A Qualitative Textual and Comparative Analysis of the Representation of Masculinity in the Action and Romantic Comedy Genres

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Abstract

This study is an exploration of the representation of masculinity in film, with particular focus on the way in which leading male characters in action genre and romantic comedy genre films represent masculinity. It is posited that masculinity is a construct, the meaning of which is dependent on the social context of the individual. Film as a social artefact and an agent of socialisation could have the potential of influencing individuals' understanding of the construct. An exploration of the variations of masculinity across genres is a first step in understanding possible influences of the definition of masculinity. A triangulation of textual analysis methods was used to analyse fictional characters according to a set of codes and 'real' world norms. The results of the findings from this study indicate that the way in which male characters are developed in each genre are different, with male lead characters from the action genre having more characteristics that align with the 'real' world norms of masculinity (Levant et al., 1992), than their romantic comedy genre counterparts.

Keywords: Film Theory, Genre Studies, Masculinity, Gender Studies, Action Genre, Romantic Comedy Genre

Introduction

> It is rare to find analyses that seek to specify in detail, in
> relation to particular films or groups of films, how
> heterosexual masculinity is inscribed and the mechanisms,
> pressures, and contradictions that inscription may involve.
>
> (Neale, 1993, p.9).

Identity constructs such as gender, ethnicity, class, nationality, and sexual orientation are social constructs that differ across time and culture (O'Dowd, 2003, p.41). The study of masculinity, in particular, is predicated on the theory that there is a difference between an individual's sex and gender. An individual's sex is considered to be the biological identification as either male or female, and gender is the socially constructed roles that are hinged upon a culturally and historically determined set of possibilities which come to be associated with masculinity and femininity (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.214).

In the 1980's theorists began to examine social gender issues more broadly than the previously focused feminist studies. Masculinity, it was proposed, also needed analysis (Elmore, 2007, p.931; Jeffords, 1993, p.196). The so called 'men's movement' was developed to reassess men's traditional roles in society, and the change thereof (at the time with particular focus on society in the United States of America) (Jeffords, 1993, p.196).

The purpose of this study was to determine the differences, if any, in the way masculinity is represented in the action genre versus the romantic comedy genre. To do this, research conducted on theoretically derived norms of masculinity (Levant, Hirsch, Celentano, Cozza, Hill, MacEachern, Marty & Schnedekerl, 1992) was used to compare the characteristics of the male lead characters in the aforementioned genres with those that are argued to be 'real' world norms. The 'real' world norms used within this study were taken from those that were developed for the Male Role Norms Inventory (MRNI) by Levant et al (1992). The MRNI was developed to assess masculinity across culture, race and gender to determine what kinds of masculine behaviour is expected from, and perpetuated by, individuals of different backgrounds and social contexts. Avoidance of femininity, fear and hatred of homosexuals, self-reliance, aggression, achievement/ status, non-relational attitudes towards sex, and restrictive emotionality are the seven theoretically-derived norms of masculinity used in the

MRNI that was also used to analyse the representation of masculinity in the action and romantic comedy genres. In bringing attention to differences across genres, the masculine characteristics of the male lead characters from the purposively chosen sample of films can be tabulated as an indication of the masculine characteristics used to construct characters for these two genres.

When taken at face value one can assume that there will be differences between film characters from different genres (whether main characters or supporting characters). Different genres are produced so that audiences are aware, on entering the cinema, what to expect from the story line, characters and film techniques (lighting, camera angles, soundtrack etc.) (Bordwell & Thompson, 2001, p.97). However, as stated by Schatz (2004, p.694) "we can appreciate difference only when we begin to examine films systematically, when we consider the systems whereby an individual film "makes meaning". A systematic analysis of the representations of masculinity in film, would offer more meaningful insight as to how masculinity is represented in modern film across genres.

The research question within this study is then, what differences, are apparent in the representations of masculinity from the male lead characters of action genre films, when compared to the chosen sample of romantic comedy genre films? The purpose of this study was to qualitatively analyse the representations of male lead characters in a purposefully selected sample of films from two genres, the action and romantic comedy, to determine where on the continuum from hypo- to hyper-masculinity the characters fall, thereby identifying the masculine characteristics prevalent in each genre.

Literature Review

The syntactic approach to genre classification is used within this study, because the syntactic approach to genre classification is defined by structural relationships (and as such can also be aligned with the structural approach) between elements that carry thematic and social meaning (Jancovich, 2000, pp.24-25). Similar to differing cultures, each genre has a different set of conventions that are used to make sense of society and reflect 'reality' (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.28). For example, over time the roles of men in society have changed; and as a result the representations of men in film have changed. This can be explained with the concept of thematic myths, which are the ideological concerns of a particular genre.

