view point that eventually denies that there are *any* limits to choice or opportunity. The denial of an excluding and exclusionary normal predicated on concepts of difference suggests a pure meritocracy, which helps to justify the continuing domination of white men. The aim of *Melting into the Margins* is to offer a critique of the current discourse of normality and an examination of its archive and to offer ways forward that can truly fulfil the stated objectives of masculinity and family studies: the deconstruction of the exclusive, excluding white, middle class centre of British society – the normal.

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At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award.

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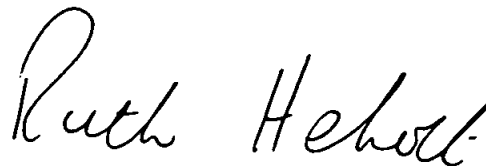
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Signed



Date





Lightly fragranced
FAMILY

Illustration 1

Introduction

The characteristics of the privileged group define the societal norm. [...]

The characteristics and attributes of those who are privileged group members are described as societal norms – as the way things are and as what is normal in society. This normalization of privilege means that members of society are judged, and succeed or fail, measured against the characteristics that are held by those privileged. The privileged characteristic is the norm; those who stand outside are the aberrant or 'alternative'.

Members of the privileged group gain greatly by their affiliation with the dominant side of the power system. This affiliation with power is not identified as such; often it may be transformed into and presented as individual merit. [...]

Achievements by members of the privileged group are viewed as the result of individual effort, rather than privilege (Wildman and Davis, 1997: 316-7).

This thesis intervenes in the current debate about normality: its definition, its status, its positioning, how it is represented and the possibility of its continuance, either as an ideal or as reality. Where the normal in the shape of white, middle class masculinity and the white, heterosexual, middle class family was seen as the ideal, privileged and powerful centre of British society, this thesis argues that currently there is a cultural change; an ideological, rhetorical and discursive removal of normality away from the centre of society and into the margins. The ideological and rhetorical removal both maintains and creates a discourse that denies the possibility of normality's existence in contemporary British society. And this thesis argues that this has been the general discursive movement in British society at least since the mid 1990s. Within the currently fashionable *inclusive* discourse of multicultural, plural, tolerant, meritocratic contemporary British society, normality is usually discussed as not existing 'anymore', often as never having existed in the first place, as being an ideal that it is not possible for anyone to (really) obtain and indeed, as being an undesirable ideal anyway. This thesis traces and examines this discourse in relation to feminism and postcolonialism, arguing that normality still exists as a material position, a regulatory ideal and a myth.¹ It argues for the recognition of a normality that is still associated almost exclusively with white, middle class men and the heterosexual, white

¹ In this case 'myth' is defined in the Barthesian sense whereby both facts and representations which define the normal are given a cultural *inflection* which conflates the concepts of the normal making it appear natural and eternal (Barthes in Storey, 1998: 115-117). Within the terms of this thesis, myth is discussed as being able to both create and sustain reality.

nuclear family and which continues to be an exclusive position that confers privilege and benefit *because* of class, race, sexuality, age and gender.

This thesis examines the archive (Foucault, 1972) of the discourse that is being created by the academic disciplines of masculinity studies and family studies and current media and fictional representations. In these academic disciplines and often in the media, there has been a shift whereby the white middle classes are *the* new objects of speculation, discussion, representation, unease and radical discourse. The new 'radical' discourse indicates a break with the past and advocates a deliberate re-positioning of the concept of the normal: a theoretical, rhetorical and representational removing of the normal from the centre into the margins of society. I argue that there is a new discourse about normality emerging with the white middle classes themselves being its authors through a reconstruction of the archive of the discourses of the normal. In the new discourse that emerges with this archive normality, as an ideal and actual position is being disavowed and denied and a new discourse of inclusivity, multiplicity, fluidity and therefore equality for all is being set up.

In masculinity and family studies and very many media representations the consensus is that throughout the developed Western world, the 'old' idea of the normal is said to be becoming obsolete, unworkable and untenable because of changes in society. Hence there has emerged a deliberate project aimed at dismantling, disproving and disavowing the normal. It is part of the work of this thesis to document and discuss how this is being done; from a discussion of why the normal is said to need displacement (chapter one), to a spectacularization of the normal that scrutinizes it and therefore displaces it (chapter two), to a re-reading and re-writing of the history of the normal and old-style masculinity which posits the normal as 'past' and singular (chapter three), to a discussion of the relentless anti-essentialism of both masculinity and family studies (chapter four). In all the

discussions and representations that this thesis looks at (the archive), 'traditional' positions of normality, white, middle class men and the heterosexual, middle class nuclear family, are deliberately being disassociated from any idea of the normal. This removal is said to benefit those who have been historically marginalized by being positioned as different to the normal as well as those who are said to have had to carry the 'burden' of normality. The dis-appearance of normality is said to be best for everybody.

As we will see throughout this thesis, the main thrust of the current argument is that normality only ever existed as an insidious myth that created and sustained inequality and unfair power differentials. It is the intention of this thesis to examine the changed discourse that currently asserts that a denial and deconstruction of the centre and a destruction of any idea of the normal is the moral and correct way to enable a redistribution of power. In this discourse normality is discussed as no longer existing and those who were seen to be in positions that could be described as being closest to the normal are being shown to be just as disempowered and marginalized as everyone else. This has the effect of symbolically re-positioning the centre of society in the margins and supposedly equalizing British society. Thus through the academy and the media we are told that there is no centre anymore, no longer any discrimination against minority groups, that we all have the same choices and opportunities and that the white middle classes are no (longer) more privileged than anyone else. In this discourse therefore normality no longer exists or exists only as one un(der)privileged position among many in the margins. Thus the benefit and privilege accruing to those in the position of the normal is also being said to no longer exist.

It is my contention throughout this thesis that the current denial of the normal and the project from both the media and the academy that aims to disprove and deconstruct it as a 'reality', far from leading to liberation from the normal, actually serves to hide the fact that

spaces of privilege *do* exist that confer benefit and privilege because of race, class, sexuality, age and gender. The current denial of the spaces/places of the normal leads on to what is becoming a systematic denial that white men might be able to exercise power *because* they are white men (heterosexual, middle class and often the ‘head’ of a nuclear family), and not because of individual merit and talent that has been recognized and rewarded by an equal, just and meritocratic society. And similarly, the constant denial from family studies and many media representations that the normal, white, middle class family *can* ever be normal, denies any privileging of this family form that may arise from a capitalist economy as well as from society’s ideologies, discourses and representations.

This thesis works from Foucault’s suggestion that:

Power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms (Foucault, 1976: 86).

Assuming (as I do) that normality still exists, if the continuing power of the position, reality and myth of normality cannot be seen, it cannot easily be resisted. If therefore, normality still exists as a place of power and privilege and it is in the interest of the ruling class that it continues to exist, then it is most effective for the ruling class itself to deny the existence of the normal and, by implication, suggest that we live in an equal and meritocratic society where normality is being marginalized.

The new discourse that this thesis traces is sophisticated, complicated and very effective. White middle class commentators acknowledge firstly that any ideal or reality of an exclusive and excluding normal is immoral and needs changing. This itself is a new move whereby the white middle classes are involving themselves in the seeming deconstruction of their own privileged position. Secondly both the academy and the media seem to accept the idea that what cannot be seen cannot be resisted. Therefore the new move from both the academy and the media is explicitly to make the centre visible. This it is said will

displace, deconstruct and ultimately destroy the exclusive white, middle class normal. The culmination of the new discourse is a varied and concerted effort designed to expose normality and bring it to light. The idea being that visibility in and of itself will destroy the normal and is in the process of doing so already. The visibility of the white middle classes pursued by the media and the academy looks 'beneath the veneer' of normality in order to expose the failure, doubt, disempowerment, bewilderment and often downright abnormality underneath. What is supposedly exposed by this project is the non-existence of normality in 'actual fact'. Thus we have a double denial of the normal whereby it is said that what 'looks' like the normal isn't (reality), and at the same time it is said that this exposure itself destroys the myth of normality.²

This introduction sets out the main areas of concern within this thesis, including an explanation of the intervention the thesis makes into the academic debate about the centre of British society as evidenced within contemporary masculinity and family studies as well as in current media representations of the normal. I begin with a discussion of the definition of the normal and my strategy of using the words normal and normality. I then move onto a discussion of the evidence given by masculinity studies, family studies and postcolonial studies of the origins of our ideas about the normal and how it is defined against that which is placed as 'different' to it; for example the feminine and colonized people of colour. This leads to an examination of the rise of both masculinity and family studies as new disciplines arising primarily out of traditional sociology in the form of masculinism and studies of the family. I will look at how masculinity studies and family studies, in opposition to this traditional sociology claim parentage from both feminism and postcolonialism. From this I set out my methodology of examining the archive (Foucault, 1972) of the normal and the re-application of feminism and postcolonialism to the

² In the new discourse there is often a conceptual split between the ideas of reality and myth whereby myth is perceived to be 'untrue'. Within this split a separate and perceivable reality or 'truth' is suggested to be beneath the myth ignoring the material and ideological effects of any cultural myth, whilst simultaneously ignoring the "status of truth" (Foucault, 1984: 74). The ideological creation of 'truth' will be discussed later in this introduction.

discourse of the normal. Following on from this the next section of the introduction “Interventions from Cultural Studies” sets out the position this thesis takes within the academic discussion of the normal, showing how it intervenes in these debates. Taking two cultural theorists of the normal, Deborah Chambers from the discipline of family studies and Sally Robinson from the discipline of masculinity studies, I discuss how my work moves on from their discussions, arguing that the visibility of the centre that they cite as a threat is in fact a strategy from the centre which will serve to maintain the status quo. This leads to a discussion of the use of taking a cultural studies approach to examine the discourse of the normal and in particular the importance of media representations in the maintenance and creation of this discourse, reviewing my choice of primary texts used within this thesis. Discussing how enunciations and the discourse that they exist within create truth, this introduction ends by examining Mahmood Mamdani’s definitions of ‘beneficiaries and victims’ (Mamdani, 1997). This introduction lays out the main areas of concern for this thesis, traces where these concerns originate from and points to the way that I move the debate forwards.

Definitions and uses of the word Normal

This thesis entire is about normality; a concept of the normal is at the centre of it. In general parlance there are different types of normality which include: medical normality whereby the state of health is ascertained via an idea of a norm or standard of ‘good’ health, both physical and mental; a normal that is ascertained by a statistical average; a concept of everyday normality for individuals; and the type of normality this thesis is most concerned with, a biologically visible position (whiteness and usually maleness), heterosexuality, a position of economic stability and the possession of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2001), power and knowledge. Throughout this thesis I use the word ‘normal’ in this final way to depict what in this definition it is culturally, historically and ideologically *meant* to mean, an idea of an ‘ordinary’, ‘proper’ or ‘best’ way of being or

living that is universalized. At its most basic this definition defines the normal through race, sexuality, age, class and gender. These characteristics; whiteness, heterosexuality, middle age, middle class, maleness, historically defined as the normal, help to secure a politically, socially or culturally central position and lifestyle within a society that in and of itself, because of how it is structured, both conferred and still confers privilege, benefit and power to the group of individuals who possess these characteristics.

Within the academy the word normal is not usually used and there is a decided preference for the terms 'normative' or 'normalization'. And where the 'normative' and 'normalization' indicate a process of becoming or moving towards the normal, the 'normal' is an already-there *outcome*. The use of the words 'normative' or 'normalization' point more to an activity (an averaging out, a homogenizing impulse, a moralizing pull) rather than to a conceptual *thing* or a solid and static position. The concepts of normalization and the normative are more abstract and can apply to anyone, the normal is more concrete and can only apply to certain (white, middle class) people. From the discipline of masculinity studies Bob Connell says that "normative definitions" allow for some recognition of the differences between men, offer a standard of masculinity but "allow that different men approach these standards to different degrees" (Whitehead and Barrett, 2000: 32). Within the terms of the normative therefore, some movement and interpretation is possible. Where Connell cites 'normative definitions', the normal would only have one definition. The normative thus also more readily refers to a plural than the singularity of the normal. The term normative is far more fluid than the more historically and politically relational concept, structure and position of the normal.

In my use of the word normal I do not take it to mean a majority, usual or average position although these definitions of the word will become important as we proceed. Within the argument of this thesis I take the word as describing a position that only a specific minority

can reach. However, although this thesis denies the possibility, the new discourse I am examining points to a process of *normalization* whereby everyone is in the same boat really, and anyone with the right attitude, despite differences in class, race or gender has the opportunity to choose their own position and lifestyle (meritocracy). And, even as the more static normal is being denied as an exclusive and exclusionary position, I will argue that the normal continues to be *normalized* (and therefore recreated) through its denial as an exclusive position and its repositioning as marginal. In our society the concept of ‘normalization’ indicates a process towards a position that can (and should) be made into an average or majority position, one that aims to become ubiquitous. The ideal of a meritocracy involves a denial of the position of the normal as exclusionary and actually widens it out as a concept, making it inclusive and thus supposedly turning it into a position that anyone can achieve. Paradoxically the widening of the normal (supposedly turning it into a position that anyone can achieve), is being accomplished implicitly through a process that sets out to *abnormalize* the normal. In this process (aided and abetted by media and academic discussions and representations) the normal is being strategically marginalized – shown again and again to be just one more position among many in the margins and therefore a position that anyone can choose to occupy. Thus even as the exclusionary normal is being denied, the concept is being constantly recreated as an inclusive concept that still carries the same ideologies and moralizing pulls that it always did.

The academic reluctance to use the word is perfectly understandable as it *is* embarrassing to still have a white, heterosexual, middle class, male and familial normal still in place. However in this thesis the use of the word normality is a deliberate strategy which aims to show that normality *is* (still) a concept with psychic and material consequences and implications, and to highlight the fact that it is a common currency colloquialism. It is even more important to use the words normal and normality because currently they *are*

politically uncomfortable to use. In fact this thesis argues that it is this very political discomfort that is driving the current denial of the continuing existence of normality. Therefore my use of the words normal and normality is an integral part of my argument that positions and concepts of normality and the normal still exist and the use of these words is part of this thesis' strategy of intervention in and disruption of the 'comfortable' contemporary discourse arising from the academy and the media. Although I recognize that the words normal and normality are awkward to use and even embarrassing, sidestepping the use of words that are still used will not eradicate the concept of the normal or its political, social and personal effects.

The new inclusive discourse that marginalizes the normal promises the same opportunities for all, and in doing so de-historicizes the concept of the normal. Thus we have a peculiar move whereby the new discourse denies normality's existence even as it invites everyone 'in'. So for example the first sentence in an important and influential family studies book reads: "Our focus in this book is the changing nature of intimate and familial relationships in the context of *shifting* normative frameworks" (Silva and Smart, 1999: 1, my italic). A 'shifting normative framework' in denying a static and exclusionary normal does not actually let other people into the normal but rather points to changes in the boundaries and the removal of certain goal posts. Thus the normal seemingly becomes permeable and, one would suppose, therefore dissolves. This however involves a denial that the positions of whiteness, a concept of 'the' family, middle classness and maleness do still and have historically, formulated the normal. That which has been defined as the normal has always been specific, discrete and a minority position with closed, impermeable boundaries. Even as the white middle class normal defined itself as a universalized 'average', it was an exclusionary 'average' that placed the majority of people as different and abnormal. Historically and therefore definitionally it is *not* possible for everyone to be normal:

normality and the normal are classed, racialized, sexualized and gendered concepts that inherently set up inequalities.

The Historical Emergence of the Normal

The discursive formation of white masculinity and the normal family is usually sourced as beginning to be apparent in colonial times, and in the nineteenth century in particular (see for example Tosh, 1999, Davidoff and Hall, 1987, Whitehead, 2002, Beynon, 2002, Weeks, 1981, Sinha, 1995). In the discussion of the historic construction of the normal, its creation in relation to an idea of abnormality is inevitable. In relation to the normal it is the perceived 'differences' of races, classes and genders that allow the normal to be defined as white, male, middle class and Western. Our current ideas of the normal are cited as beginning with the industrial revolution. The industrial revolution necessitated a division of home and work and from this precipitated a gender division that is still recognized today (Tosh, 1999). Division of another kind was necessitated by the colonial adventure whereby a definition of 'civilized' culture and people (white, western) was created in opposition to 'savage' and inferiorized native cultures and people (Hall, 1997a) and 'manly' men were defined in opposition to women as well as often in relation to the 'effeminate' men of other cultures (Sinha, 1995). Because of the division of home and work, and because the colonial administrations needed men to be away from their families, questions of monogamy and paternity became pressing and many of our myths of perfect, or at least proper, family life are premised on these fears as well as more positive ideals of refuge and sanctuary and peace (Tosh, 1999, Weeks 1981). These divisions of home, work, gender, race and many others including class and relative status and ideas of proper 'civilization' all congealed into a (white, middle class and British) definition of the normal in opposition to what was seen as improper, abnormal or uncivilized.

The gendered division of labour; home and work, equates to a division between the public and the private. Chambers argues that

By the mid-nineteenth century in Britain, the concept of the family was perceived as nuclear, patriarchal and hierarchical, and its members were defined by their primary relationship to the conjugal couple [...]. Discrete family units headed by a male breadwinner, became the hallmark of both civilized society and stability (Chambers, 2001: 37).

The image and trope of the nuclear family, with its male head became embedded into culture in colonial times and became one of the most abiding images of 'civilization'.

Colonial tropes of both the family and masculinity rested on all kinds of definitions of difference and various constructed hierarchies in all of which normal, white masculinity sits at the top. Chambers argues that the nineteenth century idea of the family itself at the time upheld the idea of white male dominance:

The family came to be a metaphor for the naturalizing of hierarchy, of race, gender, generation, nation. [...] Women were only treated as members of the nation-state as dependants of men and the family in private and public law, not directly as citizens. By drawing on familial metaphors, the naturally superior 'adult' races were perceived by the white British to be domesticating, by example, the 'children' of 'primitive' races. The hierarchically gendered middle-class family was therefore centrally a symbol of white imperial nationalism, providing a sexual, gendered and racial justification for the white male control over colonial space (Chambers, 2001: 39).

The 'family' as a regulatory myth or ideal of the normal (white, middle class, British) served to justify colonial domination, the domination over others by white men and the universalizing of the idea of the white normal as the proper and moral standard.

The split between the domestic and the public domains was also consolidated at this time partly through a very strong concept of biological determinism that occurred in the nineteenth century. Biology, through ideas of biological determinism, (social) Darwinism and eugenics not only separated the 'uncivilized' races (the non-white) and the 'civilized' races (white), but also separated the masculine from the feminine domestic (Weeks, 1981). Thus the idealized image of the normal, which placed the white man at the head of his nuclear family also, in a peculiar twist, removed him from that very domestic. Masculinity

in colonial times was associated with a certain type of masculine culture that was set both beside and against an idea of femininity. John Tosh argues that in fact the acquisition of 'proper' manhood require a renunciation of the domestic, at least for a time:

Becoming a man involved detaching oneself from the home and its feminine comforts. It required a level of material success in the wider world which was so often represented in threatening and alienating terms. And it depended on the recognition of manhood by one's peers in an atmosphere which had as much to do with competition as camaraderie (Tosh, 1999: 110).

This instilling of a rigid conception of 'manliness' usually started at public school which encouraged both an atmosphere of homosociality and competition (Tosh, 1999: 177).

Ideas of normal or proper 'manliness', empire, competition, a delay of the domestic and homosociality were often consolidated in the arena of sport, which itself took boys away from the feminizing world of women (Weeks, 1981).

Tosh argues that the values of British public schools were actually at odds with the domestic:

The job of these schools was to instill manly self-reliance in boys who had been raised in comfortable conditions of domesticity [...]. The level of anxiety felt by Victorian fathers and schoolmasters on this score meant that the balance was often tilted strongly in the direction of homosociality at the expense of domestic graces or home tastes. [The] emphasis now was placed on stoical endurance, group loyalty and team sports. [...] The late Victorian upper middle class was significantly overpopulated with men who were permanently disqualified from family life. The characteristic stance of mid-Victorian fathers towards domesticity had been an appreciation of its material comforts and moral uplift, combined with the fear that it would emasculate their sons (Tosh, 1999: 177).

And although Tosh argues that "marriage was still seen to be an essential stage in the attainment of full manhood" (ibid), it was to be delayed and was often rejected altogether. The difficulty was that in order to attain an idealized form of masculinity, the feminine had to be rejected. Too close an attachment to home could itself lead to effeminacy and weakness (Davidoff and Hall, 1987: 113). Beynon argues that narratives of empire written for boys "emphasized sports, sportsmanship, team spirit and a strong manliness determined against the 'fragile' feminine" (Beynon, 2002: 32). The idea of 'manliness' for both

middle class and working class boys and men³ was innately at odds with any idea of the feminine which brought with it disturbing connotations of both effeminacy and therefore homosexuality, which was also a danger and has an underlying strain in any homosocial culture. Beynon as well as Tosh argues that sports were used to combat this double threat:

The division of labour occasioned by the Industrial Revolution (that is, men into the factories, most women consigned to the home) and the resulting patriarchy (based on men's economic superiority), the idea that men were innately practical, rational and competitive, unlike women was 'naturalized'. Also, in both Britain and the United States in the latter half of the nineteenth century [...] there was a determined effort to **re-masculinize** men through sports and outdoor activities (Beynon, 2002: 18).

That men 'needed' to be 're-masculinized' was the fault of the 'soft' domestic. Hardness, practicality, rationality and competition were set against the threat of the feminine. These were the properties that white, colonial men were supposed to 'naturally' possess and which thus 'naturally' placed these men at odds with not only the feminine and domestic at home, but also the feminized colonized subject.

Normalized masculinity constructed itself as naturally practical, rational and expressed itself through physical culture, or sport. Beynon (2002) as well as Easthope (1986) and Burstyn (1999) amongst others posit colonialism, nationalism, patriotism, sport and masculinity as almost indivisible. In a peculiar blurring of realities, myths, concepts and constructions, the biology of maleness, a conception of normality, a fierce nationalism and an idea of the moral properties of masculinity converged into a construction of a 'correct' and, at the same time, 'natural' masculine culture. Beynon says that a concept of normal masculinity has been historically constructed through narratives of "action, adventure, competition and aggression" (Beynon, 2002: 17). These are (white) colonial virtues and, Beynon argues, rest on an ideal of 'hard masculinity' that involves discipline and self-sacrifice, and the 'manly' virtues of "grit, self-reliance, determination, leadership and

³ The idea of 'manliness', although predominantly a middle class ideal was also educated into working class boys and men as a means of social control (Beynon, 2002: 40). And although the expression of working class masculinity has historically been somewhat different to that of the middle classes, it is often cited as involving more extreme expressions of manliness in order to compensate for a lack of economic or familial power (Segal, 1990/97: 94-5, Beynon, 2002, Easthope, 1986).

initiative” (Beynon, 2002: 28). And, because they are colonial virtues, this construction of ‘proper’ masculinity rests on the difference of women and people of colour to the normal.⁴

In relation to the colonies, these white virtues were to be educated into, and imposed upon the colonial subject and by this (sometimes violent) imposition were to be hardened and consolidated into a rigid conception of normal (white) masculinity associated with very specific moralities and properties. C L R James documents a childhood in the West Indies educated via the white, English public school code which not only espoused but morally imposed the ideals of “playing with the team”, “keeping a stiff upper lip” and “playing with a straight bat” at least on the cricket pitch where these codes were imbibed most fully (James, 1963: 25). James talks about these colonial codes being naturalized and therefore unquestioned because “*everything* began from the basis that Britain was the source of all light and leading, and our business was to admire, wonder, imitate, learn; our criterion of success was to have succeeded in approaching that distant ideal” (James, 1963: 30).

‘Success’ in both Britain and the colonies depended on the playing out of the normal codes of masculinity; “the British reticence, the British self-discipline, the stiff upper-lips, upper and lower” (James, 1963: 42). And all these were (and often still are) encoded within masculine sports. All these codes encapsulated the ideal of ‘manliness’ apparent in the Victorian and Edwardian eras. As Whitehead suggests: “by the end of the nineteenth century an idealized version of masculinity – encompassing physicality, virility, morality and civility – had emerged to some prominence” (Whitehead, 2002: 14). It was these codes, morals and ideals that were employed to limit and control both colonizer and colonial subject.

⁴ Mrinalini Sinha discusses an interesting aspect of this type of ‘manliness’ and what it is necessarily posited against in her discussion of not only the ‘manly Englishman’ in relation to colonized Indians, but also a concept of the ‘manly’ Anglo Indian posited against the ‘effeminate Bengali’. In her discussion too, sport and physicality is an arena of difference (Sinha, 1995).

Varda Burstyn equates nineteenth century sport, education, recreation and military training together with very specific (white, Western) ideals of masculinity (Burstyn, 1999: 47). For Burstyn the realms of nationalism, war and sport are always psychically mixed. Not only this, but she cites the rise of corporate capitalism as being the base of all these ideas in the nineteenth century. She says that all nineteenth century sports had something in common with each other and that this extends to today:

That commonality lay in their definition of who was permitted to 'play the game' (men), what the participants were expected to do (aggress), and what such participation signified and conferred (power and privilege). [...]

The major team and individual sports of today emerged practically, economically and mythically as the rites of men, marking out symbolically and literally the attributes and activities of an exclusively male terrain (Burstyn, 1999: 49-50).

Sport is a (mostly) male arena and the codes, practices and moralities of male sport help to define normal and naturalized masculinity at least partly through gender and often racial differentiations. Burstyn says that "sport served to regroup men as men, to reassert their gender privilege, to reclaim and extend their entitlement to leisure and public space, to celebrate aggressive physicality, and to symbolically place themselves, both in their experience and that of women, at the heart of community myths of prowess, valour and heroism (Burstyn, 1999: 60-1). In this mythological construction of masculinity, men are *seen* as men, as separate (better) and different to women. Through sport men are placing themselves in the symbolic centre of society: the normal.

Sport however is not the only realm that is discussed as constructing and expressing normal, white masculinity. With the rise of corporate, and later consumer capitalism other ideals and expressions of normal masculinity have been hardened, naturalized and come to identify normal masculinity. And although there is a differentiation made between working class and middle class expressions of masculinity, the main forms of expression of normal masculinity itself are said to congregate around concepts of being practical and 'handy', the valorization of 'hard' labour, banter, jokes, buddy-dom, horseplay, swearing, sex, alcohol and of course sport and many forms of physical culture as well as the wider

and more institutionalized concepts of rationality, sanity, law and civilization (Beynon, 2002, Easthope, 1986). Together these properties, priorities and ideals are said to form themselves into a conception of 'old' masculinity – an idea of normal masculinity that is now said to belong to the past, but also one which is both associated with and described as, a *unity*. The concept of normal masculinity passes itself off as unified, complete, certain and universal.

Re-Reading Masculinity Studies and Family Studies Through Postcolonialism and Feminism

In documenting and discussing the normal, the archive of the normal and the discursive formation that allows the creation of this archive, two of the main areas of concern for this thesis are the academic disciplines of masculinity studies and family studies because of their preoccupations with white masculinity and the white, middle class nuclear family. Both disciplines indicate a 'break' with older definitions of normality and forms of masculinity studies (masculinism) and family studies (traditional studies of the family). Both disciplines arise with and from the theories from the margins of feminism and postcolonialism and both are heavily invested in postmodern deconstructions of a singular definition of masculinity and any idea of *the* family. This thesis argues that there is, within the archive, a discourse has not been properly examined yet: the discourse of *marginalization* for white men and the nuclear family. It is the enunciations and the archive of the new discourse of the normal that this thesis sets out to explain, exploring the possibilities of enunciation, the creation of the archive and the theoretical, political, social and material implications of the new discourse of the normal. This thesis examines the current *collection* of these enunciations and thus takes as its subject the *archive* of the normal.

We will begin with masculinity studies, which is ideologically, politically morally and theoretically removed from the premises of masculinism. In masculinism the 'old' type of masculinity documented above is normalized, universalized, naturalized and equated with 'masculine nature'. Arthur Brittan argues that this view of masculinity is still circulating in the cultural debates of masculinism:

Masculinism is the ideology that justifies and naturalizes male domination. As such, it is the ideology of patriarchy. Masculinism takes it for granted that there is a fundamental difference between men and women, it assumes that heterosexuality is normal, it accepts without question the sexual division of labour and it sanctions the political and dominant role of men in the public and private spheres. Moreover, the masculine ideology is not subject to the vagaries of fashion – it tends to be relatively resistant to change. In general, masculinism gives primacy to the belief that gender is not negotiable – it does not accept evidence from feminist and other sources that the relationships between men and women are political and constructed nor, for that matter, does it allow for the possibility that lesbianism and homosexuality are not forms of deviance or abnormality (Brittan, 2001: 53-4).

Masculinism thus takes on fully the 'old' view of naturalized gender relations. Masculinity and heterosexuality are seen as natural and normal, the division of the private and public spaces is endorsed, and men are seen to be the natural dominators of both. Feminism is rejected as are its theories of social construction of gender roles, and any form of homosexuality is seen as abnormal. This 'old' ideology of masculinism has been called variously: 'the men's movement' (Whitehead, 2002) and also 'men's studies' (Collinson and Hearn in Whitehead and Barrett, 2001). This 'old' ideology is not however so 'old' after all and it has been incorporated into the late 1980s and early 1990s 'mythopoetic movement' of Robert Bly (Whitehead, 2002). Masculinism upholds a rigid idea of normal masculinity.

As a relatively new discipline, and as instrumental in the current removal of normality into the margins, masculinity studies has a vested interest in discussing masculinism, and in describing and defining the normal it naturalizes, in order to indicate the 'break' with this 'old' view. In the analysis of the origins of the normal, masculinity studies takes the same

starting point and the same *evidence* as postcolonial studies.⁵ Postcolonial studies examines oppression and the positioning and ‘creation’ of the oppressed by the dominant white colonists. It looks at the *experience* of people under colonial rule (Quayson, 2000), at the twin points of power whereby people were subjugated: power and knowledge – especially the imperial ‘knowledge’ of other peoples (Ashcroft et al: 1995: 1) and the historical impact that this has had on oppressed and marginalized people. Taking colonization as an “historical fact” (Ashcroft et al: 1995: 2) postcolonialism looks at the process that ‘othered’ and ‘abnormalized’ colonized people in relation to a dominant white ideal of the normal: a process that positioned them as ‘different’ (Hall, 1997a: 259).

In contrast, masculinity studies looks at the creation of ‘Imperial Man’ (Beynon, 2002: 26) and offers knowledge about the creation of this dominant and idealized persona. These are two different, although interrelated emphases. Put simply, postcolonialism looks at the processes that oppressed people and at their experiences of that oppression. Masculinity studies looks at the processes that made white men dominant and at the experience of that position of dominance. Because of this two different projects are formulated, but projects that link at various points. Masculinity studies takes as its *raison d’être* the destruction of the idea of a privileged, normal masculinity. As Stephen Whitehead and Frank Barrett put it in the introduction to one of the definitive masculinity studies texts, *The Masculinities Reader*: “what we are fighting against is a culture that privileges men and masculinity” (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 13). Masculinity is examined as a ‘myth’, (and a destructive one at that), that needs to be de-mystified, de-essentialized, proved to be a social construction and dismantled.⁶ Thus where masculinity studies seems to involve a process of coming-into-non-being (the destruction of the white, privileged masculine normal), Quayson cites postcolonialism as: “a process of coming-into-being and of

⁵ This point and its implications will be examined in more detail in chapter two.

⁶ In this context ‘myth’ is seen as an untruth rather than a continuing and deep-seated social construction that carries truth-effects.

struggle *against* colonialism and its after-effects” (Quayson, 2000: 9). And where masculinity and family studies set out to ‘disprove’ the normal as a method of its deconstruction, postcolonialism cannot, in the same way ‘disprove’ oppression. Thus where masculinity studies advocates the deconstruction of what is largely its own position (white and middle class), postcolonialism is involved in a process of *reconstruction*; of subjectivity, position, history and agency (Hall, 1997b, see also chapter three of this thesis). The deconstruction of the ‘myth’ of the normal inevitably (as we shall see throughout this thesis) involves a deconstruction of white-men-as-a-group. The postcolonial reconstruction project however involves forging links *and* acknowledging differences between seemingly disparate groups of people, their histories and experiences.⁷ What this thesis asks is if such a deconstruction of the normal will really help erase inequality; to “correct imbalances in the world” (Quayson, 2000: 11), or if it is a postmodern sidestepping of the issues that will individualize social inequalities and thus only serve to hide them.

Masculinity studies therefore *begins* with concerns shared by postcolonial studies. However, it is feminism that is discussed as the explicit origin of the discipline of what is termed “pro-feminist masculinity studies” (Whitehead, 2002, Whitehead and Barrett, 2001, Pease, 2000, Peterson, 1998 etc). All the masculinity studies texts that I consider fall into the category of ‘profeminist’ masculinity studies. The introduction to *The Masculinities Reader* emphasizes its affiliation with feminism: “[t]he point to stress, then, is that writings in this volume originate from both women (feminists) and men (pro-feminists) and, as such, declare their feminist parentage and affiliation quite openly” (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001:4). Masculinity studies *comes from* feminism. Jardine and Smith, (1987), Chapman and Rutherford (1988), Berger et al (1995), Peterson (1998), Whitehead (2002) and many others who practice masculinity studies make the same point. Masculinity studies therefore

⁷ Questions of anti-essentialism and strategic essentialism will be examined in chapter four as well as in the conclusion.

borrowing its concerns, the evidence it uses and some of its methodologies from feminism and from postcolonialism.

Both postcolonialism and feminism are theories of and from the margins. They theorize the positioning of the groups of people they are concerned with and document the placing of marginal people *as* marginal, as 'different' and as 'abnormal'. There is a strong sense of historicism and an acknowledgement that things change slowly, if at all. In contrast, the discipline of masculinity studies is said to have moved very quickly through various phases, indeed, Whitehead and Barrett cite "third wave masculinity studies" (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 17). Beginning in the 1970's with the 'men's movement' that (sometimes) complemented the 'women's movement', masculinity studies as such began to consolidate itself into an academic discipline in the early 1980's (Whitehead and Barrett: 2001). Beginning as a response to feminism the area of masculinity studies quickly moved into the consideration of "men in feminism" (Jardine and Smith, 1987), and "the question of male feminist criticism" (Boone and Cadden, 1990), whereby, although running at the same time as masculinism, in direct contradiction to it these texts examined if there could be a place for men *within* feminist theory and critique. This discussion moved on and away from the idea of men in feminism and, taking the methodologies of feminism, masculinity studies became a discrete discipline in its own right with its own set of basic theoretical presumptions. Academic texts such as *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity* (Chapman and Rutherford, 1988), and Anthony Easthope's *What a Man's Gotta Do* (Easthope, 1986) began to look exclusively at masculinity and questions around fatherhood and the place (or not) of men in the family.

A similar movement has happened in relation to family studies which is the second academic discipline that this thesis critiques. The family studies equivalent of masculinism is traditional sociological *studies of the family*. These studies assumed (and sometimes still

assume) a singular type of white, heterosexual, nuclear normal family. Although colonial times are discussed as bringing into being our current ideal of the family (Tosh, 1999), traditional sociology tends to revert back to a 1950s ideal image of a small, closed unit that is relatively autonomous and isolated with the husband/father being the main breadwinner and through this the 'old' sociological definition of the normal family is evoked.⁸ The usual suspect cited as having the biggest impact sociologically on the creation and definition of the normal family is Talcott Parsons whose main work covers the period from the 1940s to the 1970s. David Cheal says that "Parsons argued that the cultural standard for American family life was that of the urban middle-class family. It defined for practical purposes the 'normal American family'" (Allan, 1999: 58). And although writing about America it is this model of normality that has also been taken up in Britain. Cheal continues:

In its narrowest form, standard sociological theory conceives of the 'normal family', or 'conventional family', as consisting of the nuclear roles of husband and wife, and their children. In the work of Parsons (1943, 1971) the norms regulating interactions between family roles require the following:

- 1 Marriage between adult partners (more specifically monogamy).
- 2 Superiority of the conjugal bond over other social commitments.
- 3 Fulfilment of the marriage bond through the raising of legitimate children.
- 4 Co-residence.
- 5 The employment of one or more adult members outside the home.

The unrestricted sharing of incomes between adult members

(Allan, 1999: 59)

In this way it is argued that the normal family could be 'classified'; measured and defined using empirical and statistical methodologies borrowed from science. Traditional sociology such as Parsons' follow the positivist approach which argues that there can be "a science of society" (Haralambos et al, 1995:16) which employs scientific methodologies. However this model of normality is not just a definition, it represents certain moral values and expectations; it is gendered, classed and raced. And as well as being a mythologized regulatory ideal and imperative, this model of normality was taken as the standard or the average. Thus two forms of normality are conflated whereby the ideal is seen as the

⁸ The abiding images of 1950s normality will be discussed fully in chapter three.

average, the usual, and therefore is used to measure difference from this model. Deborah

Chambers names:

The persistent privileging of white ethnicity and the regulation of heterosexuality and patriarchy through family values [and] the processes through which both whiteness and heterosexuality are naturalized and normalized by appropriating the nuclear family as a regulatory ideal that inferiorises and discredits alternative experiences, structures and meanings (Chambers, 2001: 3).

Chambers argues that this version of the normal is said to be biologically natural and therefore universal (Chambers, 2001: 2). This error is compounded by traditional sociology accepting this model as the normal and itself taking it as being natural and as the basis for studies of the family, studies that are still being conducted today.⁹

Family studies critiques the traditional model of the normal family. Taking the studies of the family that are to be found in traditional sociology, family studies as a newer sociological discipline indicates a break with 'old' sociology. The studies of the family that 'old-style' sociology made are critiqued because they accept and even advocate *the* singular family which is white, heterosexual, middle class and nuclear and which normalize this family in relation to other pathologized, abnormalized and demonized forms of family – extended, ethnic, working class, single parent etc (Silva and Smart, 1999, Jagger and Wright, 1999, Smart and Neale, 1999). Deborah Chambers charts the concerns and assumptions made by traditional sociological studies of the family, arguing that:

Academic research and debates in the social sciences in the United States and Britain continue to prioritise the nuclearised family form as an object of study (Van Every, 1999), and to take the Anglo-white nuclear family as the norm against which to measure 'other' family forms. [...] Sociological theories of the family typically invent 'the family' as a relatively bounded unit that exchanges with other equally relatively bounded units in society. Many accounts of the family consist of checklists and categories of information collected to be tabulated and quantified for scientific analysis of 'the family' as an economic unit, residential household type, kinship network, and so on, and then presented as the manifestation of identified trends and generalities (Morgan, 1999: 14). An example of this is the methodological approach and summaries of the influential British government

⁹ One such report that is compiled annually is *British Social Attitudes* that interviews 3,500 people each year to find out their opinions on matters such as gender divides and roles, the family, marriage, religion, sex and national identity (see for example the 17th annual report, Sage publications, 2000/2001).

statistical journal *Social Trends*. While theoretical accounts are increasingly representing the family in terms of 'change', 'decline', or 'de-institutionalisation', it continues to be treated as a unit, as a coherent whole that somehow *ought to be* static and unchanging." (Chambers, 2001: 10).

Traditional sociology is thus a part of the creation of the idea of the normal family, a family form that places others as different and measures them against this 'normal'. In these studies of the family, it is seen that *the* family can be quantified; identified, measured and recognized by everyone.

Family studies as a subject began as a (rather small) strand of mainstream sociology and has its origins in these studies of the family. The reason given for the emergence of family studies as opposed to traditional studies of the family and its consolidation into an important and discrete discipline and specialism is the rise of feminism which removed family studies from just being a small subsidiary part of sociology to having importance in its own right as women began to examine and critique their own positions in the home and in the world. To begin with, family studies remained within feminism, then itself became sidelined by feminism in the 1980's, only to be revitalized as a subject in its own right when the 'big boys' such as Anthony Giddens stepped in (Smart and Neale, 1999).

According to Carol Smart and Bren Neale family studies did not emerge as a discipline in its own right until the mid 1990's and really took off at the end of this decade. Family studies, as opposed to traditional studies of the family, is a very new discipline indeed.

Family studies on the whole takes as its starting point the popular conception of the nuclear, white, middle class, gendered family as having represented the British ideal but now as being in decline or crisis. The concept of the 'normal' family is invoked just to be challenged and in order to reinstate and revalue alternative forms of the family and what family studies calls 'families of choice' (Morgan, 1996). The ideal of the white nuclear family is de-mystified and debunked as a myth, and as a damaging, oppressive and 'untrue' myth (Chambers, 2001). Current examples of family studies attempt to pluralize, multiply

and fragment notions of the family in order to get away from the one ideal of the white nuclear family. David Morgan writes that the newer approach to looking at family 'practices' (as opposed to studying *the family*) seeks "to overcome the gap between some of the more formal or statistical analyses of family life and everyday experiences and understandings" (Morgan, 1996: 15). Morgan traces the changes in emphasis and politics in 'family sociology' as it moves into a postmodern era and therefore into 'family studies'.¹⁰ He describes these changes as a blurring of boundaries and an overlapping of different aspects of sociology (labour, poverty, leisure etc) with an active interaction between sociology and other disciplines such as feminism, cultural studies and postmodernism (Morgan, 1996: 12-13). In this way, 'family studies' can be described as traditional studies of 'the' family meets cultural studies, feminism, postcolonialism, and perhaps most importantly, postmodernism. As Jo Van Every says, "for better or worse, the post-modern family revolution is here to stay" (Jagger and Wright, 1999: 165).

Coming from a different place (the central) to feminism or postcolonialism, masculinity studies and family studies theorists set themselves the relatively easy task of arguing against traditional sociology. Traditional sociology assumes a 'normal' be it statistical (although of course statistics themselves and the questions they ask are not static), political, experiential or moral. Masculinity studies and family studies critique traditional sociology but this sociology still provides a clear platform for them to work from. However, both feminism and postcolonialism were born from contradictions, conflicting desires and tempting and or inevitable complicities and conflation with the white, male mainstream. The difference of theorizing from the margin to theorizing from the centre is, too often not acknowledged or dealt with.

¹⁰ 'Family studies' as a phrase has not been universally adopted by practitioners that could be described as working within the field. The term the 'sociology of the family' is still sometimes used, but often as in the case of Graham Allan and his book *The Sociology of the Family*, the work that is being done falls into the new style, questioning sociology.

Masculinity studies says that it has the same aim as feminism and postcolonialism in that it has the general aim of dismantling patriarchy and its attendant gender and race inequalities. As the concerns of masculinity studies and family studies originate from feminism and postcolonialism, these 'studies' of the centre explicitly originate from and claim to use or improve on the theories, methodologies, critiques and ideas of the margins. Because of this it is these marginal theories (feminist and postcolonial), their methodologies and critiques that I apply directly to my own examination of these 'new' studies¹¹ and the subject of normality itself. I will examine the ways in which masculinity studies and family studies are implicated in the creation of the new discourse of normality and I employ feminism and postcolonialism from source as theoretical tools to deconstruct and examine this discourse and the claims of the 'new' studies. Relatively frequently the feminist or postcolonial theory or discussion that I use is quite old with perhaps the oldest being Fanon's writing from 1952. In places throughout the thesis this is a deliberate strategy designed to demonstrate that too often masculinity and family studies have failed to listen to the theory they claim to be using or to the people they claim to be 'liberating'. In citing Fanon or hooks, for example, there is no sense that these people speak for 'all' black people or 'all' women, but their voices and others are included to show intervention and disruption to dominant (white or male) assumptions and to show that such disruptions have been around, often unaccounted for in dominant theory, for decades. This thesis argues that in ignoring these voices and interventions masculinity studies and family studies use marginal theory selectively and in ways that serve to maintain the current white, patriarchal hegemony. Too often the easy route is taken by these studies, particularly in relation to postmodernism where, unless one is extremely careful, people can be silenced and theory can become glib (Waugh, 1997: 208). Postcolonial and feminist theorists have struggled and continue to do so both with their own theories and in an effort to be heard by the centre.

¹¹ Throughout the thesis 'new studies' refer to current masculinity and family studies.

In relation to both feminism and postcolonialism it has been the *process* of these struggles that has produced the most fruitful connections theories and ideas around the ideas of (self or imposed) identity, agency, oppression and positioning. Masculinity studies and family studies, perhaps because they claim to originate as disciplines from marginal theory, often only engage with the outcomes of these theoretical and personal struggles and theorize their own positions from there. Thus many masculinity and family studies texts and arguments stand on the theoretical achievements of the marginalized without fully engaging with the steps that were followed before these outcomes were ‘achieved’ and without acknowledging that theory for the marginal and those in the centre are two different things. Much of the strength of both feminist theory and postcolonial theory comes from their marginalized position. As we will see in more detail in chapter two of this thesis, there is strength that comes from “living in two worlds” (James, 1963: 25) and being able to see both inside and outside by virtue of being placed outside the normal. In both feminist theory and postcolonial theory there is a thorough (although unfinished) discussion about complicity, resistance, standpoint, biology and even the *possibility* of either feminism or postcolonialism as discretely defined disciplines given the fact that the positionings of both ‘woman’ and ‘person of colour’ or ‘colonized person’ come from *without*, and are (historically negative) reflections of difference to the white male normal (see for example discussion in Cook and Bernink, 1999 and Quayson and Goldberg, 2002). Both bodies of theories and discussion come from political and personal struggles and perhaps because they come from the margins, the amount of rigour involved is sometimes astonishing. This sense of rigour is often expressed in debates around difference *within* the (pregiven, if reclaimed) categories of gender, race and colour. Political and personal positionings, experiences and exigencies are never taken as read and in that sense nothing is taken for granted or seen as ‘done’ or ‘finished’.

Within masculinity studies and family studies theorizing however, sometimes the 'outcomes' and 'achievements' of feminist or postcolonial theory are seen as singular, truthful, 'universal' and 'finished' and therefore can be taken as something 'solid' for the theorizing of masculinity or family studies to stand on and move on from. This can be a grave difficulty when the new studies theorize for the white middle classes. Both materially and theoretically some things just don't 'fit'. Because of this I retrace and reapply some elements of postcolonial and feminist theory and critique that have not been selected for use or discussion by masculinity studies or family studies, for example such concepts as ocularcentrism and essentialism; often because it is seen that these discussions have *been done*. However these discussions have not 'been done' by masculinity or family studies themselves in relation to their own subject. Some of these discussions would, if applied properly to the subjects of the new studies, disrupt their theoretical logic and therefore these elements are often silenced within the new discourse that is being created.

Although the new discourse of the normal at the moment is extremely widespread, it is often contradictory and involves other elements. There is discussion outside of it although these discussions are often restricted, limited, and sometimes ignored entirely. Many of these (subversive and disruptive) discourses/discussions are being marginalized again, turned into what Foucault termed "subjugated knowledges", or "disqualified knowledges" (Foucault, 1980: 81 and 83). Foucault argues that there has been/is "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task: naïve knowledges located low down on the hierarchy" (Foucault, 1980: 82). The discourse of normality that I describe in detail below, has consolidated and hardened itself into a set of specific truths, knowledges and speech acts, and across a range of academic disciplines and diverse media texts, the degree of consensus is remarkable. Masculinity studies and family studies have left behind their feminist and postcolonial roots (which are often implicitly, and occasionally explicitly dismissed as 'inadequate to the task' of explaining particularly

white masculinity, see Easthope, 1986) and have morphed into something other that rarely argues with itself. Because of this I re-introduce both feminism and postcolonialism to the debate. Foucault suggests that the re-application of marginalized knowledges can be the most useful:

I [...] believe that it is through the re-emergence of these low-ranking knowledges, these unqualified, even directly disqualified knowledges [...] that it is through the re-appearance of this knowledge, of these local, popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges, that criticism performs its work (Foucault, 1980: 82).

And, in this way, a re-application and re-evaluation of postcolonial and feminist theory to the discourse of normality can help to shed light on how the discourse is being formulated and the (material) effects of this formulation.

Both masculinity studies and family studies are involved in a project that deconstructs the normal. Any idea of normality is seen as excluding, exclusive and often just purely as 'wrong'. Thus both disciplines see it as their job to deconstruct the idea of the normal, often by 'disproving' it. Whilst not disagreeing that a proper destruction of the normal is desirable this thesis argues that the way that this project is being approached by masculinity studies, family studies and the media actually serves to obscure continuing power relations and aids the continuation of the current status quo. This thesis argues that the denial that normality exists at all also inevitably entails a denial of continuing privilege and benefit for a small and exclusive group (the white middle classes). I argue that a denial that there is a concept of normality (mythological or otherwise) still existing and working at the centre of our society is more dangerous than a clear acknowledgment of normality's existence.

Interventions From Cultural Studies

So far we have been looking at the supposed 'break' from old notions of normality by masculinity studies and family studies and a denial of normality's continuing existence.

Whilst both masculinity studies and family studies are more multi-disciplinary than older style sociology as I have argued, there remains a tendency to base their own work on older style sociology. Thus the greater part of masculinity and family studies still concentrate on the traditional sociological concerns of 'real life' and lived reality, social policy, law, statistics, interviews and ethnographies, all methodologies that allow people, communities and societies to be classified and measured in relation to an idea of the normal even if that normal is cited as 'past'. And so it is that whilst indicating a relationship with the broadly cultural studies approaches of feminism, postcolonialism and queer studies, these disciplines are used within current masculinity and family studies as a means of changing the emphasis of sociological study from an unquestioned assumption of the normal and a naming of the abnormal, to an emphasis on the destabilizing of the normal and a political objective of deconstructing and marginalizing that normal through looking at 'real life'. And in this way, as we saw above, although the emphasis may have changed, some of the assumptions haven't and the very methodology of marginalizing the normal by deconstructing it, displacing it and defamiliarizing it, can itself leave the normal in place. Theorizing the normal as having disappeared through statistics, ethnographies, consciousness raising group work and case studies will not, as it is claimed, *make* it disappear into an equalizing cloud of postmodern multiplicity, fluidity and fragmentation.

There are however two texts, one from masculinity studies and one from family studies that do not accept that merely 'theorizing away' the normal and 'proving' it does not exist is an acceptable or effective strategy. These two texts, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* by Sally Robinson (2000) and *Representing the Family* by Deborah Chambers (2001) have both been a link between this thesis and more mainstream¹² examples of masculinity studies and family studies. Both texts adopt a more cultural studies' approach

¹² Within the terms of this thesis the word 'mainstream' in relation to masculinity studies and family studies refers to pro-feminist masculinity studies, and family studies as opposed to the now more marginalized but more traditional sociological studies of the family.

than most examples of masculinity and family studies and look at novels, films and general media representations as *still* being implicated in the creation of the normal *and* in self-identity.¹³

Deborah Chambers examines the 'reinvention' of the normal, white, middle class, heterosexual 'ideal' family. Her emphasis in *Representing the Family* is on the fact that the normal is still being constantly created as a regulatory myth. Chambers does not try to sidestep a concept of the normal family, and her interest is not in 'disproving' it.

Chambers argues that

the modern nuclear family *does* exist and is flourishing as an ideal: as a symbol, discourse and powerful myth within the collective imagination. This cultural myth is a regulatory force that impacts on our lives at a very personal level. It structures emotions, modes of official knowledge, bodies, identities and definitions of public and private cultural space (Chambers, 2001: 1).

Chambers, in the very first page of the book, acknowledges the continuing importance and centrality of the normal, idealized family. Chambers is excellent at setting out the ideal-as-was/is. The entire book is about stopping and looking at the continued construction of the white, nuclear family *as* normal. Where the other family studies texts I examine take this 'normal' as read (and past) and aim to disprove and discredit this norm without first examining or deconstructing it properly, Chambers, carefully and with thought, examines the contemporary construction of this norm:

Overall, the book focuses on two key themes that have come to represent core arguments surrounding family values in western Anglophone nations: namely the persistent privileging of white ethnicity and the regulation of heterosexuality and patriarchy through family values. These themes are examined by analyzing the processes through which both whiteness and heterosexuality are naturalized and normalized by appropriating the nuclear family as a regulatory ideal that inferiorises and discredits alternative experiences, structures and meanings (Chambers, 2001: 3).