As an example of a thematic myth, Benshoff and Griffin (2009, p.105) state that the thematic myth of the western genre could arguably be about bringing civilisation to the western wilderness. The strong individual protagonist uses righteous violence to protect the American way by taming the indigenous people of the western frontier, thereby nullifying any threat to the expansion of American civilisation. The thematic myth of the film is what makes a genre relevant or irrelevant to audiences depending on its significance to the social concerns audiences are experiencing at the time. If a film's thematic myth is valid to the lived experience of the audience and correlates with their sociological interests, the film (and genre) will be successful (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.28). This concurs with Basinger (2001, p.109) who explained that in order for films to remain popular, they have to be adapted to the current social situation of the audience.

It stands to reason then that genres will change with time, as the sociological interests of the audience changes. A current example of this can be seen with the number of films released after the September 11 attacks in the United States. Films like *War, Inc.* (2008)*, Syriana* (2005)*, Jarhead* (2005)*, Body of Lies* (2008) and *Brothers* (2009), to name a few, are all films that have themes based on war; some being specific to the war in the Middle East, some reflecting on the politics of war, while others deal with experiences of soldiers during war time. As one examines film and the era of its release, one can begin to see the way in which the characters in film are reflective of the social and political issues of the time (Ayers, 2008, p.45). This causes a feedback loop between the audience and the producers of film, with certain genre's 'dying out' when the thematic myth is no longer relevant (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.28).

Historians can, when studying genres, learn about the culture that produced them (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.28). As an example of this, Bordwell and Thompson (2001, p.100) make use of the 'reflectionist' approach to genre analysis and genre innovations and makes use of the film *Aliens* (1986) to explain the theory. The film's premise is that of an alien that boards a mining ship in space and proceeds to inseminate its young into the onboard crew members, thereby killing them. The female protagonist, Ripley, spends the majority of the film fending off attacks from the alien and eventually begins to hunt down the alien in order to survive. Ripley is argued to be a reflection of the 1970's Women's Movement as she epitomises the duality of independent warrior as she defends herself and others from the alien, and nurturing

care giver (positive traits considered fundamental to femininity) as she takes on the role of protector of a young orphan (Bordwell & Thompson, 2001, p.100).

With regards to masculinity in film, Clarke (2006, p.19) asserts that the discourse within Vietnamese War films is indicative of the ideals assigned to masculinity at any given point over the last 30 years. Clarke (2006, p.22) reports that from the 1980's to 2000 the portrayal of male leadership characteristics changed from that of something that should be trained and instilled in men, to something that is inherent in men. Clarke (2006, p.22) compares the film *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) to *Tigerland* (2000) to exemplify how in the 1980's there was an attempt to re-masculinise men in society. This was done by portraying the leadership qualities of the characters in films like *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) as something that men could learn to have; this re-masculinisation being a consequence of the confusion about the war, as well as a reaction against feminism that was building in popularity at the time. Connell (1993, p.599) states that in 1970's and 1980's the popular belief was that masculinity was something that could be learnt from role models. In the film *Tigerland* (2000)*,* however, these same qualities were portrayed as something inherent, which Clarke (2006, p.22) argues indicates that the concept of re-masculinisation had not been successful and therefore had disappeared and was replaced with the idea of 'natural heroes' with natural abilities that men understood and used.

Character Representations as Social Constructions

Benshoff and Griffin (2009, p.426) define representations as the process of presenting an image of something in order to tell a story or communicate an idea. Films are argued to be a 'window on the world' and thereby reflecting 'reality'; however, the selection of representations is complex and selective and arguably reinforcing, according to feminist theory, the values of a patriarchal society (Nelmes 1999, p.273). Lacey (2009, p.147), in contrast, argues that within media studies it would be naïve to think that the world has no effect on meaning. It is for this reason that Lacey (2009, p.147) supports the constructionist approach to representation; explaining that representations in the media are able to construct meaning, but this meaning is based on some form of material reality. This is supported by Barker's (2000, p.390) definition of representation as he states that representation is the depiction of another object or practice from the 'real' world, and these representations are constitutive of culture, meaning and knowledge. Jones (1999, p.308) explains that representation is a social process that takes place as an interaction between the reader of the

text and the text itself. It is a production of signs that reflect ideas and attitudes. These representations can be attributed to the organisation of editing, *mise-en-scène*, narrative patterns, and sound (Jones, 1999, p.308). Film texts are then structured in a specific manner, and the representations being expressed are viewed and understood by the audience when making sense of the combination of elements that constitute the structure of the film.

Cohen (2001, p.246) explains that identification with television and film characters plays an important contribution to the development of self-identity. This is defined as an individual's perception of self and how that person thinks others perceive him or her. Cohen (2001, p.246) explains this by stating that individuals, through viewing media, are able to experience social reality from different perspectives, which then assists individuals in developing their own identity and social attitudes. The question then is what ideas then are being communicated by male lead characters in recent releases of the romantic comedy and action genres? In order to answer this question, one would first have to determine what forms of masculinity these representations are taking through the male characters in film. Characterisation can be described as those characters in films that are similar in type with regards to roles, personal qualities, motivations, goals and behaviour and are sometimes stereotypical in nature (Chandler, 1997).

Masculinity has been a subject of much discussion with regards to television and film, particularly with the changing shape of the physical male form and masculinity (Ruddell, 2007, p.499). Over the last 60 years there have been changes in the lived realities of men in westernised society, all of which it can be argued, have been mirrored in the changing thematic myths of film as well as the film's protagonists. Benshoff and Griffin (2009, p.259) give examples of the kinds of male characterisations in different genres: the lone cowboy bringing justice in the western genre; the violent criminal success seeker in gangster films; and the man dealing with his morals under the hardship of battle in war films. Lacey (2009, pp.167-172) illustrates the evolution of the representation of masculinity in film, using one story within one genre (the western) re-made 50 years apart. *3:10 to Yuma* (1957; 2007); was a film first released in 1957 and represented the male protagonist as a family man struggling to prove his 'manhood' to his wife. Remade in 2007, the film depicts the male protagonist as having to defend his 'manhood' to his son. This change is attributed to a 21st century, post 9/11 American need for men to return to 1960's-70's patriarchal values (Lacey, 2009, p.169).

A comparative analysis of the representation of masculinity between these two films, Lacey (2009, p.169) argues, brings to the fore the evolution of masculinity; where once men had to prove their manhood to their wives; they now have to prove it to other men as well. The inference taken from this evolution is that men no longer take masculinity for granted, masculinity is not something that is automatically attributed to all men; they have to prove themselves worthy of it. The evolution, however, spanned over 50 years. During this time different representations of masculinity were expressed across different genres and in different films.

'Real' world masculinity norms

Pleck (cited in Levant & Richmond, 2007, p.131) admits that masculinity ideologies are diverse, but notes that there is "a common constellation of standards and expectations associated with the traditional male role in the Western world". In terms of masculinity, masculine ideology is defined by Levant and Richmond (2007, p.131) as an individual's internalisation of cultural beliefs and attitudes towards masculinity. It is with these common constellations in mind that Levant and colleagues developed the gender role strain paradigm and Male Role Norms Inventory (MRNI) to assess traditional and non-traditional masculinity ideologies.

The seven theoretically-derived norms of traditional masculinity ideology measured by the MRNI, as previously mentioned, were developed to measure traditional and non-traditional attitudes towards masculinity. The MRNI uses 57 normative statements measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Of the 57 statements higher scores on 45 of the statements indicate adherence to traditional masculinity ideology, while the remaining statements belong to the non-traditional subscale for masculinity ideology (Levant & Richmond, 2007, p.132; Levant et al., 1992).

Research using the MRNI has revealed variances in gender norms across ages, genders, sexual orientation and race (Levant & Richmond, 2007, p.134). This further emphasises the importance of the cultural and social aspects of how masculinity is defined. In Levant's studies African American men scored highest on the traditional sub-scale of the MRNI thereby endorsing the traditional masculinity ideology more than Latin American men and European men, who scored lower respectively (Levant & Richmond, 2007, p.134).

Men whose scores indicated fewer identifiable indicators within the seven theoretically derived norms and therefore less likely to endorse traditional masculinity ideology, are more likely to be accepting of racial differences, gender equality, and paternal involvement in child care (Levant & Richmond, 2007, p.142). If society and culture play a role in the way in which men (of all ages) understand masculinity (Levant & Richmond, 2007, p.141; Levant, 1996, p.259; Zaitchik & Mosher, 1993, p.230), and film is a part of modern culture, it is important to analyse how much leading men in film are conforming to traditional masculinity ideology.

It is because the seven norms of masculinity for the MRNI have not only been theoretically derived but also tested by Levant et al (1992) that these norms were chosen to be used for this study. It is only the norms and the definitions of these norms that are taken from the MRNI to analyse the leading male characters from the chosen sample of films. The reason for using these norms is that in order to effectively compare the characters and their masculine traits, 'real' traits and behaviours would be required to form the baseline off of which each character could be compared. If the MRNI can be used to determine a man's place on a continuum of masculinity (from hypo- to hyper-masculinity) then it seems appropriate to use the same criteria from the MRNI to determine the kind of masculinity being represented by male characters in film. Do these characters have the same characteristics of masculinity as described in the MRNI and if so where on this same continuum do male characters within and across genres fall?

Methodology

Babbie (2007, p.378) describes the purpose of qualitative research as discovering of underlying meanings and patterns of relationships. These patterns and the underlying meaning of social phenomena are analysed through various forms of language. Durrheim (1999, p.43) states that qualitative data is collected in the form of 'language', whether it is written, spoken or visuals translated into 'language', as opposed to data collected in numerical form within quantitative research. An analysis of media texts is then, by definition, grounded within the interpretivist paradigm, as Crotty (1998, p.87) states that a characteristic of interpretivism is the study of texts, in order to gain an understanding of the meaning within texts. Texts, in the form of films, were analysed within this study. Therefore 'language' was used not only as a tool to 'read' and make sense of the text but also to gather the data so as to

interpret the text.