This discussion and Chambers' process of examining a still existent normal is almost in direct contrast to that of most family studies practitioners. Thus where Silva and Smart

¹³ Although I found these two texts to be the most progressive and interesting examples of either family studies or masculinity studies texts, neither is often cited in mainstream masculinity or family studies texts.

claim that “the idealized nuclear family simply cannot work, either across the whole of the life course or on a universal basis any more (if it ever did of course)” (Silva and Smart, 1999: 12) and Jagger and Wright claim that “there simply is [...] no such thing as *the* family” (Jagger and Wright, 1999: 3), Chambers’ business is not to deny the idealized, normal family, but to look directly at it. In denying any existence to the normal family (now), most family studies texts and discussions unwittingly use it as a (static) basis from which to jump from into discussion about alternative (implicitly ‘not normal’) families and alternative ways of looking at the family. Although I have my areas of disagreement with Chambers, which I will look at later in this introduction, her approach is much closer to my own in that she recognizes that the normal is still the normal.

Sally Robinson’s usefulness to this thesis is somewhat different. Her book, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* fills the theoretical gap between mainstream masculinity studies and my own work. In line with the theoretical strategy of Deborah Chambers, Sally Robinson makes a point of looking directly at the centre of society stating that: “I seek to elaborate the effects of a marking of white masculinity in the middlebrow or, more simply, the ‘mainstream’, because that is where the normative lives” (Robinson, 2000: 15). And in line with my own work Robinson also concentrates on the issue of visibility. Most masculinity studies practitioners see the way to deconstruct the concept and positioning of normal, white, middle class, heterosexual masculinity as being through making the normal visible and thus dispelling it. Visibility for white men is theorized as being a disadvantage as it is said to endanger their position. Sally Robinson disagrees with this position and challenges the view that visibility will, inevitably, de-centre white masculinity. She argues that:

Whilst most accounts of the relationship between power and (in)visibility suggest that only the disenfranchised have a positive interest in promoting the visibility of social difference – and that the dominant can only have an interest in remaining unmarked and invisible – I will argue that what calls itself normative in American culture has vested interests in *both* invisibility and visibility (Robinson, 2000: 3).

It is the argument put forward by so many masculinity studies texts that 'only the disenfranchised' have an interest in making and keeping the dominant (and therefore inequality) visible that leads to the idea that visibility is bad for those in the dominant position and therefore visibility will aid equality for those who are disenfranchised.

Robinson takes a somewhat different view, and argues that visibility for white men can be beneficial. She argues that the discourse of victimized and wounded white men that arose in the 1980s, (her work centres on America), far from making inequality visible and inevitably leading to change, visibility for white men actually serves to recentre these men in the dominant position of the normal. She sees this visibility as a deliberate, (although still defensive), individualizing strategy that, although originating from an imperative from the margins, has subsequently been used and promoted by white men themselves.

Robinson agrees with the argument put forward by most masculinity studies texts that white men were forced into visibility (citing 'feminism and black power' (Robinson, 2000: 14) but where most masculinity studies texts argue that this was a disadvantageous move forced onto those in the centre of society who were first passive, and then reacted defensively (Whitehead, 2002, Berger et al, 1995 etc), she sees the subsequent moves and positionings of white men, at least in some ways, as being controlled. Usually visibility, embodiment and particularization are most often seen as happening to passive white men, however Robinson sees this as a (representational) strategy coming from white men. Robinson sees the 'new' visibility of white men somewhat differently to most masculinity studies texts which argue that this visibility is forced onto men.¹⁴ She argues that:

Representations of wounded men most often work to *personalize* the crisis of white masculinity and, thus, to erase its social and political causes and effects. [...] On the one hand, the substitution of an individually suffering white male body for a social class or gender and racial identity under attack betrays a desire to materialize, literalize the wounds to white and male privilege that come from puncturing the aura of 'universality' and 'unmarkedness' historically claimed by whiteness and masculinity. On the other hand, individualizing a more properly social wound is a way to evade, forget, deny the very marking that has produced

¹⁴ This will be fully discussed in Chapter One.

these wounds in the first place. In other words, narratives about wounded white men spring from, but obscure, the marking of white masculinity as a *category*. [But] such a materialization, in turn, threatens to expose the lie of disembodied normativity so often attached to white masculinity (Robinson, 2000: 8-9).

Sally Robinson concentrates on media and fictional representations of white men from the late 1960s to the late 1980s (Robinson, 2000: 16), and during this time many of the dominant images and representations of white men were of white men as wounded and victimized. Robinson argues that these representations ‘personalized’ and ‘individualized’ the new, critical position of white men and that this personalization helps to sidestep the political. She argues that these representations actually directly signify the ‘wound’ white men felt through the questioning of their position as dominant.

Robinson however sees this as being a risky strategy for white men as this personalizing, although it sidesteps the political, continues to ‘expose the lie of disembodied normativity’. She says; “the middle is, as I see it, is an essentially *defensive* culture and political formation, one characterized by suspicion, even paranoia, about the passing of a now delegitimized cultural order” (Robinson, 2000: 14). It is here that I differ in my analysis of the current situation to that of Robinson. This thesis takes the social and cultural discourses and representations of the mid 1990s for analysis and argues that the discourse of wounding and victimization for white men, as well as the discourse of crisis for both white men and the nuclear family is being substituted by a discourse of marginalization. Because of this, my argument throughout this thesis is that (controlled) visibility and marginalization for white men is not a risky strategy for white men, and that it is in fact, in the current climate the safest strategy for white men. Although Robinson sees some advantages for white men in a (defensive) strategy of visibility, in line with other masculinity studies texts and theorists, she still argues that this visibility may well lead to a deconstruction of the universalized normal and the privilege that it carries for a small number of people. Sally Robinson argues that: “the forced *visibility* of the white and male

norm, as white men experience [a] 'marking' [...] *endangers* their position as unmarked and universalizing norm" (Robinson, 2000: 55, second emphasis is mine). Robinson is arguing that white men cannot retain the position of 'unmarked and universalizing norm' now that they have been forced into visibility.

And where she cites this danger in terms of a threat to white male power that comes with 'exposing the lie of disembodied normativity' (8-9), this thesis will argue that an exposure of white men, a making visible of their embodiedness and particularity actually serves as a safety-valve in that it can 'demonstrate' that white men are marginalized too: just the same as anyone else, no more 'whole' or indeed privileged than anyone else. Thus Robinson has been extremely useful to this thesis in that she begins to theorize the advantages to white men from (enforced) visibility. This thesis goes further in that it argues absolute (and deliberate) advantage to white men from visibility.

Chambers also cites the 'new' visibility of the white, heterosexual family, arguing that where more usually it was 'other' families that received attention, now the 'normal' family "is also being scrutinized and marked out" (Chambers, 2001: 30). Chambers sees the visibility, exposure and scrutiny of the white, nuclear family as being a social discourse that is gathering force. Chambers deduces from this that a re-visited version of the normal family and the patriarch's position in this "white, Anglophone nuclear family" (Chambers, 2000: 166) is in the process of being reformed. She cites gay and bisexual relationships as being the biggest threat to those who wish for a reformation of the rigid normal. However she argues that:

This threat is no longer 'external' but comes from inside, through the desire for individuality and experimentation. And it is depicted as a *white* problem (Chambers, 2000: 170).

Where Robinson sees this 'threat' as being, to some extent, utilized by those in the centre, Chambers depicts the main reaction to the 'threat' as a return to fundamentalism (Chambers, 2000: 167). Both conceptions are useful to this thesis. Mainstream

masculinity studies and family studies see the rise in, and increased visibility and legitimacy of diversity as exposing gaps and cracks in the ideal normal and therefore as precipitant of crisis and deconstruction. Chambers and Robinson, in different ways disagree with this optimistic reading of the situation. Chambers still sees the idealized white nuclear family as being represented as aspirational and as being (still) universalized and Robinson sees the trope of wounded and victimized white men as recentring those very white men. Both see the centre as still being the centre, albeit that that centre is more vulnerable than it was.

This thesis also argues that the centre is still the centre, but it argues that the new discourse that takes account of diversity, difference and indeed the supposed 'vulnerability' or 'crisis' of the centre has in fact strengthened the position of those (white, middle class) people in the centre. This thesis claims that what can be seen as the 'disadvantages' of the rise in diversity in society and the 'threats' to the centrality of white masculinity and the white nuclear family that occur because of this are, in fact, the lynch pins of the new discourse that formulates a concept of marginalization-for-all. And out of this comes a conception of the new 'normal' (which universalizes the ab-normal) that comes from a discourse of both marginalization and equality for all. The scrutiny of the normal by the media and the academy and the increased visibility of multiculturalism and diversity show that, what was seen as the normal is not in fact 'normal' (usual) at all. The fact that the normal was never 'usual' because it is an exclusive concept is ignored, and what is set up as a consequence of this oversight is a universal abnormal that shows that 'we' are all equal, but therefore all capable of aspiring to the same ideal. Thus this thesis argues that what are presented by both Chambers and Robinson (as well as very many others) as problems and risks are in fact an integral part of the new discourse that claims abnormality and marginalization for all and which leaves space for an ideal of meritocratic aspiration.

Fictions/Factions of the Normal

As indicated, both Robinson and Chambers take a cultural studies approach to masculinity studies and family studies respectively. A cultural studies approach examines both myth and reality as producing and creating each other and, at the least, sees that these related ideas can radically affect each other and the conceptions of identity that come from both (Hall, 1997b). And so it is that fictional, media and popular cultural representations remain a critical area of study to cultural studies. This thesis is situated within the discipline of cultural studies where the emphasis of study is most usually on popular culture: television, radio, film, novels, newspapers etc: mass media, mass entertainment. An important part of this thesis therefore is the examination and discussion of the part of the archive of the normal that is made up of contemporary media texts. As stated at the beginning of this introduction, this thesis sets out to examine, explain and discuss the archive of the normal as it is being expressed through the discourses of the normal in both the academy and the media.

According to Foucault discourses are made up of enunciations, articulations or statements and the discourses themselves are organized into and around what Foucault calls the *archive*. He argues that discursive formations are a

complex volume, in which heterogeneous regions are differentiated or deployed, in accordance with specific rules and practices that cannot be superposed. [We] have in the density of discursive practices, systems that establish statements as events [...]. They are all these systems of statements [...] that I propose to call *archive* (Foucault, 1972: 128).

Because discursive formations and the archive are created through specific rules and practices they are both, to some extent, limited and bounded. And it is through and because of these limits and boundaries that discursive formations and their archives make sense. In terms of the subject/object of this thesis it is therefore the fact that the new discourse of the normal *is* limited and in fact only one among several, that makes it

possible to identify it and therefore makes it possible to study. Foucault says that the archive

Far from being that which unifies everything that has been said in the great confused murmur of a discourse, far from being only that which ensures that we exist in the midst of a preserved discourse, it is that which differentiates discourses in their multiple existence and specifies them in their duration (Foucault, 1972: 129).

The archive itself differentiates discourses, lays them out as multiple and of limited duration. Thus where this thesis details and examines one discursive formation of the normal, there are others. The discourse of normality that I consider in detail below is not finished, complete or singular. There are a diversity of voices out there and there are always spaces outside various discourses, the 'extra-discursive' (Foucault, 1980).

Competing, parallel and contradictory discourses are in circulation. However, many of these contradictions, or outright disagreements, are not listened to by those who still occupy the dominant positions in society. The discourse of normality that I examined in this thesis does not exist in isolation, but exists alongside other discourses around the normal some of which still assert in the 'old' way that the white, patriarchal, heterosexual, nuclear version is correct, 'natural' and 'best'. Although acknowledging that these 'old' views and discourses exist, my intention is to examine the movement towards the more 'radical' discourse of the normal; one that is, in the final analysis, more effective for the retention of the status quo.

This thesis engages in what Richard Johnson calls "text-based" cultural studies (Storey, 1996: 107). All types of text are implicated in the creation of knowledge about normality (Hall, 1996b), the discursive formation that formulates knowledge of and 'truth' about the normal, and the enunciation of this formation. Because of this, texts will be treated in a similar manner whereby 'factual' or academic texts will not be read in a radically different way to 'fictional' texts and documentaries, novels or films will not be read very differently to each other or to the academic texts either as they all contribute in their different ways to

the making of meaning and the creation of the archive within a discursive formation. They will be seen as *enunciations* of the discourse, expressive of the codes and conventions of that discourse.

I have chosen to study the (dis)appearance of normality through media representations as well as theory because within my own discipline (broadly cultural studies), representation is seen as *the* site of the creation of knowledge and therefore *the* site of the creation of discourse and identity. Although this thesis could have been followed through by looking at other areas; law or politics for example, the stories and fictions that constitute our most popular and accessible media representations also present the most accessible and clear way of examining the new discourse and explaining its comprehensiveness. Cultural studies, following Stuart Hall (as we so often do) works from the premise that discourse, identity and ‘reality’ itself are formulated through representation: “how things are represented in a culture [...] plays a *constitutive*, and not merely a reflexive after-the-event role” (Hall, 1996b: 443). Representation creates discourse and discourse is always implicated in relations of power, and is therefore always implicated in inequalities of power in the real, material world. As Marjorie Ferguson and Peter Golding put it: “cultural studies has always been resolutely focused on the links between culture and power, especially as detectable in popular culture” (Ferguson and Golding, 1997: xxv). Because of this, representation is also spoken about as making spaces for the creation of identity. Stuart Hall has this to say about representation and the formation of identity:

[i]dentity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within and not outside representation (Hall, 1997b: 51).

Thus all enunciations, including representations are a part of the creation of the changes and new identities and are implicated in the creation of spaces from which we can think and articulate ourselves.

As we have discussed, in the discourse that is recreating spaces of articulation, the normal is being displaced, shown not to exist and being re-placed as marginal and this is reflected in all the texts I examined whether academic or from various types of media. The contemporary media representations that look at the centre of society, white middle class masculinity and the white, middle class nuclear family, do not follow the more traditional 'romantic' formula of many of the representations of the centre that have gone before them. 'Reader I married him' is (more or less) how *Jane Eyre* (Bronte, 1847), in classic romantic style, ends. The films and novels that I am using for this thesis do not end here. I have chosen texts to examine in relation to the new discourse of marginalization for the normal because they begin *after* marriage has occurred and are about marriage, divorce and family life: the novels *Man and Boy*, (Parsons, 1999), *The Best a Man Can Get*, (O'Farrell, 2000), *Intimacy*, (Kureishi, 1998), *Larry's Party* (Shields, 1997), and the films *American Beauty*, (1999), *The Truman Show*, (1998), *Pleasantville* (1998), *Magnolia* (1999), *Fight Club*, (1999), *The Full Monty* (1997). There will also be discussion of some documentaries that also fall within the new discursive formation of the normal.

At the centre of all the texts looked at is a concept of the normal nuclear family even if this is breaking up, broken up or already failed. In all of them there are different kinds of crisis for men and for their families. And when Jane Eyre (to really end the book) places their firstborn in Mr Rochester's arms, in contemporary texts this is where the hard business of fathering begins. The point with many of these texts is that being a husband and a father and a worker is not given and not easy. In most new representations of (what was seen as) the normal, it is crisis and marginalization that is concentrated on. In the discourse of marginalization in popular culture, in novels, films, debates and discussions, men do battle with their masculinity, their lives, their fathers and their own experiences of fatherhood, work, the family and domesticity. And the white nuclear family itself is shown to be

changing and indeed falling apart. What all these representations show in their own way, is that normality, particularly in terms of the family, fatherhood and rigid gender roles is not only an impossibility but if you scratch the surface of the seeming-normal you will see that it never existed anyway. All these texts in line with the stance of masculinity and family studies texts are *anti the normal*, albeit in quite specific ways. None of them idealize the normal in the way one might expect from mainstream texts from societies (Britain, America and Canada) that are materialistic, ideological, white-dominated and patriarchal, instead they show (and often celebrate) marginalization and disempowerment.

Masculinity in these texts is studied in relation to three main areas: a) domesticity – which encompasses relationships with women, the home and fatherhood, b) work – status, success, authority (or not), power (or not), prestige and money making abilities and c) the body – which encompasses physical prowess, physique and looks, muscles (or not), and sexuality. The primary texts have been chosen because they look at different aspects of masculinity as it is spoken about and represented in contemporary culture. I have chosen texts that range from 1997 to the present. This is because, although some of the texts examined are North American, my emphasis is on British culture and attitudes. The North American texts are thus looked at in relation to their impact on British popular culture and society, and in relation to their echoing of the concerns of British culture, ideology and politics. The year 1997 has been chosen as a starting point for the media texts looked at because of the change in political climate that came about in Britain with the election of Tony Blair's 'New Labour' government, its emphasis on inclusion, meritocracy and the 'Third Way' that again emphasized inclusion, choice and opportunity for all. The advent of 'New Labour' ideology thus both sets and reflects the tone that makes the new discourse both possible and desirable. I contend that the current re-positioning of the old exclusive normal would not have been possible within a different political climate. And also that

within the current political climate an advocacy of the old, exclusive and excluding normal would be extremely difficult and therefore it is rarely explicitly attempted.

All the texts chosen have found their way into popular, contemporary culture and the novels and films at least have done extremely well commercially. Most of the novels have sat on the bestseller lists (*Larry's Party*, *Man and Boy*, *About A Boy*, *Intimacy*, *The Best a Man Can Get*), and many have been adapted for either television or radio (*Larry's Party* - radio, *Man and Boy* – television, *About a Boy* – feature film, *Intimacy* – feature film, *The Best a Man Can Get* - radio). The films too have been box office hits, critically acclaimed and popular (*American Beauty* won five Oscars and *The Full Monty* took the most money of any British film at the time). All these texts express a change in representation; from an idealization of the normal (usually expressed through romantic texts) to a vivid examination of the ins and outs of the abnormal and as we have and will see, this is presented as a 'break' from the old intolerant and rigid expression of masculinity and the family and new representations have an emphasis on inclusion and tolerance.

This 'break' with the old and the change to the 'new' has of course got its own history. If we just go back to the early 1990s John Beynon argues that; "laddishness was in the air as a backlash against 1980s over-dressed, narcissistic new man. [...] Lads' programmes dominated television ratings, most notably *Men Behaving Badly*" (Beynon, 2002: 111). This 'lad' was the precursor of the type of some of the (now grown up) men in the representations examined in this thesis. There is of course some cross-over (and indeed continuation),¹⁵ however I will contend that the move within mainstream representations and theorizations is away from this type of laddishness. In *Man and Boy*, *The Best a Man Can Get*, and *Intimacy* the cross-over from lad to what Beynon calls, "'dad lad' (that is, the 'lad' who has grown up and settled down)" (Beynon, 2002: 119), is quite clearly apparent.

¹⁵ The first series of *Men Behaving Badly* was broadcast on ITV in 1992, but the last was not aired until 1998 on BBC 1 (BBCi website).

In all these texts the protagonists' crises are precipitated by the pull of this 'old' laddishness and the 'new' grown-upness of being a husband and father. However in these texts the pull of the lad is shown to be an irresponsible and incorrect pull. This is because, as Beynon puts it, "the new lad [is] objectionable, selfish, loutish, inconsiderate, building his life around drinking, football and sex" (Beynon, 2002: 111). This is an expression of unreconstructed 'old' style masculinity and it is this 'old' style masculinity that most of the texts I examine indicate a break from. Even in these texts where the protagonists feel a 'pull' to the old, the emphasis is not so much on 'drinking, football and sex' as on marriage, the family and fatherhood. The discussion is much more about Beynon's 'dad lad' and in the texts such as *Fight Club* and *Magnolia* where expressions of old-style masculinity are examined any expression of older types of masculinity is not seen as sustainable.

Indeed extreme old style masculinity is portrayed as pathological, and is not sanctioned in the same way that Beynon argues that it was in the early 1990s. Beynon argues that at this time "young men were sanctioned to display the errant side of masculinity, a return to the unreconstructed basics like flesh, fun and unselfconsciousness" (Beynon, 2002: 112).

Fight Club and *Magnolia* are neither of them much 'fun' and unselfconsciousness is not part of their remit. Most of the texts studied question the idea of 'how are men *meant* to behave now'? And the subtext of many of the films and dramas and documentaries and novels as well as the theory that I am looking at is that this laddish way of behaving is not how men are meant to behave now. And what is often explored is the tension that exists between the 'true' old masculinity (the normal), the frivolity of the lad, and the failing, but caring, responsible, fluid and flexible 'new' forms of masculinity.

I have deliberately chosen a wide range of texts to discuss in this thesis in order to be as thorough as possible in my examination of the archive of the normal. Within the

examination of a discursive formation any and every way that a subject is spoken about (and not) is a part of the creation of that subject within discourse and therefore part of the creation of the discourse itself. Within cultural studies representation is seen as *the* site of the creation of knowledge and therefore *the* site of the creation of discourse and identity, whilst theory is the arena where the academic discussion of knowledge, discourse and identity is played out and re-presented. Representation creates spaces from which we can speak as subjects/individuals, and this includes the academic texts, as well as the media texts. Stuart Hall has this to say about representation and the formation of identity:

[i]dentity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within and not outside representation (Hall, 1997b: 51).

Thus where specifically masculinity studies and family studies claim to be reflecting changes that are already happening in society (feminism, multiculturalism, divorce, single parenthood etc), they are in fact a part of the creation of the changes and new identities and are implicated in the creation of spaces from which we can think and articulate ourselves. The purpose of this thesis is to intervene in a discourse that is consolidating and 'proving' itself and, in the process, hardening. Already it is difficult to critique the denial of the normal without feeling 'mean' as the explicitly stated aims of the new discourse are inclusion, an end to inequality and tolerance of difference and diversity. However I intend to show that in order to even begin to reach these goals more care will be needed and crucial to the stated aims of masculinity and family studies is an acknowledgment of other people's points of view, a more thorough and careful reading of postcolonial and feminist theory, and a space of silence from the white middle classes in which other people can speak, publish and represent for themselves.

For the moment however, we will look at Foucault's 'enunciative modalities' (Foucault, 1972) and the idea of who, at the moment is able to enunciate the new discourse of the

normal. Because ‘spokespersons’ are created within the discourse (Hall, 1997b), creating identities and places from which to speak, for the new ‘truth’ of normality in particular, because of the racial, class and gender implications the term carries, it is imperative to trace which groups of people ‘speak’ it. Through an examination of both media and academic texts this thesis will examine which groups of people are ‘allowed’ to speak, when and what they are allowed to speak and what the ‘correct’ way of speaking about normality is at the moment. It is this limitation as to what can be said and the limits to the possibility of *how* things may be said that make up “enunciative modalities”. Foucault says these modalities are:

Described on the basis of the position occupied by the subject in relation to the domain of objects of which he is speaking. In this way, there exists a vertical system of dependences: not all the positions of the subject, all the types of coexistence between statements, all the discursive strategies are equally possible, but only those authorized by anterior levels [...] certain modalities of enunciation are excluded (Foucault, 1972: 72-3).

In the possibility of speech there is a hierarchy and often only certain things are able to be said and what is able to be said may depend on the position of the subject who is speaking. It is in this way that the current discourse of the normal is sometimes ‘allowed’ to be articulated by black people, gay people and women and their speech is thus let into and is expressive of the current discourse. As Hall himself says when speaking of power (which is always completely implicated in discourse), power “circulates. It is never monopolized by one centre” (Hall, 1997a: 49).

In the face of a discursive formation, no one person or even type of person is ‘all powerful’ in articulating that discourse. And to this extent it does not matter who authored the texts or representations (in the sense, for example, of whether an author intended this or that nuance etc). In discussing the texts from the academy and the media as contributing to the discourse of normality I do not intend to imply personal or institutional intention, in fact for many of the texts, discussions and representations I examine the consequences and effects are obviously unintentional, deviating widely from stated intentions (pro-feminism,

liberation, inclusion etc). This is because individual speech acts themselves can unintentionally originate from, and indeed have (often) been created by, the discourse itself and are thus enunciated through it.

Discursive formations always imply a 'truth'. Stuart Hall says that they constitute what the "truth of the matter" is at a given historical moment (Hall, 1997a: 45) and at this moment, the discursive 'truth of the matter' of normality is that, in the forms of white masculinity and the white nuclear family, normality doesn't in fact exist and is an 'untrue' myth that needs deconstructing, dispelling, fragmenting, multiplying, and, in effect scattering to the wind. We are presented with a discourse that espouses the dismantling of the normal and the exclusive white, middle class male power bases and which speaks of the goals of inclusion and equality for all regardless of sex, race, class, sexual orientation or family type. These are all very seductive goals that appear to be of benefit to the majority of the population. The white middle classes are expressing a desire to dismantle 'old' concepts of an exclusionary and exclusive 'normal', and this debate is framed and discussed in such a way that it makes it very difficult to argue with or to be able to see any discrepancies between stated aims and employed methods. The discourse of the normal at the moment is being so successfully 'squared' with the 'will' of (all) the people (Hall, 1982) that, as we have seen and will continue to see, it has created spaces that allow those who have been marginalized to 'speak' it in the same way that for example, white, middle class male academics are speaking it, most often without the slightest hint of a possible conflict of interest. All sides seem to agree and the new discourse of the normal is being represented as being in the interest of all.

The 'truth' that normality does not exist is being 'proved' again and again by both the academy and the media. 'New' knowledges about normality, nearly all of which repeatedly 'prove' that normality does not exist, are being unearthed almost daily and are

then presented as the ‘truth’ of the matter. However, what must not be forgotten is that any concept of ‘truth’ is always invested with power. As Stuart Hall says: “[k]nowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of the ‘truth’ but has the power *to make itself true*” (Hall, 1997a: 49, his emphasis). Thus the academic disciplines and media texts that are claiming truth are also making that truth and any claim to knowledge of a singular, certain truth is itself an exercise of power. However, there will always be spaces/places/speech acts outside any given discourse and, as Stuart Hall says: “[i]t is not inevitable that all individuals in a particular period will become the subjects of a particular discourse” (Hall, 1997a: 56). And so it is that there is always room for dissent.

The current discourse is neither singular nor complete in part because neither patriarchy nor power itself are overriding or all-encompassing. From Foucault’s point of view, it is not possible for anyone to *hold* power because power is exercised rather than held (Foucault, 1980: 89). Therefore in this model of power it is impossible for one group in society or for specific individuals to *possess* power, but inequalities in the exercise and the possibility of exercising power can and do exist. This has been a difficulty for some feminists (see Ramazanoglu, 1993). However, this model of power fits in with the idea of discourse as being a *formation* that creates places of articulation and identities which can encompass different groups of people and a formation that can suppress within it marginalized voices and concerns.

The idea of power being exercised rather than possessed is usefully expanded by Mahmood Mamdani. Mamdani, speaking about South Africa, and specifically about the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, writes that it is far more useful to consider the relationship between the beneficiaries and victims of a system than to cling to the idea of *perpetrators* and victims:

Perpetrators are a small group, as are those victimized by perpetrators. In contrast, beneficiaries are a large group, and victims defined in relation to beneficiaries are the vast majority in society. [...]

Which is more difficult: to live with *past* perpetrators of an evil, or its *present* beneficiaries? If perpetrators and victims have a *past* to overcome, do not beneficiaries and victims have a *present* to come to terms with? If reconciliation is to be durable, would it not need to be aimed at society (beneficiaries and victims) and not simply at the fractured political elite (perpetrators and victims). [...]

The significance of [...] history teaches us to think of evil as social rather than just individual (Mamdani, 1997: 25).

Although Mamdani is speaking about a specific situation, I find his notions extremely useful in relation to the idea of (British) normality. Employing the notion of *beneficiaries* means that we can move away from the concept of intention, and therefore from the stifling concept of guilt, and means that we can't conceive of either in an uncomplicated way. Mamdani argues that power can be exercised through a set of specific social situations and histories, rather than just possessed by individuals who intentionally perpetrate inequality and injustice. This means that conceptions of power can be seen in a larger context. It also means that those who benefit from existing relations of power cannot fall back onto the idea that for example, some individual men merely expressing 'profeminist' statements will change anything at all. However if we can show how, historically, benefit has come about and is sustained for certain groups of people through a concept of normality then some change in the systems of thought, practice and creation of discourses may be possible.

Consideration of the idea of beneficiaries and victims may also help to clarify who in fact does benefit from discourses of normality, old and new, and may aid in extricating other groups of people for whom the given discourse may in fact be harmful to their specific causes. Although acknowledging that patriarchy is not all-encompassing, it allows us, without needing to 'blame' individual men, to acknowledge that there is "deeply entrenched male privilege throughout social life" (Ramazanoglu, 1993: 17). Despite the denial, deconstruction, 'disproving' and disavowal of normality nothing much seems to be really changing. White men still reap the benefit of a patriarchal society and the nuclear

family is still the institutional family form of this patriarchy. This needs acknowledging and tackling head on before there can be any hope of real and radical change.

Chapter One: Dispelling the Invisibility of the Normal: Making the Centre Visible

This first chapter traces the arguments, as laid out by masculinity and family studies texts, that have led up to the discourse that they espouse of dispelling and disproving the normal and beginning to de-centre it. And in doing so, this chapter considers the creation of the new rules and conventions of the discursive formation of normal. These first arguments set up *how* the normal is being spoken about. The chapter culminates in a sustained examination of fictional representations of the ‘crisis’ of masculinity and the family.

Masculinity studies and family studies take certain consensual starting points¹⁶ from which to construct their arguments and which they then use to ‘logically’ move the discussion onto their own claims, methods and concerns. This chapter follows and explains the first steps that the texts of new studies take in beginning to construct their arguments and looks at how these ideas are recreated and illustrated within current fictional representations.

In order to examine these first theoretical steps it is necessary to take a step or two back from the eventual marginalization of the centre to look at how masculinity and family studies themselves (re)construct and relay the various movements of the normal. The first steps taken by masculinity and family studies trace the origins of our current conception of the normal and seek to explain the change in how we see the normal. From their conclusions, and from the inevitable and inherent inequalities, the silencing of others and the violence and repression of others due to a white, and mostly male conception of the normal, the new studies argue that the centre *must* be studied in order to expose the ‘true’ workings of the concept of the normal. From this foundation masculinity and family studies texts lay out their aims, aspirations and the methodologies. In this chapter we will thus follow masculinity and family studies as they trace the movement of the normal from

¹⁶ There is, within masculinity and family studies texts, a small amount of dissent which is examined later in this chapter. For the most part, the level of consensus across the new disciplines is remarkable.

invisible to visible, from backlash reactions to crisis. We end this chapter with the argument from masculinity and family studies that the normal, white, nuclear family and normal white, middle class men have moved from a historic position of stable invisibility to a new crisis of visibility.

The discourse of crisis for those who used to be in the 'stable' position of the normal is a favourite theme for a plethora of contemporary representations and fictions, which illustrate and are a part of the creation of the discourse as set out by masculinity and family studies. In popular culture representations the discourse of crisis is most apparent in representations of fatherhood and the family and with this in mind, this chapter examines four contemporary novels and two films: *Man and Boy* by Tony Parsons written in 1999, *The Best A Man Can Get* by John O'Farrell, (2000), *Intimacy*, by Hanif Kureishi, (1998), *Larry's Party* by Carol Shields, (1997), and the films *The Full Monty* (1997) and *Fight Club*, (1999). These popular films and novels all base their stories around themes of crisis for men, and they all look at the crisis in terms of fatherhood and man's place in the family. All the texts involve a breakdown of the nuclear family and all look at the aftermath of the breakdown in relation to the male protagonists' lives, their sense of masculinity and the affect this has on their efforts to parent effectively. *Fight Club* however looks at these themes from a slightly different angle. The breakdown of the family and fathering is looked at in relation to the protagonist – Jack. In this text it is Jack's father who left and Jack has not yet become a father himself and it is he who precipitates his own crisis. All the texts have been chosen as examples *par excellence* of representations of (and therefore statements about) men in crisis in regards to any idea of normal masculinity and the expectations put on men by this construction of the normal. All the texts illustrate vividly the 'new' visibility of the normal, the personal and social shake up for those who could be described as having been in the position of the normal and the crisis for those people that this visibility is said to precipitate. In and of themselves

these texts contribute to the new discourse of the visibility of the normal and therefore, in the terms of masculinity and family studies they contribute to the break up of that normal by showing it is no longer either an inevitable position for certain people or a stable position for anyone. They illustrate, discuss and show that the concept of the normal is changing from what it used to be. These texts show this change to have both positive and negative elements, but for the purpose of this thesis, the most important things that these texts assume are that this change is *new* and there *is* a crisis.

The discussion of these primary texts will be delayed somewhat, coming later in this chapter as they show crisis, and this 'crisis' is theorized by the new studies as coming after and occurring because of an 'enforced' visibility of the centre that I need to discuss first. Masculinity studies and family studies begin with the premise that things have changed and changed recently. The principle that masculinity and family studies work from is that the marginal theorists as well as changes in society have made the centre *visible* and that before this, the centre sat in the middle of society as the invisible unquestioned normal. They argue that white, middle class men and the white nuclear family were, within white Western society, positioned as the normal with everyone and everything else displaced as other, different and marginalized. This is said to have begun in colonial times as we saw in the introduction, and to have continued until very recently. Both masculinity and family studies begin their work on the basis that this is morally and socially wrong and needs changing. This premise originates from postcolonial and feminist theory and therefore originates from theorists working within the marginal spaces in our society. The new studies issue from the white middle class centre and therefore approach this initial premise *from* the centre. This is of course a fundamentally different starting place from marginal theory.

The first ideas that arise from masculinity and family studies is that the white centre needs to re-position and examine itself if any change is to be possible, that this has not happened before and that it was theories from the margins that drew the centre's attention to itself. This is a change from the initial premises of masculinism and the area of 'studies of the family' we looked at in the introduction whereby the normal is both accepted and acceptable. Masculinity and family studies begin with the premise that change is not only happening but that this change is necessary. I will therefore begin by looking at how these studies (re)construct and re-state the conditions that they say precipitated the change they advocate, examining how masculinity and family studies discuss the idea that the centre was invisible, why these new studies say that invisibility was necessary for the retention of power by the white middle classes and what they say has now changed.

1.1 The Invisibility of Normality – A Technique of Power

We begin with the oft-stated argument that the centre was, or used to be, invisible. It is important to look at this assumption because it forms the conceptual basis for the theories and claims made by masculinity and family studies and provides the stated foundation for their very existence as disciplines. Chapter two will argue that the stated foundational premises of masculinity and family studies are fundamentally flawed and only address the dominant white middle classes. However, before discussing these arguments it is necessary to lay out the ground as masculinity studies, family studies and media representations present it. Therefore I begin with the discussion as evidenced in the new studies, of how the invisibility of the normal is sustained and why it should need to be.

The main thrust of the argument is that *someone* needs to look at the centre. And 'someone' needs to look at the centre because it is argued, it *was* invisible and this was a technique of power that allowed/allows the white patriarchal status quo to continue.

Within masculinity studies and family studies (as well as some feminisms and postcolonial

studies), the answer to how white, bourgeois male power manages so successfully to continue is that it is (or at least has been) invisible. Anthony Easthope argued this position in 1986: “masculinity has stayed pretty well concealed. This has always been its ruse in order to hold on to power. [...] Masculinity tries to stay invisible by passing itself off as normal and universal” (Easthope, 1986/1992: 1). Concealment and invisibility are seen as a ‘ruse’ used by masculinity, and this ‘ruse’ *enables* the masculine hold on power. White men have consolidated and maintained their power because ‘we’ have not been able to see that this is what was happening. Hegemonic, white, male power has striven to remain invisible. In relation to the ideological state apparatus that is most important in constructing the white patriarchal bourgeois normal, the family, it is fatherhood that is discussed as having remained invisible. Deborah Chambers cites the “absence of fatherhood in anthropological and historical studies of parenting and the lack of its visual presence in popular representations during the ‘golden era’ of nuclear familialism in the mid-twentieth century (Chambers, 2001: 99). Indeed, the absence of fatherhood is cited again and again within family studies, (Chambers, 2001, Jagger and Wright, 1999, Smart and Neale, 1999 etc). As Chambers succinctly puts it: “fatherhood has been largely absent, until now” (Chambers, 2001: 174). Men, in various roles, it is argued, maintain their grip on power, both public and private, by remaining invisible, absent and concealed.

Why would this work? In explaining why invisibility is so important for retaining power we need to refer back to the Foucauldian conception of how modern discursive power works quoted in the introduction:

power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms (Foucault: 1978: 86).

In this model, power needs to hide in order to be effective. Power has to be acceptable or consent can never be won. And power will only ever be accepted if it hides most of its manifestations and workings. It has to be able to hide how it works because if power

cannot be seen, it cannot be resisted. If power is obscured it is less likely to be questioned and if people cannot see its workings it is more likely to be taken-for-granted and left in place. Sally Robinson argues this point:

Masculinity and whiteness retain their power as signifiers and as social practices because they are opaque to analysis, the argument goes; one cannot question let alone dismantle, what remains hidden from view. This line of argument makes a good deal of sense, for it is clear that white male power has benefited enormously from keeping whiteness and masculinity in the dark. What is invisible escapes surveillance and regulation, and, perhaps less obviously, also evades the cultural marking that distances the subject from universalizing constructions of identity and narratives of experience (Robinson, 2000: 1).

Although Robinson goes on to complicate this view as I will discuss later, here she clearly lays out the argument made by most masculinity studies texts. If power cannot be seen then it cannot be analyzed and therefore cannot be deconstructed or dismantled. In this argument, invisibility ensures the retention of power by the white male centre of our society. Invisibility means that the status quo remains unquestioned, white masculine power is not held under surveillance or therefore regulation. And further, if white masculinity cannot be seen it cannot be accurately categorized as a position, or as a specific and particular grouping, enabling white masculinity to universalize outwards from its own (particular) position without this being properly detectable. Thus it is argued, white men become representative of 'mankind'. It is this universalization that defines the normal as well as what is other than or different from the normal. Invisibility and silence are said to be *techniques of power* that enable those in power to stay in that position more easily. And by keeping the centre invisible and keeping the mechanisms of power opaque, the norms of society, rather than being seen as ideologically invested and unequally balanced, appear to be given, universal, historically static and inevitable.

This absence at the centre of society has been observed by academics from many different disciplines; feminists, postcolonialists and those engaged in masculinity studies and family studies. How, they ask, is it that (within contemporary parlance), white, middle class men have managed to remain 'unmarked'? (Robinson, 2000, Bourdieu, 2001, Glenn, 1999: 28,

Chambers, 2001: 15). One of the most common explanations is that it is the *overwhelming presence* of white bourgeois masculinity and its point of view that paradoxically keeps it hidden. Stephen Whitehead and Frank Barrett, editors of the *Masculinities Reader* concur with this view; “as feminists have long argued, the historical centrality of malestream writing, philosophy and political practice has served to make men invisible” (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 4). The argument is that because white, middle class masculinity pervaded every part of cultural production, its ideologies and the men behind this hegemonic form of masculinity were obscured. White masculinity with its privileged view- point was so ubiquitous that it was normalized, and therefore neutralized and naturalized (Bourdieu, 2001: 8-9, Young, 1990, in Kemp and Squires, 1997: 196). The white male point of view was/is given out to be ‘objective’ and therefore neutral – no point of view at all, just *the* taken-for-granted, common sense position.

Richard Dyer argues this is the most important factor for those in the centre wanting to retain power. Most necessary is:

The attainment of a position of disinterest – abstraction, distance, separation, objectivity – which creates a public sphere that is the mark of civilization, itself the aim of human history. [...] It provides the philosophical underpinning of the conception of white people [...] as everything and nothing. It suggests the sense in which the viewpoint of a text (how, in its formal organization it sees its subject matter) may legitimately be characterized as white (as well as male and upper or middle class). It is a position of such notable, albeit catastrophic, success in the world that it is one that many people neither white, male nor middle class, may aspire to (Dyer, 1997: 38-9).

Abstraction, distance, absence, objectivity, all common conceptions within Western culture. Each contributed to the creation and the veiling of what is conceived to be the normal. Dyer characterizes this as ‘everything and nothing’, everything in that these conceptions underpinning the signification of white people were all-pervading, and nothing in that, by being all-pervading, these (white) conceptions/ideologies become invisible. These central ideological concepts were not directly spoken about as they became the ‘common sense’ or ‘given’ ways of looking at things and conceiving of things. The white

patriarchal viewpoint was synonymous with the normal, the taken-for-granted and white masculinity itself from colonial times defined and inhabited the normal which within this argument was both invisible and silent. As Chapman and Rutherford argued in 1988: “masculinity remains the great unsaid. The contestation is over the bodies of black and gay people and women. Masculinity remains somehow removed” (Chapman and Rutherford, 1988: 11). White masculinity does not ‘say’ itself because it does not need to, it remains ‘unsaid’ and disembodied, removed, absent and distant and, it is argued that it is in the interest of preserving the status quo for it to remain so.

In essence, the argument is that since colonial times white, bourgeois male power has been so huge and all pervading that it is virtually invisible, so normalized that it cannot be seen clearly, if at all. Stephen Whitehead in *Men and Masculinities* complicates the matter a little, saying about men that he is not suggesting:

that men have previously been invisible. On the contrary, men as a gender group, are omnipresent across the social world. Are not men the very centre, the core, the drive, the universal ‘mankind’? Certainly, many men have been prone to seeing themselves as such. But is being at the ‘centre’ the same as being ‘visible’? No, for paradoxically, being at the centre can serve to hide, obfuscate, confuse, obscure (Whitehead, 2002: 5).

Thus ‘men as a gender group’ are visible and invisible. And it is their omnipresence that obscures them, the fact that they are ‘the centre, the core’ and the universal. They are *too present* to be seen. Richard Dyer quotes David Lloyd noting the same quality in relation to whiteness:

White identity is founded on compelling paradoxes: a vivid corporeal cosmology that most values transcendence of the body; a notion of being at once a sort of race and the human race, an individual and a universal subject; a commitment to heterosexuality that, for whiteness to be affirmed, entails men fighting against sexual desires and women having none; a stress on the display of spirit while maintaining a position of invisibility; in short, a need always to be everything and nothing, literally overwhelmingly present and yet apparently absent (Dyer, 1997: 39).

As white masculine power universalizes, so it obscures. It is the overwhelming presence of white, heterosexual, male power that makes it absent. The materiality of the body is

transcended, the particularity of the white male position is universalized, normalized and obscured. This it is argued is one of the major ways in which white male power remains invisible. White masculinity is defined as normality. The normal in these discourses is spoken of as being *the* human condition. Other definitions, ways of living, or positions are defined as different from this one central position. It is this concept of a single position being the normal that is and has been strongly critiqued largely because this means that everyone else is seen as abnormal, different or other. This singular concept of the normal also relates to the white heterosexual nuclear family. Deborah Chambers cites widespread social processes “through which both whiteness and heterosexuality are naturalized and normalized by appropriating the nuclear family as a regulatory ideal that inferiorises and discredits alternative experiences” (Chambers, 2001:3). Having the nuclear family as an ideal means regulation in that the very definition of the normal displaces others as inferior to it. Any concept of the normal cannot exist without a concept of otherness.

In the discussion of the creation and sustenance of the normal as white, heterosexual and patriarchal, the question of otherness becomes extremely important. If as Richard Dyer puts it white masculinity “both defines normality and fully inhabits it” (Dyer, 1997:9), what happens to those who are not white or male? White, hegemonic, patriarchal Western culture works conceptually and ideologically within systems of hierarchical binaries. One of these binaries is that of mind over body and, within masculinity studies in particular, one of the techniques discussed as enabling the retention of invisibility for white men is to remain in the mind (spirit) half of the Cartesian division of mind and body. Removal from the body itself enables white men to universalize outwards thus, it is argued, keeping others within particularized embodiment. Men are related to the spirit, the mind, and therefore remain disembodied and thus invisible (Dyer, 1997, Peterson, 1998, Chapman and Rutherford, 1992 etc), whilst traditionally in Western society it has been women and people of colour who have been related to the body, (see Ortner, 1974, Betterton, 1996 and

Fanon, 1967, among many other discussions). As the bodies of those deemed different to the normal are visible, so the marginalized are visible and the spirit/mind/white male is not. Masculinity studies argues that this *strategic disembodiment* of white men is also a part of the invisibility of white men and a part of their consolidation of the power base. Stephen Whitehead claims that even within academic disciplines this is often so: “within the sociology of masculinity, the male body is omnipresent yet relatively absent” (Whitehead, 2002: 181). Thus it is the same omnipresent/absent argument that we saw above, largely in relation to cultural production, that is used when examining the (non) positioning of the white male body.

As the ‘unmarked’ norm against which other’s bodies are marked, the overwhelmingly present white male body remains invisible at least as a direct object of study or overt topic of discussion. As Richard Dyer argues in relation to race:

Biology [...] has traditionally been based upon a model of scientific knowledge as separate from that which it investigates. It is thus not surprising that the biology of race should sometimes seem to have written whites out of the account, for whites are those who have such knowledge, but are themselves less readily the object of it (Dyer, 1997: 20).

Since at least the nineteenth century biology and science in general have the white ideals of abstraction and objectivity that help to define the normal mostly by looking at bodies that are deemed abnormal – people of colour and women. Therefore if it is white men who are defining what biology is, constructing and performing the experiments, then the very fact that white men are doing the defining removes them from objectification. White people hold the knowledge and thus at the same time escape knowledge’s surveillance. In this argument the privileged point of view of the knowledge makers remains unseen and it is others who are the objects of knowledge and therefore seen.

This is an important aspect of the strategic invisibility of white men; the visibility of others keeps those in the central positions obscured. If the bodies of white men are to remain

invisible the bodies of others must be forced into visibility. Judith Butler explains this phenomenon in relation to the idea of the (neutral) white gaze that looks *outwards*, describing: “the masculine privilege of the disembodied gaze, the gaze that has the power to produce bodies, but which is itself no body” (Butler, 1993: 136). Butler invokes the idea of the objective, white (scientific) gaze associated with the strategic disembodiment of white men expressed from a feminist point of view, however masculinity studies itself concurs with this view and Richard Dyer relates it to whiteness:

The claim to racial superiority resides in that which cannot be seen, the spirit, manifest only in its control over the body. [...]
Moreover, the ultimate position of power in a society that controls people in part through their visibility is that of invisibility, the *watcher*. [...]
Whites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness as a race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen (Dyer, 1997: 44-5).

Dyer is arguing that the white power base can *see* but it cannot be seen. The surveillance of others' (bodies) is a vital part of this, allowing white, bourgeois masculinity to remain in the centre of society and to occupy the position of the normal.

If we return to Foucault for a moment we will see how he believes the disembodiment and invisibility of those in power and the visibility and embodiment of those without power to be an historical (and relatively new) phenomenon:

Traditionally power was what was seen, what was shown. ... Discursive power, on the other hand, is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. In discipline, it is the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assumes the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his [sic] subjection (Foucault, 1984/1991).

Foucault is arguing that not so long ago power itself was invested in visibility. In this form, power wanted to be seen and power was exercised by being seen. However, what he terms 'disciplinary power' has vested interests in not being seen – it is those who are disempowered that are seen and this compulsory visibility is a part of the process of disempowerment. Discursive power is itself invisible and the disciplining and powerful

gaze is turned outward, illuminating the marginalized, whilst itself remaining in the shadows. Attention is diverted away from the centre. Whereas, historically Foucault argues, feudal power drew attention to the body of the King, and power was invested in what was shown, (Foucault, 1975: 187, also see Silverman, 1992: 152-153) now, newer forms of discursive power rely on obscurity – on not being seen. Homi Bhabha links the discourse of language with the discourse of vision when discussing these points:

‘He’, that ubiquitous male member, is the masculinist signature writ large – the pronoun of the invisible man; the subject of the surveillant, sexual order; the object of humanity personified (Bhabha, 1995: 57).

Therefore we have the ubiquity of white masculinity, the surveying properties of this privileged position, the invisibility of this position, and the singularity of it. Within the discussions of masculinity and family studies white bourgeois masculinity *was* it seems, in the perfect (objective, removed, ubiquitous, disembodied, invisible) place of the normal.

These arguments and discussions are of course not unfamiliar. However, the claim from masculinity studies, and family studies is that a critique of this invisibility of the centre by the centre is new. The new studies espouse change and as we shall see advocate change from the invisibility of the centre to a new visibility. However, if the white patriarchal centre as exemplified in the ideal of normality *was* invisible, how has this ‘new’ critique become possible? How for example can we possibly have the discussion in the introduction to this thesis that traced the creation of the ideals of the normal ‘manly’ man and the nuclear family? What is it that is said to have shed light onto the ‘invisible’ space of the normal making it invisible no longer?

1.2 The ‘Enforced’ Visibility of Normality

The idea that the white patriarchal spaces of the normal were invisible, forms the first stage of the arguments of masculinity studies and family studies. The idea and discussion of this invisibility comprises the initial link in the chain of the theoretical logic that these studies,

with very few exceptions, follow. The second stage of the argument is that the white patriarchal centre began to be made visible by feminism, postcolonialism and queer theory; by the physical presence of an increased diaspora, through globalization including de-industrialization, economic, communication and technological changes and by the marginalized mobilizing politically. In the discussions of masculinity and family studies the phenomena of change that receive most attention are the marginal theories that are in fact, said to have 'mothered' the new studies themselves as disciplines. The argument runs thus: feminist and postcolonial theorists began their work by looking at their own marginal positions trying to gauge how they had been placed in the margins of society and what the implications of these positionings might be. By examining their own marginal positions they began to question the central hegemonic position of white bourgeois heterosexual men and the ideology of the normal and this questioning began to throw light onto the white centres. However as we saw with the centre-was-invisible argument documented above, what is said to have been found was not a presence but an absence, (Braidotti, 1991, Butler, 1990, Betterton, 1996, Dyer, 1997, Easthope, 1986/1992, Chapman and Rutherford, 1992, Chambers, 2001 etc). Within this argument what feminist and postcolonial critics and theorists seemed to discover was that white, heterosexual, middle class masculinity was absent in representation, theory and audible hegemonic discourse. The conclusion drawn was that white men have been sitting invisible, silent and disembodied at the centre of the family and society. These two stages; the invisibility of the centre and the beginning of enforced visibility by the margins, form the founding arguments for most new studies texts. It is on these foundational arguments that the logic of the new studies is based and therefore these arguments are of vital importance not only to masculinity studies and family studies but also to my own examination of the logic of the new studies texts and the theoretical and ultimately material implications of their theories.

Within masculinity studies and family studies the phenomenon that is most often cited as bringing masculinity and the 'true' nature of the nuclear family to light is feminism. More recently postcolonialism is cited as the theory that first brought whiteness into the critical spotlight (Dyer, 1997), and in relation to the construction of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, 1980), queer theory is implicated. Thus the theories of the marginal are said to have brought normality itself into visibility. The visibility of the centre is discussed as being an almost inadvertent move brought about by the marginalized examining their own positionings and the inequality inherent in being placed away from the centres of society. These investigations are said to have begun to disrupt the unquestioned hegemony of white men. The early (as well as the later) movements of these disciplines examined binaries and stereotypes. Binaries are, as is suggested by the name, hierarchical systems of duality which include what is seen as the privileged and normalized as well as the inferior and abnormalized, as we saw above with the binary of mind/body. This means that even when marginal theorists concentrate on examining the way that the 'lesser' half of a binary opposition works, the 'normalized', 'higher' part of the binary is implicitly evoked, recognized and acknowledged. Similarly, still working with binaries, the deconstruction of stereotypes necessarily involves an examination of the normal. As Stuart Hall puts it:

Stereotyping [...] is part of the maintenance of the social and symbolic order. It sets up a symbolic frontier between the 'normal' and the 'deviant', the 'normal' and the 'pathological', the 'acceptable' and the 'unacceptable', what 'belongs' and what does not or is 'Other', between 'insider' and 'outsider', Us and Them' (Hall, 1997a: 258).

In deconstructing hierarchical binaries and the stereotypes of those placed as 'other', the central hegemonic 'normal' is uncovered and its techniques and mechanisms of retaining power by fixing and marginalizing others by defining them as 'abnormal', 'pathological', 'deviant', 'unacceptable' and 'outside', are laid bare. Through examining one half of the binary that defines the 'abnormal' the definitions of what constitutes the 'normal' immediately become apparent. In this way it is argued that the centre was made visible, although absolutely not through its own volition.

Whitehead and Barrett argue this position when they speak about this unasked for and *enforced* visibility:

One of the direct consequences of feminist thinking and action has been to *expose* and *highlight* the power, privilege, position and practices of men. In so doing, feminism has explicated the continuing inequality between women and men as they exist across ethnic groups and cultural and social borders. Feminism is political inasmuch as it is about seeking change [...]. In pursuit of this aim, feminism puts men and masculinities in a critical *spotlight*, in the process centring on the practices of men in ways many men would *prefer it not to*, not least because there may well be costs to them as a result. Certainly in terms of sustaining unequal material advantage, opportunity, status and privilege, men have much to lose with the rise of feminist thinking (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 3, my emphases).

From Whitehead and Barrett's point of view this exposure of men is the most important consequence of feminism. As women began to systematically examine their positioning *as* women, this could only be done if they looked at their positioning in relation to men. By its very nature feminism called masculinity into question. According to Whitehead and Barrett the critique of masculinity and men is central to feminism and this critique is discussed most often in terms of bringing men and masculinity into visibility. Men have been highlighted, exposed and thrust into the spotlight by feminism and from this point of view it became impossible for white, bourgeois, heterosexual masculinity to continue to occupy the normal unnoticed. In this argument the margins marked the centre. Sally Robinson argues that in post 1960's America (and this relates to discussions in Britain too), "the so-called average American – straight, white, male, middle class – also experiences a mark imposed on him by others" (Robinson, 2000: 16). In Robinson's argument 'others' have always been 'marked' by the centre but now with the rise of the marginal theorists and the social movements that often accompanied them she argues that the normalized white male became a 'marked' man.

Within masculinity studies it is stressed again and again that, at the beginning, the margins forced visibility (Easthope, 1986/1992, Peterson, 1998), embodiment, (Robinson, 2000), race (Dyer, 1997), and even gender (Boone and Cadden, 1990) on to men. This seemingly

unstoppable movement is sometimes linked with the rise of postmodernism and the consequential and inevitable break up of the master or grand narratives. Truth is no longer 'truth' and the singularities (normality, humanity) assumed by dominant discourse in the past shatter into multiplicities and fragments (Whitehead, 2002: 222-3). The shattering of the invisibility of white men is said to have ricocheted onto the ideal of the normal, white, middle class, heterosexual nuclear family as well. Discussing the realm of representations of the nuclear family, Deborah Chambers argues:

Representations have become a critical battleground in the conflicts over family and family values, leading to the *spectacularisation* of the family as the platform on which society's profound debates about sexual and personal morality are struggled over. As such, family values are being argued over at the level of representations, leading to a spectacularisation of 'the family' as a monolithic unit, to be defended or dismantled (Chambers, 2001:176, my emphasis).

Chambers argues that for the nuclear family, as it inhabited the place of the normal, this 'spectacularisation' was new. And, as Whitehead and Barrett argue that now white men can be seen, so Chambers argues that the nuclear family can also now be seen.

Thus we begin the logical progression of the new studies. For masculinity and family studies, having argued that invisibility was necessary in order to maintain the current white patriarchal status quo and in order for it to be unquestioned as the definition of the normal, logically, this 'new' visibility of the normal must shake this definition of the normal and therefore the status quo itself. If invisibility allowed (particularly) white men to stay in power, then it is understandably argued that visibility will undermine this power base. Following this argument, the new visibility of the normal leaves it open to question and therefore resistance. Within the invisibility argument it was the invisibility of normality that prevented questioning – with the argument that what cannot be seen cannot be resisted. Therefore, if one allows for this 'new' visibility of the normal that 'safe place' of power has now gone along with invisibility. Abigail Solomon-Godeau in *Constructing Masculinity* takes up this point in relation to men:

The recent visibility of masculinity itself as, variously, a disciplinary object of knowledge, a subject of artistic or literary investigation, and a political, ethical and sexual problematic – a diagnostic primarily derived from and in fact inseparable from feminism and the women's movement – attests, if nothing else, to a destabilization of the notion of masculinity such that it forfeits its previous transparency, its taken-for-grantedness (Soloman-Godeau, 1995: 75).

Soloman-Godeau argues that as feminism and the women's movement have made masculinity visible so begins the destabilization of masculinity itself. And with masculinity, whiteness and 'the' family now visible, what was seen as normality is opened up as an object of enquiry itself and opened up again to criticism and resistance.

1.3 Backlash

We now turn to the reactions that are/were the first response to this 'new' exposure and critique of the normal. The texts of both masculinity studies and family studies always document what they describe as the first reactionary responses to the 'new' visibility of the centre and the newly perceived threat of the destabilization of the normal: the backlash responses. Within the context of this thesis, the documenting of these reactions and the reactions themselves represent an important stage in the changing place of the normal within current discourse. In this section I examine the discussion of these first reactions only in relation to how current theory represents them rather than documenting these reactions myself. This is because I am examining these first 'backlash' reactions as a stage within the progression of the new studies' own arguments about themselves and their own political positioning and as an important step on the road to the 'crisis' of the normal that we will look at soon.

The backlash arguments are presented as being in complete contrast to the new discussions and agendas of masculinity studies and family studies. The backlash responses seem to be documented in order to demonstrate that their opinion and politics differ completely from the right wing reaction. Those espousing the backlash arguments want the re-centring of the normal whereas both masculinity studies and family studies ostensibly and explicitly

require the de-centring of the normal. The backlash arguments differ from the discussions of masculinity and traditional studies of the family in that these disciplines both assume and accept the normal *as* the normal. The backlash argument recognizes that society has changed and that the normal has been deposed and displaced and sees this as wrong and as needing rectifying and moving back to 'how things were'. Between those espousing a change 'back' and the more radical position of masculinity and family studies there are however some similarities in the discussions around how and why the normal has been made visible. Although after this initial 'agreement' about the foundations of the changes in the way that normality is being perceived, those who say they want normality reinstated *as* normality and those who say they don't, radically separate in their discussions and their theorizations.

The first points of agreement between the reactionary right-wing attitudes that they document and masculinity and family studies themselves is the idea that normality has become visible, it is under threat and attitudes to it are changing. The second point of agreement is that these changes have come about through the 'intervention' of minority groups; by minority theorizations, by minority political movements, by the assertion of minority rights, and by the very presence and visibility of minorities. However, where masculinity and family studies see this as a positive change for the better, in their own texts they document the reactions of others who do not. In many of the early responses to feminism and postcolonialism that are documented, there is a palpable sense of threat that informs the discourse around the normal. The normal is seen as being under attack, the status quo endangered and the very existence of the privileged normal threatened.

Masculinity and family studies texts and the conservative rhetoric they quote agree that there *is* a threat to the normal and that there really are not many places left for the white patriarchal centre to go. As Stephen Whitehead says; "men have nowhere to hide now. There are no overarching ideologies or dominant discourses into which men can retreat"

(Whitehead, 2002: 5-6). Whitehead is arguing that the universalizing ideologies and discourses that came from the white male centres have fallen apart or more likely been blown into a thousand fragments. White men as the epitome of the normal have been caught in the light; cornered. And the first reaction that is discussed by the new studies to this 'cornering' is this (very visible) violent and dogmatic backlash, which is discussed as peaking in the 1980s.

In the introduction to the 1988 book *Male Order* Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford document this first response to feminism, gay and black political movements:

Queer, poofter, sick, deviant: all those words weighed down with the baggage of ignorance and violence have been resurrected from the heterosexual psyche, to defend its claim to normality. In the Tory right-wing think-tanks, church debate and the 'quality press' the prose may be more muted, but the sentiments have been similar.

This moral panic, and the strength of feeling that has been aroused, indicates the centrality of sexual politics in the production and reproduction of power relations. Far from being peripheral, the meanings, definitions and representation of different sexualities are a central arena of political contestation. The right has been attempting to counter and defeat the politics of feminism, gay affirmation and black identity. It has been seeking to construct these politics as the cause, rather than the consequence, of a fractured society (Chapman and Rutherford, 1988: 9-10).

Chapman and Rutherford describe the sentiments of a movement that they say is defending normality against those who supposedly intend to dismantle the normal; feminists and gay and black activists. In the language of this backlash, rather than white patriarchal society's inevitable inequalities being blamed for the fracturing and destabilization of society, those who have historically *experienced* this inequality are blamed: 'them' rather than 'us'.

Various 'enemies' are said to be evoked and created by the backlash movement and these enemies are viewed as agents of chaos intent on destabilizing society and pulling down the traditional order. Chapman and Rutherford continue: "when the litany of threats is read out – the recurring list of blacks, gays, lesbians and feminists – it speaks to the threatened power and privilege of a white masculinity that has been the symbol of patriarchal order" (Chapman and Rutherford, 1988: 11). In light of this, it is not surprising that when the marginal force a hearing for themselves, it is the marginal who within conservative rhetoric

were/are *blamed* for the subsequent destabilization of the central normal. Pro-feminist masculinity studies (of which Chapman and Rutherford are a part) also believes that white masculinity's power and privilege is being threatened and, interestingly, is being 'threatened' by the very same people/political movements; blacks, gays, lesbians and feminists, that are invoked by the right-wing backlash rhetoric, albeit that in this case it is seen as positive.

The composition of British society is changing. Marginal political movements highlight inequalities and make the presence of minorities such as gays and blacks inescapable. As David Theo Goldberg proclaims:

In the late twentieth century [...] the regulative force of colonialism has broken down and the unsettling capacity of hybridity can no longer be kept (colonially) marginal by modern forms of control. Indeed, the heterogenous and hybrid have come to occupy and challenge modernity's centers. Under these altered conditions, hybridity's unsettling capacity has been celebrated and embraced, but also fiercely resisted (Goldberg, 2000: 83).

In this (postcolonial) view of the change in our society it is the *presence* of the 'other' that challenges the centre. And as Goldberg notes there are two reactions to this – there are those who celebrate and embrace this change and there are those who resist it. Those who are said to resist the 'threat', in order to resist this chaotic, disruptive 'other' are discussed as re-invoking a singular, stable normality which they then present as the moderate 'common sense' middle way of the normal.

Masculinity studies and family studies argue that as the white patriarchal centres of society are being threatened an attempt is being made to re-cover the unities, stability and ideological structuring of those centres: white hegemonic masculinity, and the white nuclear family as the ideal normal. Deborah Chambers documents this 'backward looking' movement:

A revisionist model of the nuclear family is being recuperated through a rising moral fundamentalism in western Anglophone nations, spearheaded by the Moral Right, ethical socialists and certain religious groups to regulate meanings and

practices of family and halt the processes of increasing individualization. A growing sense of agency among formerly subordinated and inferiorised groups, including women, gay men and people who are treated as ethnic 'minorities', threatens modern family values. Modern family values have been the very site in which those social and cultural inequalities have been reproduced. Their demise would erode those key mechanisms of regulation. The privileging of nuclear family values is therefore being sharply defended, policed and fought over. [...] Fundamentalism is, then, a reaction against the demands for diversity and difference (Chambers, 2001: 167).

Chambers speaks of a 're-vision' of the nuclear family that seeks to see it 'again' as the singular normal form of the family and which will then impart certain right-wing and religious moral attitudes to both its members and to society as a whole. What Chambers describes are reactive sentiments expressed in the language of the backlash; a sense of 'shoring up' the centre against the assault that is flowing from the margins. This bigoted and rigid type of reaction to uncertainty, doubt and a sense of threat has been closely examined in relation to nationalism. People's sense of (national) identity becomes more divisive and rigid if people feel under threat (Woodward, 1997), and it is this type of *defensive* reaction that is discussed as being apparent in relation to the threat to the normal. The defense that the new studies document but disagree with is a re-creation of the idea of a single, stable normal as a counterpoise to the frightening and chaotic and 'bad' 'other' that is demanding a voice and that is bringing both itself and the normal, privileged centre of society to light.

1.4 Crisis

The notion of crisis is said to have come after the initial backlash reactions to change. As we have seen both those who are vociferous in their reaction against the destabilization of the normal, and the proponents and participants of the new studies see the visibility of the normal as a threat to the status quo, to the 'old' patriarchal order. From seemingly diametrically opposed positions both sides of the argument, whether for the preservation of the normal as it was/is, or those who advocate the deconstruction of this normal, discuss this visibility of the normal a) as new, b) as being forced upon the positions and places at

the centre of society and c) as a serious threat to this centre. For both camps, this enforced visibility leads to ideas of the destabilization of the old order and beginning the notions of 'crisis' (Whitehead, 2002). The notion of 'crisis' is said to follow on from and, at least to begin with, to be a part of the violent and dogmatic backlash against the marginal voices that forced a hearing for themselves and 'forced' visibility onto white masculinity and the white nuclear family.

The notion of crisis comes with the notion of 'blame' although the discussion of crisis differs from that of backlash. However the same elements and circumstances are said to have precipitated the crisis as the backlash. Most often it has been women in general and feminism in particular that have been implicated in both the perceived crisis in masculinity and in the white nuclear family. Deborah Chambers says starkly; "it is female emancipation that is blamed for the breakdown of modern family values" (Chambers, 2001: 129). Along with feminism or the "genderquake" as he calls it, Richard Collier cites "the increased 'visibility' (and thus it is assumed legitimacy) of gay, lesbian and bi-sexual practices and cultures" (Collier, 1999: 42). He argues that the increased visibility of minority groups helps to construct an idea of both the family and masculinity 'in crisis'. The visibility and subsequent 'acceptance' of the 'abnormal' are said to have precipitated the crisis.

Alongside the rise of feminism and the visibility of diverse sexualities and practices, the rise in the amount of people who can be seen to belong to 'ethnic minorities' is also cited as precipitating a crisis in the white centres. Our society is increasingly multicultural.

There is no doubt that things have changed apace. This is how Bhikhu Parekh discusses multiculturalism:

Multicultural societies are integrally bound up with the immensely complex process of economic and cultural globalization. Technology and goods travel freely, and they are not culturally neutral. Multinationals introduce new industries and systems of management and require the receiving societies to create the necessary cultural

preconditions. [...] People travel for employment and as tourists, and both export and import new ideas and influences. Thanks to all this, no society can remain culturally self-contained and isolated. Indeed, the external influences are often so subtle and deep that the receiving societies are not even aware of their presence and impact. [...] [T]he project of cultural unification on which many past societies and all modern states have relied for their stability and cohesion is no longer viable today. Contemporary cultural diversity thus has an air of inexorability and unpredictability about it and confronts us all as a shared universal predicament (Parekh, 2000: 8).

Parekh is arguing that multiculturalism and globalization will themselves undermine any attempt at 'cultural unification', stability or cohesion. Global capitalism itself means that national isolation and static populations are no longer a reality. Cross-cultural influences pervade most parts of the globe and the first world is as affected as everywhere else.

Societies *have* changed and the viewpoints of backlash, crisis and celebration all recognize this. From slavery to Windrush, from asylum seekers to the new economic migrants, the diaspora is growing and will continue to do so. Multiculturalism and diversity within the discourse of the new studies are seen as an important part of the breakdown of the traditional, white, nuclear family as being representative of the normal and are seen as pointing the way to the meltdown of the white male hegemony.

Masculinity and family studies argue that in both the backlash and the crisis rhetoric it is these 'minorities' that are blamed for the changes in society over and above all other factors. Changes in economic conditions (de-industrialization), technology (especially reproductive), and globalization are also all cited but (largely) as subordinate factors to the changes 'enforced' on the white patriarchal centres by minority groups; the increasing diversity in society and (because of feminism) the rise of divorce, cohabitation and single parenthood (Segal, 1997, Chambers, 2001, Allan, 1999, Whitehead and Barrett, 2001, Jagger and Wright, 1999, Smart and Neale, 1999 etc). With the growing diversity of our society other related changes have followed. On the point of immigration, Graham Allan in *The Sociology of the Family* writes:

The migration of individuals and families from the Caribbean, South Asia, East Africa and other parts of the Commonwealth in the second half of the Twentieth

Century has resulted in much more variation in the organization of family and kinship relations than existed previously (Allan, 1999: 5).

Forms of the family that deviate from the white nuclear family are it is argued, on the increase and therefore the traditional 'ideal' of the nuclear family is in danger of crumbling. In the arguments of masculinity studies and family studies reality is said to be interfering with the 'myth' – whereby *actual* family forms do not (any longer) conform to the mythic white, nuclear ideal. And again there is concurrence between differently motivated arguments. This self-same argument about multiculturalism and variations of family forms 'threatening' the centrality of the nuclear family form as the ideal in Western societies is also used by those who bemoan the fate of the nuclear family; it can be employed to 'prove' crisis in the family, but it can also be and is used to point out and celebrate change and point the way to new possibilities. In the rhetoric of both movements, anti-change and pro-change, it is argued that variation, diversity and multiple family forms are becoming increasingly visible. And again in both viewpoints in relation to diversity, immigration and globalization are both cited (as interrelated phenomena) as playing a large part in the (relatively recent) changes in our society¹⁷.

In the political (ideological) book *The Global Third Way Debate*, Helen Wilkinson writes:

Many families today experience huge strain. Relationships are breaking down at a rapid rate; more and more children are growing up in disrupted [sic] families; birthrates are in decline; and there is a serious tension for many between the demands placed on them to be good parents and spouses and to be high achievers in an increasingly competitive workplace. Our [sic] very notion of the family itself appears to be threatened. The long-term trends suggest that we are not only living in a 'post-divorce' society, we are rapidly moving to a 'post-marriage' one where marriage itself is increasingly redundant. (The first time marriage rate is at its lowest possible level since 1889 and cohabitation is a cultural norm) (Wilkinson, 2001: 224).

Wilkinson argues that everything that 'we' know is being broken up and 'our' norms being dismantled as the reality and the myth come head to head. As Deborah Chambers writes,

¹⁷ Also cited are the histories of the slave trade and the enforced movement of people; the enforced, as well as the more recent *chosen*, diaspora (see Behdad in Schwarz and Ray, 2000: 396+, and Hall in Woodward, 1997: 51+, among many other discussions).

“western anglophone nations [...] struggle to cope with the huge disjunction between the mediated ideal nuclear family and real complex, hybrid families and relationships”

(Chambers, 2001: 108). This is where there is another split between the advocates of the ideal-as-reality (some right-wing and religious groups that argue that the ideal is a reality that can be reinstated) and those who see that the ideal *has become* a myth (or in this reading an ‘untruth’). This latter, is the view that family studies, on the whole, takes. Family studies argues that the white, heterosexual, nuclear family is no longer either the ideal or the majority family form. From both sides of the argument though it is seen that other forms of the family are becoming so common that the ideal of the white nuclear family as normal is being left wide open to question and thus is being portrayed as being in crisis.

In masculinity and family studies the discussion of the discourse of crisis is an important step in their own theoretical paths. The discourse of crisis in masculinity and the family, although slightly different to the rhetoric of backlash is not unconnected. Within the discussions of masculinity and family studies the backlash reaction to change is not spoken about as being static and the reaction itself is said to change: from backlash to crisis. In the first place it is argued that the visibility that the margins forced on to the centre meant that men-as-a-group could be identified and claims to neutral, unmarked individuality were shattered (Robinson, 2000). This as we have seen led to the backlash reaction but the backlash reaction itself inevitably involves the centre acting and identifying itself *as* centre against the margins. In this way the visibility of the centre is inadvertently consolidated and (so it is argued) the centre itself further destabilized. As well as this, the language and arguments of the backlash movement are easy to argue against to show bigotry and intolerance and can themselves be used to show that the white centre *does* perpetuate inequality based on identity. Thus although the backlash sentiments are still sometimes reiterated in various quarters its influence seems to be waning and one can cite the massive

rise of pro-feminist masculinity studies as one demonstration of this. Another 'proof' of the waning of the influence of the reactionary language/ ideas of backlash is the rise in the rhetoric of crisis. This rhetoric is not, as I have argued, entirely separate from that of backlash – indeed it comes from it, but it does represent a change in tack.

Within masculinity studies texts such as Stephen Whitehead's (2002) and family studies texts such as Deborah Chambers' (2001) the rhetoric of crisis is discussed as an inevitable and subsequent reaction that follows on from the first violent and dogmatic backlash. The rhetoric of crisis is said to be the next stage of a movement that, so far, is said to have involved; a) the invisibility of normality, b) the subsequent enforced visibility of normality by the margins and c) the violent and dogmatic response to this enforced visibility by the reactionary right-wing. Notions of crisis are said to be the next link in this chain. Deborah Chambers says that:

Since the golden era of the modern family of the 1950's, during which the nuclear version became an icon of morality, the family has been represented as both stable and deeply vulnerable. It continues to be conveyed as biologically and psychically natural, and, at the same time, as crisis-ridden and under siege (Chambers, 2001: 92).

For Chambers the notion of threat and crisis is a part of the creation of an ideal of the white nuclear family. The very fact that a unified, biologically determined ideal is invoked means that it will inevitably be under siege and in crisis. Any invocation of a singular stable normal inevitably carries a corresponding idea of the unstable, multiple, *abnormal*. Normality is placed in direct opposition to the 'abnormal' and its threatening and chaotic forces and with the inexorable logic of binaries, the abnormal is created in line with the normal. Order cannot exist without chaos (Foucault, 1976: 44-9). The invocation of the normal will always carry in its wake the shadow of the dark and dangerous abnormal. Thus, a visible but unified version of normality will always be perceived as being under threat. Stephen Whitehead concurs with this view in relation to masculinity:

Many writings on the crisis of masculinity assume that men and their masculinity are homogenous and biologically indivisible, sustained by a natural order that has

been severely threatened by women's 'misguided' attempts to transform the gender 'balance'. Importantly, and what is of concern, feminism is seen by many to be the guilty party in all this (Whitehead, 2002: 56).

By viewing masculinity and men themselves to be biologically determined and singular, Whitehead is arguing that, inevitably, this will place 'women' in opposition to men and thus as a threat. Here, as with the rhetoric of backlash, men-as-a-group have been identified, however the crucial difference is that the language and representations of crisis begin to *use* this identification to claim feminization and victimization for white-men-as-a-group.

Sally Robinson, who writes extensively about notions of crisis and the move into notions of victimization and feminization explains the 'new' use of a collective identity for white men:

Identity politics is only mobilized after the perception of victimization or injury; [...] the appeal of collectivity appears to depend on a felt experience of disempowerment. This is evident in the language in which calls for groups rights are couched; that language draws heavily on the moral and symbolic power of pain, victimization, and crisis, whether articulated from economic and social centers or their margins. [...] [W]hite men do not willingly fold their individual identities into a group identity except around perceived losses of power, articulated as impingements of rights (Robinson, 2000: 7).

In Robinson's articulation of the rhetoric of crisis, collective identity for white men is absolutely necessary. White men cannot be in crisis or victims unless they can identify themselves *as* white men. The discourse of men-in-crisis subsumes differences between men into the discourse of victimization. Differences such as class and even race are subsumed because this discourse can only exist if there is an identified collective identity for men and as we know, any type of strategic essentialism subsumes differences. The collective identity of 'men' in discussions and representations of crisis and victimization is more important than racial or class identities. In the discourse of crisis the identified men-as-a-group position of the backlash is mobilized into a strategic essentialism for men that shows (or makes visible) the victimization of men. It is in this way that the notion of crisis follows on from the backlash concepts. Both movements see that the centre is under threat

and white men are being disempowered. However, instead of the rage of the backlash, 'pain, victimization and crisis' are being articulated and enforced visibility is being changed into 'look at (poor) me'.

There is disagreement within the disciplines of masculinity studies and family studies about whether or not there actually is a crisis for either men or the family or indeed what form this crisis might take and what it might mean. However the notion of crisis is always discussed and the phenomenon of men-in-crisis is one of the most common ways that white men are portrayed in media representations at the moment, as we will see.

Masculinity studies and family studies tend to discuss the rhetoric of crisis as one that is common in the current climate but not one that they themselves ascribe to as a 'reality'. Thus, in concurrence with the view of many current masculinity studies discussions, this is how Stephen Whitehead puts it: "[d]espite its reductionistic underpinnings, the notion of a homogenous body of men 'in crisis' is now commonplace in many contemporary studies of men" (Whitehead, 2002: 54). Whitehead cites some more popular works which *do* espouse the rhetoric of crisis even as he disagrees with this view point as do many masculine studies practitioners. In *Masculinities and Culture* John Beynon asks among other questions: "who says there is a crisis-in-masculinity?"; "Are we talking about men-in-crisis or masculinity-in-crisis or both?" and "What is meant by 'crisis'?" (Beynon, 2002: 76). And in relation to the family-in-crisis family studies discusses the changes in society that are *said* (by others) to have lead to the crisis. The point that I want to make is that the new studies use and describe the rhetoric of crisis but it is not a part of their *own* argument. That there has been change in British and Western society is undisputed, but the slant that should be put on these changes *is* disputed, as are the possible implications of these changes.

1.5 Representations of Crisis, Feminization and Victimization

The concept of crisis for white, middle class men has gained huge popularity in newer fictional texts about men and the family. These texts often indulge in sustained representations of family breakdown, failing fathers and victimized and feminized men. The crisis of men is represented as being apparent in many areas of men's lives: the home, fatherhood, through consumption, work, their bodies and their relations with other men. In these representations and also sometimes in the theory, two sites of crisis are often conflated whereby the crisis in the family is a part of and has a direct correlation with the crisis in masculinity. In a chapter called "Men, heterosexuality and the changing family" Richard Collier argues that "a particular correlation has been made between a crisis of *fatherhood* and a crisis of the *family*" (Jagger and Wright, 1999: 39). Crisis is characterized by a breakdown in the white nuclear family, by fathers being 'pushed out' of the family, and by a *feminization* and *victimization* of white masculinity.

Representations of men in crisis have been around throughout the 1990s, but I would argue that they have changed somewhat over the decade leading to my period of concern – the late 90s until now. The film that is perhaps most often discussed in relation to the theme of a white man in crisis; in crisis with his sense of masculine, his related identity as a worker and a father is the 1993 film *Falling Down*. Richard Dyer discusses this film at some length in relation to a crisis in whiteness and reproduction, arguing finally that it shows white masculinity to be "under threat, decentred, angry" (Dyer, 1997: 222). Because of the violence and anger inherent in the film and in the protagonist Dfens, and because of the sense of everything falling apart and the feeling Dfens has that he needs to defend himself and his family from the chaos, I would argue that this film is a film in the *backlash* tradition. And although there is anger in films such as *Magnolia* and *Fight Club* that I will discuss later, for the most part mainstream representations of masculinity in crisis in the

late 1990s do not display such anger or such an obvious backlash response but tend to concentrate on the feminization and victimization of their male protagonists.

Robinson's *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* argues forcibly throughout the book that "[t]he white male victim – personally and individually targeted – is the emblem of the current crisis in white masculinity" (Robinson, 2000: 5). And it is this discourse, rather than reacting *against* the visibility forced on the white family and on white men, that begins to *use* this visibility in order to show what a hard time white men have *really* been having (Robinson, 2000). In many of the fictional, media representations that build stories around white, middle class men in the late 1990s there is a palpable feeling of emasculation, an almost welcomed loss of privilege and status and the feeling that something is slipping away from these men. This 'crisis' for men is most often examined through issues of feminization. Men in these fictions are feminized partly because 'proper' masculinity is represented as not being possible anymore. Representations of crisis however, do not concur with the earlier backlash reactions which attempted through discussion or representation to recoup some solid sense of masculinity. There is more a sense of the bottom having been taken out of any idea of masculinity (usually by women and 'women's lib') and thus a sense of men floundering. In contemporary films and novels men's disempowerment is represented through various forms of feminization to the point that men's position is shown to be almost the same as women's traditional, oppressed position.

The consensus is that men are being feminized and victimized and fathers marginalized whether they are working class or middle class, white, black or Asian, American or British. Deborah Chambers writes: "[t]he white middle class male is no longer being signified as neutral. White male protagonists are now taking on more marginalized identities. [...] Powerful white males have also been portrayed as crisis-ridden" (Chambers, 2001: 110).

The crisis is said to cover *all* men: working class, (*The Full Monty*, *Fight Club*), middle class, (*The Best a Man Can Get*, *Man and Boy*, *American Beauty*, *Larry's Party*), or black or Asian, (*Babyfather*,¹⁸ *Intimacy*). Discourses of class and race become subsumed by the discourse of masculine crisis. The back cover of *Intimacy* (Kureishi, 1998) has a quote from the Independent on Sunday which says: “*Intimacy* speaks to, and for, a lost generation of men: those shaped by the Sixties, disoriented by the Eighties and bereft of a personal and political map in the Nineties”. This is the rhetoric of crisis. Men don’t know what the rules are anymore, they have no map, no way of knowing how to go forward or what is expected of them. Men, whether they are white, black, Asian, working class or middle class, are in crisis, and, because men are in crisis, so is the family.

It is in relation to this sense of crisis, to the feelings of pain and victimization and the emotive crisis in fatherhood that the primary texts, the novels and films come into play. As we will see later in this thesis,¹⁹ current representations of any idea of the right wing backlash to the changes for men and the family show these reactions as aberrations, as undesirable and ultimately useless. Much more common are the types of representation I will look at now, which indulge in the emotions of the crisis. All the texts looked at in the section; *Man and Boy* (Parsons, 1999), *The Best A Man Can Get* (O’Farrell, 2000), *Fight Club* (1999), *The Full Monty* (1997), *Intimacy* (Kureishi, 1998) and *Larry's Party* (Shields, 1997), whether novel or film, deal with the breakdown of the nuclear family, and a new type of *father-absence*. This new type of father-absence differs from the older type, which as part of the general invisibility of white men in social discourse, meant that the patriarch was absent *within* the family as a part of his power (Jagger and Wright, 1999: 49, Chambers, 2001: 99). Now men are represented as being either absent in the family through being disempowered and deemed useless, or they are shown to be absent because

¹⁸ *Babyfather* is a drama on BBC 2 dealing with issues of black masculinity and fatherhood that aired its second series in November 2002. The initial catchphrase on the *Babyfather* website for the BBC is “Once men were men and women were glad of it”.

¹⁹ See in particular chapter three’s section on homophobia

they are being *pushed out* of the family, most often by disaffected wives, but also sometimes by the very babies that they have fathered.

Most of the fictional texts are comedic, or at the least ironic and all proved very popular on release or publication. The issues these texts deal with, although often dealt with lightly, carry remarkable similarities both to each other but also to the wider discourse of the family and white masculinity in crisis. These fictional texts illustrate (and create) the phenomenon of crisis. They are part of the archive of crisis. Supposedly half a step behind the theory, which tends to deny actual crisis, current media texts demonstrate crisis and weave its narrative into their own with a vast array of wounded, feminized, victimized male protagonists many of whom are also ejected from the families they have fathered. In these texts fatherhood is discussed and made present. In this way the novels and films, despite their different tones and concerns are a part of the change in society that is making the normal, in terms of white men and the family, visible, de-naturalizing it and examining the way it works (or doesn't). Fatherhood and family life are no longer seen as either easy or natural for men: there is a crisis of both fatherhood and the family.

We will start our discussion on fatherhood by looking at men being 'pushed out' of the family. In *The Best a Man can Get*, the protagonist, Michael Adams is an absent father in order, he argues, that he might manage to be present some of the time. Michael pretends to his wife and two small children that he is working when in fact he is renting a room in a house with three other (young) men in order to get a break from family life. Although the narrative both tells us and demonstrates to us that he is not behaving well, it also gives us the reasons for his (chosen) absence. It all begins when he and his wife Catherine have their first baby. Michael tells us, "I felt redundant almost from the outset. Normally when there had been something that Catherine had really wanted, I had been the one who got it out of the box and wired up the speakers. But when we took this baby home, I was the

useless one who had no idea what to do” (O’Farrell, 2000: 47). Michael does not feel needed. He feels both redundant and useless – “I was offering to be hands-on, but in reality my hands were just hanging down by my sides” (O’Farrell, 2000: 54). Michael feels more than just useless, in fact he feels *pushed out*. Catherine actually does push him out of the marital bed; “so now she didn’t sleep with her husband any more, she slept with her new love, The Baby. [...] She was besotted, spellbound, obsessed. It was like when she first fell in love with me. Except this time it wasn’t with me. Millie had pushed me out. She had taken my place” (O’Farrell, 2000: 50). For Michael, both his wife and his daughter have pushed him out, emotionally, and physically, and so he ‘goes with the flow’ and removes himself completely.

In *The Full Monty*, the white male, and this time working class ‘hero’ Gaz, also feels pushed out of the family, and nearly pushed out of fatherhood itself. And although dealing with issues of class, unemployment and poverty, issues that *The Best a Man Can Get* doesn’t really address, the main thrust of the story revolves around many of the same ideas of fatherhood and masculinity. The film demonstrates very clearly that the traditional ‘male’ occupations in Sheffield’s steel industry have been erased almost completely, leaving men unsure of their masculine roles. Factories have been closed and unemployment among men who were the breadwinners has become rife. Because of the collapse of heavy industry Gaz is unemployed and on benefit and therefore cannot afford the maintenance his ex-wife is demanding for his son Nathan. The entire film is premised around this, as Gaz would not have organized the ‘full monty’ strip if it were not for needing the money that would enable him to be a ‘proper’ father. The film follows Gaz’s efforts to remain as Nathan’s father, and follows his growing relationship with his son. He has to contend with Nathan’s new ‘nuclear’ family, as his ex-wife has married again, and is now living in relative luxury in a warm and tidy semi-detached house in the suburbs. The fact that Gaz is such a disgrace as a conventional father provides much of the comedy as

well as the pathos of the film. It is his ex-wife who has the power over his relationship with his son (and this is true too in *The Best a Man Can Get*, and *Man and Boy*). She has the power to stop Gaz seeing Nathan, and for most of the film it is her version of what a 'proper' father is that counts. Gaz as a father has been completely disempowered (although, luckily, his position as a father is recuperated at the end of the film with a triumphant exposure of his penis to a crowd of screaming women!).

Man and Boy, a best-selling novel by Tony Parsons adopts a slightly different stance in relation to fatherhood. After the white, male, middle class protagonist, Harry Silver, commits adultery, his wife Gina leaves him alone with his four year old son Pat for four months while she tries to recoup the career she gave up for the sake of their family. The novel follows Harry's failures and eventual triumphs as he attempts to be a 'real parent' and overcome his own personal crisis around fatherhood. In this text too it is Gina who really holds the power. Harry, when Gina demands to have Pat back tells her; "I'm all for men taking responsibility for their children. I'm all for men doing their bit in bringing up their kids. But you can't have it both ways. You can't expect us to take part in the parenting and then just step aside when you want us to, as if we were just like our dads, as if it were all really women's work" (Parsons, 1999: 308). Harry's complaint is that Gina is reverting to and using, 'old' gender stereotypes in order to get her own way. He notes that Gina wanted him to be a 'hands-on' dad when it suited her to go away to work, but that now she wants him to absent himself as the 'older' type of father did and to allow her to resume her gendered role as mother. Harry's own priorities have changed from being career oriented and concentrating on the television show he produces to being family oriented. He muses; "I had changed over the last six months, my months of bringing up Pat alone. The show with Eamon was just a way to pay the mortgage, not the way to prove my worth to myself and everyone else. Work was no longer the centre of my universe. The centre of my universe was my boy" (Parsons, 1999: 324). Harry has learnt to be a

‘real parent’, and ‘proper’ father, partly by denouncing the masculine priority of work, career or breadwinning. Even so he is still ‘forced’ to allow Gina to have custody in the name of the nuclear family. Harry tells his irate lawyer that he is dropping the custody battle with Gina because: “I just think that a child needs two parents. Even a kid whose parents are divorced. Especially a kid whose parents are divorced” (Parsons, 1999: 328-9). Harry decides to bow to convention – the child will, finally, go with the mother and in a decision that is seen as correct and moral within the narrative, Pat will live in a nuclear family.

This discourse of disempowered/displaced fatherhood is a repeated media concern at the moment. The Radio 4 programme on fatherhood in the ‘Men in Crisis’ (2001) series included a sustained discussion about how men are being edged out of the family; “air-brushed out”. A panel of both women and men talked about the threat to fatherhood from the growing movement of women choosing to be single mothers, and further, by reproductive technology itself. (Dr Anthony Clare noted with irony that this technology was being created by men themselves). Deborah Chambers writes that within current media discourse there is a;

Fear that fatherhood is being marginalized and should become a more central concept to encourage enduring commitment from men in relationships. Arguments about the crisis of commitment seem then, to be centring on the ways in which men’s role in the family has been problematised, as fatherhood is identified as a central cause of a crisis of masculinity. It is linked to the problems of male unemployment and the crisis around representations of men as fathers and husbands in post-divorce families (Chambers, 2001: 131).

There is a general feeling that without proper father-figures, with fathers either leaving the family or being pushed out of it, whole generations of boys and men are being both victimized (boys need fathers) and feminized. This discussion is covered in various types of texts – from radio, to TV, to novels to films. Thus Tyler Durden in the film *Fight Club* proclaims bitterly; “we’re a generation of men raised by women”, whilst in *The Best a Man Can Get*, Michael Adams ponders all the baby manuals that he has read, finally deciding;

“[a]ll these concepts and suggestions left me feeling that I was supposed to try and make myself more maternal. That’s what they wanted me to be: a back-up mother” (O’Farrell, 2000: 59). Men, in Western society are being *feminized* and, as we have seen, this discourse is not confined by class or racial considerations, nor by the Atlantic, nor by textual or media type.

In concurrence with the discussion and representations of disempowered and feminized fatherhood whereby what it seems that is really wanted (by women) is a ‘back-up mother’, there is an extension of this that posits man-as-wife and which furthers the discussion of men’s disempowerment within the family. In many representations of men as family men, they are in their feminization, positioned in the role that was traditionally represented as being the wife’s. These men are often oppressed within the family in the way that wives have said to have been (Segal, 1990, Delphy and Leonard, 1992) – exploited, taken for granted, patronized and ignored. And even when not exactly placed as wife, contemporary man is shown to have the malaise that was previously seen as the province of the housewife, the suburban woman – the ‘problem that has no name’ (Friedan, 1963: 1). Men are being placed in the traditional feminine position – the position that feminism mobilized against in the first place. And thus through the rhetoric of crisis we can begin to see the first moves through the representations and discussions of men as feminized and victimized towards the discussion (and positioning) of men as marginal.

Intimacy by Hanif Kureishi is perhaps the most serious text that examined in this section. The story centres on one night, the night before Jay, the protagonist, is going to leave his wife Susan and two young sons for good. The entire book is saturated with sadness and regret, but Jay as protagonist and narrator presents us with the breakdown of his family as being an inevitability even as he blames himself. He *can’t* play his allotted roles as family man with conviction or sincerity anymore and he doesn’t want to. Jay will leave his family

because it is suffocating him and within the book his knowledge of his own imminent departure gives him back some of the power he has lost. Jay, although not excusing himself, has become invisible within his own home. He feels a stranger in his own house, claustrophobic and constrained. On this, his last night, Jay helps bath his boys, puts them into their pyjamas and brings them back downstairs:

where they lie on cushions, nonchalantly sucking their dummies, watching *The Wizard of Oz* with their eyes half open. They look like a couple of swells smoking cigars in a field on a hot day. They demand ginger biscuits, as if I am a butler. I fetch them from the kitchen without Susan noticing me. The boys extend their greedy fingers but don't look away from the TV (Kureishi, 1998: 10).

In Jay's house his children have more power than he does. They are the 'couple of swells' and he is the 'butler' who performs his duties without his wife noticing and without the children even bothering to look at him as he serves them. Jay has been feminized into role of servant and wife. And in the context of the novel this is dangerous. If Jay keeps getting treated in this demeaning manner he will leave. He has no visibility in his house; no-one even looks at him. This keeps happening throughout the book; a sense of 'if only ...' but things have gone too far and Jay is taken for granted too often:

But I have been pushed and shoved because I haven't known my own mind, because I have become accustomed to going along with things, and tomorrow morning we will kiss and part.
Actually, forget the kiss (Kureishi, 1998: 32).

Jay's position in his family has become untenable and intolerable. He is not allowed to be properly man, husband, father or even individual and he will not take his enforced feminization any more. Jay has been pushed too far and he can't go along with things any more – he will absent himself.

Jay's position as man, as husband and as father in his household is almost the direct reverse of the 'traditional' role for men in a normal nuclear family. Jay quite often works from home, cooks, fetches, carries and takes on many of the parental responsibilities. He is not positioned as 'husband' but as 'wife' and, in line with this positioning Jay has the housewife's special mentioned earlier; "the problem that has no name" (Friedan, 1963).

Jay is not the only male character to suffer this 'problem' in the texts that I am examining. In *Larry's Party* Larry spends almost the entirety of his first marriage grappling with this 'problem that has no name'. Larry does not have Jay's anger and although he shares Jay's sense of claustrophobia, Larry's anxiety manifests itself as panic. Whilst Larry is still quite newly married to his first wife Dorrie, we enter his home for the first time in the book:

And what's the word for this spasm of panic that strikes Larry as he unlocks his back door on a winter night? [...] In the tiny linoleum-floored vestibule he stamps the snow off his boots and stoops to remove them, feeling as he leans forward that the air has dangerously thinned and that he could easily topple over dead on the spot.

He hums Michael Jackson's 'Billy Jean' to scatter the silence, an aerosol spray. The silence contributes to his plummeting faith in his own arrangements. Still air, empty rooms. It was as though he and Dorrie had never embarked on a life of house and children, but had been brought to this spiritless edge by force. The walls, the kitchen floor, the tight circle of second-hand appliances, the tiny corner table with its chairs pushed neatly in – these objects refuse to acknowledge him, though he's the one – isn't he? – who brought this scene into being, and who is now trapped in the bubble of his own dread. He ought to rejoice in the settledness of this room, but he doesn't. He should see it as a sequestered cave hidden away in the tall immensity of winter. What is the word for the slow, airless unrelieved absence he feels? It's coming to him, this word, winging its way as though guided by radar, but it hasn't quite arrived (Shields, 1997: 94).

Larry's situation fills him with panic. He feels stifled, claustrophobic, trapped; a stranger in his own house and life. Larry feels that this situation has occurred without his volition and that he has been brought here by force – the force of convention. He fears that this 'spiritless' life of 'house and children' might kill him. He is aware of an 'airless, unrelieved absence'; a void. And when the word does come to him ('desperation'?), he leaves his family, as does Jay.

As we have seen these two novels explain men's crisis and particularly their crisis within the family in terms that are remarkably similar to Betty Friedan's early 60s examination of the 'housewife's malaise'. In chapter one of *The Feminine Mystique* Friedan describes 'the problem': "it was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning" (Friedan, 1963: 1). And she says this stirring and yearning culminates in a single question: "Is this all?"

(Friedan, 1963: 1). In the terms set out by many of the current fictional texts about men, this crisis, yearning and this final question itself are precipitated by a re-enactment of masculinity; the expectations that society has put on men, the roles that are prescribed for them and by a conventional enactment of the normal. These texts express the same crisis for men that women are supposed to have 'gone through' already.

In *Larry's Party* Larry, successful, married, solvent takes a sideways look at the 'problem':

Temperamentally he seems to have settled for a convivial melancholy, the rather lumpy psychic matter of perplexity: *the problem is, he doesn't know how to be this person he's become*, but this could change tomorrow. For the moment, there *he sits behind his own face*. He's dressed, he's on time. What a surprise. What a bad surprise too. The parts of life that used to offer comfort more and more seem an illusion or a deep difficulty. This is what his friend Eric Eisner calls *the paradox of plenitude*. It seems that once there's enough money, enough recognition, enough love, [...] then there's nothing to look forward to except the next minute (Shields, 1997: 269, my emphases).

Larry has *too much*. Larry seems to feel defined by his role and (good) position in society and he does not feel that this is the 'real' him. Larry feels he does not fit. He hardly knows the 'person he's become' and feels that he exists behind the image he projects outwardly to the world. What used to be a comfort is now an 'illusion'. He has enough of everything, but this in itself is not enough. Position, money and consumption lead to a feeling of emptiness. Shields' description of Larry's 'problem' echoes almost exactly the articulation of a female interviewee in Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* who says that after college, falling in love, having a child, moving to a new house all that happens is that "you wake up one morning and there's nothing to look forward to" (Friedan, 1963: 4). This Larry's 'paradox of plenitude', once one is in the position one has strived to achieve, the emptiness of that position becomes apparent. Thus the domesticization and therefore feminization of men is represented as constituting their crisis.

In Friedan's early feminist text consumption is a part of 'the problem' as it is shown to be in *Larry's Party*, and also in the films *Fight Club* and *American Beauty*. This is the point

that *Fight Club* begins with. Jack has been attempting to fill the void he can feel in his life with *things*. In one of the first scenes of the film we see Jack wandering through his apartment where each consumer item is labeled by brand names. Jack wants his possessions to define him. He says he even wondered “what kind of dining set defined me as a person”. Matt Jordan speaks about the book *Fight Club* (Palahniuk, 1997), but the issues are the same in the film. He writes of Jack;

His sense of monotonous isolation is reinforced by the consumer items he buys, which seem to standardize rather than individualize him. ‘We all have the same,’ he repeats, with respect to items from Ikea, before remarking that the culmination of this process of appropriation is that ‘you’re trapped in your lovely nest, and the things you used to own, now they own you’ (p.44). Or, as another character puts it later in the novel, ‘Our culture has made us all the same. No one is truly white or black or rich anymore. We all want the same. Individually, we are nothing’. (Jordan, 2002: 373).

Jordan argues that Jack has allowed himself to be defined by the things that he buys and in doing so he becomes like everyone else: homogenized, standardized. Consumption in this way is said to cut across race and class, ‘no one is truly white or black or rich anymore’. Everyone is the same and everyone can choose and afford the same things. In this context equalization leads away from individuality. What Jack used to own now owns him. Consumption in *Fight Club* is spoken about as emasculating, as a trap, a void and unreal – numbing, part of the crisis. Jack has no feeling, which is why he splits into Tyler who will *fight* to regain his feelings and his body because the more you consume the less you are, or you are (only) what you consume.

For Larry, for Jay and for Jack, consumption means that they are in danger of losing themselves. Fall into the trap of trying to attain it all and the void in the centre will swallow you up. There is a sense that people have been tricked into trying to attain the normal and then trapped within an approximation of it. At the beginning of *American Beauty* Lester in his suburban life of seeming comfort, security and affluence tell us “in a way I’m dead already”. His life of ‘ideal’ masculinity; breadwinner, husband, father, consumer, lived out in suburbia is killing him, killing his sense of self, his creativity and

individuality. Lester continues in a voice over; "I have lost something. I'm not exactly sure what it is, but I know I didn't always feel this ... sedated". Lester feels asleep. He has lost himself in the 'American Dream'. Lester as a man has lost his sense of self in the void of conventional normality and expresses it again in a very similar way to Friedan's suburban interviewees. Friedan reports women as saying "I feel as if I don't exist" and "I just don't feel alive" (Friedan, 1963: 3-4). Lester as a man in the late 1990s feels a hollowness at the centre of his 'ideal' life, he is sedated by it and by the roles he is expected to play within it. Lester is not sure what he has lost, and his problem has no name.

Larry too has lost himself in the ideal. Here he ponders on being forty:

'I'm a forty-year-old man', Larry says to himself at least once every day [...] and the thought – *forty years old* – hangs around and around, and forms part of the atmosphere. He understands at last the rather hard dullness of being an adult, and perhaps for that reason he's become a man too easily consoled by games and surfaces. And now, suddenly, having celebrated four decades of life, he is a sad man but without the sad history to back it up. What he needs is a good slap on the ear, but at the same time it seems to him that one wrong step would throw him off-course, and that what he would lose would be not money or friendship or intention, but his own sense of self (Shields, 1997: 163-4).

Larry is *bored*. And he is so bored that he could lose himself. Living a life of convention (surface) has almost swallowed him up. His life consists of surfaces and games with no 'real' core. The implication of these representations is that a life of normality is in itself not a healthy place to be, it is a space of crisis. In and of itself this position and the acceptance of all the roles and conventions attached to a life of normality is all-encompassing; encompassing the individual who drowns in convention, falls asleep by living a life of prescription, and loses his/her (although usually 'his') sense of self in the process.

In *Intimacy*, in order to save himself Jay has to leave his nuclear family, re-find himself and release himself from the trap that the ideal has lured him into. He tells us: "I am not leaving this unhappy Eden only because I dislike it, but because I want to become someone

else. The dream or nightmare of the happy family, haunts us all; it is one of the few utopian ideas we have these days” (Kureishi, 1998: 101). Jay cannot be the person he is within his family anymore, it has turned from aspirational, utopian dream into constricting and constraining nightmare and the only escape for Jay is to smash it and smash through it. As he puts it: “[a] breakdown is a breakthrough is a breakout. That is something” (Kureishi, 1998: 49). If Jay stays there is nothing, if he breaks it up there will be something, to break it up will be a creative act. Jay will create a critical point, he will *create* a crisis in order to be able to live. Jay’s crisis has been precipitated by his family, but he will push it further – into disaster. And in *Fight Club* Jack too has to break out and smash up his ideal life of convention and consumption to the extent that he blows up his ‘ideal’ life quite literally when he blows up his apartment and all it contains.

There is a sense that if men do not create a climax of crisis that will force change then the possibilities of their exploitation and disempowerment are unlimited. Men are represented in both fictional texts and within masculinity theory as not only sometimes being disempowered in relation to women, but also in relation to other men. In this version of the crisis there is a further removal from the backlash reactions where the marginalized were seen as the enemy, here it is ‘other’, (powerful, hegemonic) men²⁰ who are posited as both different and as threatening to men themselves. Within the discourse of (marginalized) masculinity this is an important point. There are some men who are in power and very many others who are not. There comes with this a double victimization; from the hegemonic, powerful men, but also from all white men being *associated* with such men. As John MacInnes points out; “[m]any powerful men are obnoxious, homophobic and misogynist” (MacInnes, 2001: 322). A part of the new discourse bemoans the fact that *all* men have been associated with this type of masculinity; a collective identity forced on to

²⁰ See Whitehead and Barrett, 2001:73+ for discussion around ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and the idea that some men (in this case, Naval officers) “attempt to secure a masculine identity in comparison and contrast to a series of ‘Others’: those deemed weaker, less able, feminine or less masculine” (73). This discussion focuses around the fact that some men are ‘othered’ by a group of more powerful men.

men that is not of their choosing. Anthony Easthope argues that although feminist and gay accounts of masculinity have been useful, they have linked together all men into one (unpleasant) homogenous lump. He says that these accounts: “written from a position *outside and against* masculinity, [...] too often treat masculinity as a source of oppression.” (Easthope, 1986/1992:2). There is a sense that everyone has turned against men. MacInnes argues that if we go too far down this road, it “becomes difficult to prevent masculinity becoming a general term for anything we don’t like” (MacInnes, 2001: 324). The contradictory forces of collectivism come into play and where there is complaint about the identification of men-as-a-*bad*-group the defense seems to only have recourse to the identification of men-as-a-*victimized*-group.

Harry Silver, in *Man and Boy* demonstrates the two contending forces when he feels victimized by being associated with men-as-a-*bad*-group. As he drops off and picks his son up from school he feels ostracized by the mothers:

The women in Alice bands had more in common with the women in ankle bracelets than they did with me. The women who were single parents had more in common with the women who had partners that they did with me. At least that’s how they all acted. [...]

Those mothers seemed to look upon me as a reminder of the thousand things that could go wrong with men.

Standing at those gates I felt as though I was an ambassador for all the defective males in the world. The men who were never there. The men who had pissed off. The men who couldn’t be trusted around children.

Well, fuck the lot of them. I was sick of being treated like the enemy. It wasn’t that I minded being considered an oddball. I expected that. After all I knew I was an oddball. But I was tired of carrying the can for every faulty man in the world (Parsons, 2000: 200).

Harry is being treated as the representative for *all* (bad) men. He is being punished and victimized for every crime (other) men have ever committed. His male body is being made to carry gendered meaning that here, is both villainous *and* ‘other’. In fact what is happening is that Harry is being naturalized as masculine – the construct of masculinity (as bad) being seamlessly associated with Harry as an individual man and with his body. He is being stereotyped, and Hall makes the point that “*stereotyping tends to occur where there*

are gross inequalities of power” (Hall, 1997a: 258), and this time it is the women who have the power. Again, the position that Harry is being placed in is a feminized one where his body is made to carry certain meanings and where he is representative of all men, a position that (until the victimization discourse arose around white men) was far more usually associated with the bodies of black people or women.