The interpretation of the texts was done through the identification and analysis of patterns within and across each text. A key assumption of basic research is that the world is patterned and that these patterns can be identified (Patton, 2002, p.224). It is the patterns of symbols used to represent masculinity in different film genres that were identified, analysed and described within this study. Furthermore, descriptive research, Du Plooy (2002, p.49) notes, requires that the results of the study include a description of the "characteristics of phenomena, or relations between a number of variables, as accurately as possible". Included in the analysis was therefore a description of the identified similarities and differences between the sample of male lead characters from the action genre films and the romantic comedy genre films.

Population and Sampling

Du Plooy (2002, p.101) suggests the use of an accessible population to ensure ease of access to the population, as well as to minimise cost, time and other resources. The population was consequently reduced from the large general population of action and romantic comedy films to those listed on a revolving list of the top earning films distributed by Ster-Kinekor within South Africa (Cinemark: rolling top 50 [n.d.]).

The films analysed were drawn from the accessible population as a nonprobability sample. The small accessible population and explorative nature of the study, are characteristics that Du Plooy (2002, p.113) asserts are befitting of a nonprobability sampling method. The purposive sample of films (see table 3.1) from the action genre were *The Tourist* (2010), *Knight and Day* (2010), *Unstoppable* (2010) and from the romantic comedy genre were *Just Go With It* (2011), *Killers* (2010), and *The Back-up Plan* (2010).

Film title	Date of release	Director	Cast Name of character (name of actor in brackets)	Production company	Genre
Knight and Day	2010	James Mangold	Roy Miller (Tom Cruise) June (Cameron Diaz)	Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation	Action
Unstoppable	2010	Tony Scott	Will Collson (Chris Pine) Frank (Denzel Washington)	Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation	Action
The Tourist	2010	Florian Henckel Von Donnersmarck	Frank Tupelo (Johnny Depp) Elise (Angelina Jolie)	Columbia Pictures	Action
Killers	2010	Robert Luketic	Spencer Aimes (Ashton Kutcher) Jen (Katherine Heigl)	Lionsgate	Romantic Comedy
The Back-up Plan	2010	Alan Poul	Stan (Alex O'Loughlin) Zoe (Jennifer Lopez)	CBS Films	Romantic Comedy
Just Go With It	2011	Denis Dugan	Danny Maccabee (Adam Sandler) Katherine (Jennifer Aniston)	Sony Picture	Romantic Comedy

Table 3.1 Summary outlining film production details for sample

Research methodology

Texts, McKee (2003, p.15) argues, are "the only empirical evidence we have of how other people make sense of the world". A textual analysis of the male lead characters in the

romantic comedy and action genres is an attempt to ascertain how masculinity is made sense of through the construction of meaning and, therefore, understood in the context of contemporary American film.

The data collected, for the textual analysis, involved the combination of Hsieh and Shannon's (2007, p.115) directed qualitative content analysis and Neuman's (2007, p.330) three-stage coding process. Figure 3.1 is a visual representation of the combination of these two methods. The combination was used to ensure a thorough analysis of the data, as the bulk of the data was reduced to more manageable pieces by coding the data. This method also allows for the researcher to make use of information gathered from the literature review and apply it to identify themes. The result of the combination of the two processes is therefore a step-by-step guideline that is not linear but rather flexible enough for the coding and analysis to take place during the viewing of the films, data collection as well as interpretation of the data.

Throughout the research process careful consideration was given to the structural meaning of key concepts used within the context of this study. Also, detailed descriptions of the stated actions and opinions were outlined in order to clarify how each was embedded in the context of the study. These actions were taken to ensure a "rich and credible account" of the research, in order to meet the requirements of credibility and dependability of the research as explained by Durrheim and Wassenaar (1999, pp.63-64).
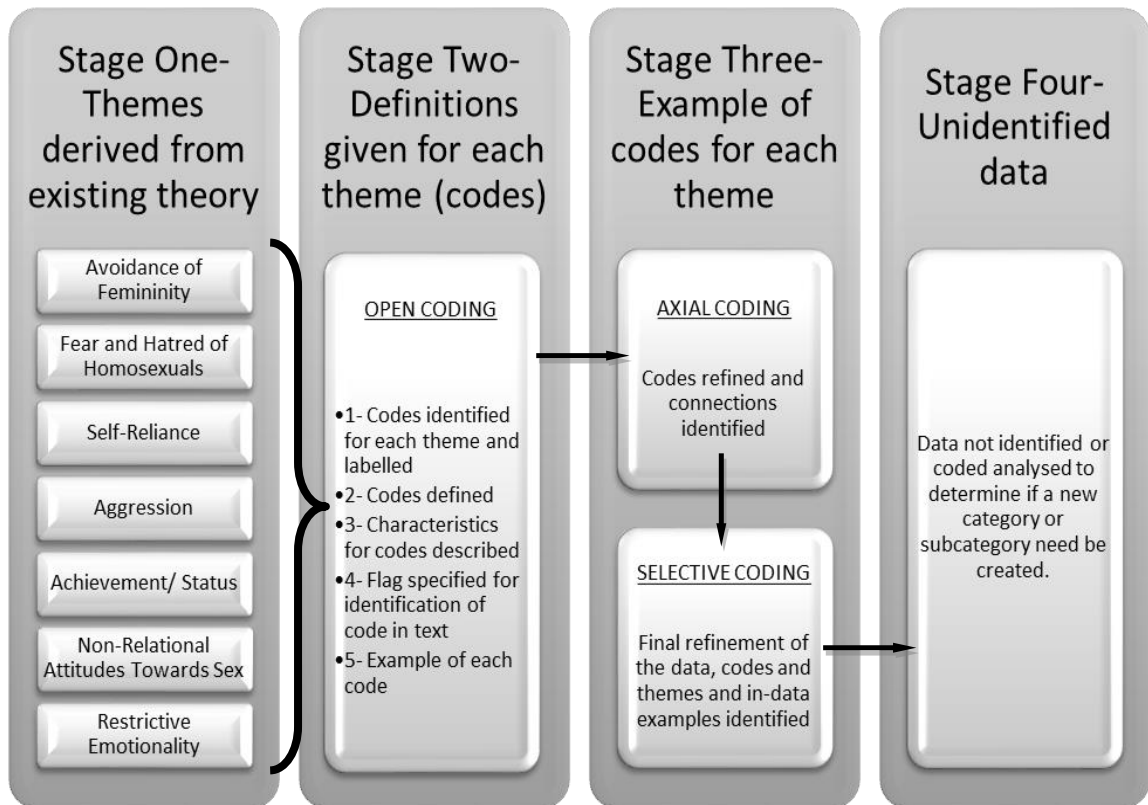
Figure 3.1 Conceptual framework of the combined data collection methods

Adapted from Hsieh and Shannon (2007, pp.115-116) and Neuman (2007, pp.330-332)

Data Analysis

In the initial stage of directed qualitative content analysis, the existing research was used to identify key concepts as initial coding categories or themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2007, p.115). With regards to this study, the seven norms of masculinity, as mentioned previously, were derived from Levant's existing research (Levant & Richmond, 2007; Richmond & Levant, 2003; Levant et al., 1992), and used as the key themes of masculinity that the male lead characters in the sample of films were judged against.

The second stage of the analysis was the process of using Neuman's (2007, pp.331-332) open coding method in order to define each theme (Hsieh & Shannon, 2007, p.115). It was only from the third stage of the qualitative content analysis that interrelationships between the data, the codes and the themes emerged. Hsieh and Shannon (2007, p.115) explain that following the creation of the codes the researcher can begin highlighting those parts of the data that fit with the created codes and begin linking these back to the themes. In this study, this process was facilitated through making use of the second and third stages of Neuman's

(2007, p.331-332) three-stage coding process (see fig 3.1).

The aim during the third stage was to find examples of the themes and connections between codes identified by the previous stages. Those actions that exemplified and fitted with the themes, as well as those that were in direct contrast to the themes were noted to be used as examples during the discussion of the findings. The fourth and final stage took place once all the data had been coded and connections were made to the themes. Any data not coded was further analysed to determine if new codes or sub-codes needed to be created (Hsieh & Shannon, 2007, p.116).

It is from these new codes or sub-codes that it is possible to create new knowledge and extend the theories used during the analysis of the sample of texts. Conceptually similar instances were noted and added together, whereas instances that differ were also noted and discussed. Instances of similarity include those instances where characters from different films had characteristics that represent masculinity in the same way. For example, if characters from two or more of the sample films made homophobic statements, this was noted as a similarity. Once all three films were compared to one another, the findings from the analysis were compared to the combined analysis of the second genre. Once all three films from the romantic comedy genre were compared to one another and the three films from the action genre were compared to one another, the resultant comparisons were compared to identify similarities and difference between genres.