Sally Robinson writes that there has been a “savage embodiment” of men by women, (Robinson, 2000: 89). Men are being re-tied to their bodies by women. This re-embodiment can be viewed in two ways. Firstly, as a (male) acknowledgment that the disembodied normativity of white men is not/was not such a good thing, and a re-embodiment is overdue. Secondly, there is a reversal, as we saw above with Harry Silver, whereby white men are being forced back into biologically determined masculinity by women even as these women attempt to disengage *themselves* from such biological determinism. In *Larry's Party*, Larry's second wife Beth, (a “third-wave” feminist), at one point tells Larry: “Penis owners are more violent, their will more concentrated – that much is indisputable. (At this Larry blinks, but Beth hurries on.) Men are, in this respect, as much slaves to their biology as women, and cannot, therefore, be held to blame” (Shields, 1997: 122). Beth, by re-tying Larry to his (male) biology, is actually placing him in a feminine position. Larry is a man being equated with nature. Beth's ‘feminism’ emasculates Larry (although within the narrative Larry is allowed the moral high ground as what Beth is doing is ‘wrong’). By proclaiming on his biology, tying him to it, not letting him speak, and at the same time taking away any responsibility from Larry, he is being placed in a traditionally feminine position: silenced, passive, not allowed agency or volition, having his bodily urges placed over and above his reason. Larry is suffering the oppression (long endured by other groups) of having an essentialized nature imposed upon his (individual) body from *without*. Larry, in the same way as Harry is being forced into an association with men-as-an-essentialized-group and therefore in the terms of this

discourse being inevitably and simultaneously feminized. Thus we have an almost total reversal of the gender binary.

It is argued as we have seen, that one of the most common identifications of men-as-a-group is to see all men as 'bad'. And if masculinity is tending to be associated with the oppressive, reversing the binary and re-associating masculinity with powerlessness and feminization might be a better option. Back in 1988, in one of the first masculine studies books, Rowena Chapman wrote the following:

There is much deploring of feminist essentialism nowadays, but this is to forget that patriarchy is founded on essentialism, on the assertion of biological difference and the unequal apportioning of values. It is hardly surprising that in opposing patriarchy, feminism tended towards a position of counterposed essentialism. But as a result of this, male supremacist arguments have been reinforced by a distortion of certain feminist tenets. Essentialist radical feminist arguments erected a moralistic equation around gender: femininity equalled good, masculinity equalled bad. This meant that, in order to lay claim to a stance of moral superiority men were forced to disavow their masculinity, and to take up a feminine subject position. [...] If what we define as feminine qualities will be highly valued in our [...] future, then to maintain hegemony it is in men's interest to co-opt femininity (Chapman and Rutherford, 1988: 247-8).

Chapman argues that a reversal of the binaries of masculinity and femininity whether through reversing the values (good/bad) that are associated with each, or by a reversal of the definition of each (men as feminine) actually solves nothing. She argues further that an association of men with the feminine will in fact help to maintain the status quo. She argues that currently, in keeping with the binaries of patriarchy, it is better for men to be seen as being in a feminine position.

Sally Robinson argues that white middle class men in the 1970s felt as if they had been cast into the shadows, made invisible by the (new) visibility of minority groups, and redefined as the 'enemy' and that this precipitated a move by white men to make *themselves* visible through displays of feminization, victimization and wounding. In an argument that differs from the one that posits white masculinity as being forced into visibility by others, she asserts:

[m]y claim [is] that the current crisis, as it is played out in the halls of academe, is instigated by a marking of white masculinity as a specific and embodied (racial and gendered) identity – *and* that the mere enunciation of crisis does the cultural work of recentering white masculinity in a remapped academic context. [...] These announcements of crisis do not, [...] function to alleviate that crisis, and to recuperate and ‘unmark’ white masculinity once more; on the contrary, in *enacting* and, in fact *producing* that crisis, these texts work towards a recentering of white masculinity [...] precisely as endangered, victimized, wounded (Robinson, 2000: 55, her emphasis).

Robinson’s argument relates to the academy, but it is relevant for the fictional representations we have been examining. She argues that the tropes of victimization re-centre white masculinity and that this of course carries benefits for white masculinity. Robinson sees the visibility of victimized white masculinity as a strategy of white masculinity, that in the first place, didn’t want to be ‘left out’ of identity politics and that white men, both “resist and welcome” embodiment. Robinson’s argument is that the visibility of white men implies several things to and for white men. In the first place, the visibility of victimization, as we saw above, can be used as a strategy for re-centring white masculinity. Further, it is desire for white men, a “masochistic pleasure”. It is therefore an *active* response to the pressures being placed on normative white masculinity by minority groups, the marginalized, and by more general changes in society. If white men are to be made visible, it may as well be in a way that is useful to them. The backlash response was a passive re-action to changes in society. Robinson argues that the crisis and victimization trope is a far more active response, and one that can usefully re-centre white men as ‘victims’ of the current social trends.

A change in discourse is certainly needed from both the hegemonic and the non-hegemonic point of view in relation to both white masculinity, and the white nuclear family. Stephen Whitehead documents the fact that the ‘traditional’ notions of white masculinity; “biologically given: unassailable, singular, discrete [...] are at the end of the Twentieth Century [...] increasingly untenable” (Whitehead, 2002: 17). And as it is unacceptable for men to articulate these notions, the fact that in *Man and Boy* and *Larry’s Party* it is women

who are continuing to essentialize men immediately places them in the wrong. In these texts it is *men* who are being positioned as the more politically correct and clear sighted. Society has changed, and it is suggested, notions of essentialism and gender also need to change.

Conclusion

In this discourse our society has become more fluid and diverse and therefore any idea of what was seen as normal gender identities and the family needs to change. This is recognized by both masculinity and family studies. In relation to the white nuclear family, Deborah Chambers writes: "the white nuclear ideal is increasingly irreconcilable with the observable evidence of diversity" (Chambers, 2001: 115). There is a rise in observable material differences among family forms and these observable differences are also evident in relation to gender relations. More importantly, there are changes in relation to ideas and attitudes both to diversity and difference, and to the idea/l of a white middle class normal. The idea of the white, middle class normal entire is being shaken up. The very concepts and ideas that have upheld the idea of the normal are being seen as untenable and indeed 'untrue'. Silva and Smart may have identified the crux of the 'problem' when they say; "it may be changes in attitudes [...] that are seen as so alarming and destabilizing" (Silva and Smart, 1999: 4). Societal attitudes to difference are themselves changing things rather than the actual material differences that are becoming so visible. People's attitudes to diversity and difference as well as to the 'normal' are changing and, we are being told, *should* change.

It is because of this that we see the various hegemonic twists and turns documented above. If we go back to the first backlash reaction to these changes and the evocation of a stable, singular normal, and remember the binary that necessarily comes with it, the abnormal, we can see that re-evoking the idea of a stable normal as an ideal and an aspirational reality is

an *unsafe* reaction, relying as it does on the rigid binaries; normal/abnormal, order/chaos, with each side relying on the other for identification. Not only is it an unsafe and unstable reaction, it is far too visible. If the hegemony of the white nuclear family and white masculinity is really under threat then this is quite a crude and very visible and identifiable attempt to maintain power. Lynne Segal voices the opinions of many theorists when she writes of masculinity:

The closer we come to uncovering some form of exemplary masculinity, a masculinity which is solid and sure of itself, the clearer it becomes that masculinity is structured through contradiction: the more it asserts itself, the more it calls itself into question. [...] If we look more closely at some contemporary models of exemplary masculinity, [...] we uncover once again the instabilities of 'masculinity': dependent as it is upon the steady confirmation of power from what can prove unstable social institutions and practices, dependent also upon its hierarchically understood difference from what can prove insubordinate 'others' (Segal, 1997: 123).

The louder masculinity (or the family) says itself, the more it brings itself and its methods of construction and maintenance to light, and therefore, the more it 'calls itself into question'. If in order to maintain itself power needs to hide, then this type of bigoted and reactionary response is no place to hide in. It is too loud, it is too visible, and it too obviously relies on ignorance, intolerance, prejudice, injustice and bigotry in what is increasingly a multi-racial and multi-cultural society.

In 1988 Jonathan Rutherford voiced a complaint about the more generalized silence in response to the exposure of masculine privilege, arguing against the violent, bigoted backlash that again puts the onus onto the marginalized other whilst remaining silent about the centre. He says that in the face of feminism and queer theory critiquing and exposing masculine privilege:

Heterosexual men have remained remarkably silent in the face of this unmasking and criticism. It's as if the growing demand from women for something more from men has pushed them into a defensive huddle shored up with their institutional power, without a language in which to answer. Exposed to a growing questioning men have used their silence as the best form of retaining the status quo, in the hope that the ideological formations that once sustained the myth of masculine infallibility will resurrect themselves from the fragments and produce a new mythology to hide us [sic] in (Chapman and Rutherford, 1988: 25).

As we have seen, the old mythology of the centre and the normal, and the backlash that attempted to resurrect this mythology have not been/are not working. And thus, if it is in the interest of white middle class men to preserve the status quo, a new mythology is needed, and a 'new language in which to answer' the growing criticisms of the elite centre needs to be formulated. Rutherford is explaining the white, masculine centre as *passive*, sitting tight, doing little (apart from attacking the usual suspects), and hoping the entire situation will go away. This is a *defensive* culture that is closing its eyes to its own new visibility and also to the rapid changes in the configuration of society and the changing perceptions and attitudes of many people.

Sally Robinson's book marks a shift in the discussion of both the theory and the representation of white masculinity and documents a change in the way that the manifestations of the idea of the crisis are both being spoken about within the academy and how they are being represented by various media forms. She describes a more *active* response to the centre's new visibility: namely the re-centring of white masculinity through the discourse of victimization, feminization, wounding and crisis; the discourse that is being represented in the novels and books we have looked at. In her argument, the centre (largely through representation) is using visibility as an hegemonic strategy rather than completely resisting it. However, as discussed in the introduction, she sees this as a dangerous strategy. From the point of view of the white male hegemony she writes:

The desire to confess anxiety is fraught with the ambivalence which necessarily attends any move that requires even a temporary or provisional (or even rhetorical) surrender of power. Will the payoff be worth the risk, or will some unexpected social or discursive maneuver render white male dominance as truly obsolete as some would claim it already is? Can the representational system misfire? (Robinson, 2000: 51).

Robinson sees a danger in white men confessing anxiety and using the discourse of victimization and crisis. From her point of view the (temporary, rhetorical, representational) surrender of power may backfire on white men and power may really be

lost to them. Robinson views it as a risky strategy and, even as she sees the tropes of victimization and feminization for white men as being an active strategy, she sees it as a defensive one that resists the changes in society and the concurrent displacement of white men from the centre: “the middle, [of society] as I see it, is an essentially *defensive* culture and political formation, one characterized by suspicion, even paranoia, about the passing of a now delegitimized cultural order: (Robinson, 2000: 14). Her reading of the ‘crisis’ documents a change in hegemonic discourse, but she discusses it as a change that follows the received idea of the pattern of white hegemonic reaction to the ‘delegitimization’ of the cultural order: a defensive reaction. If the backlash reaction discussed above was too visible, this reaction (the discussion of victimization and feminization) is, at least, more active and subtler.

For those in privileged positions, if they want to retain those privileges, passivity in the face of diversity and a changing society is no longer an option. The defensive and reactive culture adopted by the white centres of our society has to change. As we have seen, for a variety of reasons, the white, patriarchal centres of society have become more and more visible, to the point where displacement from power is becoming a very real possibility. As we discussed in the introduction western forms of power are hegemonic, and hegemonic systems rely on the consent of the majority of the population. As power, in order for it to be sustainable, has to *win* consent, reactions to difference and diversity that are as reactive and divisive as those outlined above in relation to the first backlash are not conducive to long term maintenance of consent. And this is partly because those included in the description of the normal, in particular white, straight, middle class men, are being *perceived* to be a smaller and smaller group. Thus the public voicing of bigotry and the claim to normality only for white straight groups in society are coming from a group that is becoming more and more easy to identify and this identification in itself makes the positions of power and privilege unstable. As this is realized we see the change from pure

backlash responses to a more in depth discussion of the issues of crisis, the debates about feminization and victimization that are prevalent within representation. However despite the popular and numerous representations of crisis for white men in the media, in films and in novels, most masculinity studies texts keep the discussion of crisis as a small part of their larger discussions and then move on. This may well be because claims to victimization from a group in society that still visibly holds most of the power in society (straight, white, middle class men), cannot be sustained for very long.

Chapter two will begin to look at how the power of straight, white, middle class men might be consolidated and sustained in the current climate. The purpose of this chapter has been to lay out the current arguments and developments in the field that this thesis intervenes in. It has begun to examine the new archive of the normal, laying out where the silences in society and theory are said to have existed, why these absences are said to have arisen and the process of exposure of the centre. It has charted the rise of the 'subversive' disciplines of masculinity and family studies and relayed the discussions and representations of crisis. In this chapter we have moved from the idea of the invisibility and silence of the normal as well as through the 'enforced' visibility of the normal that came about through marginal theory, representation and actual changes in the demographics of society. We have examined the discussion of the first 'backlash' reactions to this visibility and these changes and moved onto a discussion of the crisis that is said to follow on from this. We ended with a discussion of current representations that place men as victimized and feminized. We have also examined criticisms of this crisis and the effect that it can have of recentring men. However, the point I want to stress here is that, like the backlash reactions the discourse of crisis is not sustainable. No-one can be in crisis for ever, and the idea of white men as victims itself cannot last. Vast inequalities in our society are still self evident and thus it has to be in the interests of those who benefit from these inequalities to find another way round the visibility of this inequality. This chapter has demonstrated that the backlash

reactions don't work and argues that claims to victimization are not sustainable. Chapter two therefore begins to look at new hegemonic moves, moves that will achieve majority consent, sustain the status quo and retain privilege for the small group in society that have always been positioned as normal. Thus chapter two, in response to the failure of the backlash responses to change and the failing rhetoric of crisis begins to answer George Yudice's question (albeit with a somewhat different emphasis): "What's a Straight White Man to Do?" (Yudice, 1995: 267).

Chapter Two: The Dis-Appearance of Normality – The Re-Application of the White Male Gaze

This chapter begins to look at the creation of new discourse proper and engages in a further examination of its archive. In the first chapter we looked at the theoretical positions that were said to lead to the formation of the new discourse; the movement from the invisibility of the normal, which is said to have begun in colonial times, to the more contemporary enforced visibility instigated from the margins. We examined the phenomenon of the backlash to this visibility, which instigated a (certain) embracing of it through the notions of men and the family in crisis and the subsequent move into victimization and feminization for men both inside and outside the family. This chapter looks at how these and even newer conceptions of normality are being formulated into a discourse and how this will ensure that consent is won for the current white middle class male status quo. Following the lead taken from the new studies texts we will examine the movement that claims to make the normal visible in order to dispel it, look at some of the implications of this by re-applying particularly postcolonial theory to this claim, and finally trace the disappearance of the normal within the new discourse. In this chapter the fact that in the new studies the centre is examining the centre will become increasingly important to my argument as will the claim by all new studies texts that they theorize from and as a response to feminism and postcolonialism. This chapter traces the concept and effects of normality as it melts into the margins.

Chapter one ended on the point that, in order for any group in society to retain power (whether intentionally or not), consent from the majority of the populace needs to be won. Both those who are pro and anti change accept that change is happening and that the balance of cultural power is shifting:

Cultural hegemony is never about pure victory or pure domination (that's not what the term means); it is never a zero-sum game; it is always about shifting the balance of power in the relations of culture; always about changing the configurations of cultural power, not about getting out of it (Hall, 1996b: 448).

From Hall's point of view no-one will 'win' through pure domination. Winning consent for a particular hegemonic configuration of power means that strategic shifts in the balances of power are necessary: subtlety rather than force. One cannot actually absent oneself from the forces of cultural power but one can have a hand in shifting the perceived parameters of that power. And for the maintenance of the current status quo the balance of power needs to be shifted again because of the changes in the cultural and political make up of our society and the fact of multiculturalism and diversity. As Lynne Segal puts it:

The dominant idea of a fixed and pure heterosexual masculinity, to which women and children are inescapably subordinated, once so securely grounded in the nuclear family, is if not in crisis (as is often glibly claimed), at least a little less hegemonic than it has ever been before (Segal, 1990/1997: 100).

So, even as masculinity and family studies do not fully accept the crisis thesis, the fact of change and a change in the balance of power is accepted.

Over the past fifty years or more there have been massive changes to our society, and this means that there must be changes to the way that consent is won from our changing population with their changing attitudes. Tony Bennett says, if hegemony

refers to the process through which the ruling class seeks to negotiate opposing class cultures onto a cultural and ideological terrain which wins for it a position of leadership, it is also true that what is thereby consented to is a *negotiated version* of ruling class culture and ideology (Bennett, 1994/1998: 221).

If we turn this around for a moment, and posit a *negotiated version of subordinated class culture and ideology* we get closer to the new *pro-active* hegemonic movement that it is the purpose of this thesis to discuss. The passive/ defensive reactions detailed in chapter one, as examined by the new studies texts are, by these theoretical disciplines, being changed into active and *offensive* action, representation and discourse through their own work. As denial of the threats besieging the centre did not work, either through denying the 'other', (backlash), or through a strategic burying-the-head-in-the-sand and claims to

victimization are unsustainable and still defensive, the best way forward for the white, patriarchal centre must be to fully *embrace* the threat and turn it to advantage through the strategy of *absolute* visibility.

The strategy of overt and absolute visibility is apparent in both the theory coming from masculinity and family studies and also in media representations. Over the past few years representations of the white nuclear family and of white masculinity have become explicitly scrutinizing; looking beneath what *looks* like the normal, to see the contradictions, doubts, conflicts and secrets underneath.²¹ We have examined some of the representations looked at in this chapter in relation to the idea of crisis, but the representative work of these texts goes deeper than that, involving something other than just crisis – and that is *scrutiny*.

On all the posters for the 1999 5-Oscar winning film *American Beauty* there is, written in large type, the injunction to ‘Look Closer’ and this injunction is at the crux of contemporary representations of the nuclear family and white men. *Many* new representations appear to be participating in the new project of visibility and particularity for white men and the white nuclear family, and this extends to (re)embodiment for white men (Robinson, 2000). There is an explosion of novels and films as well as documentaries and discussions on both radio and television that explicitly scrutinize white men’s lives and the white nuclear family, particularly the roles of fathers within the family. For the purposes of this chapter the novels *Larry’s Party* (Shields, 1997), *Man and Boy* (Parsons, 2000), *The Best a Man Can Get* (O’Farrell, 2000), and the films, *American Beauty* (1999), *Fight Club*, (1999) and *The Truman Show* (1998) will be examined in relation to the new explicit scrutiny, with reference also to two television documentaries; *Married Love* (Channel 4, February 2002), and *The Secret Life of the Family* (BBC1, July 2000). These

²¹ This phenomenon has been growing during the 1990’s, but has really exploded from the late 1990’s to now.

very different forms of representation from different parts of the white Western world (America, Canada, Britain) all contribute to a comprehensive archive of the new discourse of the normal. And it is here that we begin to see the interests of the white patriarchal centre and the interests and work of the new studies theorists (albeit inadvertently) begin to coincide, form an archive and permeate out into the wider cultural and social world through representations and media discussions in the first instance turning visibility from threat to advantage.

2.1 The Agendas of Masculinity Studies and Family Studies: Answering the Margins

The advent of masculinity studies and family studies marks a dramatic shift in the technique/attitude of the centre as shown by these studies themselves. The responses from these disciplines are not the first denial, backlash or 'poor me' responses to feminism and postcolonialism that they document. Indeed as we have seen most do not agree that there really *is* a crisis either for the family or for white masculinity (Chambers, 2001, Whitehead, 2002, Beynon, 2002). Within these disciplines there is a unified and general consensus that the normal *does* have to go, a consensus that the privileged position of the normal *is* untenable and a consensus that this position is fracturing anyway. The new rhetoric from these disciplines that come from and examine the centre is that 'we' too want to bring normality to light and dispel it and the attendant privileges that accrue around race (whiteness), class (the middle class), sexuality (heterosexuality), and gender (masculinity). Following on from the above discussion of the new studies disciplines that argued that historically white, middle class men have been sitting silent, disembodied, universalized and invisible in the central position of normality, the new argument from masculinity and family studies is that the best way to dispel the power and privilege inherent in being white male and/or middle class is to continue the movement that has been making the centre visible and to *force* visibility, particularization, embodiment and multiplicity on to white

masculinity and the white nuclear family, make them confess themselves and their imperfections. The visibility of victimization and crisis is not enough.

All the new studies talk about their work entailing a direct use of the methods and techniques of the marginal (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001, Smart and Neale, 1999 etc). This involves a re-turn of the gaze on to the white centres. Homi Bhabha writes that there has been a “feminist and gay revision of masculinity – the turning back, the re-turning of the male gaze” (Berger et al, 1995: 58). Feminists and gay theorists have themselves employed the white male gaze to examine masculinity. It was, in part, this re-turning of the gaze onto themselves and onto those in power that led to marginalized theorists ‘exposing’ white middle class men in the first place. Thus theorists from the white centres claim that they are employing the techniques, theories and methods of the margins as a pro-active (and more morally acceptable) change of tack. The rhetoric of victimization, and notions of crisis although (as we have seen) a part of current representations of white men, are beginning to move aside, making way for a new extreme form of visibility for white men (and the white nuclear family), which is manifested in a deliberate, close and sustained *scrutiny* of the centre.

Both the theory and the new representations of the normal examined later in this chapter are currently engaged in detailed enquiry into the central positions of society; scrutinizing and picking them apart. Notions of crisis are being de-bunked, most often because the rhetoric of crisis is viewed as merely being another white hegemonic strategy for re-centring the centre (Robinson, 2000), albeit through a (different) kind of visibility for the white centres. New masculine and family theories do not use the notion of crisis as their own strategy as we saw in chapter one. Instead they explicitly engage in a close scrutiny of the white centres ostensibly in order to dissipate the power that the positions of the normal in our society have traditionally held. What is being promised is liberation *from*

the white patriarchal centre *by* the white patriarchal centre. Within these disciplines there is an adoption of the techniques and theories used by the ‘mother’ disciplines, feminism and postcolonialism, and a paradigm shift whereby the work of marginal theorists is being used by theorists from the centre as an answer to the (documented) requests made to (specifically) white men by others. Richard Dyer quotes Hazel Carby prescribing a method for ending hegemonic white rule. She says we should consider whiteness as well as blackness “in order to make *visible* what is rendered invisible when viewed as the normative state of existence: the (white) point in space from which we tend to identify difference” (Dyer, 1997: 3). Carby is suggesting that whiteness itself should become an object of discussion and examination in order that it can become truly visible. This is a different idea to the one we discussed above, where the examination of whiteness, masculinity or more generally normality was almost a by-product of the examination of the margins. This is a far more direct approach which (here) looks directly at whiteness.

This is by no means the only call for a direct examination of the centre. In relation to masculinity, Lynne Segal writes: “men will only stop displacing their fears about themselves into contempt for women, and antipathy and loathing for excluded or subordinated groups of men, once they are able to recognize and accept their own multiple and conflicted identities, able constantly to question and complicate the notions of masculinity” (Segal, 1997: xxxi). Segal is asking men themselves to question masculinity and to complicate it: asking men to *look* at masculinity. Rosi Braidotti asks men to dispel with the ideal of disembodied white masculinity: “men need to get embodied, to get real, to suffer through the pain of re-embodiment” (Kemp and Squires, 1997: 529). And, it is suggested, the idea of universalized mankind can be done away with completely.

Elsewhere Braidotti wrote that “the proper task of *men who intend to deconstruct the phallic premises* should be to speak as individual men, not as representatives of Mankind, and to develop a new way of thinking about masculinity” (Braidotti, 1991, my emphasis).

Men are being asked to re-embody themselves, to complicate notions of masculinity, to do away with the singular universal, to individualize and particularize masculinity, to make it multiple in the name of positive and pro-active change. Further, the requests made to white hegemonic masculinity from marginal theorists involve using the *methodologies* of the marginal in order to examine and begin to dismantle the centre using the methodologies of making visible, particularizing, embodying and multiplying and applying these to white masculinity. And it is these requests that new studies theorists both document and claim to answer with their own work.

2.2 Making the Centre Visible – A Technique of Abnormalization

As we saw in chapter one, one of the main complaints of family studies and masculinity studies was of the invisibility of normality as manifested in hegemonic white masculinity and the nuclear family. Thus it makes sense that the main project of masculinity studies and family studies is said to be the making visible of the normal. Where the normal was once invisible it is the stated aim of most of the new theoretical texts to make it visible, and make normality visible as a response to the requests from the margins that ask that the centre not remain invisible and hidden. In taking up the ‘requests of the margins’ Anthony Easthope sounds the rallying cry for making masculinity visible when he proclaims: “masculinity has to be unmasked” (Easthope, 1986/1992: 2). Masculinity *was* masked, it was invisible and it is now the stated project of masculinity studies to bring it into the light. Alan Peterson’s entire book is titled *Unmasking the Masculine* (1998), Chapman and Rutherford’s book is entitled *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity* (1988) and the covers of both books explicitly illustrate the idea of uncovering masculinity. The cover of Alan Peterson’s book *Unmasking the Masculine* has a picture of a slim, muscular, white, male (headless) body. Cracks are appearing on this body, and the man’s hands are ripping his own chest apart to reveal a large jagged hole stretching from collar bone to navel, exposing

a white void; a white empty space where there is no substance.²² What this image, anchored by the title suggests, is that there is no substance to the myth of masculinity and a forcible and even violent ripping open of the myth is necessary to show the emptiness beneath. The cover of Chapman and Rutherford's book *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity* shows another headless male body, as the man in the photograph pulls off his shirt to expose his naked torso – making his body visible, and thus 'unwrapping' his masculinity.²³

The idea that masculinity was masked, wrapped up and hidden is explicit and is discussed in most masculinity studies texts and has been for years. Stephen Whitehead decides that "[t]he turn of the millennium appears to be a particularly appropriate moment to cast a critical eye on men" (Whitehead, 2002: 5). Men need to be seen. In relation to whiteness Richard Dyer lays out the 'new' central project as well as prescribing how it may be brought about; "[w]e may be on our way to genuine hybridity, multiplicity without (white) hegemony, and it may be where we want to get to, but we aren't there yet, and we won't get there until we *see* whiteness, *see* its power, its *particularity* and *limitedness*, put it in its place and *end its rule*" (Dyer, 1997: 4, my emphases). *Seeing* whiteness or masculinity will (apparently) shatter the power and privilege of these positions. Multiplicity and hybridity will not be possible unless 'we' can see whiteness and see its particularity.

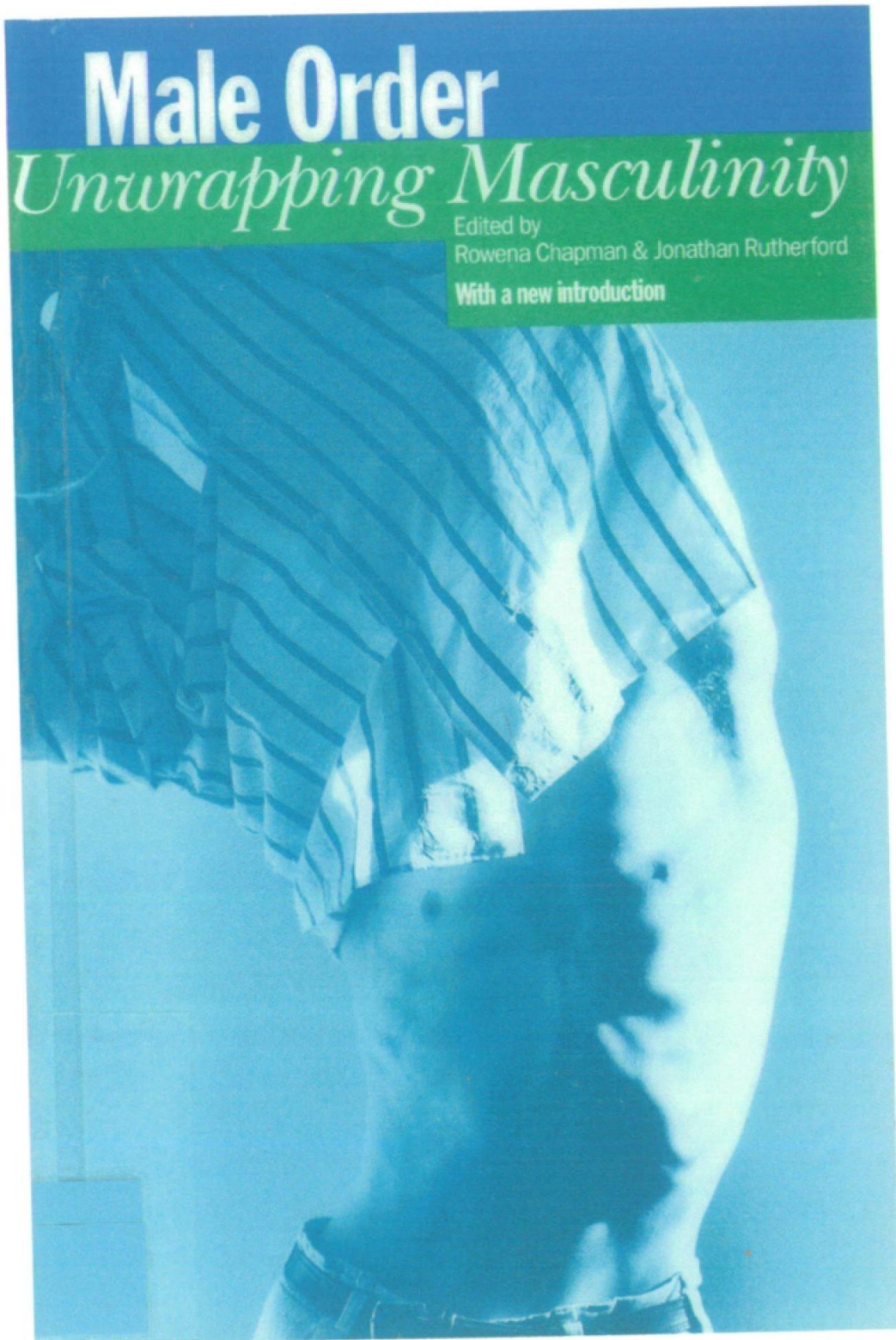
Jonathan Rutherford, a strong proponent of making and keeping masculinity visible lays out the logic of this project; "[t]oday, the masculine myth is being sufficiently questioned to drag it into view. Like the *Invisible Man* of H G Wells, whose death is signified by his return to visibility, the weakening of particular masculine identities has pushed them into the spotlight of greater public scrutiny" (Chapman and Rutherford, 1988: 22-23).

²² This cover illustration is by Michael Macku, 1998 and entitled "Gellage No.90", see illustration 2, page 118.

²³ This cover illustration is photographed by Frances Angela, see illustration 3, page 119



Illustration 2



Visibility will mean death. And as masculinity becomes visible, so Rutherford argues, it will die. This idea of making masculinity visible is continued through new representations of white middle class men (and the white nuclear family), which are part of the archive that shows the 'weakening of particular masculine identities'. What is enunciated by both theory and representation consolidates the idea that if one can make white masculinity visible it, as a myth, and the power that the myth holds over people, will disappear. One has to wonder where it will disappear to, but Easthope, Dyer, Peterson, Chapman and Rutherford, Whitehead and *very* many others are arguing that visibility, particularization and embodiment are enough to dispel white masculine power. There has been a massive hegemonic shift from bemoaning the visibility of the normal to that which extols 'exposure' for white middle class men and the white nuclear family. To paraphrase Rutherford, visibility will signify death, so all one has to do is to continue the work of the marginal theorists and work to bring masculinity to light, make it a presence, the object of discourse and the subject of representation and masculine power will disappear.

This is a huge change from the 'invisibility' of the centre discussed in chapter one. There is also a change from the victimization trope that Robinson discusses. We have a movement that has shifted from Robinson's discussion of white men *beginning* to see the advantages, benefits and pleasures that come with (limited) visibility and from the discourse that claimed victimization, or white men 'bemoaning their fate', to a vivid spectacularization and *celebration* of 'crisis' and abnormality within both theory and representations. Although the rhetoric of victimization and feminization for men has not disappeared as we saw above, there is another aspect to both the theory and the new representations, the *newer* strategy of full visibility. Starting with the representations, the novels and the films explicitly scrutinize the lives of their white, middle class male protagonists, looking *beneath* the surface appearance of normality in order to explore the doubts, fears, desires and failures that lie underneath. White middle class men and the

white nuclear family are being made *visible*; the 'truth' about the normal exposed.

Deborah Chambers writes: "[a] spectacularization of postmodern family values and practices is taking place and being projected globally" (Chambers, 2000: 116). The normal is being represented as disintegrating, and the fragmentation and disintegration of the normal is being made into spectacle.

Within all the representations that examined, even where there is a surface appearance of normality, if you look closer you will find it fragmented, shattered and not really existing at all. Within the representations this is most often dealt with in relation to the white male protagonists' 'lived' experience: no-one *feels* normal. This is Larry Weller, 'hero' of *Larry's Party*, for whom insecurity, doubt and disempowerment lurk just below the surface appearance of privilege and normality:

At the age of forty-two Larry Weller, a landscape designer with an office in suburban Chicago, gives the *appearance* of having found tranquility and ease in his life. He's not interested in breaking through the power firmament. He's already, in fact, come further along in the world than he ever expected to. Everything about him announces a man in a state of reasonable good fortune. He is, at forty-two – another surprise! – more or less solvent. He's getting along in the world, he and Beth. But perpetually – every minute of every day in fact – he prepares himself for exposure and ruin: he has no university degree to fall back on or boast about, he has never read Charles Dickens or Ralph Waldo Emerson [...]. So how is it he *projects* such an air of confidence when, at the same time, living a fraction of an inch from public humiliation: Do other people exist this close to the flame of extinction? (Shields, 1997: 208, my emphases).

The surface appearance of Larry's life belies the trauma, doubt and confusion that exist just below that surface. Larry is middle aged, solvent, settled but this is not how he feels. He feels under-educated and inadequate, not middle class enough to be secure in the normality that he projects. He feels he is on the edge of a precipice. Larry is hanging on by his finger-nails. He may project settled middle-classness, but look closer – penetrate the surface and you will see that the surface of normality is just that: *surface*. Scratch that surface of normality and see the chaos, doubt, fear and failure spill out.

In *Fight Club* the veneer of normality is very thin indeed. Only this time beware; if you do scratch the surface, you will get something more than just fear and doubt. As Jack says of his boss's world vision: "under and behind and inside everything this man took for granted, something horrible had been growing". It is his boss's view of normality that is the fallacy. In *Fight Club*, the violent, destructive but creative abnormal is fighting to come out. The men in their fight club fight to make manifest the abnormality lurking beneath the surface. Throughout the film it is suggested that the abnormal upholds the normal. Within *Fight Club*, although Jack is white and middle class, there is a definite and different kind of class consciousness and a feeling that the middle class normal is being upheld by angry, feminized, victimized men, who may, at any moment, decide to smash the whole thing up (or blow it up, as they finally do). As Tyler tells the head of the crime prevention conference who is trying to destroy fight club: "the people you are after are the people you depend on; we cook your meals, we haul your trash, we connect your calls, we drive your ambulances, we guard you while you sleep. Do not fuck with us". Beneath the normal lurks the dark and dangerous abnormal. The normal is not only a fallacy, it is a dangerous dream to have, one that involves willful blindness to that which is pushing its way to visibility. As Jack tells us: "it was right there in everyone's face. Tyler and I just made it visible".

2.3 Failure is Inevitable, Normality is Impossible

In the other less extreme representations those who attempt to create normality, although not represented as being in danger of extreme violence, are represented as courting *inevitable failure*. This idea is one of the main themes of all the fictional representations that I am looking at. Any attempt to create normality will fail and indeed the more one tries for the normal the more disastrous that failure will be. In *Larry's Party*, Larry, despite starting out with a good job, a wife, a son and a suburban 'starter' home, manages two

divorces, a near-breakdown, and alienation from his son. Harry Silver in *Man and Boy* manages to smash his perfect nuclear family, as does Michael Adams, protagonist of *The Best a Man Can Get* (although he manages to recoup it later). Kristoff's creation of perfect normality for Truman in *The Truman Show* eventually tears open along with the painted sky. And Lester in *American Beauty*? Here is what the blurb of the screenplay says: "[i]n a typical suburban town, there is an ordinary family living the American dream. But look closer. Lester Burnham's wife, Carolyn, regards him with contempt; his daughter, Jane, thinks he's a loser; and his boss is positioning him for the axe" (Ball, 1999). Lester's 'failure' is quite spectacular, even whilst he is in what looks like perfect normality. Take a closer look and the edifice crumbles. Privilege is shown not to really be privilege, as we are all as insecure and doubting and failing as each other. In fact, the closer you get to what seems like perfect normality, the more likely it seems that you will fail.

Harry Silver in *Man and Boy* also fails at his attempt to make a perfect nuclear family, finally realizing:

I saw that I had let everybody down. Gina. My mother and father. [...] I hadn't been strong enough, I hadn't loved them enough, I hadn't been the man they wanted me to be, or the man that I wanted myself to be (Parsons, 2000: 83-4).

To expect the ideal normal to be (re)created by just one person is asking too much. It does not and cannot work, even where it appears that it is. Within most of the texts there is a kind of 'double consciousness'²⁴ whereby normality is desired even as it is recognized as an impossibility and a fallacy. In *The Best A Man Can Get*, Michael Adams puts it this way:

In all the adverts that I'd arranged the music for, the families always had such fun; they always looked so comfortable with each other. Even though I worked in the industry I still hadn't seen through the lies. [...] The adverts told us we could have it all, we could be great dads and still go off snow-boarding and earn lots of money and pop out of a business meeting to tell our children a bedtime story on the mobile phone. *But it can't be done.* Work, family and self; it's an impossible Rubik's Cube. You can't be a hands-on sensitive father

²⁴ See T. J. Jackson Lears (1985) for discussion of Gramsci's original concept.

and a tough, high-earning businessman and a pillar of your local community and a handy do-it-yourself Mr Fixit and a romantic attentive husband – something has to give. *In my case, everything* (O’Farrell, 1998: 88, my emphasis).

Michael Adams feels that he can’t achieve any of it. The ideal is a lie. It is impossible to achieve and if the ideal is a lie, then failure must be the ‘truth’; the ‘truth behind the façade’. In all the fictions an atmosphere and appearance of the normal is being set up only to be ‘disproved’. White middle class men are being made visible; shown not to occupy the unified, powerful position of the normal, but in fact to be as disempowered, doubting and failing as everyone else. In nearly all contemporary representations, those who were perceived to be in the position of the normal; white middle class affluent men, and those in white middle class nuclear families (as well as those at the very top) are being portrayed as actually being nowhere near the ideal. Look closer at the lives of the men in the novels and films of the white Western world: *Larry’s Party*, *Man and Boy*, *The Best a Man Can Get*, *American Beauty*, *Fight Club* and *The Truman Show* and you will not see the normal. These men may appear to be privileged and exist (at certain times) within the ideal normal, but a closer look will show how (most if not all the time), they are just as disempowered as others, and their seemingly normal lives are anything but. The surface appearance does not equate with what is ‘really’ going on underneath.

The current myth/representation/‘truth’ that is being enunciated by these texts is that the ideological idea/lived reality of normality does not exist any more for anyone. It does not matter what position in society one occupies, an ideal of the normal that is exclusive, unified and centralized is being represented as impossible and, following on from this, any sort of extraordinary power due to that position even for the white middle classes is also being represented as being impossible. The idea of any sort of ideal normality being impossible is one that is a recurring theme in current novels and films. This is Harry Silver, protagonist of *Man and Boy*, on turning thirty:

All my images of this particular birthday seemed to be derived from some glossy American sitcom. When I thought of turning thirty, I thought of attractive thirty-

nothing marrieds snogging like teens in heat while in the background a gurgling baby crawls across some polished parquet floor [...]. That was my problem, when I thought of turning thirty, I thought of somebody else's life" (Parsons, 1999: 6).

What is being suggested in texts throughout the archive is that this 'glossy' ideal can *only ever* be 'somebody else's life'. The ideal images that have been built up around white middle class normality are fictions themselves. And if no-one can get close to the ideal normal it must mean *per se* that the normal does not exist. It is around this premise that the entirety of the film *The Truman Show* has been constructed. Truman's 'ideal normality' is everything but that. It is pure surface, pure simulation, and it couldn't be anything other. In relation to the white nuclear family, Deborah Chambers writes; "[t]he nuclear family exists in the public imagination [...] this virtual family, is, like a computer animation, more pure, more perfect and more real than the real thing" (Chambers, 2000: 172). And it is this fantasy that has been created for Truman. Truman has a 'perfect' wife (no children yet, but that is in the plan), a perfect home, a perfect suburban neighborhood – clean, with white picket fences everywhere, everyone is friendly and one would assume that the crime rate would be zero. However, the whole point of the film is that this is an artificial, created fantasy, set up purely for voyeuristic purposes. The gaze of the entire world (and the cinema audience) is focused on Truman, white, middle class and male and because of this the entire fantasy of normality begins to become quite sinister, exploitative and threatening. The film also implies that this is the only way that anyone can 'enjoy' normality. Kristoff, the producer/director/ creator/Father of Truman's world, when someone questions the morality of the show, tells her, "I have given Truman the chance to lead a normal life. The world *you* live in is the sick place. Seahaven is the way the world should be". However, from the viewer's perspective (assuming we are on Truman's side), Kristoff is wrong and in trying to create a version of normality for Truman he is committing an immoral act.

When an attempted creation of the ideal normal is discussed as 'immoral' then the way that the discourse is being enunciated and the discourse itself has indeed changed. And, as we have seen, the discourse around the visibility (or not) of normality or those in the position of the normal has also changed. Hegemonic discourse has moved (very quickly) from a documentation and enunciation of absolute invisibility of normality, through the visibility of victimization, to absolute visibility which eventually shows abnormality. Discussing the nineteenth century, Foucault says that at the time there was:

a centrifugal movement with respect to heterosexual monogamy. Of course, the array of practices and pleasures continued to be referred to as their internal standard; but it was *spoken of less and less*, or in any case with a growing moderation. *Efforts to find out its secrets were abandoned*; nothing further was demanded of it than to define itself from day to day. The legitimate couple, with its regular sexuality, had a right to more discretion. It tended to function as a norm, one that was stricter perhaps, but quieter (Foucault, 1978: 38, my emphases).

Well, the silence has now been broken and the 'secrets' of the centre are being excavated with great gusto and discussed at great length. And what is being found is that the closer one looks, the more that is uncovered, the less the 'normal' is found to be the normal. As the secrets of the normal are unearthed the main revelation appears to be the presence of the *abnormal within* the normal, or as Trinh Minh-ha puts it: "[t]he center itself is marginal ... [H]ow possible is it to undertake a process of decentralization without being made aware of the margins within the center and the centers within the margin?" (Minh-ha, 1995: 216). In the new representations it is the margins within the centre that are being highlighted. In effect this is the same point already discussed in chapter one in relation to the backlash evocation of the stable normal inevitably containing the unstable abnormal, although this time the hierarchy has been reversed. Foucault maintained that the normal creates and contains the abnormal (Foucault, 1978: 44-9). My contention is that the new hegemonic move from the centre now involves the abnormal creating and containing the normal: a shift from Foucault's "normalizing technique" (1978: 89 and 144) to an *abnormalizing technique*. The 'normal' is no longer represented or discussed as the normal.

If we view this as a *strategy* there is, within both theory and representation, another strand whereby the abnormal is represented as being the normal. In July, 2000 a BBC 1 documentary called “The Secret Life of the Family” turned a ‘normal’, middle class, white, heterosexual, nuclear family into a voyeuristic spectacle. The ‘scientific’ white gaze was turned on to a white middle class nuclear family. Cameras were placed all around the house – in the toilet, down the sink, in the beds, in the carpet, in their hairbrushes – in order to examine the microscopic germ life that lurks beneath the façade of clean, white, normality. What is suggested is that what we ‘see’, the surface appearance of normality, doesn’t begin to tell even half the story. The germs, bugs and filth that were found (and they were pretty disgusting) were said to apply to *every* family: as the voice-over at the beginning of the programme told us, the aim was to “reveal a hidden world we all share”. The white, affluent, middle class, nuclear family is being held up as the universal of what is perceived to be the not-normal. The clean white façade is shown to be a fallacy, but a fallacy that we all share. The ideal image of the white nuclear family does not convey the ‘truth’ and in this case the image hides dirt, filth and decay.²⁵

The ‘strategy’ of abnormalizing the normal goes all the way up to the top of our society. Deborah Chambers writing about the British Royal Family says: “the Royal Family has transformed from one that stands for *all* families as moral guardian, into one that is dogged by the dysfunctionality of infidelity, divorce and media attention” (Chambers, 2000: 98). Chambers is arguing that *because* of their dysfunctionality the Royal Family can no longer be held up as the ideal. Within most academic work, particularly on the white nuclear family, dysfunction is discussed as a ‘threat’ to the hegemonic, exclusive white centres (Chambers, 2000, Jagger and Wright, 1999, Smart and Neale, 1999 etc), and in all cited cases they see this as a positive thing which will lead to the eventual fall of these white

²⁵ This move can also be seen in the very popular Channel 4 comedy documentary *How Clean Is Your House?* showing in 2003.

centres. However it is still argued that dysfunctionality will lead to the demise of the white nuclear ideal as a hegemonic structure. Later Chambers continues: “the real threat to pro-family campaigners, [...] is instability: that is sexual relationships regarded as transient, illicit, transgressive. [...] This threat is no longer ‘external’ but comes from inside, through the desire for individuality and experimentation. And it is depicted as a *white* problem” (Chambers, 2000: 170). However, if the white centre is beginning to embrace the perceived threats to itself and to engage with them, then this depiction of internal destabilization will not be unwelcome. So it is that if we view the representation of the Royal Family as not being disengaged from the wider world of representation, then within contemporary discourse, the very fact that the Royal Family are dysfunctional, adulterous and in no way live up to the white nuclear ideal will *allow* them to ‘stand for all families’, to be universalized in their abnormality.

If those at the very top of our society can claim universal individuality it is much harder for anyone else to engage with the white centre in terms of group privilege and historically accumulated patriarchal power. Much better than to continue to attempt universality, invisibility, disembodiment and silence is to move to allowed and controlled visibility, embodiment, confession and particularization/ individualization. Sally Robinson discussed the tensions for white men in the 60’s between individualism and collective identity (based around victimization), (Robinson, 2000: 31-2) and although this tension still exists, it is being resolved through white men and those in white families being depicted as representative of *everyone*’s unique individuality or as representative of everyone’s *universal individuality*.

2.4 Re-embodiment White Men

As we saw in chapter one, masculinity studies cites a re-embodiment for men; a “savage re-embodiment” (Robinson, 2000), whereby white men are forced back into their bodies

through being made visible and also by the tropes of victimization and wounding.

However now, in line within the new discourse that is emanating from the centre, this re-embodiment itself is being embraced and the white male body itself is represented as symbolic of everyone's unique (and imperfect) body. There is (beginning to be) a strategic re-embodiment of white men which has become a part of the new discourse that seeks to de-centre or marginalize the centre. This involves a logic of 'lowering' those in central positions 'down' into the margins –into the morass of failure, doubt and imperfection (a version of subordinated culture), rather than holding up the centre as the aspirational, perfect ideal. In *Larry's Party*, there is a whole chapter entitled 'Larry's Living Tissues' much of which is a discussion (from Larry's point of view) of his body. We are taken on an intimate tour which probes and investigates Larry's body. This tour covers very many pages of which this is just an extract:

At forty-five years of age Larry Weller has lost a number of his excretory 'units', or nephrons – despite the fact that he has never been a heavy drinker. His liver, *like most people's* livers, has been shrinking since the age of forty.

[...]

The thickness, color, and sheen of Larry's hair is at risk. He knows that *about fifty percent of men of European descent* suffer some balding, which ought to be a comfort but isn't. [...]

Larry's testosterone, *if he follows the normal pattern for North American males*, has probably been in decline since his thirties – this worries him, but it doesn't worry him every minute of the day; he prefers to think his occasional episodes of sexual failure are psychological, and that a total reverse is possible. How many times has he felt the skin of his scrotum tighten? – a million? – and isn't it reasonable that this involuntary mechanism wearies eventually? [...]

Like everyone else, Larry's skin started to lose its elasticity during his teens. His life range of expressions can be found on his face, etched there. A small brown spot sits in the middle of his upper left cheek, and another on the side of his neck. Are these caused by exposure to the sun, or could they be liver spots? [...] If the *medical statistics* tell the truth, Larry's brain weighs less than it did when he was thirty. He can no longer balance a number of thoughts in his head at the same time. [...]

His lung cells have stiffened – which is *absolutely normal* at forty-six – so that his former capacity is now deflated by about twenty percent (Shields, 1997: 265-8, my emphases).

Larry's body is being made visible in extraordinary detail. His worries, fears and minor vanities are laid bare and we see beneath his skin – emotionally and physically. His 'living tissues' are opened up, exposed for all to see, along with his private anxieties, doubts and

fears. Larry himself is being 'unmasked' and being shown as vulnerable, subject to scrutiny and a disembodied gaze. Larry is being held up, in his vulnerability, decay and doubt, to be *everyman*. Larry, as white, middle aged, middle class man, is being given out as an example of the normal – a yardstick which others can use to establish their own position and selves (again). This normal however, is measured through its abnormality. In his slow decay and imperfection, Larry is described as 'perfectly normal', to be 'like most people' and one who falls into the 'average' bracket of 'medical statistics'. This discussion of the white male as 'everyman' continues throughout fictional representations and is still apparent in some of the theory. Whitehead and Barrett in the introduction to the *Masculinities Reader* proclaim that "[i]n coming to an understanding of masculinity, we are, in fact, coming to some understanding of the human condition" (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 14). Thus masculinity is still equated with the (singular) human condition. Larry, although being portrayed as 'ordinary' is ordinary through his imperfection, vulnerability and unique individuality. In the late 1990's the normal condition for white men is being represented through what would, traditionally, have been seen as the abnormal, particularly in relation to the 'ideal' white male body. Thus what is being shown is that the (new) 'normal' state of white men today is that of the abnormal. Portraying the prevalence of abnormality within normality itself allows for freedom of movement and choice in subjectivities. It means that white men can choose normality *or* abnormality, or indeed, both. This is a freedom that is still not granted to others either in 'real' life, or in representations.

American Beauty, and *Fight Club* both deal with the recuperation of the white male body in relation to recuperated masculinity. In *American Beauty*, Lester recovers his self respect as he recovers his body, moving from unfit to fit. As his lust for the young girl Angela grows, he begins jogging – demonstrating how unfit he is when he starts, sweating and breathing heavily – but moving onto a regular (and effective) exercise regime, which

builds up his self esteem at the same time as his muscles and allows him, finally, to be able to do the 'moral' thing, and reject Angela's amorous advances. In *Fight Club* too the recuperation of fitness and 'hardness' is associated with increased self-confidence, control (controlled violence), and a recovery of the participant's sense of their masculinity. Indeed this is a major theme of the film. Jack, the narrator, tells us that when the men first join fight club they are "cookie dough" but after a few visits they are "carved out of wood". These bodies however are very different and carry very different connotations to the 1980's hard male body. Josh Stenger argues that the late 1990's hard body has been 'queered' and the hard bodies recuperated in *Fight Club* and *American Beauty* "are not characterized by self-reliance, productive physical labor, and unqualified heterosexual desire, as they might have been twenty years ago. Rather, they embody the oftentimes queer, relentlessly merchandised male beauty that retains its cultural purchase not in spite of, but because it is sexually ambiguous, spectacular and fetishised" (Stenger, 2001). These bodies are visible but objectified as commodity, even sexual commodity, in a way that was alien to the 1980's depictions of the 'perfect' male body, in which whilst inviting the homoerotic gaze, this association was hidden. The bodies in *Fight Club* and *American Beauty* are openly available for the male gaze and the male bodies in both films and the men they belong to, are marginalized because of this.

This (strategic) marginalization is a part of the close scrutiny and exposure of the white male body, and men's re-embodiment entire. At a recent conference entitled 'The Black Gaze' Suzanne Schneider discussed the changing Western view of the black male body, which during colonial times was subject to what she termed a 'penetrating scrutiny'. The gaze, in colonial times and beyond, was turned on to the other, taking a 'scientific', 'objective' stance that, Schneider argues, was in fact pornographic, and therefore intimately bound up with those who were in the position of power and could *look*, as opposed to those who were disempowered and were *looked at* (Schneider, 2001). The men

in the representations cited above are being *looked at*. Their bodies are being viewed with a ‘penetrating scrutiny’ and thus, are being placed in the position of the marginal and away from the normal.

The type of gaze being employed by new masculine theory and current representations of white men immediately marginalizes white, middle class men; places them in a marginal position. The reason for this is that the white male gaze (the type that is being re-turned onto white men), is the gaze that has always rendered the other visible.²⁶ This visibility, and the embodiment that it carries, has always been a vital part of the process of marginalization and systematic disempowering of others by the white centre – the process of the abnormalization of the other. The *type* of gaze that is being deployed in the making-visible project that is emanating from the centre is not, itself, being scrutinized. What is forgotten when injunctions to ‘look closer’ are given and theorists cite the need to systematically make the white centre visible, is the long tradition of feminist and postcolonial critiques of the gaze, of white Western forms of looking and of the idea of vision itself. The type of vision that we talk about and deploy is a modern construction.

2.5 The White, Male Gaze

Many theorists working from the margins argue that there has been an historical privileging of sight itself: *ocularcentrism* (Crary, 1998), where there is a complicity of the privileging of sight with white, Western, masculine power. The main criticisms are of the objectifying, objective, scientific, medical gaze, which predominates in Western culture from the Enlightenment onwards. Rogoff says that many critics have noted: “the gaze as an apparatus of investigation, verification, surveillance and cognition that has served to sustain the traditions of Western post-enlightenment scientificity and early modern technologies” (Rogoff, 1996: 189). The argument is that during the Enlightenment, with

²⁶ This is not to ignore the simultaneous invisibility of the marginalized which will form a part of the discussion.

the decline in religion, with the rise of the 'rational' sciences and the changing views of nature as something to be conquered and the body (of others, mostly) as something to be probed and investigated, there came a change in the way that people *saw* things. Vision became the predominant sense, but a certain kind of scientific, classifying, objective vision. Vision, visibility and sight have a history themselves. If this is ignored, then a universalized, singular 'objective' vision is the mode of vision that the white centre will (*because* of the history) deploy.

John Rajchman, discussing Foucault writes:

Foucault's hypothesis was that there exists a sort of 'positive unconscious' of vision which determines not what is seen, but what *can* be seen. His idea is that not all ways of visualizing or rendering visible are possible at once. A period only lets some things be seen and not others. It 'illuminates' some things and so casts others in the shade (Rajchman, 1993: 391).

This idea that only certain things can be seen at one time leads to an anomaly in the theoretical discussions of vision that emanate from both the centre and the margins. In the discussion that cites white men and the white centres as invisible, this invisibility is predicated on the visibility of others. In most discussions it is the bodies of the others that are rendered visible by the white patriarchal gaze and it is this visibility that plays such a large part in the marginalization and systematic disempowerment of the other. This phenomenon has long been a concern of feminisms and postcolonial theory. This is Frantz Fanon writing in 1952:

I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance. I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval, I progress by crawling. And already I am being dissected by white eyes, the only real eyes. I am *fixed*. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare. [...] Why, it's a Negro! (Fanon, 1952/1967: 116).

Fanon's visibility and overdetermination originate from *outside* himself, from 'without'.

Fanon's self and his reality are sliced away from him – in this (white) discourse they are not important. He is laid bare; stripped and dissected until the part of him that *is* deemed important is irrevocably visible – he is down to only his skin. The white eye, the one that

commits this act, is the only 'real' eye, because it is the one that holds the power. Fanon's own eye and way of seeing carry no hegemonic power, and therefore Fanon as an autonomous human being need not even be acknowledged by the white hegemony. It is only Fanon's body that is visible and that matters.

In Fanon's case, the white power to see equates with the white power that controls the oppressed. However, within this equation there is another aspect to the visibility of the dominated, and that is the (seemingly anomalous), often cited, *invisibility* of the oppressed. Where Fanon cites the compulsory visibility of black people, he himself also acknowledges their simultaneous invisibility and bell hooks maintains that "one mark of oppression was that black folks were compelled to assume the mantle of invisibility" (hooks, 1992: 168). A closer look at this anomaly though, means that it is resolved quite easily. Whilst Fanon's *body* is compelled into visibility, he is not allowed to *look*. He is denied the gaze himself, merely becoming the object of the white gaze. And bell hooks claims that it is this denial of the gaze that itself leads to invisibility for those who are othered: "to be fully an object then was to lack the capacity to see or recognize reality. Those looking relations were reinforced as whites cultivated the practice of denying the subjectivity of blacks (the better to dehumanize and oppress), of relegating them to the realm of the invisible" (hooks, 1992: 168). Thus compulsory visibility for othered people slips quite easily into compelled invisibility. What is not seen is the humanity and agency of the other, partly through the very visibility and objectification of their bodies. If only certain things can be seen at once, in this case it is the bodies of the oppressed that is seen, whilst their individuality and agency is not.

Foucault writes that we should be aware of and concerned about "the 'body politic', as a set of material elements and techniques that serve as weapons, relays, communication routes, and supports for the power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and

subjugate them by turning them into objects of knowledge” (Foucault, 1984: 175-6). In a peculiar usurpation of a (one would think undesirable) position, the white male body itself is being turned into ‘an object of knowledge’ and thus being shown to be marginal to its own objectifying gaze. The patriarchal white gaze is being turned on to white men and the effect of this will be to de-centre white men. Being envisioned by this gaze (even as it originates from themselves – white men looking at white men) *will* marginalize white middle class men as it is the nature of this gaze to marginalize whatever it turns its attention on. However, white male power and privilege will never be displaced by merely employing an objective, distanced and unified gaze to dissect white men. Texts like Fanon’s show the shameful nature of what has happened to those deemed other by our society and because of changes in our society this is no longer deemed acceptable. Something has had to give and something has to change. Ostensibly it is the focus of attention that has changed. Denouncing their own invisibility, disembodiment and silence the white gaze of power is being turned by white men onto white men. However, the gaze that was used to *fix* Fanon is not being used to fix white men into one position. David Theo Goldberg commenting on Fanon notes that: “[c]onstitutive or reflective of strategic relations, visibility and invisibility each can serve contextually as weapons, as a defensive or offensive strategy, as a mode of self-determination or denial of it” (Goldberg, 1996: 181). In this context white men are using the concept of visibility as an offensive strategy that can *aid* self-determination. The white gaze itself has been chosen and it is being used to demonstrate abnormality within normality, to show universalized individualism, denounce essentialism and display marginalization and multiplicity. From Lester wanking in the shower (“Look at me, jerking off in the shower”), to the men in *Fight Club* fighting to regain their bodies and their self respect, to Larry’s living tissues, white men are being re-embodied, subjected to the objectifying and distanced white gaze and, therefore, strategically (and supposedly) marginalized.

The argument from masculinity and family studies is, as we have seen, that this new scrutiny of the centre originated from the margins (Robinson, 2000, Whitehead, 2002 etc), and therefore this new scrutiny of the centre by the centre is being heralded as a technique of the margins. People who have historically been marginalized *have* employed the scrutinizing gaze that positioned them to look at their own positions, the position of the centre and the process by which they got to be disempowered and displaced.²⁷

Marginalized people at various times have used the dissecting, distanced white gaze to examine how they came to be positioned where they are, how they came to be fixed in the marginal spaces of society, who positioned them there and for what reason. However, this gaze belongs to and originates from the dominant and therefore in the new making-the-centre-visible project white middle class people just end up using their own technique again. This time however, the white gaze is not being used (as it is by the marginal) to demonstrate the *power* held by the white patriarchal centre and exercised as oppression, rather it is designed to display the *limits* in power from inside the white power base.

Whereas marginalized groups and peoples appropriating the dominant gaze to expose the injustices and inequalities of their position is subversive, white men, using the patriarchal white gaze to examine and multiply themselves, is not. Taking this unified vision of itself and ignoring the fact that other points of view and ways of seeing exist, the gaze that is being utilized to look at white masculinity, scrutinizing, white, patriarchal and singular, returned onto its own subjects, will only serve to marginalize those in positions of power, de-centre the phallic centre, hide the power that it has, keep privilege invisible, keep the centre safe, and therefore paradoxically keep it from true exposure.

As David Levin concludes; “the power to see, the power to make visible is the power to control” (Levin, 1993:7). With the new abnormalization-of-the-normal and the new close scrutiny of the centre we are led into the chosen and excessive visibility of the white

²⁷ For a full discussion on those who are marginalized using and subverting the techniques of the dominant see Chela Sandoval, 2000.

centre. Following on from this if, as Rajchman argues, we are caught in a system that only allows for certain ways of seeing, where only a limited amount of things can be seen (Rajchman, 1993: 391), it appears that the more visible the white middle classes become, the less visible it must be possible for anyone else to be. As David Theo Goldberg notes: “visibility carries with it connotations that tend to be appealing – access, opportunity, ability – in short, power; and invisibility has tended to connote absence, lack, incapacity – in short, powerlessness” (Goldberg, 1996: 179). There is a difference between being visible and being ‘looked at’. In this case the close scrutiny of the centre leads to the agency and plural individuality of the white middle classes being made visible whilst their power and privilege is rendered invisible or not ‘looked at’. The white eye’s examination of the white middle classes involves the examination of *autonomous individuals* in a way that the white eye’s examination of black people or women does not. Thus within the making-visible project white middle class individuals, body and soul, are being made visible whilst white middle class power is being obscured. And if we follow Levin’s argument discussed above that the power to see and make visible is the power to control, what is happening is that the white centre, in making itself visible is in fact, controlling its own representation and (inevitably) safe-guarding its power base.

Kirk Mann and Sasha Roseneil quote from a Sunday Times leader written in 1993 which claims: “over the past twenty years, an assorted collection of sociologists, feminists, left wing ideologues and agony aunts have made the abnormal family into the norm” (Mann and Roweneil, 1999: 109-10). In the new discourse this is reversed and the normal family is turned into the abnormal family. The abnormality beneath the normal is sought and ‘proved’. Abnormality itself is no longer being despised, on the contrary, it is being ‘proved’ to be apparent everywhere, even as an internal standard within the white centres. The ‘threat’ of destabilization and the delegitimization of the ‘old’ order is being turned to advantage. The technique of abnormalization is being used in order to prove that there is

no normality. The extremes of visibility show that underneath the appearance of normality there will *inevitably* be abnormality, demonstrating convincingly that no-one occupies the central position of the normal. As we saw earlier, if an idea of a stable normal is invoked it itself becomes visible and opens itself up to question and challenge. Following on from this argument, for those who do occupy the white centres, it is a much safer strategy to deny that the normal exists at all.

For the white, middle class centres of society to be able to *show* that even where there is an appearance of normality, inevitably there will be abnormality underneath, politically denies that colour, gender, sexuality, class, privilege or wealth matter. This is a discourse that is using the apparent de-legitimization and the ‘crumbling’ of the ‘old’ cultural order to justify a new claim to individuality and equality in failure. The normal is being deliberately and systematically denied. If we are all as failing and doubting as each other, privilege ceases to be important. In the introduction to the screenplay of *American Beauty*, the director Sam Mendes writes that after the fourth reading of the script he realized that “it was about imprisonment in the cages we all make for ourselves and our hoped-for escape” (Ball, 1999: xi). We are, this suggests, all the same as each other, no-one really different from anyone else – we are all imprisoned in various emotional cages, all hoping for release. Ball speaks about the cages “we all make for ourselves” with no reference to cages that are made *for* us, those over which we have no volition. Any social wounds or inequalities are individualized, personalized and equalized. The American (and British) Dream only involves outer trappings – a veneer – close scrutiny reveals doubt, failure and dissatisfaction. If, for example, the very top of British society the Royal Family are as messed up and dysfunctional as everyone else, why envy them?²⁸ If those who *appear* to be in power are just as confused and disempowered as everyone else then ultimately, this discourse will suggest that they might as well stay there. No-one else need

²⁸ There are issues here around aspiration and consumption that I will examine in chapter four.

bother to try and muscle in because, in fact, there is no one stable unified place to muscle in to. In this discourse the 'reality' that is implicated is the idea that the normal no longer exists. With the *visibility* of the normal being said to dispel it as a universal abstract, the normal itself as a conceptual myth is apparently dis-appearing too. With the display of the abnormality of the normal (as 'truth'), the normal itself (although still incessantly cited as a concept) seems to fall into the abyss.

If we return to the discussion above around the forced visibility of white men and the exclusive white nuclear family and the first reaction to it which was the dogmatic (but unstable) backlash, the new texts whose rhetoric espouses the break up/down of the white centres is, in the way it is being played out, much more politically astute. Jagger and Wright set out their agenda for the book *Changing Family Values* thus:

We seek to examine and challenge the prescriptive, normative status of the patriarchal, heterosexist, white, middle class, nuclear family, both to emphasise intra-family differentiation and to revalue a whole range of families that take other forms. This project involves *highlighting and opposing* the patterns of structured inequality – racism, classism, patriarchal power relations and gender-based inequalities – that are inherent in the construction of the nuclear family form as natural, normal and ideal (Jagger and Wright, 1999: 2, my emphasis).

In relation to my current discussion this means several things. Firstly, it involves the white centre 'highlighting and opposing' itself. Secondly, this kind of deconstruction will inevitably show (and it does), that the nuclear family is *not* natural, it is not ubiquitous and it has serious problems of its own. This is inevitable because of the slippage between myth (the universalized normal) and lived reality (whereby normality is only ever possible for an exclusive minority) that is endemic to so many texts on this subject. The myth is taken as if it is supposed to relate to the lived reality of individuals and lived reality in general, rather than as a power structure that has truth effects and that therefore ensures that privileges and benefits can and will only relate to and be possible for certain groups in society. Thus what is shown by examinations such as Jagger and Wright's is that the normal does not exist – and therefore the centre of society (as it is supposed to be) does not

exist. The logical implication of these discussions must be finally that: *the white power base itself as unified and effective cannot exist*. Normality is only possible in a fantasy, therefore normality is a fantasy and therefore it cannot exist – *QED*. And if we return to Foucault and the idea that power needs to hide, the concept that the white, normal, unified power base does not exist is a perfect, and perfectly safe hegemonic discourse. The new discourse focuses on the ‘fact’ that white bourgeois power is *not* invulnerable, it is *not* centred, it is *not* unified, and if you look closely enough, it does not exist at all.

2.6 Whose Gaze?

The most pertinent questions to ask amongst all this must be; *from whose point of view does the central normal not exist* and *from whose point of view was the centre ever invisible?* As we have seen, the new visibility-for-the-centre project involves the centre ‘highlighting and opposing’ itself, showing normality to be fragmented, its grand-narrative(s) disrupted and disunified, making normality visible, because it *was* invisible. The entirety of the making-visible project rests on the idea that the white, central normal *was* invisible. However when we ask – invisible to whom? the problems begin to appear. Within contemporary masculinity studies it is recognized by some that it is the centre that is invisible to itself (Dyer, 1997, Collinson and Hearn in Whitehead and Barrett, 2001). The main points made by these theorists is that white people do not *see themselves* as white, and men don’t *see themselves* as ‘men’ (gendered). Richard Dyer argues that this is why white people do not see privilege accruing to them because they are white. Stephen Whitehead first says: “[t]he fundamental question is [...] simply whether or not most men are even aware they have a gender” (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 355-6), and then quotes Michael Kimmel on his own masculinity. Kimmel writes: “[w]hen *I look in the mirror ... I see a human being – a white middle-class male – gender is invisible to me* because that is where *I* am privileged. *I am the norm*. I believe most men do not know they have a gender” (Kimmel in Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 356, my emphases). By ‘looking in the

mirror' Kimmel is providing his own self-reflection and as there is not an 'other' to reflect himself back to himself, he is unable to see his own specificity and particularity. He sees himself not as white, or male, or middle class, but as an individual that provides him with the reference for the universal – 'a human being'. There is no imperative to consider what he may look like *from the outside*. In the realm of the centre's own self-reference, whiteness, masculinity and probably class are invisible. Therefore the centre's project of making itself visible will be a project that addresses the dominant, whilst claiming to be using the techniques of the margins because it was the work and methodologies of feminism and postcolonialism that are said to have first made masculinity and whiteness visible (Dyer, 1997, Whitehead and Barrett, 2001, Pease, 2000).

Richard Dyer writes:

[w]hite power [...] reproduces itself regardless of intention, power differences and goodwill, and overwhelmingly because it is not seen as whiteness, but as normal. White people need to learn to see themselves as white to see their particularity. In other words, *whiteness needs to be made strange* (Dyer, 1997: 10, my emphasis).

Within the project of making-visible this can be read as whiteness needing to be objectified, so as white people can gain a distance from it and begin to see it 'properly'. And theoretically, in saying this, Dyer is also saying that whiteness needs to be exoticized: 'made strange'. Masculinity too is spoken of as (already) being 'strange'. Stephen Whitehead speaks about men and masculinities as being complex and strange:

The more we delve into men and masculinities, the more is revealed of the complex dynamics of difference, subjectivity, power and identity, weaving their way across the social web. These processes are never fixed and never settled. They are under constant revision, negotiation and movement; in which case the idea that a core masculinity lies deep in men's inner biological state, to be rendered unto the social through men's natural propensities, is just not tenable. *Men, and the masculinities they exhibit, are often strange*, always variable and inevitably amorphous (Whitehead, 2002: 5, my emphasis).

Biology as a fixed and stable determinant of masculinity is no longer a tenable argument, the single, unified, stable view of biological masculinity as the normal is no longer tenable.

Therefore within the complex, fluid and multiple arena of masculinities, masculinity itself is strange but this needs pointing out to 'us' as 'we' may not have been able to see this.

Within many of the representations that I am examining, this 'strangeness' is expressed through the idea that white men are an endangered species. This idea is expressed as having occurred because of different aspects of men's lives and positions. Men are 'endangered' as a species through the lack of a need for men because of new reproductive technology which takes men out of the equation (*Men in Crisis* series BBC Radio 4, July, 2000). Men are 'endangered' as a species because many women want female children (discussion on Woman's Hour BBC Radio 4, February 2000). Men are "finished, extinct" (*The Full Monty*, 1997) through a lack of need of men because of unemployment and in *Larry's Party*, Larry looks at himself; "Larry Weller, a forty-five-year-old white male, an endangered species if not rare" (Shields, 1997: 261). In these documents white, middle aged, middle class men are themselves, 'endangered' just because of who they are. This sense of the normal as strange and endangered extends to representations of the white nuclear family too. In *Man and Boy* Harry Silver describes his 'normal' family:

It was a small, ordinary family – I'm the only child – and we lived in a pebble-dashed semi in the Home Counties which could have been in almost any suburb in England. [...]

My mum watched the street from behind net curtains ('it's my street,' she would say, when challenged by my dad and me). My dad fell asleep in front of the television ('there's never anything on,' he always moaned). And I kicked a ball about in the back garden [...].

How many families are there like that in this country? Probably millions. Yet certainly a lot less than there were. Families like us, *we're practically an endangered species*. Gina acted as though my mum and my dad and I were the last of the nuclear families, protected wildlife to be cherished and revered and wondered over (Parsons, 2000: 32-3, my emphasis).

This sense of strangeness and being endangered gives the impression that what was the normal is on its way out. Although these examples could be seen as being an expression of the language of backlash, whereby the normal is threatened, the impression given is much more of rareness, mystery and exoticization.

As a part of the making-visible project, and as a part of the abnormalization-of-the-normal, making white men, white masculinity and the white nuclear family 'strange' makes some sort of sense. It does however, beg the question; for whom is whiteness, masculinity or the 'normal' white family *not* strange? And the only possible answer must be: for those who were *in* those positions/institutions. Again, the point of view of the other, of those who are 'outside' is being ignored. In speaking of her white students bell hooks writes that:

[m]any of them are shocked that black people think critically about whiteness because racist thinking perpetuates the fantasy that the Other who is subjugated, who is subhuman, lacks the ability to comprehend, to understand, to see the working of the powerful. Even though the majority of those students politically consider themselves liberals and antiracist, they too unwittingly invest in the sense of whiteness as mystery (hooks, 1992: 167-8).

In claiming to make 'whiteness strange' to the white self and the other, the fact that those designated as 'other' already see whiteness critically and intelligently is ignored. There is an assumption that there is only one point of view or, at least, only one point of view that *matters* – and that is (again) the central one. In this way the dominant is only taking its own view of itself into account and is employing a singular and unified field of vision, with the dominant addressing themselves.

This concept of the dominant addressing (only) the dominant becomes, within certain areas of masculinity studies, explicit. It is most apparent in the frequently argued position that the project of making the dominant visible is best undertaken *by* the dominant themselves. At a recent conference on white studies,²⁹ the assertion throughout the day was that white people, in particular men, have looked at others for too long and it is now time for white people to look at and examine themselves: to re-turn the gaze. This, it was argued, would help in shifting the unequal power differentials between the centre and 'the rest'. The assertion that in some areas of masculinity studies following on from this is that it is, in

²⁹ The conference was entitled 'Picturing Whiteness' and was held at the Tate Britain, 24 February 2001. (As a point of interest, Richard Dyer was the keynote speaker).

fact, *best* if white men look at and examine white men rather than anyone else doing it, because others have been doing it incorrectly. Anthony Easthope writes:

Feminist and gay accounts have begun to make masculinity visible. But, written from a position *outside and against* masculinity, they too often treat masculinity as a source of oppression. Ironically this is just how masculinity has always wanted to be treated – as the origin for everything. [...] The task of analyzing masculinity and explaining how it works has been overlooked (Easthope, 1986/1992: 2, my emphasis).

The implicit idea here is that it is best to examine masculinity from the *inside* and therefore the best people to do this are white men themselves. Examining masculinity from the outside is no use, it is up to white men to analyze and explain white masculinity. Indeed the only people who can legitimately write about white masculinity are those inside it. Men must tell ‘us’ about masculinity from the “inside”. Bob Pease claims “[t]he basis of men’s contribution to feminist knowledge (and to their struggles) will be from our specific situation. Men have access to some areas of male behaviour and thought that women do not have” (Pease, 2000: 6). This is the same point that Easthope is making; the best research can be done from the inside. Work done from the ‘outside’ is in danger of being ‘wrong’.

Michael Kimmel defends men’s position and personal experiences as white men but as individual men:

Feminist women have theorized that masculinity is about the drive for domination, the drive for power, for conquest. This feminist definition of masculinity as the drive for power is theorized from women’s point of view. It is how women experience masculinity. But it assumes a symmetry between the public and the private that does not conform to men’s experiences (Kimmel, 2001: 282).

As ‘feminist women’ are identified as a group and categorized, Kimmel is enabled to define an ‘enemy’ that would themselves categorize all men into ‘masculinity’ incorrectly. Kimmel differentiates between ‘masculinity’ and ‘men’, the first being the group identity forced on men and the second relating to individual men’s fragmented experiences. Feminists have been theorizing masculinity incorrectly and “this is why the feminist

critique of masculinity often falls on deaf ears with men” (ibid). In other words, the dominant will only listen to the dominant and so the argument that the dominant should address themselves is justified.

Men will not listen to women (so the argument goes) and, anyway, women’s point of view of masculinity is ‘skewed’ (or, perhaps one could read, ‘prejudiced’?), and the reflection that is given back to white men is ‘incorrect’. In the introduction to *The Sociology of the Family: A Reader*, Graham Allan makes a similar point in relation to the area of family studies. He claims that whilst feminism has been crucial to putting family studies on the academic agenda, and has led to the opening up of “new and exciting lines of enquiry”, on the other hand, “[f]or all intents and purposes, a focus on family sociology became synonymous with an analysis of women’s experiences, particularly within the domestic sphere. [...] [I]n some regards this appeared detrimental to the field of family sociology as a consolidated area of research – at the very least it led to some aspects of family life being ignored within sociology” (Allan, 1999: 2). Feminism, or the ‘view from one side’ is just not enough – it is limited and partial (rather than unified and universal?). This is why in the area of masculinity studies “the sociology of masculinity, and the subsequent *critical spotlight* it can shed on the hitherto *shadowy performances* of masculinities and men’s lived experiences and practices, is so *central to feminist praxis*” (Whitehead, 2002: 78, my emphases). Masculinity can get in where feminism can’t, and therefore is much more adept at ‘bringing masculinity to light’ and thus ‘enlightening’ feminism. White men need to mobilize as a group, but in order to discover men’s individual, unique experiences and realities.

David S Gutterman is absolutely explicit about it being up to white men to expose white men:

Profeminists are often most effective when they use their culturally privileged status as men as a platform from which to disrupt categories of sexual and gender

identity. (The privileges of race, class, education etc., of course, also provide some profeminist men with access to other platforms.) This is often a delicate balancing act, but by contextualizing and critiquing the closed category of male heterosexual identity, profeminist men pose a unique predicament for cultural discourses of power. Much as heterosexual transvestites and macho gay men are especially disturbing to normative standards of masculinity, the slipperiness of profeminist men provides them with opportunities to be extraordinarily subversive. Thus, whereas women and gay men often are forced to seek to dismantle the categories of gender and sexuality from culturally ordained positions of the 'other', profeminist men can work to *dismantle the system from positions of power* by challenging the very standards of identity that afford them normative status in the culture (Gutterman in Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 65, my emphasis).

Gutterman's proposed strategy is for those in the position of normality to hide there, *imitating* the norm; using an outward appearance of normality in order to disrupt and subvert it. This is a strategy that has been used before by marginalized people in order to subvert the self-same strategy that was imposed on them by the centre. It is remarkably similar to Homi Bhabha's idea of *mimicry*, (Bhabha, 1994), where, as a strategy of appropriation/internal colonization, the colonial subject is encouraged to 'imitate' the colonizer. However, in Bhabha's model it is the colonized, subordinated subject who 'mimics' the powerful colonial subject, rather than Gutterman's idea of the powerful imitating the powerful, or as he puts it "for profeminist men to 'pass' as 'normal'" (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 66). In Bhabha's model it is a strategy employed by the colonizer in order to appropriate the other. However, it is a strategy that proved to be a double edged sword, which produced subjects who were "at once resemblance and menace" (Bhabha, 1994: 85). Bhabha's 'figure of mimicry' profoundly disturbs colonial certainties. It brings the subordinated, 'different' subject far too close to the colonizer's own idea of himself. In bringing those who were 'different' so close and through the resemblance that could be perceived through proximity, the centre received back a reflection of itself that was 'skewed'. It produced a subject who was "almost the same, *but not quite*" (Bhabha, 1994: 85), and in doing so, the dominant subject himself, his beliefs, values and even idiosyncrasies were brought into question through a reflection of themselves that originated from the *outside*. The subordinated subject that this technique produced proved to be a "threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers"

even though this technique was conceived as a colonial “strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other” (Bhabha, 1994: 86).

What Gutterman does is turn this round so that it is the privileged, white, hegemonic man who ‘mimics’ the privileged white hegemonic man. However, where Bhabha’s ‘figure of mimicry’ truly disturbs those in power’s image of themselves with a vision that comes from ‘outside’, all Gutterman’s is able to do is to substantiate the idea that it *is* possible to have it all – to be a ‘profeminist’ man *and* retain the power and position that come with white hegemonic masculinity. And indeed, in the name of ‘extraordinary subversion’ Gutterman claims that it is incumbent on such men to retain these positions: “by ‘cross-dressing as normal men’ [...] profeminist men can ‘pass’ as ‘normal men’ and can then move among other men, strategically subverting social demarcations of sexuality and gender” (Gutterman, 2001: 66). The suggestion is that only normal men can subvert normal men. Bhabha’s model turns the colonial strategy on its head. He is describing a technique of the dominant that is used/subverted by the dominated. Gutterman purports to be describing a technique of the marginal (cross-dressing), which can be appropriated/used by the dominant. However, if we take Bhabha’s lead, what Gutterman is in fact proposing is that the dominant use what was a technique of the dominant anyway, one which proves to provide less of a subversive reflection and more of a minor tweak, which merely leaves everything in place and leaves the ‘closed category of male heterosexual identity’ still closed. And where Bhabha at least allows the marginalized proximity to the centre through imitation and subversion, Gutterman keeps the marginal where they always were – away from the centre. Gutterman’s strategy is a white male strategy *for* white men, performed within white male institutions, and because of this, the ‘other’ need not be taken into account at all as lip service is paid to change.

In Bhabha's model, the centre is disturbed by the proximity and point of view of the other. It is this very point of view that is being dismissed by Easthope, Peterson, Allan, Kimmel and (to a lesser extent) Whitehead above, as being 'outside' and therefore unable to *see* properly. There is a peculiar double argument being followed whereby as it is the centre that is unable to see itself, it is argued that it is best if the centre *does* see itself and then tells everyone else about it. There are problems here in that it is the centre's view of itself that is being taken as a) the most important one, b) the only 'authentic' one and c) really the *only* one. What is forgotten is, as hooks argues:

Spaces of agency exist for black people, wherein we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see. The 'gaze' has been and is a site of resistance for colonized black people globally. Subordinates in relations of power learn experientially that there is a critical gaze, one that 'looks' to document, one that is oppositional (hooks, 1992: 116).

There is always an-other point of view. In ignoring the point of view of others, a terrible theoretical mistake is being made, one that will ultimately lead to everything being left in place and the promised dissolution of the centre disappearing into thin air. If the centre cannot see itself, it is perfectly obvious that others *can*. bel hooks who, writes extensively on this point, has this to say:

In white supremacist society, white people can 'safely' imagine that they are invisible to black people since the power they have historically asserted, and even now collectively assert over black people, accorded them the right to control the black gaze. As fantastic as it may seem, racist white people find it easy to imagine that black people cannot see them if within their desire they do not want to be seen by the dark Other (hooks, 1992: 168).

The question that is being ignored by so much of the 'new' theory, is: *how does the centre look from the outside?* It is only when this question is taken into account and addressed that a disruption of the centre will be possible. If the centre has *never* been invisible (to everyone else) what can the project of making-the-centre-visible possibly do to subvert that centre? For whom are whiteness and masculinity being made visible?

Put another way; for whom is whiteness or masculinity *not* visible? For those who occupy the margins of society, the centre must always be visible. And historically the central

normal was always *meant* to be visible to those who were colonized. If we return to our discussion in the introduction about the creation of the ideal of the ‘manly man’ and the ideal colonial white nuclear family, masculinity studies texts themselves discussed these ideals as having been meant to be visible. In Bhabha’s analysis of mimicry the normalized white ideal *has* to be seen in order for its virtues to be extolled and anyone persuaded to copy or aspire to it. ‘Imitation’ of the colonizer would not be possible if the colonizer, his ideals and values and indeed his body were not visible. C L R James, for example was a man with “a remarkable visual sense” (Grimshaw, 1992: 2), aware of the nuances of shades of colour. He was also aware (at least later) that the business of the white masters at his colonial school was “instilling and maintaining their British principles as the ideal norm” (James, 1967: 30). If James had not seen the dominating white colonists, (the school masters), how could he have known who he was meant to ‘look up to’ and imitate? He had to see the colonists in order to recognize which behaviours he was meant to copy and be aware of which values he was meant to internalize and aspire to. And although it is this very colonial idealized normality that is cited by masculinity studies texts as having been invisible, I argue that it *cannot* have been, and indeed the colonial project would not have worked if it was invisible. Even if we take masculinity studies’ own evidence (Whitehead, 2002, Beynon, 2002, Tosh, 1999, all discussed in the introduction), it shows that the colonial white ideal was set up to be visible.

Not only this, but if in social, economic, racial, gendered or class terms one is *not* in the central position of the normal, this will only be apparent through a concrete sense of what the central normal is. If one’s opportunities in society are limited due to such factors such as race or gender, one will invariably be aware of the racial or gendered difference that would mean that opportunities would *not* be limited. It is only possible for the margins to be marginal in relation to a concrete centre. As Peter McLaren puts it; “[d]ifferences are always *differences in relation*, they are never simply free-floating” (McLaren, 1994: 58).

This is a point that is too often ignored by masculinity studies, but one that is of great concern to postcolonial theory in particular. Decades ago Frantz Fanon was writing on this subject. In 1967 he wrote: “not only must the black man be black; he must be black *in relation to* the white man” (Fanon, 1967: 110, my emphasis). Black people *have* to relate images of themselves to or against those of white people. Within prejudiced white society and discourse there is no possibility of self-referentiality for those othered by that society. Fanon continues, writing that when confronted by prejudice “[t]he black man stops behaving as an *actional* person. The goal of his behaviour will be The other (in the guise of the white man), for the other alone can give him worth” (Fanon, 1967: 154). The ‘other’ is the white man, symbol of the white patriarchal norm, which, in order to be recognized (and perhaps despised or desired) must be *seen*. Those in the margins cannot but be aware of the centre and the differentials of power and privilege between the centre and the margins.

bell hooks laments the possibility of self-referentiality for black people: “[o]ften when the radical voice speaks about domination we are speaking to those who dominate. Their pressure changes the nature and direction of our words” (hooks, 1990: 146). The dominated speak in relation to the circumstances of domination – and therefore have to take those who dominate into account. For those who dominate however, there is no imperative to speak to the dominated or those who are oppressed. And the texts of the dominant, be they theory or fiction, tend not to speak to the other. So it is that every attempt by the centre to make white masculinity or the white nuclear family visible in order to display vulnerability and failure is a self-reflexive exercise, one that has no need to take anyone else into account. The point that is constantly missed is that the only people for whom the white centre *can* be invisible are those *in* the centre; the only people for whom the centre can possibly be perceived as silent are those who occupy that place. As Stuart Hall says of white European *presence* in the colonies and ex-colonies; “for many of

us, this is a matter not of too little but of too much. Where Africa was a case of the unspoken, Europe was a case of the endlessly speaking – and endlessly speaking *us*” (Hall, 1997b: 56). The idea of the invisibility and silence of the centre can only be the centre’s view of itself. It cannot be invisible. Therefore, even when the fact that the centre cannot see itself is discussed, the follow-on arguments about white men making white men visible can only be re-affirming what is already happening from the point of view of the other.

Thus where masculinity studies started alongside the period of attention and engaged with the concerns of postcolonialism, it has taken a radical and disastrous step away – ignoring the agency and the gaze of the other, the colonized, oppressed and othered. And in doing so, postcolonial theory itself has become colonized; the theoretical spaces of the marginalized have been taken over. As Ato Quayson reminds us: “the key dimension that postcolonialism forces us to consider is that of agency” (Quayson, 2000: 100). The theorizing of the centre as having been invisible does not allow for the agency of those who are not in the centre. The arguments outlined above that deliberately ignore the point of view of the other, begin from a theoretically incorrect position, claiming ‘subversion’ and ‘newness’ for a phenomenon that has been always-already there. If the centre and those who occupy it are to assume both they and the centre itself are invisible, not only are they just accepting their own view of themselves but, in order to argue for (or against) the invisibility of the white centre, they have to ignore the margins and those who occupy them, assuming (if they even think of it) that those who are marginalized cannot see the centre either. Masculinity studies, representations of white men and the white nuclear family, when recounting the invisibility of those in the central positions, or claiming to (now) make white masculinity and the white nuclear family visible or strange, take no account of the fact that they have always been visible to others and therefore exhibit a point of view that is almost entirely self reflexive.

bel hooks, who often talks about the *visibility of the centre*, explains this visibility in relation to her own childhood spent in America's south, living on the 'wrong side of the tracks':

To be in the margins is to be part of the whole but outside the main body. [...] Across those tracks was a world we could work in as maids, as janitors, as prostitutes, as long as it was in a service capacity. We could enter that world but we could not live there. We always had to return to the margin, to cross the tracks to shacks and abandoned houses on the edge of town. There were laws to ensure our return. Not to return was to risk being punished. Living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center. [...] This sense of wholeness impressed upon our consciousness by the structure of our daily lives, provided us with an oppositional world view – a mode of seeing unknown to most of our oppressors (hooks, 1990: 146).

In hooks' discussion it is the world view of those considered other that is strange. And, although 'alien', the culture of the dominant is seen. The margins *have* to see the centre. The marginalized vision, of necessity, must be (at least) double, the centre does not need (and tends not to either employ or acknowledge) this double/plural vision – it need only see itself. This phenomenon of 'doubleness' is one frequently cited in postcolonial theory, and a theme that runs throughout Schwarz and Ray's *Companion to Postcolonial Studies*. Ato Quayson cites: "the double vision that a peripheral existence in the world engenders" (Quayson, 2000: 96). Existing on the edge or at the margins means that double/plural vision is *inevitable*. David Theo Goldberg vilifies intellectual politics that has "failed to take seriously the doubleness of hybrid consciousness, not just its in-betweenness but its 'caught-betweenness,' and accordingly not just the ambivalence it produces but its almost inevitable duplicity" (Goldberg, 2000: 83). The oppressed have no chance to be singular, truly unified or to see themselves as the universal subject.

The discussion around the idea of acknowledging and recognizing world views, (plural rather than singular), and expanding horizons, also speaks about 'allowing' for disagreement, "dissensus" and *interaction* (McLaren, 1994: 57). Dissensus and interaction

do not necessarily induce a comfortable state, rather (sometimes intentionally) a state of discomfort is brought about, especially for those who occupy the dominant positions in society. The disruption of the stable, comfortable, single, 'given' point of view or gaze and the pluralizing of the gaze involves a proper recognition of difference and points of view that may well dissent from the white norm. This argument for a different way of seeing impinges on the feminist and postcolonial theories of 'standpoint' (Harstock, 1997: 152). This theory arises from discussions around the question: is there a specific way of knowing for various groups (for example women), and do they have a different way of seeing based on experience? It is this that is argued by some theorists of masculinity when they claimed that women have theorized men's experiences of masculinity incorrectly and that it is up to men to articulate their own disparate experiences. Standpoint theory itself impinges on the idea of 'strategic essentialism' and it has been criticized largely because it "assumes a notion of the 'real'" (Harstock, 1997: 143), and therefore a notion of the 'authenticity of experience'. However, in my discussion of vision, I not assuming the idea of double/plural vision to be a 'natural' phenomenon accruing to certain groups in society because of their biology or, necessarily, as a specifically political point of view. I argue instead that ways of seeing that differ from the dominant have different *perspectives* that arise from different positioning within society. Sandra Harding talks about a strategic essentialist phenomenon when she says: "a feminist standpoint is not something anyone can have by claiming it, but an achievement. (A standpoint differs in this respect from a perspective)" (Harding, 1997: 169). Therefore in this context, I am not referring to an actively achieved 'standpoint', but rather a 'perspective' that (mostly inadvertently) comes from certain positionings within white Western society. And even as pluralized vision need not necessarily be political, it can be used to political effect. Mieke Bal takes this point: "[v]ision can be pluralized so as to deprive the colonizing, patriarchal gaze of its authority" (Bal, 1993: 401). Pluralizing vision can de-authorize the white male gaze and finally lead to proper social and political pluralizing.

Denouncing the white male centres as having been invisible and uncritically moving onto the project of making-visible is not enough. This is Mieke Bal again:

Is there an inherent connection between vision and patriarchal power? [...] the assumption underlying the suspicion is that vision is an essentially unified mode of perception and interpretation. But as has become clear in so many other areas of thought, unification, (eg of 'man', 'woman' language' or 'life') tends to promote in and of itself a usurpation of power, if only through rendering invisible other aspects, elements, or positions within the unified category. [Better therefore] to address the question of vision's relation to power with the explicit aim of differentiating various modes of vision. I consider attention to such differentiations itself a more effective contribution to the rupturing of monopolies than their acceptance, albeit in their critical denunciation (Levin, 1993: 379-380).

The differentiation of modes of vision - from the singular to the double or plural is what is often discussed in postcolonial theory and it is this recognition of different modes of seeing that Bal is advocating. From Bal's point of view, to critique a monopoly is to accept it, and it is in this way that I am arguing that to critique the 'invisibility of the centre' and to advocate its visibility is to accept that the centre was/is invisible, and thus to employ a (dominant) singular field of vision, even as it is denounced. Paradoxically, the project of making the centre visible allows that centre's disappearance. Arguing that the centre needs to be made visible means both denying other ways of seeing - only acknowledging one way of seeing - and therefore inevitably employing the dominant singular field of (white) vision to 'expose' the centre. And, using this gaze as the method of making the centre visible means that the centre cannot be recognized as the centre, but can only be recognized as the marginal. Thus the centre is de-centred but not to any effect because even as the centre is recognized as the marginal-by-any-other-name, the relations of power remain the same - nothing changes. The (unconscious) strategy of moving out of the light and melting into the margins is consolidated through the denial of the normal.

Conclusion

If the centre is de-centred into the margins, what happens to the middle of society? This dislodging (supposedly) re-moves the centre, 'gets rid of' 'inequality, oppression, privilege

and suffering', and moves what was the centre out into the margins. The decentring of white men and the white, heterosexual nuclear family upholds the ideal of equality-in-diversity. Indeed inequality for diverse marginalized groups in society and diversity itself are said to be the reason behind the (moral) concept of de-centring the centre. Silva and Smart write: "[a]ccepting diverse forms of intimacy and caring as legitimate forms of family life will de-centre the nuclear family" (Silva and Smart, 1999: 10). Diversity legitimates the de-centring of the centre. However, this removal of the centre to the margins through the making-visible project paradoxically serves to obscure and hide the centre as it still exists in terms of the benefits of power, privilege and wealth accruing to a (small) group.

De-centring as a strategy employed before unequal wealth, power and privilege is dealt with will not have the explicitly stated 'desired' effect. Far from being a subversive strategy, if white power is seen and perceived to be de-centred it can more easily stay in place. The danger to the white hegemony comes if white power is seen and perceived to be *still* in place (power must hide its own mechanisms), and de-centring the centre – sending it out into the morass of the margins is very adept at doing this. We are left with a silence at the centre, which, because of its absence, cannot even be properly identified and therefore it cannot be resisted. The new hegemonic project as it is stated, is to remove the centre, to deconstruct it through language and/or representation. This means that there will be no need to let anyone else into the centre because, in perfect postmodern terms, there *is* no centre anymore.

This chapter has led us through the making-the-centre-visible project that is so apparent at the moment, looking at some of the consequences of the way it is discussed, theorized and carried out. Normality has been 'disproved', 'dispelled' and it has disappeared. However, for all that, normality as a concept is still cited albeit when it is hailed as an absence, or

spoken of as being in the past. Chapter three examines (the creation of) the space/place that, it is said, *was* the centre. And where this chapter traced the deconstruction of the centre and looked at some of the implications of this, the next chapter looks at the re-created phenomenon of the 'old' that enables this supposed deconstruction. If the centre is said to be melting into the margins, there needs to be a concrete sense of where the centre *was* and it is here that we turn to next.

Chapter Three: Rediscovering Hidden Histories And Constructing Static Singularities

Although the existence of normality may be being marginalized and denied at the moment, the marginalization and denial are predicated on a strong idea of what the normal *was*. Alongside this solid idea of what the normal was, the concept of whether this normal was a good thing or a bad thing has changed. This chapter will examine the current discussion of how the normal was seen in the past – from idealized utopia to dysfunctional dystopia. It will examine the changed rules and conventions of the discourse whose archive relates history and re-reads it. Chapter one, whilst also looking backwards looked at the (supposed) historic invisibility of the normal and charted the discussion about the move to visibility now which is coming from both the new academic studies and the media. This chapter will examine the re-writing and re-viewing of the history of the normal that is occurring from the ‘moral’ position of the making-the-centre-visible project detailed in chapter two. It will look at how the history of the normal is being re-viewed through both theory and representations that re-view ‘old-style’ masculinity and the nuclear family. This chapter will examine how this re-view is (re)discovering the oppression and repression of the white middle classes. In this discovery the position of the white middle classes, far from being privileged, becomes almost the *most* repressed and therefore oppressed and disadvantaged position of all. As no-one can live up to the myth, those who are expected to try to are shown to be the ones who have the most difficult time.

This chapter re-views some of the primary texts examined before in relation to the tropes of crisis and in relation to the scrutiny of the normal. To begin with the archiving of the history of the normal will be studied by looking at the re-reading and re-viewing of the 1950s in both theory and representation. Two very different primary texts have been

chosen from this archive: the British Channel 4 documentary *Married Love* (Channel 4, February 2002) and the US film *Pleasantville* (1998). These have been chosen as they represent the range of texts forming the archive that looks directly at the 1950s. The re-writing and re-presenting of this period has been chosen as it is from here that we get many of our current conceptions of the normal (Chambers, 2001). This chapter will also re-view how masculinity theory, particularly in relation to film theory, resets the 1950s ideals. Within all these texts there is a continuation of the victimization, crisis and marginalization tropes, but the fact that this time they are discussed in relation to history makes it very powerful indeed as a re-writing of the past will always give legitimacy to the ideas of the present. Finally this chapter will move on to a consideration of 'old' masculinity and its representation today in texts already discussed in other contexts: *Larry's Party* (1997), *Man and Boy*, (1999), *Fight Club*, (1999), *Magnolia*, (1998), *The Best a Man Can Get*, (2000), and briefly considers a film not looked at before, *Billy Elliot*, (2000). Each of these texts are examined in relation to their portrayal and discussion of 'old' style masculinity, looking at how the ideals associated with this type of masculinity are demonized and at new attitudes to homosexuality. This chapter looks at how 'old' or 'past' ideas are being re-written and re-viewed in relation to contemporary ideas of 'new' pluralized, fluid and tolerant masculinity.

These re-readings (and re-writings) of history are based on a re-creation of a singular conception of the normal as unified, essentialized and universalized. This keeps the concept of the normal static and in fact re-creates it as a basic cultural concept. This recreation occurs during the repositioning of the normal as past. In consigning the idea of the normal to the past it is displaced from the current centres of our society and where it is found, in history, in fiction or in the imaginations of misguided people, normality is demonized, vilified and consigned back to the more morally and politically acceptable position of the margins. The re-creation of the history of the normal and those perceived to

be closest to it is presented as radical, moral and revolutionary, deliberately going 'against the grain' of dominant discourse. A concept of a singular normal is re-created and forms a springboard for multiplicity and enables the new rhetoric to claim a radical break with the past. This 'past', and any idea of the normal it may have carried with it, are shown to have never existed in the 'ideal' form and that a proximity and aspiration towards the normal led not to a utopia, but to a repressed, oppressive and immoral dystopia.

3.1 Re-reading the 1950s/ Re-viewing the Normal

Jeffrey Weeks discusses the period after the Victorian era and up to the 1950s as being the time when the nuclear family, as he puts it, "began to come into its own" (Weeks, 1981: 202). And now, certainly one of the places where we get some of our most abiding images of the normal (white, middle class, nuclear) family as well as normal white masculinity appears to be from the 1950s. In many masculinity studies texts the 1950s are discussed as being almost as important in the creation of the ideal of normal masculinity as the colonial period (Whitehead, 2002, Beynon, 2002). Also, for most family studies texts the 1950s are seen as *the* most important period for creating the ideal of the white nuclear family (Chambers, 2001, Silva and Smart, 1999). Silva and Smart cite how "the discursive construction of the *Happy Home* (Good Housekeeping Institute, 1955) in the 1950s placed the traditional family as the ideal model of how things were" (Silva and Smart, 1999: 5). In this postwar culture the gendered division of the public and private (domestic) spheres was once again (as in colonial times) seen as a priority. It is in this period that we get the re-emergence of the ideal of the male breadwinner supporting his wife and family as being an expression of "normal masculinity" (Beynon, 2002: 102). Thus it is from the 1950s that we get many of our current stereotypes and recognizable images of and about normality – often through advertising imagery and films.

The image and ideal of 1950s masculinity involves a re-establishment of the importance of the family and the man within the family, or what Christine Gledhill calls the “re-masculinisation of cultural value” (Gledhill, 1987: 34). In the post-war 1950s the family and the place of the man as father, breadwinner, husband and head of the house became central to definitions and ideals of normality. Arthur Brittan quotes Barbara Ehrenreich who, in 1983 argued that:

In the 1950s ... there was a firm expectation ... that required men to grow up, marry and support their wives. To do anything else was less than grown-up, and the man who willfully deviated was judged to be somehow ‘less than a man’. This expectation was supported by an enormous weight of expert opinion, moral sentiment and public bias, both within popular culture and the elite centres of academic wisdom (Brittan, 2001: 51-2).

Thus in the 1950s ‘real’ men (‘manly’ men) were husbands, fathers and breadwinners. Concepts of ‘proper’ masculinity were solidified around this idea of ‘real’ men being family men: patriarchs.

The myth of the 1950s as being “the golden age” (Chambers, 2001: 34) of the family in particular is now being challenged and discussed as ‘untrue’. What the discussion of these stereotypes, concepts and ideals points to are a continuing interest *and* definition of the normal. Normal masculinity is recognized as constituting a concept of the normal even when this ‘normal’ is said to belong to the past and value judgements are passed on it. The stereotypes and ideals are also said to have conferred a space or place of privilege for white men that positioned everyone else as ab-normal or different. It is because of the (now) unacceptable inequality of others and the privileging of white men that this hardened concept of normal masculinity is said to belong to, and indeed to be, past; whether disappeared into a discussion of colonial times or into a critique of 1950s ideology. However, recent criticism, involving a re-reading of 1950s texts has begun to question even this ‘stable’ (if not ideal) image of both men and of the family. In the late 1980s and early 1990s a plethora of new theoretical books began to re-view the 1950s in relation to gender roles and, most often, how they were represented in films at the time. *Male*

Trouble (Penley and Willis – eds, 1993), *All That Hollywood Allows: Re-Reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama*, (Byars, 1991), *Home Is Where The Heart Is* (Gledhill, ed, 1987), *Imitations of Life*, (Landy, ed, 1991) and Lynne Segal's *Slow Motion* (1990/1997) all began to review masculinity in the 1950s. These books differ in their analysis of the 1950s to that which went before. In relation to 1950s melodrama films, Christine Gledhill argues that what earlier critics found was that these texts:

Reproduce bourgeois ideology because they implicate the spectator in a single point of view onto a coherent, hierarchically ordered representation of the world, in which social contradictions are concealed and ultimately resolved through mechanisms of displacement and substitution. In the process the spectator is 'interpellated' as the 'individual subject' of bourgeois ideology (Gledhill, 1987: 8).

Current theory however does not find this unified, ordered and universal bourgeois ideology. The re-reading of both the 1950s and the media texts of the 1950s find an earlier period of crisis for both men and the family. Citing the nineteenth century as the period of the creation of the melodramatic form, Gledhill argues that it was nostalgic even then evoking "a return to a 'golden past': less how things ought to be than how they should have been" (Gledhill, 1987: 21). The 1950s melodrama however is discussed as failing even in that nostalgia. Although a vision of the patriarchal bourgeois normal is set up, it is argued now that this vision even at the time, was shown to be crumbling internally. Impotency, homosexuality, dysfunction, anxiety, confusion and crisis are said to be the lot of 1950s men as they "failed the test of manliness" (Cohan, 1993: 213). The family in the popular melodramas of the time is characterized as a site of conflicting (and failing) identifications, violence, neurosis, psychosis and hysteria (Cohan, 1993: 216, Rodowick, 1991: 241).³⁰

³⁰ One of the most interesting films in relation to this subject is the 2003 film *Far From Heaven*, directed by Todd Haynes which is explicitly an "homage to 1950s melodrama" (DVD – director's notes), and which remakes a melodrama in the style of those critiqued by new film studies. In *Far From Heaven* the male protagonist, Frank Whittaker may *appear* to have a "perfect life" (ibid) but the film reveals that actually he is homosexual and when his wife finds out she begins an inter-racial relationship. This re-reading of 1950s melodrama makes explicit that "there is trouble in paradise" (ibid).