Figure 3.2 is a visual representation of the above explanation of how each film was analysed and then compared to the other films within the same genre, and finally compared between genres
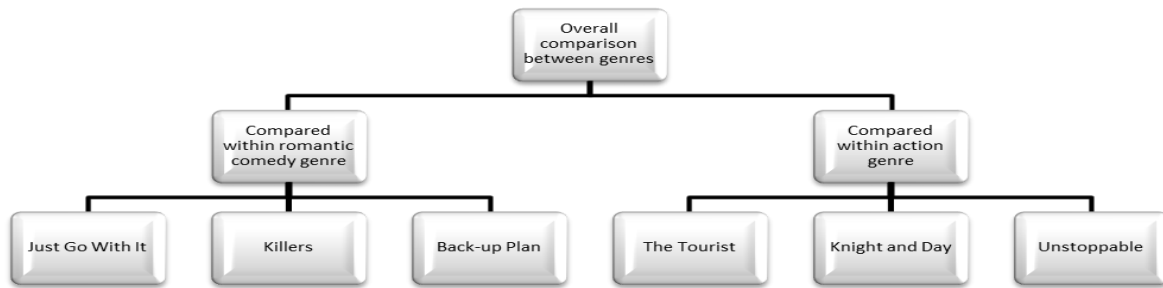
Fig 3.2 Visual representation of the stages of the comparisons

Findings

After completing the textual analysis it is indicated that the characters from the action genre (Frank from *The Tourist* (2010)*,* Roy from *Knight and Day* (2010)*,* Will from *Unstoppable* (2010)) do exhibit more masculine characteristics than those from the romantic comedy genre (Danny from *Just Go With It* (2011), Spencer from *Killers* (2010), and Stan from *The Back-up Plan* (2010)) (see table 4.1). If it is argued that one character is more masculine than another, that character is argued to have more masculine characteristics that align with the themes. However, it must be noted that these representations are complex and often share in certain characteristics and differ in others, indicating that what is perceived as masculinity is complex even in film, with variations within and across genres.

The more links that can be made between the characters' actions, behaviours, social artefacts and dialogue, and each of the themes, the more masculine the character was considered to be. However, three variations were discovered during the analysis. When identifying the themes in the coded data it was discovered that; firstly, some of the characters had characteristics that aligned with the themes. Secondly, some of the characters had characteristics that aligned with the themes; however, the extent to which they aligned with the themes was less than other characters. Thirdly, there were characters that had no characteristics that aligned with any of the themes.

As an example, out of the six male lead characters three characters had no characteristics that could be aligned with the aggression theme: Frank (action), Danny and Stan (both romantic

comedy) (see table 4.1). The remaining three characters had characteristics that could be aligned with the aggression theme, however, the aggression characteristics of one character (Spencer – romantic comedy) was less than those of the two characters from the action genre (Roy and Will). A possible explanation for this, and a possible topic for future research, could be that the expectation exists that the characters from the action genre will be more physical, or rather more physically aggressive, as this is argued to be the nature of the action genre.

One theme that none of the characters could be aligned to was that of fear and hatred of homosexuals. None of the characters had characteristics that could be aligned to this theme as none of the characters came into contact with homosexual characters, or discussed homosexuality in any way (see table 4.1).

Each character in the romantic comedy genre (Danny, Spencer and Stan) and two characters from the action genre (Roy and Frank) at one point decline the offer of sex. This is in opposition to the "non-relational attitudes towards sex" theme. If they were to adhere to the expectations espoused within this theme, each character should have, without fail, accepted each offer for sexual gratification. The characters from the romantic comedy genre, and two characters from the action genre, then do not behave in a way that their actions could be aligned with the "non-relational attitudes towards sex" theme.

There are two themes that indicate a distinct difference between the characters from the action genre, as compared to the characters from the romantic comedy genre. The characters in the action genre have characteristics that align with both the self-reliance and avoidance of femininity (see table 4.1) themes, whereas the characters from the romantic comedy have no characteristics that align with either of these two themes. This could be an indication that characters in the action genre are more likely to portray to a patriarchal understanding of masculinity.

The action genre characters are fiercely independent, relying little on others to complete their tasks. They volunteer for, and accomplish dangerous tasks, without expecting or receiving much help from others. There is one exception in the action genre sample who relies on his female counterpart to complete tasks (evading capture, manipulation of police officials etcetera). From the romantic comedy characters, alternatively, rely on their female

counterparts throughout each respective film. Furthermore each romantic comedy character participates in a pastime that could be considered stereotypically feminine (examples include; interior design, women's clothes shopping, and cheese making). The three action genre characters do not participate or show interest in, these sorts of behaviours and therefore are portrayed as having no characteristics that could be considered feminine.

The final two themes, achievement and status, and restrictive emotionality, are also more prevalent in the action genre, although there are some instances of these themes evident in the romantic comedy genre but not to the same extent (see table 4.1). Each of the characters in the action genre has characteristics that are aligned with the restrictive emotionality theme, as they express little with regards to their emotions. Alternatively, the characters from the romantic comedy genre are particularly expressive of their emotions. The romantic comedy characters are represented as being both verbally and physically affectionate and unashamed to express how they are feeling to others.

The achievement theme has a similar trend to the restrictive emotionality theme. All the characters from the action genre were identified as being so motivated to achieve their goals, that they would risk not only their own safety but also their relationships with significant others. Only one of the characters from the romantic comedy genre was identified as being as motivated. Danny takes a break from his work and places the relationship with his assistant and friend at risk, in order to achieve his goal. The rest of the characters from the romantic comedy genre, however, begin the film as being ambitious and driven but soon change when they meet their female counterparts. It is here that the characters from the romantic comedy genre begin to veer away from a patriarchal understanding of masculinity as they become reliant on their significant others, becoming more considerate of the safety and needs of others, more than achieving their own personal goals.