One of the main reasons given for this emotional and psychic mess is the existence of patriarchal authority (Rodowick, 1991, Segal, 1990/1997) and the gendered nuclear family itself (Byars, 1991). The rigidity of patriarchal authority as it is manifested within the family is critiqued, and the 1950s representations of this authority are re-read as being *problematic at the time*. In relation to the patriarchal figure David Rodowick argues that:

Where the melodramatic Father formerly functioned to legitimate the system of conflict and guarantee its resolution by successfully identifying its heroes on the side of the law, morality and authority, in the 1950's he functioned solely to throw the system into turmoil by his absences through death or desertion, his weaknesses, his neglects, etc. In this manner, the failures of identification so characteristic of the domestic melodrama, and the self-conscious 'oedipal' solutions they demanded, can be directly linked to the figure of the Father as representing either the very sign of madness (the transgression of the law he represents) or as an empty center where the authority of the law fails (Rodowick, 1991, 245-6).

This analysis reads as remarkably similar to the crisis of contemporary fatherhood we looked at in chapter one. The historical figure of the Father is being re-read in relation to contemporary notions of the failure of masculinity, its crisis and (that which we will examine later in this chapter) its pathological expression. In line with more general masculinity studies texts, these criticisms of 1950s films show that the normal is crumbling, but more importantly it is being shown as never having existed (even in mainstream Hollywood 1950s representations) at all. In constructing my argument it doesn't matter whether current criticism is right or wrong, what matters is that history and historical representations are being re-read. In the 1950s Betty Friedan's criticism of the deep underlying problems in suburbia was almost a lone critique. Today however the idea of normality be it the family or masculinity, crumbling from within is the mainstream discourse. In contemporary texts the history of the 'manly' man and the nuclear family is being 're-read' and reinterpreted. The 'normal' is shown not to be the normal again.

In a spate of academic discussions and media representations of the nuclear family as dysfunctional, repressive, undesirable and 'wrong', there are certain texts that deal with the 'manly' man and the family's 'history'. The archive of the history of the normal in texts

that discuss and re-present the 1950s disbands and deconstructs any idea of a utopian 1950s normality. We will now turn to two media texts that revisit the 1950s. The Channel 4 documentary series *Married Love* (February 2002), which re-tells the history of heterosexual marriage in the twentieth century, and the US film *Pleasantville* (1998) which fictionally recreates the utopic vision of 1950s normality. These texts have been chosen out of the archive as they document the re-reading of 'real' history and provide a fictional re-viewing of history respectively. From these two very different forms of media production, discussion and representation we can begin to look at the rules and codes that structure the discursive enunciation of the history of the normal as it is 'allowed' to be spoken today.

Both media texts examined in this section as well as the theory briefly discussed above are relentlessly *anti*-nostalgic. For masculinity or the family to be positioned as 'new' in any sense, a documented and specific concept of the 'old' is needed. In the new discourse of the normal, white, middle class normality is not just being denied and re-positioned in the margins, it is also being conceived of as belonging in the past and further, it is being demonized as bigoted, intolerant, ignorant and repressive. Where once the white, bourgeois normal was seen as a position to aspire to, within the current climate and configuration of society the normal is being re-presented (ostensibly) as something that should not be aspired to in its 'old' form because it *was* intolerant, bigoted and exclusive. Where once there was nostalgia for a 'golden' past now many texts represent that past as immoral and wrong and the 'golden age' is proved to have never really existed anyway.

Contemporary theory re-views the representations of normality at the time. The two contemporary representations I look at document the 1950s in different ways and were both made in the late 1990s. The US film *Pleasantville* (1998) explicitly fictionalizes the utopian 1950s ideal of normality, showing that indeed it *was* a fiction. The documentary

series *Married Love* (Channel 4, February 2002) however looks at the 'reality' at the time. *Married Love* seeks to uncover the ignorance and repression that it argues, existed in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century. *Married Love* is a series of three historical documentary programmes taking a 'fresh' look at the history of sex in the twentieth century. The documentaries go to great lengths to document ignorance, fear, guilt and misinformation around sex in the past and juxtapose these attitudes with contemporary ones. The emphasis of each programme is that attitudes to sex were 'wrong' but things now are much better. The older men who are interviewed, when speaking about this time are incredulous and often sad about what it was like then and at the enforced ignorance and repression of the time. In all three programmes the discussion of the time before the 1960s emphasizes ignorance, repression, the absence of sexual education, the fact that no-one spoke about sex at the time, the lack of experience and the lack of a language for any experiences that people did have.

In *Married Love* it is the women's movement and time itself that is said to have done most to combat repression and ignorance. Things are represented as getting progressively better as the voice-over to the programme tells us: "men's attitudes to sex in marriage have moved a long way since the first half of the twentieth century. Men's sexual behaviour was transformed by a new generation of assertive women" (Channel 4, 26.02.02). There has been progress and change and modern attitudes to sex are contrasted directly with those that espoused only one type of married, heterosexual love. *Married Love* does its best to shatter the idealized myth of the nuclear family in the mid-twentieth century. As the narrator explains: "the suburban, middle class family presented an image of domestic contentment in post-war Britain. But just beneath the surface lay dark feelings of sexual frustration that could suddenly explode" (Channel 4, 26.02.02). Again, even when there is a surface appearance of normality there will be abnormality underneath: scratch the surface and something nasty is bound to ooze out. Here, and throughout most of the discussion of

the three documentaries of *Married Love*, it is sexual frustration, brought about by repression and cleaving to the conventions of the time, that provides the time bomb that could explode surface normality at any time. And if the normal nuclear family did not exist (even in the past that it is said to have occupied in an untroubled manner), this provides sound 'proof' that the normal cannot exist today. The re-viewing of the past enables the current view of the normal.

Married Love re-reads the 'image of domestic contentment' presented by the suburban middle class family, and re-presents us with a dark and violent image instead. Look *beneath* the idealized historical image and you find darkness, frustration, a lack of control and violence. Repression, it is suggested, lead to levels of sexual frustration that could lead to both domestic violence and to marital breakdown. Thus repressive sexual attitudes could themselves endanger the nuclear family. And at least some of the discussion in all three of the documentaries is around how more liberated attitudes to sex and an emphasis on equal pleasure for men and women can lead to happier, more stable marriages.

In the other text, the film *Pleasantville* (1998), stable marriage is not even presented as necessarily desirable. *Pleasantville* is the story of two modern teenagers David and Jen, who fall into a 1950's sitcom world and how they set about 'modernizing' this world. The 1950's world of the sitcom 'Pleasantville'³¹ is black and white and the two teenagers bring colour to this grey and repressive world. In *Pleasantville* it is the young people and the women who mobilize change to this static, rigid, gendered society. And where the grey sitcom world of 'Pleasantville' may be, as the voice-over to the sitcom tells us: 'chock-full of family values', these 'values' are demonstrated to be repressive, restricting and immoral. There are two worlds in the film, the contemporary world where HIV is rife, global warming threatens our world and David and Jen's parents are divorced, and the

³¹To provide clarity, the film itself will be written in italics; *Pleasantville*, the sitcom in inverted commas; 'Pleasantville' and the town without either; Pleasantville.

world of the sitcom 'Pleasantville' that is David's favourite programme. 'Pleasantville' world portrays an idealized version of suburban, gendered normality and in the film is presented at first as a nostalgia-fest. However as the film progresses this juxtaposition that places nostalgia for a mythical 'perfect' past against a jarring, fractured present, is slowly and inexorably subverted.

In the film David and Jen are magically transported from the modern world into the black and white 'utopia' that is 'Pleasantville', taking over the roles of Bud and Mary-Sue, the teenage children of a 'perfect' white, middle class nuclear family where the father goes out to work and the mother seems to just cook endlessly. The suburban world of Pleasantville is cultureless, or at least, there is neither high, nor popular culture. The books in the library are blank, the music is middle of the road 'lift' music and the geography is confined to the few streets of Pleasantville. The suggestion seems to be that the white, gendered, suburban 'ideal' itself is cultureless, bland and lacking in 'colour'. This is by no means a new idea. In the introduction to *Visions of Suburbia*, Roger Silverstone cites "the presumed philistinism of suburban life" (Silverstone, 1997: 14). Seen from above in the class hierarchy the suburban ideal, as well as the suburbs themselves, are viewed as 'middle brow' and bland, without the 'colour' or folk culture of the working class and without high culture's art, literature or music. As Roger Silverstone says; "Suburban culture is middle-brow, and suburban music [...] is, if nothing else, pop" (Silverstone, 1997: 23). In Pleasantville the music isn't even truly pop and it is up to Jen and David to introduce rock and roll, literature, art and the possibility of physical mobility to the town. Modern values, despite the picture of current Western and global society given at the beginning of the film, are imagined as being infinitely preferable to the stifled and repressive values and world of Pleasantville.

John Hartley writes that:

Politically, suburbia has been blamed for creating an apathetic, reactionary, conservative, conformist, status conscious, petit-bourgeois class whose members are incapable of organizing anything for themselves, but who are prey to demagogues, propaganda and media influence, forming the bedrock of passive support for authoritarian, un-democratic, even fascist politics (Silverstone, 1997: 184).

This facism, as the result of extreme convention, repression and restriction is explored in the film. As the changes continue to gain momentum in Pleasantville, reactionary, conservative, authoritarian, anti-democratic and even fascist political views begin to rear their head in the form of colour prejudice. In the film this is quite literal as the 'unreconstructed' people in Pleasantville remain filmed in black and white whilst those letting go and exploring new emotions and sex are 'coloured in'.³² Free and unconstrained modern attitudes to sex are introduced to Pleasantville and begin to combat the sexless and repressive, grey regime that, it is suggested, existed in the 1950s under a façade of convention, morality and normality.

In both *Married Love* and *Pleasantville* the sexist attitudes of the 'time' are condemned and gendered inequalities are denounced and seen as damaging for both the men and women. In *Visions of Suburbia* Roger Silverstone argues that:

suburban culture is a gendered culture. Indeed the suburbanization of culture has often been equated by its many critics with a feminization of culture. The suburban home has been built around an ideology and a reality of women's domestication, oppressed by the insistent demands of the household, denied access to the varied spaces and times, the iteration of public and private that marks the male suburban experience and which creates, for them the crucial distinctions between work and leisure, weekday and weekend. In particular, postwar suburbanization was buttressed by a concerted effort by public policy and media images to resocialize women into the home, and into the bosom of the nuclear bourgeois family (Silverstone, 1997: 7).

Here as in many discussions of white, middle class suburbia and the nuclear families that lived there, it is women's oppression that is viewed as being most acute and as being most at odds with the idealized image. Silverstone both genders and politicizes the ideal. In *Pleasantville* the sitcom world that presents the supposedly idealized view of 1950's

³² There are however no black characters in the film to complicate the film's depiction of 'colour prejudice'.

suburban normality is divided into strict gender roles and the film takes the contemporary view on this. The nuclear bourgeois family itself is seen as a place of repression and perhaps particularly oppression for women. The very concept of the 1950s, post-war resocialization of women back into the nuclear family and the home is viewed as 'wrong'. In *Pleasantville* the family's mother Peggy commits adultery and her 'liberation' is dwelt on. The young people and women instigate and maintain the changes that happen in Pleasantville, and once these changes have begun, the women in *Pleasantville* are not going to be re-tied to domestic slavery. Once Peggy has a taste of liberation, nothing will be the same for her again. Indeed, the film entirely condones her affair and subsequent marriage break up.

This is in sharp contrast to the way that most of the men of the town of Pleasantville are portrayed as rigid, repressive, patriarchal and frightened; unable to believe that their wives might not make dinner or might burn their shirts when ironing. As one of the men's leaders tells the others; "it's a question of values. It's a question of whether we want to hold on to those values". The grey town draws up a new 'code of conduct' that states that all citizens must treat each other in a 'courteous' and pleasant manner, that the library is to be closed, music censored, there are to be no double beds (no sex), and it decrees that all schools will teach "*the non-changeist view of history, emphasizing continuity over alteration*". History itself is to be re-written and change is not to be allowed in Pleasantville, and within the parameters of current discourse this is entirely unacceptable. The contemporary ideals of change, multiplicity and fluidity are to be replaced with continuity and stagnation.

Overall it is the men who have most to lose with change, but also who are the most frightened of change. In *Pleasantville* it is the men who find it hardest to change but who suffer perhaps more because of this – they have been more fully socialized into repressive

convention and are therefore *more* repressed. This is quite a subtle argument and it is suggested rather than given directly. However, in a similar manner to the idea expressed in chapter one, that men can be damaged by being associated with *all* 'bad' men,³³ it is suggested that the socialization and expectations put upon *all* men/boys are damaging and repressive. It is also suggested that because masculinity is represented as being so rigid and the expectations of behaviour put on men by masculinity are so rigid, it is harder for men to reconstruct themselves and their masculinities than it might be for women to reconstruct themselves or femininity.

This idea is reflected in the documentary series *Married Love*. In most of the interviews and examples given by the programme the excessive repression of society was, it is suggested, worse for men than for women and worse for the middle classes than the working classes. Where a working class interviewee fondly recalls his gang of working class boys masturbating each other and in front of each other during lazy afternoons by the river, a middle class man who went to public school recalls institutionalized ignorance, repression and misinformation. The white, middle class male interviewees discuss the social movement at the time that discouraged boys from masturbating, and one man recalls being told that "semen came from the brain and masturbation would turn you into an imbecile" (Channel 4, 26.02.02). In the re-reading of the history of the normal it is the white middle classes who are said to have suffered and if women have suffered then so too have men.

If we return to *Pleasantville*, the film explores the idea of suffering *within* the 'ideal' white nuclear family. The film shows that the nuclear family can be an unhealthy place to be for both women and men. The film shows that this type of family can be immoral, conservative, restrictive and exclusive; set up for the benefit of white men, although they

³³ Chapter one, section 1.5, 'Representations of Victimization and Feminization'.

too suffer within it. This is no celebration, although as with family studies texts, the *possibility* of this celebration is acknowledged. As Tony Parsons put it on the Late Review, *Pleasantville* “subverts its own nostalgia” (BBC 2, 11.03.99). The idea of nostalgia although resurrected is displaced to ‘elsewhere’ as neither the film nor the review indulges in it.

Married Love does not indulge in nostalgia either. Here the past is also represented as a dystopia compared to the liberated and tolerant present. As the narrator tells us; “since the sixties the old restrictions of married love have been eroded” (Channel 4, 19.02.02). We are told that we have broken with this past in what is presented as a radical ‘rewriting’ of history. History is ‘re-read’ from our own contemporary times and contemporary morality overlaid on to it. Thus Tony Parsons is able to say of the world of *Pleasantville* that, “TV-land past is presented not as a paradise, but as a hell surrounded by a white picket fence” and that the film shows that “these weren’t the good old days, that the past was repressive and restrictive” (BBC2, 03.99). The singular ideal normal is taken in historical context and shown not to be an aspirational ideal at all but rather a ‘ruse’ of right-wing, hegemonic, patriarchal society that encourages people to blindly conform even as the values one is meant to conform to engender sexism and racism.

3.2 The Singularity of Old Masculinity

Normality is looked at as being conceived within history as a singularity; *one* dominant ideal. It is assumed that in the past people *were* supposed to conform to this ideal and this led to repression, oppression, inequality and bigotry. Stephen Whitehead looks backwards:

There is a sense that a century or so ago manliness was perceived as less fluid, less amenable to individual interpretation and, importantly, something to be openly strived for (Whitehead, 2002: 15, my emphasis).

What Whitehead is describing is ‘our’ idea of manliness and this type of masculinity. By saying that ‘there is a sense’, Whitehead opens this idea of ‘manliness’ up to interpretation/

definition in the present. It is less a question of whether it really *was* so, and more a question of how we perceive it to have been *now*. And ‘now’, manliness of this sort is not something to be strived for. This historical idea of masculinity and manliness is rarely questioned, rather it is used as a springboard from which to base the newer concepts of multiple, fluid masculinities.³⁴ Whitehead continues:

It remains the case that any notion of fixed or final gender roles or definitions is implausible. Similarly it is *no longer* tenable, given recognition of the multiplicity, historicity and dynamism of gender representations, *to talk of masculinity in the singular* (Whitehead, 2002: 33, my emphases).

This implies that it *was* tenable to talk of masculinity in the singular and when speaking historically of masculinity it often still is. The current idea of the ‘historical’ ideal of ‘old’ masculinity is itself fixed, unchanging, rigid, stereotyped and singular.

The idea of masculinity-as-it-was, or ‘normal’ masculinity in the historical re-write for the white middle classes is one of the areas that is most often overhauled, questioned and discussed especially in relation to an idea of ‘old style’ masculinity. Thus in this section we revisit some of the texts examined earlier; *Man and Boy* (Parsons, 1999), *Larry’s Party* (Shields, 1997), and the films *Fight Club* (1999), *American Beauty* (1999) and *Magnolia* (1998). These texts, as we saw earlier, all examine a conception of fatherhood and often their own experience as ‘new style’ fathers is pitted against the way that their own fathers parented them. In a recreation of both new and old types of masculinity, these texts enunciate some of the ways that these opposing types of masculinity are documented and represented today. Although they offer a range of discussions and representations of ‘old style’ masculinity, that type of masculinity itself is positioned as static, unchanging and rigid. Throughout these texts as they are taken together, a unified conception of ‘old style’ masculinity is recreated. Offered as ‘*old-style*’ masculinity this type of masculinity is

³⁴ Thus although sometimes masculinity is discussed as not having been (really) normal ever, as in the new re-views of the 1950s, there still remains a static idea of what that normal is/was meant to be, or what it ‘should’ have been.

presented as *the* trap that is opened up by society for (white) men to fall into³⁵ and it is the trap that this generation's fathers are portrayed as already having fallen into and are beckoning their sons into. Whether portrayed as sinister or naïve, the fathers of (young) middle-aged, white men are discussed and represented as having swallowed the myth of normality hook, line and sinker. Repressed, homophobic, sexist and conventional, these men represent a type of masculinity that is said to belong in the past, which is profoundly mistaken and which should be and is being confined to history. Although men of this type are still around they are represented as belonging to a dying breed and with them, 'masculinity' as a concept and a repressive myth is said to be dying. This allows 'new' men and 'new' expressions of masculinity to be presented as completely breaking with the 'old', allowing new, fluid and multiple masculinities to be expressed in opposition to the fixed conception of this 'old'.

This discussion of the 'old' being diametrically opposed to the 'new' is apparent in masculinity studies texts, factual media discussions and is constantly represented in fictional form. 'Bad old dads' as an expression of 'old' normality are being used as a springboard that allows 'new' men to express themselves in creative and more expansive ways. Indeed John Beynon uses this binarism to define what he calls 'nebulous new man-ism' entirely saying that: "[t]he only defining feature we can point to with any degree of certainty is that he is certainly not 'old man', his father" (Beynon, 2002: 120). 'New' men from this point of view are nothing in themselves (and therefore one might think may not exist at all) and can only be defined in relation to what is opposite and opposed. As there is a pull away from 'old bad fatherhood' and models of masculinity, those fathers who have moulded themselves to conventional, repressive patterns are represented as wanting their sons to do the same, to conform to the same norms, and therefore battles between the old and the new - internal and external, are waged.

³⁵ Black men are often portrayed as having fallen into it already through hypermasculinity (see Whitehead 2002 and Hall, 1997 for discussions).

In *Man and Boy* Harry Silver describes his father's ambitions for him: "he wanted me to have everything that life has to offer – the career and the kids, the family and the salary, the happy hearth and the fat paycheque. He wanted me to have it all. But nobody gets away with having it all" (Parsons, 1999: 185). Harry's father only wants the 'best' for his son, the idealized normal. Harry knows however that this is impossible and the aspiration for it is itself a trap. Harry has 'seen through' the myth and convention. Expectation, a certain type of masculinity and fatherhood, and a certain way of being a husband are the traps that men are meant to fall into from the example and advice of their fathers, who do not have the vision of their sons and are speaking from their 'incorrect' position of old-style masculinity which says (incorrectly) that there is and always has been only one type of (biological) masculinity.

In *Fight Club* Tyler's father advises him to go to college, get a job, get married. Michael Jordan says of this advice that "[c]ontaminated by an ethos of aimless ambition and adrift from custom's logic of example, the father's advice seems empty and merely conventional" (Jordan, 2002: 373). Tyler's father's words are particularly empty as he himself was absent and thus the words themselves and the actions they prescribe don't even have 'custom's logic of example'. Yet even if Tyler was expected to follow by example the implication is that he would still be following an 'aimless ambition'. This concept of 'aimless ambition' is a useful one, in this context it is an ambition for normality that is *not thought about*; it is prescribed, expected – supposedly the path of least resistance. This is why Larry, in *Larry's Party*, Michael in *The Best a Man Can Get* and Harry in *Man and Boy* feel that they have acted without volition and come to a place they did not intend to, a place that itself is 'empty and merely conventional'. These men as well as Lester in *American Beauty* and Jack in *Fight Club* try to fit but it does not work. For these men the masculine ideal is portrayed as not being natural to them, easy to fall into but

not easy to sustain or achieve properly and any attempt to achieve it will lead to unhappiness and repression.

In these texts as with many others there is a terrible anxiety around the idea of 'turning' into one's father. Married, and a new father, this is Harry Silver on his new conventional life:

And when I came back from work at night I would shout, 'Hi honey, I'm home,' as though we were characters in some American sitcom from the fifties, with Dick Van Dyke bringing home the bacon and Mary Tyler Moore making bacon sandwiches.

I don't know why I tried to make a joke of it. Maybe because in my heart I believed that Gina was only pretending to be a housewife, while I pretended to be my father (Parsons, 1999: 20-1).

I will examine the idea of performativity in chapter four, here I want to look at the concept of masculinity that Harry has. The 'ideal' often seems to relate to a mythic idea of the 1950's, a 'golden', clear ideal of suburbia, family life, a singular ideal fatherhood and breadwinning masculinity that fitted in with an industrialized capitalist economy. This idea of an older-style, old-fashioned masculinity in many of the texts is viewed with rueful nostalgia, but this is consequently subverted. The men in these texts don't really want to become their fathers and, indeed, the thought frightens them; the burden is too heavy and the expectations too great.

This is Larry, newly married, with his wife Dorrie pregnant already, on an aeroplane at the start of their honeymoon. As Dorrie sleeps, Larry feels he ought to stay awake:

He was a husband now, and his chattering, fretful Dorrie, no longer a girlfriend but a wife. [...] For her sake he would stay alert. He would keep guard over her, drawing himself as straight as possible in his seat without disturbing her sleeping body. He'd clamp his jaw firmly shut in a husband like way, patient, forbearing, and keep his eyes steady in the dark. He would do this in order to keep panic at a distance. All that was required of him was to outstare the image in the floating black glass of the window, that shorn, bewildered, fresh-faced stranger whose profile, for all its raw boyishness, reminded him alarmingly, of – of who? His father that's who (Shields, 1997: 20-1).

Larry has taken on traditional masculine roles before he is sure of himself, what he wants, and who he is. Larry, like Harry, feels/fears that he is becoming like his father. These anxieties arise as the male characters begin to follow convention and try to attain the normality of suburban, nuclear family life. Harry feels that he is in a 1950's American sitcom whilst Larry newly married has impossibly stereotyped ideas about what 'husband' is – firm-jawed, patient and erect. Larry already feels panic as 'husband-ness' and a certain type of masculinity seem to be taking him over. This is a traditional role of masculinity that is personified to Larry (as to Harry), by his father and one which fills him with panic. However, in these contemporary texts it is suggested that in fact it is incumbent on men *to reject* this type of masculinity, that it is 'correct' to do so. Rejecting old style masculinity is seen as the 'moral' thing to do in nearly all current discourse around masculinity.

3.3 Old Masculinity Versus New Masculinity

In contemporary representations this type of old masculinity is dealt with in different ways and sometimes there is a suggestion of nostalgia for the 'certainties' of the past. *Man and Boy* is one text about new masculinity that indulges in this nostalgia but it is still with the sense that any type of old-style masculinity belongs in the past and is consigned to history. Here is Harry after his father tells him he can cope with looking after his son on his own:

It was easy for him to say. His youth might have been marred by the efforts of the German army to murder him, but at least in his day a father's role was set in stone. He knew exactly what was expected of him. My dad was a brilliant father and – here's the killer – he didn't even have to be a brilliant father. *Wait until your father gets home* was enough to get me to behave. [...] You don't hear that threat so often these days [...]. Because these days some fathers never come home. And some fathers are home all the time (Parsons, 1999: 95).

Although spoken with irony there is still the sense that being a man, being a father, was easier 'in those days', your role was prescribed, expected and therefore easy to follow. Men were just expected to be 'men', and therefore you just got on with it and because it was 'natural' (biological) one did not have to do very much anyway. Breadwinning and

authoritarianism was almost all that was expected along with, of course, compulsory heterosexuality and certain types of 'manly' behaviour. At least a man knew what was expected of him.

For men now it is suggested that things are much more difficult. In *Intimacy* Jay projects what he supposes his wife will think once he has left her, the family home and his two young sons:

I am sure she will ask herself, if she hasn't already, what are men for. Do they serve any useful function these days? They impregnate women. Later, they might occasionally send money over. What else could fathers be? It wasn't a question Dad had to ask himself. Being a father wasn't a question then. He was there to impose himself, to guide, exert discipline and enjoy his children (Kureishi, 1998: 115).

We have already discussed the idea that men are redundant and here Jay suggests a reason why they might be. Men are no longer the sole breadwinners. They are no longer the source of discipline, no longer the unquestioned patriarchal head of the family. Therefore as Jay acknowledges this he laments what he sees as a loss of power, purpose and certainty. Neither Harry nor Jay want a return to the 'old' but neither is beyond regretting the power and benefit that they as 'new' men have supposedly given up.

However this old type of masculinity is not a viable option for men anymore in a multicultural, (supposedly) non-sexist society with the service and technological industries of late capitalism and the globalized economy that comes with this. Thus with the rhetoric that places the new against the old, despite the nostalgia and a certain amount of respect, the consensus is that it *shouldn't* be a viable option for men anymore. At one point in *Larry's Party* Larry seems to be regretting divided and unequal gender roles when he remembers how Dorrie his first wife "had done all the laundry. They never discussed this arrangement; she just did it. [...] Those were simpler times, the late seventies. People fell more easily and with less rancour into traditional roles" (Shields, 1997: 234). However despite Larry's tone, the suggestion is that these roles belong firmly in the past when times

were 'simpler' and people more naïve, accepting convention without question. The fragmented, postmodern world is more complicated than this and in part it is this complication that is regretted. Whitehead and Barrett argue that:

Many men still yearn to perform and validate their masculinity through 'conquering the universe', but the aggressive, dominant emotionally repressed behaviour that such yearnings engender are increasingly seen as (self) destructive, if not derisible (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 6).

There are still yearnings for the old certainties of the past and the power that both inequality and certainty brought. But not only is this morally wrong now it is entirely unacceptable and seen as damaging for *men* and those men who even attempt to practice this type of masculinity now are open to ridicule:

New and future generations of men, certainly those in post-modern, post-industrial societies, may well find that any adoption of traditional (dated) masculine postures is dismissed by women as sad and ridiculous (Whitehead, 2002: 57).

There is a lick of fear in this statement. Old-style masculinity is dated and old fashioned and, if a man attempts to express it, 'women' (as well as 'new' men) may well laugh at him. There is a 'rediscovery' of old-style masculinity as ridiculous even as this type of masculinity is denied and dismissed – who would want it now?

In *American Beauty*, this type of 'sad' old-style-masculinity-as-ridiculous is pushed on to the character of Buddy Kane Real Estate King, the man that Lester's wife Carolyn has an affair with. Buddy exemplifies a certain expression of old-style masculinity with an ego as big as his salary, a 'trophy wife', and a need to assert himself 'as a man'. Buddy wants to be treated as God, Master, King and Father – all forms of masculinity that are no longer viable or tenable within the new discourses on masculinity. Because of this Buddy is represented as flashy and shallow and the type of masculinity he exemplifies is shown to be as empty and superficial as he himself is. Buddy's expressions of masculinity and Carolyn's reactions to it are made into comedy, which exposes them both as ridiculous. Buddy's needs and desires 'as a man' are contrasted with Lester's far more secure masculinity which has no need to assert itself in this manner. Buddy's clothes and

behaviour are coded as old-fashioned (probably 1970's), sad, superficial and absurd. The representation of Buddy Kane Real Estate King caricatures this specific type of masculinity and takes it to the extreme, falling into what John Beynon names as "an ancestry of denigrating 'traditional' masculinity" whereby "the message rammed home is that men are generally lazy, slovenly and cannot be trusted. Fun was [1980's] poked at 'manly' acts of physical endurance and men were shown to be not only emotionally inadequate and domestically cack-handed, but downright dim and useless at most things" (Beynon, 2002: 135). Expressions of old masculinity are denigrated and shown to be incompetent. Interestingly the first three characteristics Beynon cites; 'lazy, slovenly' and 'untrustworthy' are three that are more usually cited in relation to black men than white (Hall, 1997a). And again, the marginalized other is substituted (displaced?) by the white man as he claims marginalization.

Old masculinity is seen as being too exclusionary for our current social climate. As Michael Kimmel writes: "manhood is only possible for a distinct minority, and the definition has been constructed to prevent others [here Irish, African, Asian and Gay men] from achieving it" (Kimmel in Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 281). Exclusion for anybody and exclusivity for white men are two things that are not espoused in the new rhetoric of marginalization (and therefore equalization) for all. Therefore, whatever the cost to respect for men who have chosen certain types of masculinity, whatever the cost to easily exercised power, old-style masculinity must be rejected.

This is one reason why the character of Frank in *Magnolia* (1998) is so shocking. Frank has *rebelled back* into old-style masculinity. His run-for-men seminar entitled 'Seduce and Destroy' has the slogan 'Respect the Cock and Tame the Cunt' and, in the current climate this is black *comedy* because of its very unexpectedness. We are invited to laugh as Frank pumps his hips chanting, "we...are...Men!", whilst at the same time *nausea* is generated in

the viewer as a reaction to this extreme expression of old style masculinity. And because it is so extreme we are distanced from it: 'we' are *not* like this. Frank is portrayed as 'rediscovering' the past of masculinity in the wrong way. Although conceptions and stereotypes of what old-style masculinity is do not vary very much, seeing that masculinity as something to be recovered in order to be used and lived, rather than ridiculed and rejected is not acceptable at the moment. Thus it is that Frank is represented as *rebell*ing by espousing this form of masculinity. John MacInnes in *The Masculinities Reader* takes the more 'conventional' view:

What were once proclaimed to be manly virtues (heroism, independence, courage, strength, rationality, will, backbone, virility) have become masculine vices (abuse, destructive aggression, coldness, emotional inarticulacy, detachment, isolation, an inability to be flexible) (MacInnes in Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 313-4).

Thus even as the stereotypes of old-style masculinity remain the same, 'strength, rationality, will' etc, men's attitudes to it are supposed to have changed. And so Frank is represented as an aberration and also as neurotic, pathological and, we discover finally, as damaged by his father who absented himself, leaving the young Frank to look after his dying mother. So in fact Frank's 'aberration' stems from a rejection by his father who re-plays the old-style absence and thereby forces a young Frank into the feminized position of responsible carer, hence the over-compensation.

In *Fight Club* too the rebellion is back to an older style of masculinity although with controlled violence and indeed elements of non-violence. However in each text, *Fight Club* and *Magnolia*, there is a sense of bucking the trend and the main trend is *away* from old-style, authoritarian, violent, sexist and homophobic masculinity. Homi Bhabha says that his critical interrogation of old-style masculinity

Turns its address from an innate invisibility, a normal condition, to a compulsive interrogation. 'Are you a man or a mouse?' I can still hear my attorney father repeatedly confronting me in Bombay, his barristerish bravura seeking a kind of exclusive, excluding, bonding. 'Do I have to choose?' I remember thinking, in anxious awkwardness, caught impossibly, ambivalently, in between 'two different creeds and two different outlooks on life' (Bhabha in Berger et al, 1995: 58).

As the normal becomes visible, for contemporary, pro-feminist men, it is no longer a question of being either 'a man or a mouse' - of being a 'real' man or an emasculated (and possibly homosexual) man. Bhabha refuses the question itself; refuses the 'exclusive and excluding' male bonding, which brings its own ties and ensures visible inequalities and exclusions.

3.4 Homophobia

As we saw above, the question of being 'a man or a mouse' involves conceptions of what a 'real' man is and what he is not. This section examines one of the most prevalent ideas around at the moment: the 'inevitable' homophobia associated with older types of masculinity. Within masculinity studies texts in particular there is a direct equation made between traditional types of masculinity and homophobia. Indeed it is argued that this old-style masculinity could not exist if it were not homophobic, the 'threat' of homosexuality being more than it could bear. Whitehead and Barrett agree that, "hegemonic masculinity depends upon notions of compulsive heterosexuality and homophobia reinforced through idealized images of heroic men" (Whitehead and Barrett, 2000: 19). Anthony Easthope writes even more forcefully that "towards overt homosexuality the male myth has one response and one only: homophobia" (Easthope, 1986/1992: 108). In the rhetoric of what Easthope calls the 'male myth' and Whitehead and Barrett term 'hegemonic masculinity', straight, white masculinity can see a threat to its hegemonic, patriarchal power. In this discourse gender is neither relative nor fluid, it is and should be, natural: men should be men, and women should be women and homosexuals should not really exist at all. In this essentialist rhetoric (with which we are all familiar and which equates to the theories of 'masculinism' discussed in the introduction), homosexuality is *unnatural*, and what are appealed to are the binaries of normal/abnormal, natural/unnatural, 'real' men and effeminate men. These were the binaries that were used to 'prove' the heterosexuality that is said to have been imperative for this type of masculinity.

Homophobia has no place in the new discourse on masculinity because homophobia is so strongly associated with 'old' hegemonic forms of masculinity. As I am arguing, current forms of white masculinity are doing their damndest *not* to be perceived as hegemonic, privileged or excluding. From this apparent rejection of homophobia we get the current representations of men who are homophobic, the most extreme being that of Colonel Fitts in *American Beauty*. Within the film old-style masculinity that is violent, macho and homophobic is embodied in the character of the Colonel who epitomizes some of the most extreme expressions of this type of masculinity: violent, macho and militaristic. From his ramrod posture to his crew-cut hair, the Colonel's entire appearance signifies the masculine, and every time the character is on screen there are signifiers of the type of controlling, violent and unstable masculinity that he represents. From making his son Ricky give him a urine sample every six months to check for drug use, to obsessively shining his already shiny car, to the state of Ricky's mother (which is indirectly attributed to the Colonel), to our view of his study with its dark wood, two US flags, and his extensive weapons collection which includes his Nazi plate, everything gives us clues to the type of man he is and the type of masculinity he ascribes to.

Within the film it is the Colonel's violent homophobia that is concentrated on. When we first meet the Colonel the first words that he says, whilst reading the paper at the breakfast table are: "this country's going straight to hell". The Colonel believes that the 'old order' is under threat and falling apart. For the Colonel one of the most significant factors in this 'disintegration of the old order' is the fact that his gay neighbours, Jim and Jim, make no effort to hide their homosexuality. To the Colonel, homosexuality is something to be hidden, kept invisible and something to be ashamed of. Indeed any question of homosexuality is something to be so ashamed of that the Colonel kills Lester in negation of

his own (rejected) homosexual advance – he cannot cope with having had those feelings for Lester.

In the film, the Colonel's masculinity, although more extreme in some ways than Buddy's, is not ridiculous because it is too dangerous. Ricky receives regular beatings from his father and after a particularly vicious attack the Colonel tells Ricky that the beating was for his own good: "you have no respect for other people's things, for authority ... You can't just go around doing whatever you feel like; you can't – there are rules in life ... You need structure, you need discipline". There are rigid 'rules' that the Colonel himself lives by, they are an expression of his extreme form of masculinity and he wants Ricky to follow in his footsteps. The Colonel is hemmed in by rules and expectations, structure and discipline, his entire view of himself and who he is being predicated on the form of masculinity that these ideas construct. And he believes that Ricky, as a male, needs these structures too. The Colonel really is doing what he believes is best but he is unable to express any emotion other than anger, violence, and a well-hidden fear. Throughout the film, in accordance with this form of masculinity the Colonel is unable to express love and remains inarticulate.

The Colonel's downfall begins when he believes that he has seen Ricky give Lester a blow-job. As the Colonel beats Ricky shouting: "I would rather you were dead than be a fucking faggot!" Ricky realizes what he has to do and tells the Colonel that he "sucks dick for money". Ricky gets up off the floor and advances on the Colonel, (who backs away), saying "you should see me fuck". As Ricky tells him he's a sad old man, the Colonel's fists grow soft and he starts shaking. As Ricky leaves, the Colonel is broken, holding out his arms now as if to embrace his son. The Colonel has been defeated by his own violence, homophobia and fear of non-normal masculinity. The Colonel's type of masculinity is shown to have too many fears, disgusts and barriers to be sustainable. In fact the Colonel

is easily beaten and rendered impotent by Ricky not being afraid of alternative sexualities and by being able to assume the language of homosexuality. Ricky wins by not reacting with violence but with words and by confronting the Colonel with his own worst fears head on. If old-style masculinity is placed in opposition to new-style and is represented as brittle and easily broken, then new-style is flexible, and not afraid of its own sexuality or the possibility of homosexuality. Whitehead and Barrett write that if masculinity is to have a crisis “there would have to be a single masculinity; something solid, fixed, immovable, brittle even” (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 8). It is this ‘solid, fixed’ and immovable masculinity that the Colonel believes in and lives by and this makes his masculinity ‘brittle’ and therefore easily broken.

Inevitably within this discourse the Colonel’s violent homophobia masks a deeply repressed homosexuality which manifests itself in the next scene when the Colonel tries to kiss Lester. In this scene, Lester is working out half naked as the broken Colonel comes across the road in the pouring rain to stand at the garage window. When Lester lets in the Colonel, in concern and with compassion, he tells the Colonel that Carolyn is probably off somewhere sleeping with someone else. When the Colonel asks if Lester minds, Lester laughs and says: “our marriage is just for show. A commercial for how normal we are when we’re anything but”. Lester, like Ricky, is able to and not afraid to express abnormality. The Colonel cannot accept his own inadvertent and uncontrolled homosexual action (trying to kiss Lester) and is so disgusted and overwhelmed by it that he has to murder what he desires. The Colonel is rigid and therefore weak. Lester is flexible within his masculinity and able to express vulnerability, which paradoxically, within the new discourse of masculinity signifies strength.

It is the Colonel’s form of masculinity that is represented as being the most unstable, and also the most visible. As John Beynon writes: “traditional masculinity is *seen* to be based

on a very *fragile* foundation” (Beynon, 2002: 15, my emphases). Men now are able to *see* old-style masculinity, and it does not look safe, it looks brittle and fragile. The discourse of new-style masculinity has a vastly different attitude to diversity, difference and particularly homosexuality to the discourse of ‘traditional’ masculinity. What are now portrayed as the more stable forms of masculinity do not (need to) claim certainty, unity, universality or normality. And they certainly do not need to claim or proclaim heterosexuality. What is being played on is the contemporary ‘commonsense’ ‘truth’ that homophobia inevitably indicates repressed homosexuality. Therefore, within the new rhetoric of heterosexual masculinity, the homosexual (for other people) has to be embraced or at least accepted so as not to cast doubt on one’s own sexuality. Thus Ricky is able to tell his father that he sucks dick for money and Lester is able to completely accept the gayness of Jim and Jim without censure and to accept the Colonel’s ‘mistake’ without disgust.

In *Larry’s Party*, the same point is made (characteristically in a more gentle manner) in a short passage that sees Larry sitting on his porch drinking beer with his friend Larry Fine. The entire passage only covers two paragraphs but it says something important about Larry Weller and his new-style, non-homophobic masculinity. Larry Fine is the only homosexual in *Larry’s Party* and is the only other man called Larry that Larry Weller likes, and who ‘saves’ the unlovely name of Larry for him:

Thank God for Larry Fine [...]. Larry Fine is a psychologist, or a behaviourist as he’s quick to tell you, who teaches at the University of Chicago. This Larry has thick, thick wrists covered in mats of hair, but he’s a good mile and a half from being a traditional hetero type. He bakes, he wears aprons, he sews his own curtains. Last Christmas he made Larry Weller a shirt out of green linen. He names everything he owns. His kitchen stove is called Eleanor. His car is Jacqueline. His computer is called Gertrude, daughter of a previous Gertrude. Larry Fine is probably a little in love with Larry Weller. They both know this, but it doesn’t stop them enjoying a beer together on Larry Weller’s screened porch (Shields, 1997: 256).

Interestingly in these ‘new’ representations (just as in the ‘old’), gay men must be *seen* to be gay (otherwise how would one know?). Thus Larry Fine’s thick, hairy wrists are, here,

said not to be a signifier of heterosexuality (whoever thought they were?) because, luckily there are other visible indications of his sexuality, like his apron. Thus whether it's Jim and Jim in *American Beauty*, with a small yappy dog they fuss over, who garden, grow flowers and bake, or Larry Fine in *Larry's Party*, who wears aprons, sews and names all his belongings with female names, or Billy's best friend in the film *Billy Elliot* (2000) who is shown to be gay through actual cross-dressing, the stereotypes of gay men still stand and the usual signifiers of gayness are used but not questioned. The men who exemplify new-style heterosexual masculinity are able to read, or recognize who is gay and who is not, in a way that old-style masculinity finds more difficult (for example the Colonel). Thus, far from homosexuality being an invisible threat it becomes an easily read, almost 'natural' state of being for some men. This easily read, recognizable (and perhaps natural) homosexuality poses no threat to those secure in their heterosexuality. And so it is that new-style straight men are not intimidated by gay men, they are tolerant and accepting.

In *The Best A Man Can Get* our protagonist Michael misses the fact that his housemate in his bachelor house, Paul, is gay until Paul 'comes out' and declares his love for Michael saying that he believes that Michael is gay too. Michael thinks:

Paul's confident assertion about my apparent homosexuality had rather eclipsed the bigger picture, which was that he had just told me the biggest secret of his life, namely, not only was he gay, but that he had a crush on *me*. It suddenly all made sense – all the times he had hoped I would be there for meals he'd cooked, all the bizarre sulks he had got himself into. He had behaved like a jilted girlfriend (O'Farrell, 2000: 217).

Although Michael may have missed Paul's homosexuality the 'clues' were there to be picked up on. Earlier in the book Michael took a look at himself and his housemates and found that 'we had inadvertently turned ourselves into mum, dad and two kids' (O'Farrell, 2000: 99), where "Paul was the martyred, long-suffering mum, fussing and worrying for everyone else" (ibid). Thus even before Michael realized Paul was gay he had been feminized, and therefore it was not too much of a shock. Michael, married with two children, is secure enough in his heterosexuality that when 'outed' at a party thinks: "I

probably wouldn't see any of these people again, so if they were determined to believe I was homosexual, then so what?" (O'Farrell, 2000: 219). And Larry too is secure enough in his heterosexuality and masculinity to be able to accept the friendship of Larry Fine and of course, as with Michael and Billy in *Billy Elliot*, he is the object of his gay friend's desire just as Lester too is the object of the Colonel's more troubled desire. Homosexuality in the new representations is easily accepted (for others), but in *American Beauty*, *Larry's Party*, *Billy Elliot* and *The Best a Man Can Get* in their different ways, it is used to prove and confirm the complete, untroubled heterosexuality of Lester, Larry, the ballet-dancing Billy and Michael respectively; their maleness and masculinity *helped* by their tolerance and acceptance.

3.5 The Demise of Old-Style Masculinity

In many of the new representations, including the ones discussed above, old-style masculinity is portrayed as becoming the minority form of masculinity. As Stephen Whitehead argues, "[w]hat is for sure is that notions of masculinity are increasingly multiple, rendering traditional forms of being male, if not redundant, certainly marginal" (Whitehead, 2002: 6). It is this older type of masculinity that is being broken down and represented as being disempowered. It is interesting to note though that the descriptions of old-style masculinity often conform to the stereotypes of working class masculinity and black masculinity, forms of the masculine that are often associated with machismo, sexism and homophobia. John Beynon discusses working class models of the hyper or extra masculine as compensating for powerlessness at work and within the economy in general (Beynon, 2002: 20). He argues (as do many others) that, "[t]he shift from manufacturing to servicing, and from industrialization to electronic technology, was immensely damaging for working class men" (Beynon, 2002: 107). And perhaps as the economy changes a new, flexible style of masculinity is more suited to the new order and a rejection of powerless, rigid, old masculinity is needed. If so this could lead to the assertion of the "end of

masculinity” (MacInnes in Whitehead, 2002). And if masculinity has ended (and therefore one would assume, by implication that so has patriarchy), then what more does one need to do? The view given is that this older style of masculinity is vanishing and belongs to the past and to a class structure that itself is said be redundant now we have our ‘classless society’.

The fact that old-style masculinity belongs to the past is the same view that is held by those who are visible and vociferous in their wish for the (re)establishment of traditional masculinity and the patriarchal order. Beynon discusses this phenomenon in relation to the right-wing print press who, he says “lament [...] the demise of the ‘old man’” (Beynon, 2002: 127). He says that “[a]t its most extreme (certainly in the hands of those who wish to re-establish patriarchal hegemony) this takes the form of asserting that ‘real masculinity’ belongs in the past” (Beynon, 2002: 127). Beynon argues that those who are for the patriarchal hegemony believe that ‘real masculinity’ has been consigned to history. However Beynon himself and all pro-feminist masculinity studies also assert that ‘real masculinity’ belongs in the past and in doing so both (opposed) views by implication, assert that a singular ‘old’ masculinity *did* exist. In Beynon’s own account by saying that some men “wish to *re-establish patriarchal hegemony*” he implies that the patriarchal hegemony is no more: that it is something to be *re-established*, (or not). Thus the implication must be that patriarchal hegemony has been consigned to history having been *dis-established* already.

John Beynon writes that:

Men have no clearly defined enemy who they can point to with certainty as oppressing them. Thus the male model of confrontation, appropriated so successfully by women, is, ironically, now unsuitable for men (Beynon, 2002: 142).

Beynon however has missed the ‘new’ enemies: old-style masculinity and the nuclear family as its co-conspirator. These ideals are indeed being ‘confronted’ by those

expressing masculinity's 'newer' forms and those wishing for a more 'tolerant' society. In relation to masculinity we have another binary, that of 'good' new masculinity, tolerant, pluralizing, flexible and relative, versus 'bad' old-style masculinity, which exudes instability, intolerance and fear. Men who adhere to old-style masculinity are also represented and discussed as oppressing men who do not conform (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001). Old-style masculinity is being demonized, and straight white 'new' masculinity, whilst still holding onto both heterosexuality and masculinity, is in the process of distancing itself from the extremities of the old male myth. And this type of masculinity is much more adept at 'justifying' white, middle class male's continuing hold on power, by denying normality, certainty, centrality and universality, and by asserting that the patriarchal hegemony has already disintegrated.

By constructing a singular history that enables the exposure and demonizing old-style masculinity, men, reinvented in the new-style, are able to (claim to) pluralize and fragment masculinity/ies and place themselves on the moral high ground, distanced from 'immoral' old masculinity. This is an individualizing strategy which is enabled by homogenizing 'old' masculinity and presenting it as singular and rigid. This aids the claims of the discourse of the ab/normal that suggests that there are only individuals with power, and not a coherent, identifiable group in society with an unfair and unequal hold on power, privilege and benefit because of race, sexuality, age, class or gender. This is enabled at least in part by the re-creation of a (bad) collective identity for those exhibiting old-style masculinity. Any questioning of new, plural masculinities can thus be read as an (immoral) attempt to redefine all men within the old male myth of the patriarchal order that these masculinities are supposedly in the process of breaking down, and that it is said, is being systematically undone by men themselves. New-style (pluralized, relative and individualized) masculinity cannot exist without a conception of the old-style (unified and 'natural') masculinity, just as the 'new' pluralized forms of the family cannot exist without

a conception of the old-style singular nuclear version. Thus we are trapped in re-created hierarchical binaries that place the new above the old, the multiple above the singular and that seem to preclude further discussion whilst leaving everything in place.

However, even as so many fictional, masculinity and family studies texts deny the utopian ideal of the normal there is a feeling that this re-reading the 'normal' as not normal and not desirable is 'going against the grain'; that normality as an ideal is still the dominant belief in society and that current views are 'revolutionary' and 'new'. In continuing to accept that a singular, white, middle class normal is still predominantly seen as an ideal in our society, the new representations, masculinity and family studies deny that they are anything other than oppositional to the hegemonic order. It is not conceived that the condemnation, demonization and purposeful fragmentation of white masculinity and the nuclear family might in fact form the dominant discourse at this time. Because this possibility is not acknowledged any representation or discussion that questions the normal-as-ideal is seen as a *threat* to the exclusive and exclusionary normal and thus seen as radical. Mark Lawson says that *Pleasantville* "suggests the past was actually worse". Lawson seemed surprised (and delighted) by this. Although in the same programme, (*The Late Review*, BBC2 11.03.99), Tony Parsons can, as we saw earlier, cite *Pleasantville* as 'hell surrounded by a white picket fence', the implication is that this sort of TV-land and this vision of suburbia would *usually* be presented 'as a paradise'.

Thomas Elsaesser complicates this view by suggesting that the ideal normal was *not usually* presented as a paradise even at the time, arguing that in 1950s melodrama the characters end up "living out the impossible contradictions that have turned the American Dream into the proverbial nightmare" (Elsaesser, 1987: 68). However, within the rules of the current discursive formation Elsaesser's own re-reading of the past is part of the current archive and therefore a part of the project that shows that the 'utopia' was a dystopia all

along. In the self-representation of the archive the 'new' re-reading of white middle class history by the white middle classes is expressly subversive and radical, uncovering aspects of history that no-one has ever seen before. The 'questioning' of normality is seen as radical even as that normal is re-invoked and (re)discussed *as* the normal (even in the form of a non-existent utopia) in order to be rejected. This in turn upholds the argument that 'disproving' the normal is in and of itself a subversive act that shatters the myth of normality. As we have seen this 'disproving' of the normal *on its own* is said to be already leading to radical social change and equality for all.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined, as one of the most powerful moves of 'disproving' the normal, the 're-discovery' of the history of the normal. This 're-discovery' is another technique of marginal theorists has been appropriated, the technique that David Theo Goldberg, (in relation to Fanon's work), terms archeology: "[a]rcheology turns on not only uncovering the hidden and (purposely) buried, and so not only on making the unseen seen, cognized, and re-cognized; it requires also the extending logic of form to the uncovered, a different way of thinking about – quite literally, of *seeing*" (Gordon et al, 1996: 186). In this way the manner in which the history of the 'normal' is *seen* is being systematically and deliberately changed. In the academy, white male scholars such as Peter Filene are explicitly looking towards marginal theory. Filene examines the 're-discovery' of women's histories by feminist scholars as particular (ie non-universal) histories and he then appropriates these techniques:

Men's history – masculine history, if you will – begins when we redefine our usual notion of historical significance and when we shift our usual frame of reference. Once we have made these two conceptual adjustments, we uncover some secrets hidden in the familiar landscape of the past. More often – and ultimately more important – as we shift our angle of vision, we recognize new meanings in the evidence that lay in front of our eyes all along (Filene in Brod, 1987: 104).

Hidden secrets are to be uncovered in the new project, and we will *see* new things. White men will uncover the hidden, secret histories of white men and of the family.

Over the past few decades with the rise of feminism, postmodernism and postcolonialism the concept of 'history' itself has been thoroughly questioned and the Western notion of history (singular) has been critiqued and shown to be only one, partial (albeit dominant) history and one that is itself reliant on other histories, is fluid, contingent and relative (Featherstone, 1995). History itself is a grand narrative of the West whereby, as Featherstone puts it, "Western history was universal history" (Featherstone, 1995: 15). This idea that Western history is the only history has been deconstructed and shown to be 'history' from only one point of view, bigoted, racist and sexist. Featherstone argues that it is postmodernism in particular that has led "to a greater awareness of the plurality of history, the suppressed narratives within history suggest that there is no unitary privileged history, only different histories" (Featherstone, 1995: 16). Thus, where in Britain we may have been taught 'history' at school or read 'history' at university, what we have been taught is biased, partial and therefore 'untrue' in its self-representation as 'true'.