The following page includes a table with a visual representation of the above discussion (see table 4.1). The table indicates which characters had characteristics that aligned with each of the seven themes, which characters had characteristics that did not, and finally which characters had characteristics but these characteristics were fewer than outlined within the theme.

Charac-ter	Themes						
	Fear and hatred of homosexuality	Self reliance	Aggression	Achievement and status	Non-relational attitudes towards sex	Restrictive emotionality	Avoidance of femininity
Action genre							
Roy		■	■	■		■	■
Will		▨	■	■		■	■
Frank						■	■
Romantic comedy genre							
Spencer			▨	▨			
Danny				■	▨	▨	
Stan							

	Characteristics not aligned to theme
▨	Has some characteristics; however, characteristics fewer than outlined within the theme
■	Has characteristics aligned to theme

Table 4.1 Visual representation of character alignment with themes

What is indicated in Table 4.2 is that no two characters have exactly the same characteristics of masculinity. The number and depth of characteristics that align with the themes are different for each character. However, there does seem to be a pattern in that the characters from the action genre have more characteristics that align with the seven MRNI themes, than the three characters from the romantic comedy genre. The assumption then being that action genre characters are portrayed to be more masculine than their romantic comedy counterparts.

There is an alignment of the characteristics given to men in the action genre and the seven themes; whereas with the romantic comedy genre there is a misalignment between the seven themes and the characteristics given to male characters. However, it is noteworthy that each character in those instances where the characters from either genre did possess some of the same masculine qualities; it was the depth or frequency of these characteristics that differed. As an example, under the aggression theme, for the most part the characters from the action genre showed more characteristics of aggression than the characters from the romantic comedy genre. However, Spencer from *Killers* (2010) (romantic comedy genre) has some characteristics that align with the aggression theme, but Spencer's aggression is only prevalent when either himself or his wife are threatened. For this reason Spencer's characteristics do not fit with the aggression theme to the same extent as the aggressive characteristics seen from the action genre. Characters from the action genre are more likely to be physically aggressive without provocation; being physically violent when frustrated or angry, or using aggressive tactics to gather information, or gain entry into restricted areas (as examples).

The male lead characters from the action genre portray characteristics that are similar to the characteristics Kimmel (1987) explain as men's reaction to the changing roles of women at the end of the 19th century. In order to compensate for the increasingly dominant roles women were fulfilling in society men began to veer away from any feminised behaviour. Avoiding emotion and nurturing connections with others, men were attempting to return the equilibrium of gender roles back to where men were in control. Male characters with a need to be in control were more prevalent in the films from the action genre. Roy from *Knight and Day* (2010) (action genre) is in control over June and Will from *Unstoppable* (2010) (action genre) attempts to remain in control of his relationship with his wife. Roy refers little to

June's judgment and makes all decisions for her. Will becomes aggressive when his relationship with his wife is threatened; he is angry at the fact that his wife has the ability to control their relationship by having a restraint warrant against him, keeping him away from her and their son.

Alternatively, the male lead characters from the romantic comedy genre are aligned with the men that Kimmel (1987) explains supported the women's movement of the late 19th century. These men were supportive not only in protests, but took on previously feminised household routines in order to be supportive as they believed in equality. It would appear that the men in the romantic comedy genre are a reflection of these same beliefs. The women in the romantic comedy genre participate in the story line as equals, and are on occasion more dominant than the lead male characters. The male characters from the romantic comedy genre either gave up, or offer to give up their own career goals in order to support the women in their lives. The decisions made with regards to their relationships, homes and friends centre on their female counterparts.

The variations between the male lead characters of the action genre and the male lead characters in the romantic comedy genre are exemplars for the different perspectives on masculinity. The male action genre characters are representative of the strong, independent masculinity that was being promoted to compensate for what was argued to be the increasingly dominant role femininity was playing in society. While the romantic comedy male characters, it could be argued, are representative of men who accept and support the equality of women, not only in the workforce, but in the home as well.

The proposed reason for these variations across the six characters is that masculine behaviour is not only a social construction, but is also context specific. What the varying roles of the men portrayed across the sample of films is indicating is that the male characters' actions and behavioural characteristics within a film could be dependent on the immediate situation and not necessarily because of the film's genre. Just as Johnny Depp portrayed action genre character, Frank Tupelo (*The Tourist,* 2010) as a man of weakness, vulnerability and dependence his behaviour was required for the situation that he found himself in. His masculinity is in question from the start of the film, until the audience is told that Frank is in fact the highly sought after international criminal; it is here that the audience becomes aware

of the ruse that Frank and Elise developed and implemented to protect both of them from capture. His masculine behavioural characteristics are secondary to his goal of avoiding capture from the Interpol agent pursuing him; it could be argued then that this is why he is represented as being less masculine when compared to the other lead male characters.