However, in many discussions from feminism and postcolonialism it is not only the 'untruth' of Western history that is seen as important (although it is), what is often seen as more insidious is the effect that the Western view of history has had on indigenous peoples around the world. The universalization of Western history and the suppression of the histories of other peoples 'justified' colonialism, slavery and the oppression of women and people of colour. It encouraged social Darwinism, eugenics and the view of biology-as-destiny. In the new discussions of Western history the very creation of the idea of the normal suppressed, repressed and damaged people not classified within this singular concept of the normal.

For the re-positioning of the normal within discourse a re-view of the history of the normal is vital. The narrative of history is so important that as Ashcroft et al put it: "historical narrativity is that which structures the forms of reality itself. In other words, the myth of

historical objectivity is embedded in a particular view of the sequential nature of narrative, and its capacity to reflect, isomorphically, the pattern of events it records” (Ashcroft et al, 1995: 356). The way the stories of history are sequenced, constructed and told underpin everything, even Ashcroft et al argue, our notion of reality. Universalized, eurocentric, Western history(ies) has been so widely critiqued as hiding partial, interested histories and negating the histories of others that any project that claims to be examining the white centre with the aim of dispelling and displacing it cannot afford to leave these critiques unanswered. For any group of people a new concept of their own history is an important part of the re-making of identity and a re-reading of their own history forms a large part of the re-making and re-positioning of white middle class identities as being away from the normal.

The ‘new’ forms of masculinity and the family are posited on and conceived within a certain conception of history. In this conception the normal, in the form of white hegemonic masculinity and the patriarchal family-form-of-choice, the white nuclear family, are seen as having been singular and unitary in form, universal, silent and largely invisible, fixed, rigid and repressive (and therefore, in the 1950s at least, in crisis). The process of de-centring this centre and reconfiguring it as an absence and a myth itself relies on a conception of the normal as singular or there would be nothing *to* de-centre and an apparent break from the past would not be possible. The current project which explicitly seeks to fragment, pluralize, multiply and marginalize white masculinity and the nuclear family also involves a ‘rediscovery’ of the ideological concepts associated with an idea of normality as ‘bad’, restrictive, repressive and damaging. Discussing the ‘rediscovery’ of history for the black diaspora, Stuart Hall says:

We should not, for one moment, under-estimate or neglect the importance of the act of imaginative re-discovery [...]. ‘Hidden histories’ have played a critical role in the emergence of many of the most important social movements of our time – feminist, anti-colonial, and anti-racist (Hall, 1997b: 52).

Hall's discussion of the imaginative act of recovering 'hidden histories' is taken from a marginal perspective, one that differs from masculinity and family studies. However it is a model that is extremely useful in exploring how these studies are recreating the 'new' conception of their own history that is apparently being 'rediscovered' by the white middle classes at the moment. The discursive movement that the new studies and new representations are a part of, involves the imaginative re-discovery of normality as past, as belonging to history. This allows the 'uncovering of the truth' that the concept of normality was as repressive and damaging to the white middle classes as to everyone else. Again the techniques of the marginal – feminists or postcolonialists - are employed in this 'rediscovery' and where these theorists found repression and oppression, so too do the theorists of the white middle classes.

Control over history and historical representation is always crucial to the maintenance of power by any one group. As an important part of the project engaged in re-moving the normal from the centre of society, the white, middle classes are engaged in re-writing their own history and the history of the normal itself. In this re-creation, re-write or re-view, the white middle classes are themselves the victims of repressive normalizations. In feminist and postcolonial re-views of history minority groups' voices have been suppressed, as have their stories and different versions of history. In these accounts the white, European, male domination of history and its definitions of normality has been a major cause of oppression for marginalized peoples. In the new re-views of history by masculinity studies, family studies and some new representations, the emphasis is on how the white middle classes too have been oppressed by the repressive, restricting and impossible expectations put upon them by institutions such as the Church and the educational system, the very institutions that are more usually associated with helping to consolidate white, male, middle class power.

Of all the aspects of the new discourse that denies, subverts and erases normality, the re-writing of the past is perhaps one of the most powerful. It provides the justification behind the rejection and denial of the normal without having to get too seriously into ideas about who is most oppressed and who benefits most from the conceptions and structures of normality. The white, middle classes are represented as having also been repressed and oppressed by a singular conception of normality and therefore that singular conception can be presented as immoral and used as justification for moving the centre out into the margins in a 'new' and 'revolutionary' action. As the white middle classes seek to re-imagine themselves and their past, new identities are being forged from a specific conception of the old. Stuart Hall discusses this act of imagination:

Cultural identity [...] is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past (Hall, 1997b: 52).

Hall argues that one is not 'just' one's cultural identity but that one constantly becomes that identity. Hall believes that any 'rediscovery' of one's past involves a desire-to-become that is firmly implicated in the present and the future as well and is not disassociated from the matrices of power or the hegemonic social order. Therefore from Hall's point of view the past is not sitting in pure and unsullied 'truth' waiting to be unearthed, rather concepts of the 'past' form a vital part of our current identity formation. The past that the academic white middle classes are 'rediscovering' for themselves firstly disassociates them from the normal and secondly it repositions that very conception of the normal as 'wrong', immoral and singular. This enables them to rediscover a static past that will allow contemporary discontinuity and rupture from something solid; an idea of "being fixed in some essentialized past". This in turn allows a new 'becoming' in the form of identities that are multiple, fluid and flexible. The 'narratives of the past' that are being

rediscovered in this context engender an abjection and rejection of the normal and precipitate a movement into the margins and the pluralized abnormal that the new hegemonic rhetoric promotes for the white middle classes and that the next chapter examines. It looks at the present for white men and the family that the re-reading of the 'old' and the 'past' for these groups that this chapter has documented allows. Chapter four examines the multiplicity, fluidity and return of aspiration that the repositioning of the past as static and singular enables.

Chapter Four: Multiplicity, Inclusion, Choice and Meritocracy

As stated at the end of chapter three, having argued that the new discourse of normality has as a necessary part of its creation (recreated) singular conceptions of history, of masculinity, of the family, and of normality, this chapter looks at the expressions of multiplicity, inclusion and choice that are enabled by these views. This concluding chapter looks at the prescriptions being given out for behaviour, attitude and lifestyle choices and the spaces left for aspiration as espoused by both the new studies texts and by the media. So far this thesis has examined the rhetoric of anti-aspiration about, and coming from, the centre. However the hegemonic movement which moves the centre out into the margins leaves space within this for aspirations that are very similar to the aspirations people were always supposed to harbour: (heterosexual) partnership, children, affluence, consumption, albeit wrapped in different rhetoric. This is the rhetoric of *choice* not imperative, of *performance* rather than biological determinism; a choice which is presented as entailing no unfair privileges and which supposedly sidesteps racism, sexism and inequality. These ideas are wrapped up in the rhetoric of a multiplicity that suggests that everyone can (and should) join in.

This chapter looks at the moral suggestions behind the idea of multiplicity. It examines the new morality of anti-essentialism that allows the concept of multiplicity itself to be formed and from this, the inevitable denial of any sort of biological determinism. This chapter argues that one of the most important aspects of the new marginalization of masculinity is the denial of biological determinism. It argues that one of the mainstays of both these interrelated movements is the removal of any idea of the personal male penis from the transcendental patriarchal signifier of the phallus. In order to examine the archive of this new idea three primary texts are examined; *Larry's Party* by Carol Shields (1997), the 2002 BBC television comedy *Manchild* and the British film *The Full Monty* (1997). These

texts have been chosen as they explicitly 'deal' with the personal penises of their protagonists, showing they are anything but the perfect phallus. In the continuing discussion of the denial of biological determinism either as a 'fact' or an ideal I will examine the very popular book by Nick Hornby *About A Boy* (1998), which itself examines the concept of the new (non-biological) family. From masculinity studies, family studies and *About A Boy* particularly the concept of (complete) multiplicity free from biology leads to the idea of inclusion-for-all, which in turn leads to the idea of choice-for-all. This chapter argues that this sets up a meritocratic ideal whereby anybody can do or even be *anything*, and that it is this conception of free choice (and therefore free will) that allows aspiration to come back into the picture. I look at what we are being invited to aspire to and what spaces/positions we are *not* being invited to aspire to. In this model, with normality theoretically having been removed to the margins, normality becomes just one more marginal position among many, and therefore one position among many that we *may* (again) aspire to. Now however, with the removal of any biological limits we may all aspire to a position that (still) looks very like the normal without the fear of excluding anyone. With the normal being presented as just one position among many it is still however being represented as being a more moral position to occupy than most. If choice is completely free then we can all choose the normal. And within capitalist, patriarchal society what fits more comfortably into society's needs than the consuming nuclear family? The 'old' immoral, regulating imperative of normality has seemingly been turned into a more morally acceptable and open 'choice' that denies the existence of both privilege and exclusion.

4.1 Exposing the Power of the Phallus

Whereas chapter three concentrated on the construction and representation of a (rejected) monolithic singular normal, this chapter examines the concept of multiplicity that this conception of the singular enables. We begin with a subject that manifestly covers the

move from the universalized, essentialized singular to the particularized, anti-essentialized, personalized plural – the move from phallus as signifier to penis. The epitome of biologically determined singular, monolithic, transcendental masculine is the phallus. This first part of the chapter examines the project to (re)embody white men which involves the move from the ‘historic’ patriarchal idea/ideal of the singular, transcendental phallus to multiple, particular, embodied personal penises. At this stage I am going to make my only foray into what is more properly the provenance of psychoanalysis through a discussion of the phallus. This foray is necessary for a discussion about the re-embodiment of white men and about the removal of white men from the traditional (phallic) place of power ‘disguised’ as the normal. I examine the movement of contemporary white men away from the idea of the patriarchal, phallus-bearing, symbolic Father (Silverman, 1992: 102) into ‘actual’, imperfect fatherhood that is (said to be) marginalized in today’s society and in the family. As we saw above in the examination of the idea of ‘crisis’ of modern fatherhood, the rejection of ‘bad old dads’ and the move from a singular concept of old masculinity allows multiple new expressions of masculinities.

The phallus is a concept that is no longer looked at just in relation to its psychoanalytic roots. It is now discussed in wider social and cultural discourse, and is related to as *the* symbol of patriarchy.³⁶ As Lynne Segal says: “it is within the journals and texts of cultural studies, rather than those of psychology, that the ‘phallus’ has been most tirelessly tracked down as the ubiquitous symbolic representation of the penis, and hence of male power” (Segal, 1990/1997: 83). I am not going to trace the ‘roots’ of the phallus through psychoanalysis, but rather will examine the way that the ‘original’ concept has been taken up by both cultural studies and cultural production more widely in relation to the penis and contemporary talk about and representation of white men’s penises. This section will

³⁶ Deriving its name from the ‘phallus’, the concept of ‘phallogocentrism’ describes “the totalizing claims of a masculinist signifying economy” (Butler, 1990: 13), apparent in what I have described as its “overwhelming presence” (see chapter one). The ‘phallus’ is the signifying concept that is used and said to encompass the ideals, ideologies and techniques of patriarchy: “power, authority and control over desire” (Potts, 2000: 86), and is thus also related to the white, hegemonic ideal of masculinity.

discuss the move away from the “phallicized penis” (Potts, 2000: 87), and into the theorized and represented embodiment, marginalization and de-phallicization of individual white men in order to discuss some of the effects and implications of this movement.

Within phallogocentric or patriarchal discourse the (erect) penis is directly equated with the (symbolic) phallus, whereby “the penis stands in for and up for the man” (Potts, 2000: 85). The actual, embodied man is therefore said to be distanced both from his penis *and* the phallus, and thereby disembodied within the phallic symbolic economy:

The penis is distanced from its purely anatomical functions of urination and insemination and comes to stand as an object. [...] This displacement permits the penis to represent the phallus at a symbolic level and vice versa; thus the penis takes up a privileged, central position in the sexual economy (Potts, 2000: 86).

Potts argues that the penis is symbolically equated with the phallus whilst being separated from the male body as an actual piece of flesh. It has moved from the embodied and out into the symbolic, but it is still inextricably associated with the *male*. Richard Dyer speaks about the phallus at ‘length’:

There is a danger of causal thought here. The phallus is not just an arbitrarily chosen symbol of male power; it is crucial that the penis has provided the model for this symbol. Because only men have penises, phallic symbols [...] are always symbols of ultimately male power (Dyer, 1997: 274).

Phallic power and the phallus itself are related to both the penis and to the man and it is because of this that the phallus has become the symbol of the patriarchal order of power.

In order to sustain the equation between penis (flesh) and phallus (symbol), the corporeality of the white male must be hidden. The corporeality of the individual penis/man needs to be obscured in order to allow male power to accrue around the symbol of the phallus. The origin of the phallus as a symbol needs to be hidden and in this way so must the penis. The phallus sustains its power as a symbol by remaining hidden. As Anthony Easthope puts it: “[t]he phallus must remain unseen if it is to keep its power” (Easthope, 1986/1992: 16). The ‘veiling’ of the phallus is thus seen as a vital part of the hegemonic patriarchal order’s continuing power and dominance. The logic that follows on

from this reads that if the embodied, individual, male penis can be *seen*, its association with the phallus can also be seen and in the true style of the making-visible project, its mystique will be shattered and the attendant power accruing to both penis and phallus (and therefore male) can be dissipated. Annie Potts quotes Segal who writes: “the equation between penis and phallus is in fact always sustained [...] once we accept that the desire for the phallus is dependent upon, at the very least an analogy with its penile referent, it becomes possible to ‘*lift the veil*’ from the phallus (which Lacan has told us can only serve its function ‘veiled’) and thereby, perhaps, to begin to challenge its authority and privilege as a transcendental signifier” (Potts, 2000: 88-9, my emphasis). In other words, expose the penis expose the phallus; demystify it, and its power will cease.

Dispelling the silence that is said to accrue around the penis also, it is argued, has the same effect:

While frank discussion of male sexuality, the male body and the penis might be meant to liberate men from disabling myths, such discussion also works to make visible male bodies and sexuality and, thus, to exacerbate the very crisis these texts want to soothe. The heterosexualized male body has been veiled by constructions of phallic masculinity that are endangered by the increased visibility of that body; for, while sexual power has long been central to these constructions, that power has often approached the mythic. This has kept the specific, embodied sexual experiences of men invisible, and hidden the penis behind the phallus. Talk about the penis can work to demystify the phallus (Robinson, 2000: 158).

Robinson is arguing that discussion about the penis can destabilize the phallic economy and ‘liberation’ for men from ‘disabling myths’ involves a (dangerous) visibility and embodiment for white men. Visibility endangers the ‘constructions of phallic masculinity’ as does acknowledgement of the ‘specific, embodied’ experiences of men. Therefore, the argument follows that if ‘we’ can re-embody men and re-embody the personal, individual penises that belong to those men, we can move closer to the dispelling of the phallus as a symbol of patriarchal power and thus move closer (so the argument goes) to dispelling patriarchal power itself. Insisting on the correlation between the disembodied and the

personal male body will, it is argued, inevitably embody and make visible what was disembodied and invisible and expose the entire phallic myth as a sham.

The transformative potential of insisting on the correlation between the disembodied and the embodied is a point that is reiterated by many theorists of masculinity:

As a number of feminist theorists and analysts of masculinity have pointed out, the assumption that the penis is (or even represents) the phallus is shattered by the recognition of the penis as a corporeal and thus vulnerable organ. What this means is that consciousness of corporeality threatens phallic power. [...] Male power is dependent on stalling the recognition of male embodiment, and particularly, white male embodiment (Robinson, 2000: 43).

The assumption that the penis can unquestioningly be equated with the phallus is 'shattered' when we see the penis as flesh. In a somewhat large theoretical leap, what Robinson argues is that embodiment (corporeality), because it 'endangers' phallic power can, ultimately, spell liberation from the phallus as a symbol *and* as power. Once the penis is exposed as flesh and blood, small(ish), not really so impressive, multiple, particular and individual, the power of the phallus disintegrates even as the male is embodied.

Robinson also says that this liberation can occur once the individual penis is seen as vulnerable. Annie Potts agrees with this analysis:

Insisting on the correlation between the penis and the phallus offers some hope for transforming hegemonic constructions of male (and female) sexuality. Once the phallus is *unclothed* and *exposed* to be a confederate of the penis-body, it will become evident 'just how inadequately it serves to signify that male organ, and men's personal histories of bodily experience' (Potts, 2000: 89, my emphasis).

Embodying the phallus within the penis will 'expose' it as an inadequate representative of men's personal experiences. If 'we' can individualize and personalize the penis, the phallus as a symbol will disintegrate. Richard Dyer argues that recognizing the correlation between the personal penis and the symbolic phallus

leads to the greatest instability of all for the male image. For the fact is that the penis isn't a patch on the phallus. The penis can never live up to the mystique implied by the phallus. Hence the excessive, even hysterical quality of so much male imagery. The clenched fists, the bulging muscles, the hardened jaws, the

proliferation of phallic symbols – they are all straining after what can hardly ever be achieved, the embodiment of the phallic mystique (Dyer, 1997: 274).

The penis cannot *embody* the ‘phallic mystique’. As Dyer says, the penis will never live up to the phallus, it ‘isn’t a patch on the phallus’. Or as Potts puts it: “[u]ltimately, the penis is doomed in its striving to live up to the phallus” (Potts, 2000: 89). This recognition that the penis is nowhere near as mighty as the phallus has lead many theorists to see a possibility for subversion of, and possibly ultimately liberation from the phallic ideal through the embodiment of the personal penis and the acknowledgment that it *is* inadequate, and ‘not a patch’ on the ideal.

4.2 Imperfect Personal Penises

The equation between penis and phallus is cited as being most strong when the said penis is erect. Potts says that what she calls the ‘hard on’ “signifies the prominence of erections in notions of ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ male sexuality and healthy heterosex” (Potts, 2000: 88). Thus it is argued when the penis is flaccid there is a problem with equating it with the phallus. Therefore, embodying, representing and talking about the flaccid penis can help to de-mystify and dispel the symbolic ideal of the phallus. Potts writes that; “the absence of - or difficulty in ‘achieving’ or ‘maintaining’ - a robust ‘hard on’ in appropriate circumstances thus presents as a disastrous affliction in the male, an abnormality, a failure to stand up as a ‘real’ man. [...] [Impotence] testifies to the downfall of a certain phallic economy focused on the transactions of one male sexual organ, the penis-as-phallus-stand-in” (Potts, 2000: 90). This is quite clear, an erect penis has no (or less) trouble in the equation with the phallus, an inappropriately flaccid penis however can endanger the entire phallic economy. For all the theorists quoted above, this is the ultimate goal. Re-embody the penis/man, make the individual male penis *visible*, *talk* about it, and watch the phallic economy dissolve.

Many current representations of men and their penises enunciate and document the difference of the personal penis with the mighty phallus. The masculinity studies texts that examine 1950s melodramatic films point to an often represented equation between the (implicit and suggested) impotence of the male protagonists and the breakdown of their patriarchal authority (Cohan, 1993: 213). And it is not just in the texts of the 1950s that a break between the penis and the phallus is indicated and represented. We will now turn to three media texts from the archive of masculinity and the normal that 'deal' with penises; *Larry's Party* (Shields, 1997), *The Full Monty*, (1999) and the British comedy drama *Manchild* (2002). All these texts quite explicitly discuss penises and, as we will see, in line with the new project of marginalization for white men, do so in a manner that in no way expresses the symbolism and power of the phallus. Carol Shields spends quite a long time on Larry's penis. Here he is in *Larry's Party* musing on penises in a chapter entitled, not surprisingly, 'Larry's Penis':

A tube of flesh, purplish in hue, veined, hooded, hanging there. Shaft and glans. A nozzle. A rounded snout. A cylinder wrapped like a wonton in transparent skin. Hanging, there, always there, first thing in the morning, last thing at night. Trunk, stalk, drainpipe, pickle. [...] Lightening rod, rattlesnake, bum splitter. A knob, a swelling, pinky-blue, blood-filled, wormy white, its tip an open hole, leaking. A duct, a conduit, ribbed, fibrous. Dick, dink, king-dong-bell. The family jewels (Shields, 1997: 123).

And, after this attractive picture of penises in general, we hear about Larry's individual, particular penis as he remembers his father and a neighbour making penis jokes:

Were penises funny then? Or such a serious business that they had to be roughly masked in backyard humor. Was a penis an event? Was it history? Was it sacred or profane? As a boy Larry didn't know. And at age thirty-six he still doesn't know. [...]

How does a penis taste? He'll never know.

All he knows is that his penis is with him forever, doing more or less what a penis is meant to do. It's his to wash, and tug at and dust with talcum powder and look after and use, and his to witness as it grows old along with the rest of his body. His partner in life, this extension of flesh, so creaturely and blind, and blundering, so friendly and willing in its puppyish moods, but which, in the future – he has no doubt about it – will be ready to betray him (Shields, 1997: 137).

Larry's penis is far from perfect. It is blundering, foolish, ready to betray him with impotence (which does happen later), and *spoken* about within the novel. What this

discussion shows is that this is not the great, mystical unseen phallus of the patriarchal order. As Anthony Easthope says: “the phallus may attract immense force and charisma while the humble penis carries on as best it can with its usual bodily functions” (Easthope, 1986/1992: 4). Larry’s penis is ‘humble’ and carrying on ‘as best it can’. In relation to the theoretical project outlined above, which advocated the embodying of the personal male penis, *Larry’s Party*, in fictional form, follows suit. Showing and discussing Larry’s penis as inadequate, personalized and imperfect (if we follow the theoretical arguments outlined above), breaks the equation of penis with phallus. The visible, imperfect penis demystifies the myth of the phallus and by implication dissipates the symbolic and mythic power attached to the phallus.

Currently, discussion of the imperfect personal penis and impotence is rife, as are representations of it. In *The Full Monty* (1999) the men’s bodies and indeed penises are under constant scrutiny throughout the film. The fact that ‘ordinary’ men are going to perform the ‘full monty’ and expose their penises and inadequate and imperfect bodies to hundreds of screaming women, provides much of the comedy and concerns of the narrative, (“‘I mean to say, my willy!’ ‘Your willy? My willy!’” (*The Full Monty*, 1999)). Horse tries out a penis pump, phoning the company who made it complaining: “How come it’s not working? Nothing’s getting bigger”. And Dave experiences erectile dysfunction, unable to ‘perform’ with his wife, while Gerald experiences erections at the wrong time: “it’s not funny, it’s medical!” And in answer to Larry’s question; ‘were penises funny then?’ the answer seems to be a resounding Yes! In BBC 2’s comedy drama *Manchild* (2002), which follows four rich, middle aged men as they experience and celebrate crisis, there are funny penises all over the place; from James’ poorly performing one, to the model of a penis the doctor he goes to see has in his room, which goes from erect to droopy at the touch of a switch, to the penis sculptures in an art gallery one of which

Patrick points at James who cries 'give it to me please!' (about something else), to the (real?) Mapplethorpe James eventually buys depicting a large black penis.

Erectile dysfunction is a major concern for James, over fifty, rich and enjoying a midlife 'crisis', he tries to make love to a twenty year old when it all goes wrong, ("well hello Mr floppy") From here on the exposure of James' penis, and its visibility within the narrative is paramount within the text. James goes to the doctor, who recommends surgery to repair his 'valves', and for extra cash, provides liposuction to "give Pedro there an extra couple of inches". Once the surgery is complete (we are given a very frightening view of the medical instruments), the doctor examines his penis as if it is a piece of meat, or, more appropriately here, a work of art made by the doctor. James stands in the surgery with just his shirt on, looking extremely uncomfortable, while the doctor puts on gloves and gets a close look at his handy work, telling James he loves his work as he can "touch it, celebrate it, marvel at it". And following the surgery James' friends beg to see, and get to see, his new penis. Throughout *Manchild* penises are funny, discussed, imperfect and exposed.

On the screen, whether television or film, the audience is actually still not permitted to *see* the penis. Although discussed constantly, the penis is never *quite* made into a voyeuristic spectacle. Indeed, in British broadcasting regulations we are still not 'allowed' to see an erect penis (but then the phallic economy hasn't really gone anywhere). However, this ban is now being openly discussed as being ridiculous and the general consensus seems to be that it will not last long. If this ban is lifted, and if more representations of the penis are shown, then the move to 'exposing' the penis will be nearer to complete. At the moment however, the discourse is confined to discussion about the imperfect personal penis and this in itself has implications and repercussions. Sally Robinson writes that images of the imperfect personal penis, (here she is speaking of a character in a John Updike book), show "an unmistakable gap between the penis and the phallus, and thus, undermines the

‘naturalness’ of male domination” (Robinson, 2000: 43). However, as I have been discussing throughout, in our contemporary, diverse culture, the ‘naturalness’ of male domination *needs* to be denied if consent for the status quo is to be won and maintained and the actual phallic, patriarchal culture and economy allowed to continue unchallenged.

Richard Dyer argues that:

A naked body is a vulnerable body. This is so in the most fundamental sense – the bare body has no protection from the elements – but also in a social sense. [...] Nakedness may also reveal the inadequacies of the body by comparison with social ideals. It may betray the relative similarity of male and female, white and non-white bodies, undo the remorseless insistences on difference and concomitant power carried by clothes and grooming. The exposed white male body is liable to pose the legitimacy of white male power: why should people who look like that – so unimpressive, so like others – have so much power? (Dyer, 1997: 146).

In the new discourses on masculinity this is the very effect that is desired. Completely opposed to the representations that showed the white male body as the extra-ordinary ideal that other bodies (female or ‘ethnic’) could never live up to, what is being shown now is that there *is* no reason why white men should have more power than anyone else just because they are white men. I repeat: white men as a group cannot be seen to hold power. And the detachment of the individual white penis from any idea of the ‘phallus’ is extremely useful in the systematic denial that white men might hold power *because* they are white men and not because of individual merit and talent that has been recognized and rewarded by an equal, just and meritocratic society. The (re)embodiment of white men disavows any dominance they, as a group, might hold.

Alan Peterson writes that; “[t]he privileging of the ‘mind’ over the ‘body’ is widely seen to be characteristic of ‘masulinist’ rationality, and to be implicated in the domination of men over women, of culture over nature and of Europeans over non-Europeans” (Peterson, 1998: 17). Within the new hegemonic project all of these implications associated with the ‘mind’ need to be disavowed, in particular the idea that white men might dominate either women or non-Europeans or people of colour. Sally Robinson, writing about the visibility

of the white male body says that whereas the ‘marking’ of other’s bodies is: “a technique of control practiced on behalf of the putatively universal and abstract, *this* marking [of white men] does not depend on the existence of an unmarked norm elsewhere” (Robinson, 2000: 21). This to me seems to be a dangerous idea. If the white male body *was* the universal and abstract and is now the particular and the present, where is the norm(al)? If we attempt to argue that we have moved beyond any idea of the universal and abstract norm, then no further conceptual or social change will be necessary. And if no further change is necessary we will be left with the inequality, privilege, unequal power and wealth, prejudice and oppression that still exist. Theorizing away the *idea* of the collective normal and the elevation of the idea of imperfect individualism does not inevitably dispel the material realities of inequality that are often collectively experienced by those who have been historically marginalized by the concept of the normal.

The we’re-all-the-same-under-the-skin, and even in-the-skin discourse is aided by the exposure of the white male body and the exposure of the imperfect personal penis. Showing white male bodies to be inadequate *does* express the fact that they ‘look like others’. Beth, while still Larry’s wife, tells him in his (temporary) period of impotency; “the point is that you’re an absolutely normal and typical human being” (Shields, 1997: 168). Here we have the equalizing force which always seems to accompany the exposure and scrutiny of white middle class men. There is a movement from the universal phallus to the particular, embodied, smallish and somewhat inadequate personal male penis that will belong to individual men. No individual penis can be perfect – but the doubts and fears felt by individual men will supposedly be normal, and this will cut across race and class. Thus we have it confirmed that Larry is indeed “an ordinary man after all” (Shields, 1997: 239). The intimacies of Larry’s body show individualism; his body is uniquely his own, but at the same time he is equated with everyone else, and to this extent shown to be “absolutely normal” (Shields, 1997: 268). Visible similarities between male and female,

white and non-white are a vital part of the new hegemonic discourse that shuns visual and biological references to power and no longer insists on difference in the traditional way but would rather claim marginalization and disempowerment for all.

Just as the making-visible project in the discussion above made the normal into the abnormal and white men are shown to be as doubting and failing as 'everyone else', exposing the individual white male penis as embodied and imperfect demonstrates convincingly that there *is* no correlation between white men and the phallus. Thus, just as it is said that the penis needs to be detached from the phallus, separated in "a form of cultural castration" (Potts, 2000: 99), so dominance as a recognizable force needs to be separated from any (biological) equation with white masculinity and white men themselves. If, as Elizabeth Grosz suggests: "[t]he phallus binarizes the differences between the sexes, dividing up a sexual-corporeal continuum into two mutually exclusive categories which in fact belie the multiplicity of bodies and body types" (Grosz, 1994a: 58), then detachment from the phallus and the singular body it implies (or "phallic singularity" as Heath puts it in *The Sexual Subject*, 1992: 59), is at this point in time, desirable for white men. The demystification of the phallus and the exposure of the personal penis is a significant part of the new hegemonic movement that seeks to expose white men and to detach them from any suggestion that their biology has anything to do with the positions that individual white men may hold in society. As Stephen Whitehead, staunch supporter of pro-feminist masculinity studies argues:

Men are not a predictable, homogenous group, needing to control women and others in order to 'be masculine'; a natural state that, if knocked back, inevitably results in some sort of profound sense of rejection and existential crisis for males. Men are much more complicated than that. First, we should recognize the multiple ways of being a man and the multiple masculinities *now* available to men *in this post-modern age* (Whitehead, 2002: 3, my emphases).

From Whitehead's point of view if men *were* a homogenous, identifiable group with a certain biology and certain characteristics, they certainly are not now. Within masculinity studies the ideological concept that binarizes the sexes (masculinism) is being rejected in

favour of multiplicity and the essentialized singularity of 'men as a group' is multiplied into individual (imperfect) white men whose position and behaviour is not tied to or attributable to their biology.

The first sentence of John Beynon's book *Masculinities and Culture* reads: "[o]ne thing has to be made crystal clear at the outset: 'masculinity' is composed of many different **masculinities**, as this book will illustrate repeatedly and which is reflected in the title" (Beynon, 2002: 1). Within 'pro-feminist' masculinity studies this statement is a usual and accepted position to take. Bob Pease writes: "We are now entering a new stage in which variations among men are seen as central to the understanding of men's lives. Thus we cannot speak of masculinity as a singular term, but rather should explore masculinities" (Pease, 2000: 29). Masculinity is multiple we are told again and again. And this central project of masculinity studies multiplies, complicates and fragments masculinity into multiple, diverse masculinities. The multiplying of men-as-a-group (masculinity) into individually and variously expressed masculinities is a de-essentializing strategy that removes men from their grouped biology whilst not removing them from their bodies. This move 'proves' that biology (maleness) is *not* destiny and proves eventually that biology is not gender, power, position, role or behaviour either. If men and their masculinities can be multiplied then any danger of essentializing men can be averted. Thus for all masculinity studies the multiplying of masculinity(ies) is one of the central projects and one that is most useful to the ultimate aim of de-centring the centre.

4.3 Multiplicity, Performance and Anti-Essentialism

All the ideas examined in this chapter in one way or another involve questions of essentialism and anti-essentialism. We will continue to examine this extreme anti-essentialism of masculinity and also of family studies and its manifestation in the narratives of some new representations. The separation of the penis from the phallus began

our discussion of anti-essentialism or perhaps more accurately in this case anti-biological-determinism whereby merely owning a white penis does not necessarily pre-determine the holding of extra-ordinary power. Putting aside the question of whether we do accept that gender is not biologically given until later in this chapter, following this argument through, if biology doesn't matter then the roles taken up or the performance chosen to be enacted are a part of an autonomous choice. This sidelining of biology and the emphasis on choice is very apparent in family studies too. This is Silva and Smart in *The New Family* talking about a new, fluid and flexible scenario for the family whereby, "in this new scenario, the family appears as a context of fluid and changeable relationships, as well as a site of intimacy and emotional growth not only for kids but also for adults" (Silva and Smart, 1999: 6). The 'new' family is not rigid or static but fluid, flexible and multiple. Relationships are not bound by biological relationships but are forged and kept up through choice.

In many of the fictional texts I have been examining the idea of biology-as-destiny is sidelined (and even denied) as concepts of choice are examined. The next text looked at is *About A Boy*, a 1998 novel by Nick Hornby that was made into an extremely popular film in 2002 starring Hugh Grant. The book follows the story of Will, a thirty six year old play-boy; womanizing, lazy, rich and selfish who metamorphoses into a kind of single parent, or parent-of-choice (not biology) of a twelve year old boy called Marcus. In *About A Boy* the separation of role and biology is an often discussed theme in relation to parenting and the family in general. Marcus' mum has tried to commit suicide and as a result of this Marcus wants more people in his life. His biological father is largely absent but in his wish to create a family of choice biology does not matter – having a biological mum and dad around is not the point:

It wasn't that he needed someone to replace his dad. He'd talked about that with his mum ages ago. They'd been watching a programme on TV about the family, and some silly fat Tory woman said that everyone should have a mother and a father, and his mum got angry and later depressed. Then, before the hospital thing,

he'd thought the Tory woman was stupid, and he'd told his mum as much, but at the time he hadn't worked out that two was a dangerous number. Now he had worked that out, he wasn't sure it made much difference to what he thought about the fat Tory woman's idea; he didn't care whether the family he wanted were all men, or all women, or all children. He simply wanted people (Hornby, 1998: 84).

Marcus actively wants a family of choice. The Conservative idea of the nuclear family doesn't matter to him, whether he has a mother and a father doesn't matter to him. Marcus' family of choice could be a straight one, a gay one, one made up of friends or any other type of family imaginable. He wants a network of people who choose to be there.

Marcus' father doesn't really matter at all. When his dad's conscience finally strikes and he apologizes to Marcus for leaving and says that he now wants to be a 'proper' dad, Marcus decides: "[t]he thing was, he couldn't be that kind of dad anymore. He'd missed his moment. [...] It wasn't as though he thought his dad should have been around, but he couldn't have it both ways. [...] He'd have to find another job for himself. Will could do the little things, and his mum, but his dad was out of it" (Hornby, 1998: 267-8). Marcus does not need his father to play at biological 'proper' fatherhood – that job is being shared around. If his father wants to stay a part of Marcus' life he will have to find a new role, one that is of use to Marcus, but that has nothing to do with the fact that he is Marcus' biological father. Fatherhood is a role, and one that can be broken down into constituent parts, which can then be played by anyone willing to play them. Marcus' father will have to fit into Marcus' family of choice, but not necessarily as a 'father'. This idea adds another dimension to the current discussions of fatherhood and is not confined to *About A Boy*. Presumably, partly because of the divorce rate and the amount of second marriages or partnerships and step-families the idea that the role of fatherhood need not be played by the biological father is becoming more common, even to my local greeting card shop having a section of cards labeled for the person who is "Like a Dad"! In *About A Boy* though, even this role of 'like a dad' can itself be broken down with anyone - male or female - who cares and is competent playing any of the roles or parts.

For Marcus, the separation of role and biological ties is liberating. He finds that; “[y]ou could create little patterns of people that wouldn’t have been possible if his mum and dad hadn’t split up and the three of them had stayed in Cambridge” (Hornby, 1998: 271). Marcus prefers the flexibility of his new type of family to the isolation of a small, biologically driven nuclear family. Will is the first recruit to Marcus’ family of choice. He first meets him whilst Will is still pretending to be a single parent – albeit with an absent, and indeed non-existent child. Will is present when Marcus’ mum Fiona is found after her suicide attempt and becomes embroiled from thereon in. Soon, Will becomes involved and although he knows that Marcus does not need a father exactly, it takes him time to realize what Marcus does need. Marcus is being bullied at school and is not conversant with popular culture. He tells Will he can help:

It was then, for the first time, that Will saw the kind of help Marcus needed. Fiona had given him the idea that Marcus was after a father figure, someone to guide him gently towards male adulthood, but that wasn’t it at all: Marcus needed help to be a kid, not an adult. And, unhappily for Will, that was exactly the kind of assistance he was qualified to provide. He wasn’t able to tell Marcus how to grow up, or how to cope with a suicidal mother, or anything like that, but he could certainly tell him that Kurt Cobain didn’t play for Manchester United, and for a twelve-year-old boy attending a comprehensive school at the end of 1993, that was maybe the most important information of all (Hornby, 1998: 147).

Will (as he realizes later still), is Marcus’ friend. He is not his father and Marcus does not want him to be, however he is a vital part of Marcus’ emerging extended family of choice. *About A Boy* exemplifies the type of family that is being both theorized and celebrated (and prescribed) in family studies that provides a non rigid space for the “intimacy and emotional growth not only for kids but also for adults” (Silva and Smart, 1999: 6). Both Marcus and Will learn and grow from their contact with each other, contact that leads to intimacy and a certain kind of commitment that is not prescribed by biological ties. *About A Boy* argues against biological determinism and for choice. Although (as with family studies) there is a nod to those whose choices are limited, the narrative is about choices and responsibility and autonomy. The family in *About A Boy* is an extended family, made up

of fragments, disorder and chaos. It is what Deborah Chambers would describe as a 'postmodern' family. She argues that "[t]he new 'postmodern family' is situated outside the modern paradigm of universal reason and progress, and as such is shaped by experiences of pluralism, disorder and fragmentation within contemporary culture" (Chambers, 2001: 115-6). In this sort of family, rather than just relying on biological ties to take the place of commitment and intimacy, each person is *active* in the creation of the family.

This active creation of family and familial relationships is what David Morgan calls 'family practices', which term he says allows a "*sense of the active rather than the passive or static*. Whatever the topic, the emphasis is upon doing class, doing gender, doing family" (Morgan, 1999: 17). What Morgan is drawing on are the ideas of *performance* and *performativity*, ideas which come from Judith Butler, most notably in *Gender Trouble* (1990). In the way that this model has been taken up and discussed by both family studies and masculinity studies, performance is an active and sometimes deliberate enacting of roles or the performance of the subversion of these roles. The idea of 'performing the family' comes out of the ideas of performing gender:

Like the performativity of gender, being part of a family is something that must be culturally inscribed and accomplished as an ongoing performance. Familialism is something that has to be reinvented and continuously achieved in everyday interactions with others – we *do* rather than simply *have* family (Chambers, 2001: 169).

Just as in *About A Boy*, Chambers is arguing that family is performed as a choice, an active choice. Part of the activity is the re-creation of the roles chosen to be played and both Chambers and Morgan emphasize the fact that these roles need to be reinvented and recreated continuously. And it is argued the ideas of practices and performance can open up what were seen as closed categories and institutions such as fatherhood or the family entire allowing space for change and subversion.

The site that is most often mentioned and celebrated by both family studies and masculinity studies as a model enabling anti-essentialist subversion, fluidity and openness is not the heterosexual, conjugal, nuclear family but what is termed the homosexual family of choice. In fact in some texts, gay households are credited with creating the 'new family' entire (Silva and Smart, 1999, Smart and Neale, 1999, Morgan, 1996). Deborah Chambers comments on the works of Weeks et al and Giddens:

The idea of a 'chosen' family based on negotiated modes of friendship, commitment and responsibility rather than biological kin relations, prioritises the assertion of *personal values over biological ties* and thereby has the potential to undermine claims to racial and ethnic purity (Chambers, 2001: 117, my emphasis).

There is an hierarchical placing of 'personal values' (whatever they are) over 'biological ties' whereby it is the 'personal values' that are most important. If homosexuals can choose their families then, one would assume, so can heterosexuals. For Chambers as well as many others: "[t]he category of 'normal sexuality' is being subverted by lesbian and gay families of choice and by hybridised representations by the act of untying sexuality from gender" (Chambers, 2001: 169). Sexuality, (biology?) is 'untied' from gender (culture?) and as the heterosexual norm is undermined by 'homosexual families of choice' so more choices are opened up for straight white people themselves – even as far as their sexuality.

Acknowledging and citing Butler and queer theory, this is Richard Collier in *Changing Family Values*:

What has emerged from within a diverse body of scholarship around the relationship between subjectivity, corporeality and gender(ed) identities is an, albeit sometimes implicit theorization of the heterosexual subject as a fluid 'performative practice', an understanding of being 'straight' as a dynamic 'project of the self' [...]. [There is an] idea of there being a (hetero) sexed subjectivity, a distinctive process of being 'sexed' as heterosexual, as having or rather obtaining or taking up a heterosexual sensibility (Collier, 1999: 40).

In this model, heterosexuality is no longer a 'compulsion' of straight, white, patriarchal, capitalist society, it is a choice. One can (or not) 'take up' a 'heterosexual sensibility'. Straightness is performed, but through choice and not compulsion. In Collier's argument, heterosexuality becomes a choice, as sexual identity becomes something to be picked up or

not. In a similar way David Morgan argues that our chosen 'family practices' and roles inform our sense of ourselves outside the home too. He says that these identities or what he calls "assertions":

May often become part of the routine understandings of individual actors as they go about their family practices. This is not in the crude sense of ideological indoctrination. Rather, it is more in the sense of social actors using culturally available rhetorics about the family in order to account for their own practices (Morgan, 1999: 20).

Morgan is asserting that 'social actors' come before the roles and these 'actors', in the everyday *use* 'culturally available rhetorics'. This gives the sense of various and multiple rhetorics (identities) floating about able to be picked up or dropped by anybody. Morgan is also suggesting that the self, as social actor, precedes culture and implies that this allows for choice, individuality and finally multiplicity for the subject. However, Judith Butler who is so often cited by masculinity studies and family studies in relation to choice and performance argues that: "the epistemological paradigm that presumes the priority of the doer to the deed establishes a global and globalizing subject who disavows its own locality as well as the conditions for local intervention" (Butler, 1990: 148). Morgan asserts individuality and multiplicity for 'individual actors'. However, Butler's argument suggests that the separation of 'doer' from 'deed' actually denies locality, specificity and particularity (so beloved of the new studies) and therefore leads to a universalization or globalization of the subject.

The separation of the doer and the deed is a stance that is taken by more than one theorist however. This is John Beynon speaking in relation to gender:

If gender is cultural, then it follows that women as well as men can step into and inhabit (whether permanently or temporarily) masculinity as a 'cultural space', one with its own sets of behaviours. In this view 'the masculine' and 'the feminine' signify a range of culturally defined characteristics assignable to *both* men and women (Beynon, 2002: 7).

Beynon is arguing that men or women can choose to 'perform' either gender role. Or in other words, the masculine carries no benefit or privilege with it and there really is no need

for political liberation as 'we' can 'perform' any role we'd like and any that we choose to. Judith Butler realized that when gender and biological sex are separated this is the logical conclusion:

If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. [...] When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculinity* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one (Butler, 1990: 6).

What Beynon gives as a joyful celebration of the free-floating nature of gender, Butler poses as a problem and one that she goes on to theorize fully. In *Unmasking the Masculine* Alan Peterson, although giving a far more well-read, thoughtful and subtle discussion of essentialism, sex and gender than many masculinity studies texts, still cites this passage from Butler without any discussion of the fact that she posed the concept of free-floating gender roles as a problem. He writes "[e]ven if one assumes the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of 'men' will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that of 'women' to only female bodies" (Peterson, 1998: 30). Despite his apparent understanding that sex too is constructed (31), Peterson here, still falls back into the division between sex and gender.

Butler refutes the theoretical basis for the split between sex and gender which can be summed up in Beynon's statement that "[i]f 'maleness' is biological, then masculinity is cultural" (Beynon, 2002: 2). It was this premise, apparent in much second wave feminism (see Moi, 1985/2002) that *Gender Trouble* was written to refute. Breaking with the logic that gender is cultural and sex is biological, Butler writes very clearly:

Gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'prediscursive', prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts (Butler, 1990: 7, her emphasis).

Splitting culture (gender) and nature (sex), means that ideas of the 'nature' of sex are left in place whereas Butler believes that: "sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along" (Butler, 1990: 8). Butler does not split biology and gender, believing in fact that *both* are cultural and that maleness therefore *is* masculinity and therefore the actor does *not* precede the act. Because of this Butler goes further and denies choice in the way that it is discussed by masculinity and family studies altogether. She says:

To enter into the repetitive practices of this terrain of signification [gender] is *not a choice*, for the 'I' that might enter is already inside: there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility that they have (Butler, 1990: 148, my emphasis).

In Butler's terms there can be no separate and multiple forms of either masculinity or the family that exist 'out there' waiting for people to pick them up at will or freely available for people to 'perform' as they wish. The main reason for this is that for Butler, performance-is-identity-is-self and the performance of gender for women for example, can lead to disempowerment and not a free choice-for-all. As she says: "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results (Butler, 1990: 25). The performance is the very thing that it is said to be performed; the act is the fact.

However, the insistence of masculinity studies and family studies on splitting biology and role, sex and gender has consequences for these disciplines as political tropes, meaning that texts and discussions that are said to be radical are wrong footed. If we take Whitehead and Barrett for example, they among many others believe that the performance of gender (masculinity) itself need not be fixed:

If we accept that masculinities and femininities are not biologically given, then we are forced to look at how the social world is formed, framed and enabled in order to get a purchase on gender relations and ways of thinking and performing gender (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 21).

Here, if gender is the performance then one must assume that Whitehead and Barrett see biology as the 'fact'. Whitehead and Barrett see gender performance and the concept of

biology as separate. This means however that even as gender performance is fluid and changeable, (the concept of) biology is fixed and static. If the idea of biology is radically removed from any idea of gender, then one must presume that it is seen as natural and static and as pre-existing the gender role. Diana Fuss argues that “it might be necessary to begin questioning the *constructionist* assumption that nature and fixity go together (naturally) just as sociality and change go together (naturally)” (Fuss, 1989: 254). Thus taking biology itself to be static, albeit a static *construction* may be an erroneous premise to start from. Or, as Fuss puts it, it is imperative to remember that “essence *as* irreducible has been *constructed* to be irreducible” (Fuss, 1989: 253). Accepting the construction as fact keeps that very construction in place. Fuss continues:

To insist that essentialism is always and everywhere reactionary is, for the constructionist, to buy into essentialism in the very act of making the charge; *it is to act as if essentialism has an essence* (Fuss, 1989: 258).

If we accept this argument then the staunchly anti-essentialist camp creates its own problems of essentialist thinking. Essentialist thinking occurs even as any questions of current patriarchal relations and inequalities are being sidestepped and dispersed in the multiplicity, fragmentation and anti-essentialism of the moment.

Simon Watney recognizes this problem from the point of view of queer theory, looking at the argument often cited in relation to gay people and even within queer theory itself that, “human sexuality is always and everywhere polymorphously perverse”, which point of view he argues leads to the idea that:

if you think you are exclusively attracted to either the opposite sex or the same sex, then you are no more than a helpless and deluded victim. [...] In this view, identities are always known in advance, in order to be denied. The mutable and inevitably deeply contingent historical forms and dispositions of human sexuality are read as if ‘gay identity’ somehow involved denying the *ultimate* provisionality of sexual identities. I emphasise the word ‘ultimate’ because it seems to me that there is all the difference in the world between the insistence on the provisionality and contingency of sexual identities in the longer historical duration, and a certain style of deconstructionist denial of the validity of the category of sexual identity itself on the grounds that such identities are ‘merely’ provisional, and of their nature ‘essentialist’ (Watney, 1997: 377).

If one ignores history and power relations one can see all sexual identities as provisional. In this case, Watney says that what is suggested is a type of 'false consciousness' whereby people are duped into thinking that they have sexual identities. Watney argues that in this view the categories are "known in advance in order to be denied" and that therefore the denial of gay identity itself categorizes and labels 'gay identity' keeping it static, rigid and stereotyped, acting as if gay identity itself has an essential identity.

In the dominant discourse biology need not determine destiny and biology need not limit choices. In relation to masculinity Stephen Whitehead and Frank Barrett assert that: "individuals do not have biologically fixed identities" (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 20). Here role and biology are firmly kept apart and *no-one* has a 'biologically fixed identity' which leads us back into an equal meritocracy. This is an easy idea for those in dominant positions to assimilate. Within family studies too, alongside some newer representations of the family and in concurrence with the discussion of masculinity studies, neither biology or social circumstances are said to pre-determine anything. Family forms themselves and the roles available within them are also said to multiply:

Family forms have moved away from a fixed or rigid notion of the 'proper' family and [...] even inside traditionally structured families, new normative guidelines are emerging. At the turn of the twenty first century in Western societies, most people no longer follow rigid set paths of living. Thus, because our biographies are not pre-given, new types and qualities of relationships have supplanted fixed models (Silva and Smart, 1999: 4).

According to Silva and Smart 'we' are moving away from the fixed, traditional family that is rigid or singular in its form into new types of 'relationships'. It is however possible to argue that the 'proper' or normal family has never been available to large groups of people and therefore to ask; just *who* is 'moving away' from it? Although I would argue that it can only be the white middle classes, Silva and Smart assert that *all* 'our' biographies are not pre-given. And, therefore, if no-one is fixed then 'we' must all have as many choices available to us as we want. However, this begs the question: if everything is as fluid and open as is suggested by some of the new studies texts, then can one *choose* to be

oppressed? If one were to accept the anti-essentialist idea of pure choice one would have to answer yes. Within the logic of this argument what for one (white) person can be viewed as (positive and liberating) performance can for a gay person be seen as 'false consciousness'. Or, if we follow this idea of fluid, changeable identities to its logical conclusion, can for another (black) person be equated with an 'incorrect' notion of internal colonization in which biology *is* seen as destiny. In this case oppression is the individual's 'own fault' as it is certainly not inevitable.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim give us the timely reminder that in relation to inequalities: "[t]he Western type of individualized society tells us *to seek biographical solutions to systemic contradictions*" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001: xxii, my emphasis). Beck and Beck Gernsheim argue that individualized society 'blames' the individual and ignores the system. In the world of fluidity, flexibility, uncertainty, 'performance' is a different thing to biology and the idea that biology-is-destiny is debunked and rejected wholesale. This rejection comes without acknowledging that the concepts of biological determinism, or biology as destiny are themselves multiple in that they mean very different things for different groups of people. The rejection of the notion of biology as destiny entire may not be a useful one for marginalized groups of people who have historically been essentialized. This is because what can represent choice and freedom for white, straight people can represent the ideological 'imperatives' that have been put on other people in relation to normality. Thus for example, in the world of pure choice, if heterosexuality is a choice then so must homosexuality be and therefore if push came to shove, gay people could turn straight *if they chose*.

4.4 The Limits of Choice

In *The New Family?* under a section heading called "Families of Choice", Weeks et al write that in relation to families of choice:

[t]he important factors [...] are not the limits [on choice], real though they are, but the ethos and values that many non-heterosexual women and men are expressing – that a sense of self-worth and cultural confidence is realized in and through friendship networks that we describe as families of choice (Weeks et al, 1999: 89).

To Weeks et al, as proponents of white family studies the limits on 'choice' (such as discrimination perhaps) are not important but ideas of 'self worth' and 'cultural confidence' are. Speaking from the position of privilege Weeks et al suggest that discrimination is not inevitable and therefore, by implication, neither is fixity (or those unimportant limits on choice). However, Gayatri Spivak writes: "It seems to me that the proliferation of multiplicity, which is always limited by what choices are allowed, is a very bad idea" (Spivak, 1994: 175). Multiplicity in terms of choice of sexual identity, role, gender or family form is, for most people, less *enabled* by choice than *limited* by it. Writing about the performance of gender from a feminist point of view Suzanna Walters argues that we need to employ:

a deep understanding of the limitations and constraints within which we 'perform' gender. Without some elaborated social and cultural context, the theory of performance is deeply ahistorical and therefore ironically (because postmodernism fashions itself as particularism par excellence), universalistic, avoiding a discussion of the contexts (race, class, ethnicity and the like) that make particular 'performances' more or less likely to be possible in the first place (Walters, 1999: 251).

It is imperative to look at which performances are possible for which people otherwise the idea of 'performance' itself remains universalistic, elite, empty, and ideologically problematic.

This is Stephen Whitehead examining masculinity and his own position as a man:

Those men able/prepared to perceive themselves as gendered subjects have, at some point, to address both material issues vis-à-vis women, and, on a highly personal level, those questions pertaining to masculine identity. For in engaging in alternative discursive realities, certainly those articulated within a (pro)-feminist frame, men are required to engage reflexively with their own ontological security as it has come to be 'achieved' in a maleist paradigm. Clearly there are both opportunities and threats here. For in confronting and attempting to 'resolve' the existential question 'Who am I as a man?', the occupier of this particular gendered configuration is increasingly denied refuge in traditional ways of being a man. The opportunity that ensues from such social and individual transformation should not, I suggest, be seen in terms of material advantage (there is unlikely to be any), but in

the multiplicity of ontological positions which then become available to those men prepared to disengage from hegemonic, oppressive patterns of masculine behaviour. Simply put, those men who do positively respond to the questions laid down by feminists/feminisms are likely to have opened to them multiple and positive ways of being a man, outside of traditional gender stereotypes (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 357).

The idea of gendering men as men is almost essentialist, or at least begins to question where issues of essentialism might arise. However, instead of delving into the politics of the question Whitehead turns it into a 'highly personal' project which side-steps these issues. One would also think that the question of 'who am I as a man?' might, instead of enabling/forcing a move *out* of traditional masculinity, allow a fruitful engagement *with* traditional masculinity. This might be a way of meeting the 'requirement' he cites as coming from feminism to engage with ways of being a man. Instead we have a particularization (and therefore de-politicization) of the positioning of individual men. Any question of collectivism for (white) men is personalized and anti-essentialized.

In contrast here is Frantz Fanon's description of discovering for himself his blackness in a racist white society:

I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism [sic], racial defects, slave-ships (Fanon, 1967: 112).

There is no liberation for Fanon in discovering 'his' blackness in the way that Whitehead poses liberation for white men discovering their gender. All Fanon comes across are derogatory, restricting, binding stereotypes that are used to define him. The white world defines and *makes* (imposes) his subject position through the stereotypes that it imposes on him or as he puts it "*It is the racist who creates his inferior*" (Fanon, 1967: 93). The only subject positionings and spaces left available to Fanon are those that are created by the dominant:

All round me the white man, above the sky tears at its navel, the earth rasps under my feet, and there is a song, a white song. All this whiteness burns me [...]. While I was forgetting, forgiving, and wanting only to love, my message was flung back in my face like a slap. The white world, the only honorable one, barred me from all

participation. A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man – or at least a nigger. I shouted a greeting to the world and the world slashed away my joy. I was told to stay within bounds, to get back to where I belonged (Fanon, 1967: 114-5).

Fanon is barred from participation. His role is prescribed for him, he is restricted and defined by the white world. 'A man was expected to behave like a man', which points to a freer, less bounded set of roles and possibilities, Fanon was expected to behave 'like a black man', 'like a nigger'. Any role for Fanon as black man is prescribed by the white world and set within certain rigid constraints. Fanon is constrained within a singular, stereotyped identity, bounded to his body and his skin colour. Fanon is essentialized and because he is essentialized by the white world, his behaviour is prescribed and interpreted only in certain ways. The white world will only *see* Fanon in a certain way and it will only allow him to act in a certain manner; as a black man, as a nigger. And in a similar manner Rosi Braidotti also sees that the only spaces/places/definitions left to women and of women come from the dominant: "Woman is other – excluded, alienated, denied, a blank screen onto which man projects his anguished terror of death, his contempt for, and fear of, all that is pre-rational and corporeal" (Braidotti, 1991: 157). In Braidotti's analysis women too are essentialized – they have an essence *imposed* onto them by white men.

In his own analysis Whitehead was left with what I would think would be the extreme material advantage of the availability of a 'multiplicity of ontological positions' and not just as he views it, the singular, rigid and fixed position of old or traditional masculinity. However, historically it has been the biologically fixed and essentialized position of others that has *allowed* white men their multiplicity. Richard Dyer examines the phenomenon of multiple positions for the dominant in relation to white people and explains it as *part* of their dominance:

In Western representation whites are overwhelmingly and disproportionately predominant, have the central and elaborated roles, and above all are placed as the norm, the ordinary the standard. Whites are everywhere in representation. Yet precisely because of this and their placing as norm they seem not to be represented to themselves *as* whites, but as people who are variously gendered, classed,

sexualized and abled. At the level of racial representation, in other words, whites are not of a certain race, they're just the human race (Dyer, 1997: 3).

For dominant groups such as white people or men, it is neither their colour or their gender that matters or constrains them or their representations. For the dominant a multiplicity of roles, 'the central and elaborated roles' and representations have always been available and it is in part this that has meant that white men for example have *not* been systematically essentialized. And if we return for a moment to the idea of white people being invisible, David Theo Goldberg, although most often discussing black people as being invisible (unseeable) says that whites can be "[u]nseen racially, that is unseen as racially marked – or seen precisely as racially unmarked – whites could be everywhere" (Goldberg, 1996: 182). For white people, their whiteness *enables* movement and freedom even as others, in this white economy, are restricted by their biological skin colour. Whilst (still) placed as the norm and the standard, white men are not being portrayed as men-as-a-group, but as individual men who are variously 'classed, sexualized and abled'. There is no suggestion of essentialism or fixity.

Fanon's skin colour in white society severely limits the choices available to him. His bodily 'difference' (biology) affects his position and reception in society. Fanon's identity, behaviour and reception are determined (from the dominant outside) by his biology; Fanon is *essentialized*. However, for white men such as Whitehead, Peterson or Beynon, freedom of choice comes with the split between biology and destiny or position – they are not essentialized - and by insisting on the split between biology and destiny entire, they suggest that neither is anyone else and therefore deny discrimination. Thus in this model Fanon will be seen to have no (biological) limits on his choices. Unfortunately, what is so often missed by masculinity studies is the fact, documented by Rowena Chapman within masculinity studies in 1988 but ignored since, that that hegemonic, white, patriarchal culture itself is *based* on essentialism - not on essentializing white middle class men but on essentializing *others*: women and people of colour (Chapman and Rutherford, 1988).

White men have never had to be essentialized and merely denying that others are does not impinge on discrimination or essentialism itself at all.

For marginalized people the idea of strategic essentialism has always been an important one. If one is to be essentialized by the dominant then using that categorization as a way of gaining a political voice can be very useful indeed. Stephen Whitehead discusses the question of standpoint for women coming to the conclusion that although it can be useful in allowing women a place from which to speak, ultimately deciding that any idea of a singular standpoint is 'untrue' (Whitehead, 2001: 353-4). He writes of the development of masculinity studies:

As this critical enquiry has developed more subtle and sophisticated perspectives, so has a tension emerged between balancing [the] recognition of differences between men with the 'fact' of patriarchy, 'gender order', and other such blanket political categorisations of male oppression. [...]

The question of 'men's sameness' is, then, directly linked to the debates surrounding a core feminist/womanist epistemology and ontology (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 355).

This however is not quite correct. Within patriarchal culture women have been imagined as having a feminine core and much of women's oppression has come with this essentializing that equates femininity with 'biological' femaleness in an oppressive and static manner. However, it is the essentializing of women and other oppressed groups that has *allowed* white men the multiple positions they have always enjoyed along with the ability to *move*. The fixed stereotyping of others need not have any kind of detrimental effect on those who perpetrate and perpetuate these stereotypes from a position of power. Therefore the essentializing of 'women' does not logically lead to the essentializing of 'men' any more than the essentializing of black people will lead to the essentializing of white people. Within the unequal relations of power, implications for different groups quite obviously differ and it is these power differentials that mean that white men have *always* had a multiplicity of ontological positions available to them.

Whitehead is suggesting the deconstruction of 'blanket categorizations' of men. However deconstructing the dominant, be it whiteness, heterosexuality or masculinity is a very different thing to the deconstruction of (truly) marginalized identities and subjectivities. And where it is suggested that the deconstruction of these dominant identities will lead to the deconstruction of unequal, marginalized identities, Rosi Braidotti argues:

One cannot deconstruct a subjectivity one has never been fully granted. [...] In order to denounce the death [or fragmentation] of the subject one must first have gained the right to speak as one; in order to demystify meta-discourse one must first gain access to a place of enunciation. Fragmentation of the self being women's basic historical condition, [...] we are left with the option of theorizing a general 'becoming woman' for both sexes, or else flatly stating that women have been post-structuralist since the beginning of time (Braidotti, 1991: 122).

Marginalized people have always experienced fragmented subject positions that it is difficult to speak from because these identities have been essentialized and created by white patriarchal society. Deconstruction of the dominant can, in this way, be seen as merely re-stating the subject position that comes with being white, male and middle class. Taking this argument the only way that white middle class men can (supposedly) deconstruct their own position as dominant, make it particular and multiple, is by having that position in the first place. De-mystifying, 'confessing' masculinity, 'making' it multiple and insisting on fragmentation in this way, is just re-affirming what already was, (re)occupying the position of the dominant and speaking of a self that has *always* been individualized, multiple and particular.

4.5 Learning to be Middle Class

If biology becomes entirely separated from role, if one can (theoretically) choose whiteness or blackness, choose gayness or straightness, choose middle class-ness or not and choose the nuclear family or not, it follows that there can be no reason why we should not *all* choose to live in the middle class, heterosexual, conjugal nuclear family and accept white, dominant ideas about the way to live 'properly'. The free choice argument so often expressed in masculinity and family studies seems to presuppose that we all live in an

ideologically free manner. In order for choice to be truly free there must be no institutionalized ideals, values, compulsions or morals. As this is patently not the case in contemporary British society the idea of 'free choice' must come with some (moral) prescriptions and predetermined ideas about which choices are 'best'. This returns us to the old Marxian argument that we do not consciously make our society, rather our society makes our consciousness. And as Simon During writes in relation to Althusser's theories of dominant ideology:

its primary role is to construct an imaginary picture of civil life, especially the nuclear family, as natural, and, most of all, each individual as 'unique' and 'free'. Ideology fragments real connections and interdependencies, producing a picture of social relations which overemphasizes individual freedom and autonomy (During, 1993: 6).

Within this supposed plethora of choice the nuclear family is being given out as just one choice among many, and heterosexuality as one choice of at least two. However, within white, hegemonic, patriarchal culture the choice to live in the heterosexual nuclear family must be *the* (ideo)logical choice. We still live in a white dominated, patriarchal, capitalist society and it has to be acknowledged that the family-of-choice for this society is the straight, nuclear version and that certain ideologies and moralities are still dominant: witness family studies' preoccupation with 'personal growth', 'autonomy' and 'responsibility' (not everyone's first choice of values).

The supposed de-centring of the normal *has turned it into a choice*. If we are all able to exercise autonomous choice we are left with a meritocracy whereby there is no reason why we shouldn't 'choose' to live in the middle class nuclear family as we are told, one may as well choose this form as any other. Formed as a concept from Anthony Giddens' naming of what he calls 'pure relationships' (Giddens, 1992), the family of choice is described as non-biological or not necessarily biological, networks of friends, lovers and possibly kin. Weeks et al describe Giddens' vision, saying that he implies: "a radical democratization of the interpersonal domain, because [intimacy] assumes not only that the individual is the

ultimate maker of his or her own life, but also equality between partners, and their freedom to choose lifestyles and forms of partnership” (Weeks et al, 1999: 85). Re-moved from biology we are left with the ultimate meritocracy in which it doesn’t matter if you’re white, black, poor or rich, straight or gay, you can *choose* what you want to be.

In masculinity studies and family studies even when diversity and difference are discussed as positive and with possibilities of creativity and energy, it tends to be the white middle classes who are being addressed and the positive changes made possible by diversity are discussed only in relation to how it will benefit this group. When endorsing or ‘legitimizing’ new forms of the family, there are certain criteria that, it seems, ‘ought’ to be met. In the introduction to *The new Family?* Silva and Smart write:

The possibility of satisfying the desire for *personal growth and autonomy* varies according to the available cultural and economic capital possessed by each individual, in terms of age, gender, professional qualifications, position in the labour market, sexual preferences, parental obligations and so on. Personal scripts are written in the context of the different social and economic locations of families, as well as individuals, within wider social structures. But there is now *more than one normative guideline* to provide the context for these *choices*. Moreover, social class, gender, sexuality, age and ethnicity no longer operate as inevitable or one-dimensional pre-determining aspects of these normative guidelines (Silva and Smart, 1999: 6-7, my emphases).

Silva and Smart are arguing (after a small nod at personal circumstances) that there are *choices* that are available to (almost) everyone and which provide plural ‘normative guidelines’. Their recognition of ‘more than one normative guideline’ must be directed at the white middle classes as for everyone else who is not white and middle class there have always been different, alternative and plural ‘normative guidelines’ as *the* normative guideline was not available to these people. However, throughout current family studies it is the idea of *choice* that appears to be the important one and it appears the only ‘proper’ choice to be made is that of ‘personal growth and autonomy’. Other values that may play a part in different types of family are ignored. Thus other (less sexy) values/morals such as duty, responsibility, obedience for example and many, many others are just not mentioned in the new studies. What this shows *at least* is that ‘personal growth and autonomy’ are

specific (white, middle class) values, (ones that one has to be able to afford), and therefore they are not necessarily universal values.

Even as family studies texts such as Silva and Smart's seem to celebrate plural forms of the family the actual roles of that those families are supposed to play remain relatively static;

What seems to be occurring is that the notion of family is being stretched to cover everything. [...] [T]his stretching of the concept of the family [...] means that the sharp boundaries which are presumed to exist between 'proper' families and less desirable families can *no longer* operate, either conceptually or politically. Using the concept of the family in this *new* sense may ultimately carry wide political connotations by dissolving the idea that *only one kind of family* (namely the heterosexual, conjugal family) can produce *moral, autonomous, but caring citizens*. Accepting diverse families of intimacy and caring as *legitimate* forms of family will *de-centre* the nuclear family through a process of gradual cultural change (Silva and Smart, 1999: 10, my emphases).

Although (again) using the singular concept of the family (heterosexual and conjugal) to rest their arguments of diversity and change on, Silva and Smart do in fact argue that there *is* a new family or, more accurately, new families. These 'new' forms of the family can, they argue, (and therefore should) produce 'moral', 'autonomous' and 'caring' individuals, or as they call them, 'citizens'. The implicit idea here is that the family (of whatever form) has a 'moral' obligation to society to perform a certain role and produce only a certain type of person. Just who decides what 'moral' is and who 'legitimizes' which forms of family is not discussed. Silva and Smart appear to be accepting without question the ideological/social role that the white nuclear family plays in patriarchal society and arguing that *other forms of the family can do it too*.

In the context of fictional discussion this is one of the lessons to be learnt in *About A Boy*. Will, who has shunned intimacy for his entire thirty six years, through his contact with Marcus and Fiona, through the mess and the fog, begins himself to grow emotionally, become more responsible, moral and caring as he begins to accept that this messy 'family' too is his family of choice or at least one part of it. Near the end of the book Marcus and his friend Ellie – another part of Marcus' family of choice (she says she's adopted him),

get arrested. Marcus' dad, his girlfriend, Will, Fiona and Ellie's mother all turn up at the police station:

Will looked at this strange little group, his gang for the day, and tried to make some sense of it. All those ripples and connections! He was not a man given to mystical moments, even under the influence of narcotics, but he was very worried that he was having one now, for some reason: maybe it was something to do with Marcus walking away from his mother and over to him. [...] Some of these people he hadn't known until today; some of them he had only known for a little while, and even then he couldn't say that he knew them well. But here they were anyway [...] all of them bound to each other in ways that it would be almost impossible to explain to anyone who had just wandered in. Will couldn't recall ever having been caught up in this sort of messy, sprawling, chaotic web before, it was almost as if he had been given a glimpse of what it was like to be human. It wasn't too bad, really, he wouldn't even mind being human on a full-time basis (Hornby, 1998: 264).

It is the ripples and connections, the chaos and the mess that matter, but ultimately in the book and in the family studies theory, it is the *choice* that really matters, and the family as (any sort of) unit. Will has been given an insight into a type of family that, for all its faults, is not really dysfunctional, or not in the way that his own, rich unhappy family was. And where Will's biological family failed to make him a responsible or moral adult, this new family of choice has achieved the oft stated goals of the family within Western, capitalist, patriarchal society. The ideological/ political 'reasons' for the formation of the nuclear family in our society are left intact and in place whilst *allowing* other forms of the family to undertake the same role. As the fact that ideas of 'morality', 'autonomy' (or not) and 'caring' may well differ across cultures and political positions is left unquestioned so the dominant ideologies are left unquestioned and the roles that the family is meant to play remain static. In this case it will not matter if the white, heterosexual, nuclear family is 'de-centred' as its ideological effects and affects can be manifested through a multiplicity of family forms.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the themes of this thesis to their logical conclusion: a re-establishment of 'old' values, wrapped up in a new rhetoric of change, multiplicity, choice

and inclusion. This rhetoric denies an exclusive normality, but begins to reconstruct a new inclusive normality – one to which *anyone* (in true meritocratic style) may aspire to. We will therefore finish this chapter by looking at the new (moral) prescriptions for aspiration in today's society, which perhaps unsurprisingly tend to look very much like the 'old' ones.

Helen Wilkinson in *The Global Third Way Debate* speaks at length about the type of 'intact' family forms that are needed for today's economy and society, and one of her main points is about education:

Adults need the skills and competencies required to cope in an increasingly flexible and competitive economy, so too they need a more robust set of interpersonal and communication skills to cope with more demanding and fluid personal relationships. The challenge will be to create opportunities to learn – rather than programmes relying in vain on coercion or moral exhortation (Wilkinson, 2001: 228).

Here education is said to be necessary for enabling people to be able to cope with fluidity. Education is needed in order to be able to cope with both flexibility and fluidity – one needs educating *into* these (middle class) values and what need for 'moral exhortation' if one has already learnt these morals within the family? This model of education involves 'interpersonal' and 'communication' skills; the personal will be changed. In Wilkinson's model; "[t]omorrow's family should be a learning family and lifelong learning about relationships will be key. [... There will be] agencies which provide advice and information about relationships and parenting" (Giddens, 2001: 229). The working classes will be educated into, if not actually being middle class, then at least accepting and learning middle class values, modes of relationships and morals.

For Wilkinson in a similar manner to other areas of family studies, it does not actually really matter what form the family takes (although the nuclear form is to be preferred), but the *family*, its morals, commitments and responsibilities does matter. She speaks about

fostering a 'marriage culture', whereby education is the first goal, but encouraging this 'marriage culture' is the second:

There is a direct public policy interest here. Finance is a major factor. Weakened families cost the state money both directly and indirectly. In this context the state has a public interest in strengthening families, regardless of their structure. Families are the foundation of civil society, where we first learn moral values. Families generate social capital – the trust and relationship skills which enable individuals to cooperate (Wilkinson, 2001: 224).

In these models the inclusion of (most) groups has a definite agenda. And the method of implementing this agenda is far more likely to work in the interest of hegemonic power structures than exclusion and hatred. In this way we can all learn to be 'moral', productive workers, family members and citizens. The 'family' of whatever structure will be 'strengthened' and 'moral values' imbibed. In this model it must follow that it will be those who do not *choose* to be 'strengthened' and who may reject or disagree with the espoused 'moral values' who will be excluded. Inclusion means homogenization and is not so very different from Matthew Arnold's ideas about teaching the working classes the value of middle class culture so as they won't revolt (in any way) (Arnold, 1865, in Lipman, 1994).

In relation to class what 'choice' means is that we can (and should) all *learn* to be middle class. In one of the more extreme examples of the dominant addressing the dominant, Silva and Smart discuss these changes in relation to 'women's' lives:

For a woman to have a professional lifestyle she does not need to marry a professional but *only* to obtain a suitable degree or diploma. More and more women have understood that this is a much more secure route to a decent standard of living than marriage can provide. And if *this woman* found that her marriage did not provide the *expected satisfactions* in terms of identity, affection, and sexuality, she could leave the marriage. She might lose her illusions, her home, and some of the time she might have wanted to spend with her children, but she *would not* lose her job, her pension or the vital currency of her professional qualifications (Silva and Smart, 1999: 6, my emphases).

Silva and Smart are describing a fictional woman. But 'this woman' has the opportunity, finances, time and prior education that will allow her to 'only' have to obtain a degree or diploma in order to lose her home without losing childcare, her job or her 'pension'. The

fantasy is a middle class and probably a white one. The discussion of choice in family form therefore is also bounded within the white middle classes although this is never made explicit. However by not making this explicit the notion of choice is left hanging without the context of economic circumstance, available (or acceptable) cultural capital, race or truly 'different' expectations and values. If the 'fantasy' family form is still white, and middle class it is interesting that in all the discussion the 'alternative' family form cited is always that of the homosexual family of choice, which because it is never classed or raced, is implicitly white and middle class. Other forms of the family such as working class single parent families or black or Asian families, although mentioned in connection with the changes to the white middle class heterosexual family, are themselves never held up as models for alternative family forms. The discussion about 'different' and 'alternative' forms of the family to the nuclear form itself re-sets up the nuclear form as the normal.

Bart Moore-Gilbert discusses Homi Bhabha's work:

Bhabha proposes a conception of cultural difference which does not aspire to 'equalizing' migrant with 'host' cultures by conceiving of the specific social practices (such as 'parenting') or institutions [like the family] as interchangeably equivalent but which instead respects the heterogenous – even 'incommensurable' – histories, identities and customs of the formerly colonized (Moore-Gilbert, 2000: 461).

In this model difference *means* difference and difference that may not be comfortable.

True difference may not 'fit'. Silva and Smart and many advocates of family studies, by making other family forms 'interchangeably equivalent' to the nuclear family form, from this model actually deny difference and keep the ideological reasons-for-being of the white nuclear form in place. Merely 'replacing' the white nuclear family with other family forms that carry the same values and reasons-for-being will *not* de-centre the nuclear family form. The family is a societal institution and David Theo Goldberg argues that:

It bears pointing out [...] the inherently homogenizing logic of institutions. In their dominant logical form, institutions are predicated principally on instituting, operating, and (re)producing homogeneity. If the state minimally is a collection of institutions, manifesting and (re)ordering itself necessarily in and through the logic of such institutional arrangement, then one could say that the state inherently is the

institutionalization of homogeneity. Liberal states like Britain, the Netherlands, and the US that claim to furnish the structures for heterogeneity to flourish in this sense actually promote contradictory aims, purposes that pull in competing directions. Hence the anachronistic language one hears of ‘managing diversity,’ of ‘ordering difference,’ of ‘unifying in difference.’ (Goldberg, 2000: 81-2).

The nuclear family is a state institution, and according to Goldberg this will inevitably lead to a homogenizing pull. In this case this involves the homogenization of diverse family forms into one ‘moral’, ‘caring’ lump that will not argue with itself. The rhetoric of family studies always seems to endorse the idea of ‘unifying in difference’, but the way that that ‘unification’ is to take place is always prescribed and in fact, is quite static.

These prescriptions and the re-inclusion of aspirational ideals almost take us full circle. Normality as an aspirational ideal remains so even as it is supposedly fragmented into the margins. Jace Weaver points out a problem with postmodernism that can be directly equated with my critique of the theorizing of masculinity and family studies: “[i]ts error [...] is that it mistakes having deconstructed something theoretically for having displaced it politically” (Weaver, 2000: 226). Supposedly deconstructing the concepts of the nuclear family and white middle class masculinity will not dispel the position of the normal in our society or displace those who benefit from it. Normality is too deeply embedded in history, in social, cultural and political practice to be banished so easily. And the ‘easy’ theorization of making the normal visible, re-moving it into the margins and multiplying it is just that: too easy. Masculinity studies and family studies are working from the centre and until this itself is theorized and worked through properly then almost inevitably the centre will end up working in its own interests. Espousing multiplicity and choice for all may get rid of some of the guilt the white middle classes carry but if we return to the beginning of the thesis and Mamdani’s idea of present beneficiaries and victims rather than past perpetrators and victims, notions of multiplicity and choice do not begin to address *present benefit* from the current system for the white middle classes, just as demonizing the supposed past perpetrators of inequalities will not change anything now. Current theories

of normality separate it out from the social and political membranes of society. Normality cannot be 'cut out' and removed into the margins, and the theoretical and representational attempts to do so do indeed take us full circle whereby in denying the normal it remains unsaid, invisible, universalized and singular. Normality still sits at the centre of our society.

Illustration 4



Conclusion: Towards Re-Centring The Centre: Acknowledging Biologically Determined Privilege and the Existence of Normality

Throughout this thesis the ideas of visibility and embodiment in relation to the normal have been crucial. From the stated invisibility, silence and disembodiment of those in the centre discussed as being cited by the new studies in chapter one, to the impossibility of that invisibility argued through in chapter two. The exposure of chaos, abnormality, oppression, repression and crisis being re-read into the past discussed in chapter three led to an exploration of how a singular conception of normality and the 'old' allows for an untroubled advocacy of multiplicity and anti-essentialism by white academics. The marginalization of the normal enabled by these exposures and discussions in the academy and in the media, by the repositioning of what is visible, and by the strategic re-embodiment of white men leads to a new position of aspiration that is (supposedly) inclusive, meritocratic. Throughout this thesis I have argued that the new discourse, its enunciations and archive are not followed by anything revolutionary and that the 'radical' discourse is becoming mainstream, its manoeuvres, rhetoric, representations and methodologies working in concert to maintain the current status quo of the white middle classes. However, the new discourse has had some material effects that can benefit people albeit that the ideologies and values behind these changes benefit only certain people and uphold a political vision and ideology that has not really changed. The conclusion to this thesis looks at the possibilities of a different type of visibility and embodiment for those in the centre, one that can lead away from the blinding light of individualism without evoking the spectres of victimization, feminization or crisis which usually accompany any idea of visible collective identity for those in the centre. This conclusion examines the transformative possibilities for those that benefit from the historic construction of the white, middle class, heterosexual normal offered by a strategy of the margins not examined

by the new studies before in relation to themselves: strategic essentialism. This concluding discussion argues for an re-acknowledgment of the centre as the centre and of the normal as the normal. It argues for a re-view of the current status of the normal and a re-view those who have historically, and who still do benefit from the exclusions, prescriptions and aspirational ideals of the normal.

That the new discourse has led to some changes is not in dispute. On the seventeenth of October 2002 the House of Lords threw out a bill that would have allowed unmarried and gay couples to adopt children. However, although there still exist those who believe in prejudice, exclusion, a certain type of morality, and a particular idea of 'family values', the main thrust of British society is away from being seen to endorse these values and beliefs. In this particular power play the newer views (quite rightly) prevailed and the bill was passed on November 6, 2002. As I hope has been apparent throughout the thesis it is not so much the stated aims of those espousing the new discourse that I am critical of, it is the universalizing of these aims, the moralizing that goes with the discourse, the methods that are being employed to attempt to gain these aims, the blindness of some of the theory to other points of view and the consequences (or not) that the methods used inevitably engender. Personally I am very glad that unmarried and gay couples can adopt children but it is interesting that single people – gay or straight – could adopt children already. This new law endorses 'committed' couples as able to provide 'legitimate' familial environments. The new law must require that the unmarried couples 'legitimate' themselves in some way before the law (otherwise how would the law recognize them as 'couples'?) This legitimation, one assumes, will become a different or alternative form of 'marriage', even as marriage itself is denied to gay couples. Thus we come around almost full circle again whereby the nuclear family itself is re-legitimized.

Almost full circle, but not quite. In true hegemonic fashion *something* has been given. As we have seen Stuart Hall argues that this is the nature of hegemonic consent; eventually, within a discourse, the interests of the powerful will come to be represented as being directly associated with the will of the majority of the population. He argues:

One of the means by which the powerful continue to rule with consent and legitimacy is [...] if the interests of a particular class or power bloc can be aligned with or made equivalent to the general interests of the majority. Once this system of equivalences has been achieved, the interests of the minority and the will of the majority can be 'squared' because they can both be represented as coinciding in the consensus, on which all sides agree. The consensus is the medium, the regulator, by means of which this necessary alignment (or equalization) between power and consent is accomplished. But if the consensus of the majority can be so shaped that it squares with the will of the powerful, then particular (class) interests can be represented as identical with the consensus will of the people (Hall, 1982: 362).

At the moment in the discourse of the normal, recent rhetoric espouses the dismantling of the normal and the exclusive white, middle class male power bases and speaks of the goals of inclusion and equality for all regardless of sex, race or class. These are all very seductive goals that appear to be of benefit to the majority of the population. However the methods employed to attain these goals and even the goals themselves are, as we have seen, suspect and even where there is no *intention* of representing the interests of the powerful. The way that the relations of power work makes it almost impossible for any one consolidated discourse *not* to favour the interests of the powerful unless one is fully aware of this possibility and guards against it all the way.

However, as I argued in the introduction to this thesis, the discursive movement described is neither singular nor complete. And the fact that the discourse this thesis has made it its business to examine is not all-encompassing also demonstrates that there are always places and spaces outside dominant discourses and this in itself can give us hope. Another cause for hope must be the stated and implicit intentions of those (away from party politics) involved in creating the new hegemonic movement. Much of the theorizing and discussion takes the path of (almost) least resistance in 'making visible', 'pluralizing' and intending to 'equalize' without too much thought. Support and consent may be gained by slightly

underhand means through the ‘we’re all the same really’ equalizing rhetoric and in several places discussion might be just wrong and both theoretical and material consequences damaging but at least those engaging in the discussions appear to *mean well*. As we know the road to hell is paved with good intentions, however in this case it depends on how much will, energy and willingness there is coming from the white middle classes to truly precipitate change and it is to the possibility of change that I turn next – and finally.

As we have seen one of the most strongly argued positions of family and masculinity studies is that of anti-essentialism. The polemic is understandable as historically the essentializing of the marginalized has been one of the most insidious, abiding and damaging elements of oppression. However, a vital point has been missed and that is, as I argued above in chapter four, that the entire Western power base is premised on essentialism. *White male power comes from essentialism* and an acknowledgement of this fact and a closer look at the concept of essentialism may illuminate a path out of the double binds we keep finding ourselves in. ‘Essentialism’ has been a despised concept for many years. However, also for many years, there have been those who have seen dangers in uncritical and complete anti-essentialism itself and its power to stop dialogue in its tracks. On the first page of the 1994 book *The Essential Difference* Naomi Schor describes the “certainty” that accompanies so much anti-essentialism as ‘the policing of feminism by the shock troops of anti-essentialism. [...] Borrowed from the time-honored vocabulary of philosophy, the word essentialism has been endowed within the context of feminism with the power to reduce to silence, to excommunicate, to consign to oblivion” (Schor and Weed 1994: vii). ‘Pure’ anti-essentialism allows for no space outside itself that is not ‘wrong’ and/or ‘immoral’. Schor argues that the dogma of anti-essentialism precludes discussion. For those who have been marginalized however, strategic essentialism has been a vital step that has helped activate radical politics, resistant representations and

theory and to a certain extent change, at least, as we have been seeing, in acceptable dominant rhetoric if not always in material circumstances.

In terms of this thesis, feminism, queer theory and postcolonialism would not exist without having utilized strategic essentialism at various times. Where we saw in chapter four Fanon's lament that the only spaces left for him to occupy were those created for him (and his 'kind') by the racist hegemony this gives us a clue to the political strategy of strategic essentialism. For many postcolonial, queer and feminist theorists (Spivak 1993, Hall 1997, Bordo 1993, Butler 1990, amongst *many* others), the oppressed, marginalized and essentialized positions and definitions of black people, Asian people, gay people or women meted out by the dominant white, heterosexual patriarchy provided the basis for collective resistance. Although this collectivism itself can carry problems of equalization, some denial of difference and silencing of various people's experience, there is no doubt that it served and still serves a useful purpose, even in the pointing out of these problems. It is largely because of strategic essentialism that the exclusive and exclusionary white, patriarchal, heterosexual normal began to be questioned from the margins in the first place.

The vehement (and unified) anti-essentialism of masculinity studies and family studies however, does not allow any engagement with the concept of strategic essentialism. And when it is discussed, it is only in relation to marginal theorists, and only the problems of this strategy are concentrated on. Masculinity studies and family studies when they mention strategic essentialism, point to the idea that it has been almost completely discredited (Peterson, 1998). Stephen Whitehead (briefly) considers the notion of strategic essentialism (whilst not naming it as such) through the concept of standpoint theory. He cites Nancy Harstock's argument that there is a position from which women can see 'male supremacy' but comes to rest on his own reading of Sandra Harding's work which he argues:

[the] questioning any notion of a singular 'feminist standpoint' or indeed, of an identity 'woman', appears to be aligning more closely with the multiplicity of identities [sic] highlighted in post-structuralist and postmodern perspectives [...]. In so doing, Harding avoids the accusation of being drawn into the gender dichotomising which underpins much of the enlightenment and (malestream) modern philosophizing. For can any group of individuals be said to have a unique and valid everyday knowledge? Does not this perspective repeat the essentialistic, Cartesian assumption of 'core truths'?

[...] The question remains then, can there be a privileging of women's knowledge – is 'woman' a universal category?

Following a post-structuralist position, I would argue that neither 'man' nor 'woman' are reducible to a priori, essential or grounded ontologies (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 353).

Whitehead is of course right, his questions are important and pertinent and the conclusion he draws is correct. However, Whitehead's poststructuralist conclusion is discussed as being the only one 'truth'. Whitehead's assumption here is that 'women' have created their own category and are fundamental in the creation of a/the gender dichotomy. Thus in Whitehead's own words, Sandra Harding "avoids the accusation" – but who is accusing? I understand the difficulties, but shifting the blame of marginalization, continuing marginalization and oppression onto minority 'groups' is not helpful, particularly in a book that claims to be deconstructing white masculinity and the white male hegemony. At this point in history it hardly seems useful for the white centre to 'accuse' the margins of upholding that very centre that marginalized them in the first place. Where Whitehead cites his 'fact' from a poststructuralist position he forgets that all theory is implicated in ideology and patriarchy and therefore as Elizabeth Grosz says that "the decision about whether to 'use' essentialism or to somehow remain beyond it (even if these extremes were possible) is a question of calculation, not a self-evident certainty" (Grosz, 1994b: 95). But at the moment all we get from masculinity and family studies is the 'self-evident certainty' of the absolute correctness of anti-essentialism.

It is possible to 'accuse' the margins because in the world of masculinity studies and family studies these self-same disciplines are deconstructing the white centre. However, where feminism and postcolonial theorists have been grappling with the problem of the

white, bourgeois, patriarchal centre for decades both masculinity studies and family studies are extremely new disciplines which claim parentage from feminism and postcolonialism. Whitehead himself says that the sociology of masculinity has moved from a first wave, through a second wave to a third. He cites the 1950's as the start of the first wave, then cites theorists/ sociologists from the early 1980s as the second wave and then says that from the mid 1990s to now this is the third wave (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 15). From Whitehead's 'second wave' this gives us approximately twenty years to move from the 'discredited' (by feminism) 'old myths', certainties, singularities, essentialisms, and the idea of power-by-right *through* essentialism, immediately to multiplicities, pluralities, fragmentations, marginalizations and anti-essentialism. He says:

[w]hile the critical analysis of men is barely two decades old, the developments ensuing from such study have been rapid and profound. It is now commonplace, for example, to assume the multiplicity of masculinities, and the importance of recognizing historical shifts in dominant and subordinated ways of being a man. (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 355).

An academic discipline can perhaps move too quickly. If so then I argue that both masculinity studies and family studies have done so. This is in part because both emerged out of postcolonialism and feminism. Because of this, both disciplines assume that they can take as their starting point the theory (from the margins) that has gone before and build their own arguments on top of this. Thus Alan Peterson in *Unmasking The Masculine* gives a sensitive reading of the concept of strategic essentialism as it was employed by feminism, then moves on to the problems that feminists encountered with it. Peterson therefore ends up (albeit sympathetically) dismissing strategic essentialism as a useful strategy because he is *only* looking at it in relation to marginal theory; feminism, postcolonialism and queer theory (Peterson, 1998: 124). Because marginal theory appears to have 'gone through' strategic essentialism and 'come out the other side' the theorists of the centre dismiss it as having any relevance to their own theoretical or material positions. Thus theorists from the centre don't bother to engage with it for themselves or in relation to their own positions. Although strategic essentialism is discussed as having been a

(historically) useful step for 'other' people (Peterson, 1998, Connell, 1995, Whitehead in Whitehead and Barrett, 2001, Pease, 2000), the debate then always moves on, usually into a discussion of multiplying masculinity and guarding against essentialism.

Strategic essentialism is based on forming a collective; a grouping upon what white patriarchal culture has termed and defined as 'essence'. And as we saw in chapter one, any essentializing of white men, any suggestion of collectivity is represented as leading inevitably to men being feminized. Any sort of acknowledgment of the collective identity of white men always points to feminization or victimization (Robinson, 2000). At the moment, Sally Robinson when speaking about masculinity argues that any sort of collectivity for white men is only employed when white men *as a group* feel under threat; then collectivity is used as a strategy:

Identity politics is only mobilized after the perception of victimization or injury; [...] the appeal of collectivity appears to depend on a felt experience of disempowerment. This is evident in the language in which calls for groups rights are couched; that language draws heavily on the moral and symbolic power of pain, victimization, and crisis, whether articulated from economic and social centers or their margins. [...] [W]hite men do not willingly fold their individual identities into a group identity except around perceived losses of power, articulated as impingements of rights (Robinson, 2000: 7).

In Robinson's articulation of the rhetoric of crisis, collective identity for white men is absolutely necessary. White men cannot be in crisis or victims unless they can identify themselves *as white men*.³⁷ The discourse of men-in-crisis subsumes differences between men *into* the discourse of victimization. Differences such as class and even race are subsumed because this discourse can only exist if there is an identified collective identity for men and as we know, any type of strategic essentialism subsumes differences. The collective identity of *men* in discussions and representations of crisis and victimization is more important than racial or class identities. In the discourse of crisis the identified men-

³⁷ In discussing the fact that the notion of crisis has historically involved a notion of collective identity (albeit here a very different identity and crisis) it is interesting to note that the first periodical for the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People founded by W.E.B Du Bois, was entitled *The Crisis* (James, 1967: 366).

as-a-group position of the backlash is mobilized into a strategic essentialism for men that *shows* (or makes visible) the victimization of men.³⁸

For white, middle class, heterosexual men at the moment, their own essentialized grouping as white men without the claims of feminization or victimization would be particularly unappealing, unattractive and perhaps 'unsafe' for the hegemonic order. As we saw above Stephen Whitehead, discussing masculinity studies admits that "as this critical enquiry has developed more subtle and sophisticated perspectives, so has a tension emerged between balancing this recognition of differences between men with the 'fact' of patriarchy, 'gender order', and other such blanket political categorizations of male oppression" (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 355). Perhaps understandably white men do not like to be placed under 'blanket categorizations' that link them (all) with oppressive practices. Thus most masculinity studies texts appear to find the question of collectivity for white men as a group extremely uncomfortable and, in these circumstances, one can also understand the attractiveness of the purely anti-essentialist argument.

If concepts of a normal, singular, unified and privileged white masculinity and its 'partner in crime' the white nuclear family can be deconstructed, dismantled and de-centred theoretically, then it seems that the job of masculinity studies and family studies will have been done. My argument throughout the thesis has been that white men in particular, and white middle class people in general, do not want to be seen as having power *because* they are white, heterosexual, middle class or men. Within a meritocracy, essentialism that leads to inequalities because of visible biological differences must be denied. White men do not want to stand united as a group because, in the current climate it is no longer the case for

³⁸ Bob Pease has gone perhaps furthest in moving the usual sociological case studies along into what he calls "Constructing a Profeminist Men's Standpoint" and "Developing a Collective Politics Among Profeminist Men" (Pease, 2000: 5 and 7), but this lead to him setting up a small 'anti-patriarchal consciousness-raising group' (ibid) among 'self-defining profeminist' men. And although this is of course a start (witness women's consciousness raising groups in the 70's), and at least a move away from the purely collectivity-for-victimization strategy, there are surely enough theoretical tools and strategies out there already from feminism and postcolonialism that there must be more effective, subtle, direct and useful ways forward.

them that '*united* we stand' because unity will bring visibility and accusations of essentialism and here, essentialism which leads to benefit, exclusion and visible inequality. Although ostensibly inviting everyone else in by 'dispelling' the centre, currently for the white middle classes it is a case of '*divided* we stand'. As Bob Pease says: "I problematize the use of 'men' as a generic category because it implies homogeneity" (Pease, 2000: 8). Men do not want to be seen as an homogeneous group, even if in a white, heterosexist patriarchy they *have* accrued benefit and privilege as a group.

An important part of the discussion in Schor and Weed's book hinges on the idea that anti-essentialism itself can deconstruct and negate feminism and indeed the concept of 'Women' or 'Woman' entire – the very basis of feminism. Which of course means that within masculinity studies anti-essentialism must do away with the idea of 'Men' or that terrible universalization 'Man' (even though there is no discussion of the impossibility therefore of 'masculinity' studies). The trouble is that from at least one point of view both of these consequences are eminently desirable. If we can eliminate the concepts of 'woman' and 'man' cannot we then dispel with sexism, prejudice and inequality? This of course is the argument coming out of both masculinity and family studies. However, this is to either ignore or forget that white men have and continue to experience benefit *as* white men. Merely theoretically denying the categories of 'man' or 'woman' not only denies current inequalities and prejudices but this denial will serve to hide them.

The entirety of the 'new project' as stated by masculinity and family studies is to *de*-centre the centre. As Stephen Whitehead puts it:

[Men] must come to some appreciation of how 'being a man' might affect and influence their expectations and experiences in a multitude of settings. For men, this act of self-reflexivity would be particularly profound for it would serve to *position them away from the centre* and, consequently, women and 'others' away from the margins" (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 352, my emphasis).

Whitehead is arguing that self-reflexivity for men will itself 'help' to de-centre them. He argues that, by positioning men *away* from the centre, 'others' will be positioned away from the margins. The only way I can see how this would work would be in a denial of the margins *as* margins thus evoking an inevitable denial of the inequality inherent in non-white and non-male people being placed in those margins. However, a de-centring of the centre is the new 'radical' project. Bob Pease writes: "[t]he postmodern concept of the decentred subject [...] has greater critical potential for provoking inner change in men than the humanist notion of an innate self. The aim is to decentre the dominating self of traditional masculinity and allow the possibility of fragmented and contradictory multiple selves" (Pease, 2000: 37). Postmodernism itself is deeply implicated in the project of decentring the centre. Postmodernism involves the move from the singular to the plural, from the universal to the particular, or the multiple *particularities* that people experience. Directly involved with these moves is the shift from disembodiment for white men to a notion of the embodied white man.³⁹ And in family studies Deborah Chambers attributes this phenomenon to postmodernism:

As a process through which global struggles about tradition and modernity are being articulated, postmodernism involves an undermining of authority by de-centring the orthodoxies of western culture. Its critique of universal values and fixed identities provides the political wherewithal for resisting racism, unitary nationalisms and other essentialist ideologies. As such it has been a critical force within the project of de-centring familism and exposing it as an essentialist ideology (Chambers, 2001: 165).

In this model, taking essentialism as one manifestation of the 'universal values and fixed identities' that Chambers cites, anti-essentialism will help to de-centre the centre and thus allow resistance to racism and sexism etc as the centre melts into the margins.

I would like to conclude this thesis with the suggestion that what is needed instead of a *de*-centring of the centre is a *re*-centring of the centre. In line with this idea my final suggestion in this thesis is that, taking just one of the strategies from postcolonialism and

³⁹ Interestingly, a part of the pluralization and multiplicity project is, paradoxically, a change from the concept of *men* (plural, in a group) to a concept of the individual *man* (on his own).

feminism white, middle class male academics should explore the transformative possibilities that I believe may be inherent in a rigorous perusal of the concept of strategic essentialism. Strategic essentialism *for* white men and family studies would acknowledge and look directly at the essentialized group of white men and at the essentialized, white, heterosexual, nuclear family. This would involve a very different making-visible project to the one advocated by masculinity and family studies. In relation to men, a pursued project of strategic essentialism for white men would allow a re-centring that acknowledges the grouping of 'white, middle class men' and acknowledges the benefits and privileges that accrue to this group. Instead of insisting that white men used to be invisible, a policy of overt strategic essentialism for white men would have to acknowledge that this was always impossible as it has been white men *as a group* that have taken most of the visible positions of power. In this case Whitehead's self-reflexivity and examination of 'being a man' would not lead to positioning men 'away from the centre' (Whitehead, 2002: 352), but to (re)positioning men *in* the centre.

Throughout this thesis I have been arguing that a mere denial of the centre will not change anything either politically or materially for anybody. It is because of this that I advocate an acknowledgement of the centre *as* the centre and the normal *as* the normal. An approach of strategic essentialism for white men would not mean, as with marginalized groups (and the current making-the-centre-visible project), a case of pursuing a collective political identity in order to resist and highlight oppression and marginalization, rather it would involve utilizing a collective identity in order to highlight, and perhaps later resist, the privilege, benefit and undue advantage that (already) so often comes *with* being a white, middle class male in our society or to belonging to a white, heterosexual, middle class nuclear family.

The making-the-centre-visible project heralded by masculinity and family studies, as we have seen, involves highlighting and exposing failure, doubt and individuality. A policy of strategic essentialism for white men and an acknowledgement of the privileged and essentialized white, heterosexual nuclear family also involves a making visible project, but in this case highlighting the centre *as* the centre and not as marginalized. In the current project the white gaze is not being used (as it is by the marginal) to demonstrate the *power* held by the white patriarchal centre and exercised as oppression, rather it is designed to display the *limits* in power from inside the white power base. A re-centring of the centre would involve using a technique of the margins proper in order to continue the work of the marginal in a different way and to continue to expose the power of the white centre and the benefit accruing to those who are nearest to the ideal of the normal. In this case the white gaze can be re-turned onto the centre in order to scrutinize it *as* the centre, not looking beneath the normal, but directly *at* it. In turn this would abolish the idea that is/was the marginal who have made white men visible, rather it could be seen that white men have always been visible as a group, but it was the voices of the marginal that were not heard, and the points of view of the marginal that were not taken into account. The silencing of the marginal will be acknowledged as the confessional of the centre will confess not inadequacy and failure, but benefit and continuing privilege.

This project would not involve a re-casting of the normal as the abnormal, but it would involve an acknowledgement of the normal as the normal, of where the category comes from and a discussion of the fact that the conditions and circumstances that allowed the categorization of what is normal in the first place have not really changed. One of the difficulties is of course the term 'normal' itself. However, it is possible to argue that an historical, contextualized, institutional and societal working concept of the normal still exists without having to argue that the 'normal' is fundamentally, universally and transcendentally 'true'. One of the ways that the normal still exists as a concept is through

aspiration and value. White middle class men and the heterosexual nuclear family, although shown to be imperfect are still the most represented of all groupings. Despite the fact that the representations show imperfection, ultimately what is suggested is confidence, comfort, affluence and a working knowledge of 'correct' cultural capital and taste. In our society these are very strong pulls and should not be underestimated. In June 2002 I attended a conference on class and hospitality (inclusion) at the University of Leeds. One of the main themes of the conference, surprisingly, appeared to be how awful it was living in the working class and many of the papers given and one entire film celebrated 'escape'. And what is there to escape *into* but the middle class? Thus despite being told that the normal doesn't exist, we are still half being told that it does, or a place that in the end looks very like it as we saw in chapter four under the aegis of 'autonomy', 'caring' and 'personal growth'. Again the values of the centre are universalized out and assumed to be the goals of everyone.

As we have seen, de-centring the centre by (saying one is) moving it into the margins will just not work. Acknowledging and recognizing the centre as the centre and then beginning a systematic, rigorous and probably slow deconstruction of material inequalities has more chance of working. It will not be easy and it will be painful (admitting that one may have achieved one's position because one is white and/or male or middle class rather than through merit will stretch anyone's good intentions). An engagement with the concept of essentialism would also enable a more open discussion about how and where society is set up to be essentialist and how institutions within society perpetuate and uphold this essentialism. This in turn might allow a sustained and rigorous critique and discussion of essentialism rather than a straight denial. As the collectivity of white men as a group is recognized, so in turn must be the biological categorizations (whether 'true' or not) that have either conferred benefit, or have imposed oppression and limitations upon different groups of people. People *have* been oppressed because of their biological 'colour', or

because their body type is coded as female, or disabled or old etc. However, these categorizations can only be fully acknowledged if it is also acknowledged that the very facts of being white and/or male carry privileges and benefits in themselves. In this case and at this time, anti-essentialism will only negate these facts. Essentialism within our society still exists and this in itself means that a straight denial and an uncomplicated anti-essentialism are not adequate tools to combat this type of continuing inequality that comes with racism and sexism.

Strategic essentialism is not an end-technique but a vital theoretical step and to paraphrase Spivak (1994), in this case the 'usefulness' of essentialism could be acknowledged rather than denied, and acknowledged in terms of its usefulness both as radical critique of patriarchy, sexism, racism etc, but also in terms of its current and historic usefulness *to* a sexist and racist patriarchal hegemony. As Spivak argues in relation to essentialism and the centred subject, when people reject such concepts out of hand: "[t]his shows, it seems to me, a real desire to take one kind of political position over against another, not to see that a way of thinking is about the danger of what is powerful and useful, and instead simply to think that that way of thinking is talking about how that dangerous thing doesn't exist" (Spivak, 1994: 162). Examining essentialism as it is now and as it works now might (eventually) enable deconstruction. Where the 'de-centring' strategy advocates equality and therefore sidesteps inequality, a strategy of re-centring will enable us to tackle inequality head on and still allow space for the acknowledgement of difference. Denial of essentialism as 'incorrect' and immoral will not. This is why I advocate the use of strategic essentialism for white, middle class men and for it to be examined in relation to current concepts of the ('proper') family, in turn leading to an acknowledgment that a category of the 'normal' nuclear family still exists.

To reiterate: my suggestion is that white, middle class men retrace several theoretical steps and try strategic essentialism themselves, only where oppressed groups have and are using it to highlight oppression and inequality, white men could employ it to identify themselves as a group in order to trace benefit, both historical *and* present. Employing strategic essentialism for white, middle class men would mean that benefit could be properly discussed and calculated and a meaningful dialogue between current centre and margins could be set up with both sides listening. In order for lasting change to occur a 'true' (historic) technique of the margins could be employed by white men in order to acknowledge (and thus be able to study properly) *benefit*. What is needed (first) is a re-acknowledgment and a re-positioning of the centre at the centre. A re-positioning of the centre at the centre will allow a far more accurate examination of power structures whilst (crucially) acknowledging that the power structures within our society are based on and aligned with essentialism. This in turn will acknowledge the margins and the true (continuing) extent of inequality in privilege, power and benefit in our society related to a (continuing) concept of normality. And if I am correct in my analysis that in the current climate, for the white, middle class centre of society it is a case of divided-we-stand and united-we-fall, then a re-appropriation of a collective, (temporarily) essentialized, white, middle class, heterosexual, (male), identity might precipitate that fall which is the stated aim of both masculinity and family studies.

It may be that hoping that this suggestion will be taken up is a little too utopian, but perhaps we should believe Silva and Smart, Neale, Morgan, Chambers, Allan, and Jagger and Wright when they propose as their goal the dismantling of the heterosexual, patriarchal, nuclear family as the idealized/privileged/essentialized family form in our society. And perhaps we should believe Peterson, Beynon, Connell, Pease, Whitehead and Barrett when they proclaim for pro-feminist masculinity studies that their fight is against "a culture that privileges men and masculinity" (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 13). There

is no point in denying the material reality of normality and only when the shame of it is faced up to will there be any real possibility for change. The shame of normality cannot be individualized, it must be seen as society's shame because as Mamdani asks: "if evil is thought of in social terms [...] then does not the demand for justice turn mainly, if not wholly, into a demand for systemic reform?" (Mamdani, 1997: 25). Theory always has transformative potential and through collective and collaborative work, by not appropriating work without acknowledging its original context, by acknowledging where academic work is positioned from, recognizing who it addresses and by listening to each other, we can work towards that systemic reform and can begin to look for true and sustained change.

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