The same could be said for Spencer from *Killers* (2010) and Will Colson from *Unstoppable* (2010)*; these men are portrayed as self-reliant, driven, aggressive and emotionally stoic when the situation required them to be so. The fact that they also exhibited behaviour that can be considered less masculine is perhaps more an indication of their ability to identify the appropriate behavioural characteristics that would best suit the situation within which they found themselves. For example, from the start to the end of the film Will gradually subsumes command to Frank (his co-worker) when he realises that it is Frank that has the experience and knowledge to save them, the train, and the small town in danger from the runaway train. Similarly, Spencer is violent when attacked but emotionally vulnerable when in the presence of his wife.

Roy as a character has numerous characteristics that can be linked back to each of the seven themes: self-reliance, aggression, restrictive emotionality and avoidance of femininity. It is for this reason that of the six characters Roy is considered to be displaying the most features of hegemonic masculinity. Will is then second to Roy, followed by Danny and Spencer from the romantic comedy genre, respectively. Stan and Frank are the two characters who display the least masculine characteristics as described within the seven themes. Much of how these two characters are represented is in opposition to the qualities and characteristics advocated for in each of the themes.

As stated previously, what the analysis indicates is that masculinity in film is just as complex as it is for the men living the construct. The kind of masculinity being represented only in part is dependent on the genre of the film. What also needs to be taken into account is the situational context within which the character is placed. It is perhaps then not as simple as labelling a character as less masculine purely because he is in a romantic comedy or particularly hyper-masculine because he is in an action film.

Conclusion

It is emphasised within this study that there are variations of masculinity being represented in and across this sample. The six films from the sample all offer versions of masculinity that differ on a continuum from hypo-masculinity to hyper-masculinity. Each character differing in the range of masculine behavioural characteristics thereby offering a varied understanding of what masculinity entails.

If working from the premise that the action genre is targeted at a predominantly male audience, and the romantic comedy genre targeted at a predominantly female audience and the representations of masculinity across these two genres differ to the extent that they do, and in the way that they do, then it is understandable that there is a discrepancy between men's and women's socially constructed definition of masculinity. If Stanley (2006, p.236), Hardt (2004, p.106) and O'Day (2004, p.204) are correct and gender representations in film are amalgamations of 'real' world understandings of gender, which audiences learn from, these differing representations could be a contributing factor to men and women's differing opinions of what it means to be masculine.

As a social artefact, film can be argued to be a part of an individual's social context and can also be considered an agent of socialisation. The findings from this study then allude to the fact that conflicting understandings of masculinity could arise as audiences of romantic comedies are being exposed to men in film that are emotionally available, willing to participate in activities that could stereotypically be considered feminine, and are able to rely on female counterparts. While audiences of the action genre, alternatively, are watching films where men are shown to be self-reliant, do not discuss their emotions, are highly driven, and often prefer to handle opposition aggressively as opposed to verbal conflict resolution. A possible avenue for future research would be to determine the influence these varying filmic representations of masculinity have on individuals' judgements and perceptions of the masculinity of men. The possibility exists that these two genres are contributing to opposing expectations of masculinity. Some individuals expecting men to behave like romantic leading men; while other individuals expect men to behave like action heroes.

After looking at numerous biological, psychological and social definitions of gender, and in particular masculinity Gilmore (1990) explains in his book *Manhood in the making: Cultural*

concepts of masculinity, that masculinity is both a cultural and social construct that is dependent on the individual's cultural upbringing, and social context. Taylor (2008, p.128) argues something similar, stating that masculinity is highly contingent on historical and personal context and is therefore unstable and constantly changing. The findings from this study indicate that the masculinity portrayed in film is also unstable and constantly changing. In the sample of films masculinity is portrayed as a broad, complex construct with each character representing different aspects of masculinity. From emotional to stoic, from placid to aggressive, from dependant to independent; each character is developed from a collection of characteristics that assist in creating a representation of masculinity for the audience. The analysis across the sample of films indicates that although the trend in the action genre is to represent masculinity as more aggressive, more driven, more self-reliant and less emotional than the masculinity in the romantic comedies, each character represents masculinity with a different and complex collection of characteristics.

If character representations are considered as social constructions it can be argued that masculinity in the 'real' world is also complex with numerous variations in characteristics. Furthermore, future representations of masculinity on film should continue to be broad and complex in order to keep the thematic myth relevant to audiences, thereby keeping audiences interested and ensuring audience engagement. The implication of this is that masculinity should be considered multi-faceted. This is particularly true if film is analysed as a reflection of society as this would mean various amalgamations of characteristics should be considered as legitimate expressions of masculinity. The idea of masculinity should then not be one of a continuum between hyper- and hypo-masculinity, but should rather be replaced with a much broader understanding of such a complex construct.

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