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WALK LIKE A MAN: HEGEMONIC
MASCULINITY AND UN-MADE MEN IN *THE*
SOPRANOS

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters by Research
in English Literature.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is intended to provide a re-evaluation of *The Sopranos* in response to recent contributions made to the field of film and television studies regarding the rise of “Quality Television” (Albrecht 2015 p. 5) and the “male-centred serial” (Lotz 2014 p. 21) as a popular medium. The thesis will examine the degree to which the depiction of a crisis in masculinity in *The Sopranos* can be said to represent a patriarchal or feminist configuration of masculinity (Lotz 2014 p. 35), and to what extent it either reaffirms or repudiates Connell’s (2005) model of hegemonic masculinity. The argument will focus on three main areas; the embodiment of masculinity, the performance of masculinity, and the presentation of violence in *The Sopranos*. The argument of this essay is that *The Sopranos* employs gendered processes of pleasure, unpleasure and identification to deconstruct hegemonic masculinity as part of a demythologising project which uses affective learning to achieve its aims (Tan 1996 p.28), and in doing so, the thesis suggests that *The Sopranos* creates a space for imagining new ways of performing masculinity and new, feminist configurations of male gender identity based on the acceptance and internalisation of “prohibit[ed] forms of emotion, attachment and pleasure” (Connell 2005 p. 85). The thesis uses Connell’s sociology of hegemonic masculinity to interrogate the presentation of masculinity in the text because hegemonic masculinity remains the most “visible” and culturally “honoured” masculinity (Connell 2002), and as such, constitutes a standard by which all marginalised masculinities are measured. The idea of catharsis as the key characteristic of pleasure is used to explore the possibility that both viewer identification and viewing pleasure in *The Sopranos* are codified as feminine. The thesis argues that the central tension of the series is the internal conflict between masculinity and femininity, and that masculinity is presented as a “Complication” (Tan 1996 p.59) in the narrative which generates tension; a tension which is only relieved through the reaffirmation of femininity.

NOTE ON THE TEXT:

The thesis will provide numerical citations for individual episodes of *The Sopranos* in place of episode titles, following the format (season: episode), such that “The Sopranos”, episode one of season one, will be written as 1.1. The reason for this choice of reference is so that the reader is made aware of the episode’s place within the chronology of the series as a whole, and as such, can come to meaningful conclusions about the coherence and consistency of the series’ characterisation and themes. Episode titles will still be used separately as and when they prove relevant to the argument. In the case of ebooks, “Loc. 1” is used to signify the location of the quote within the text if page numbers are unavailable.

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Introduction

The argument of this thesis is intended to provide a re-evaluation of *The Sopranos* in response to recent contributions made to the field of film and television studies regarding the rise of “Quality Television” (Albrecht 2015 p. 5) and the “male-centred serial” (Lotz 2014 p. 21) as a popular medium. The thesis will examine the degree to which the depiction of a crisis in masculinity in *The Sopranos* can be said to represent a “patriarchal” or “feminist” configuration of masculinity (Lotz 2014 p. 35), and to what extent it either reaffirms or repudiates Connell’s model of hegemonic masculinity (2005). The argument will focus on three main areas; the embodiment of masculinity, the performance of masculinity, and the presentation of violence in *The Sopranos*. The argument of this essay is that *The Sopranos* employs gendered processes of pleasure, unpleasure and identification to deconstruct hegemonic masculinity as part of a demythologising project which uses affective learning to achieve its aims (Tan 1996 p.28), and in doing so, the thesis suggests that *The Sopranos* creates a space for imagining new ways of performing masculinity and new, feminist configurations of male gender identity based on the acceptance and internalisation of “prohibit[ed] forms of emotion, attachment and pleasure” (Connell 2005 p. 85).

The thesis uses Connell’s sociology of hegemonic masculinity to interrogate the presentation of masculinity in the text because it remains the most “visible” and culturally “honoured” (Connell 2002) model of masculinity, and as such, constitutes a standard by which all marginalised masculinities are referred. The work of Mulvey (1975) and Neale (1983) on narcissistic identification (Neale 1983 p. 5) is used to evaluate the extent to which the male viewer’s identification with Tony Soprano validates the hegemonic model, and the thesis also refers to Tan’s work on empathetic identification (Tan 1996 p. 171-174) to analyse the possibility that the viewer’s identification with Tony is based on shared feminine, rather than masculine, traits. Tan’s work is also used to analyse the ways in which pleasure contributes to affective learning (Tan 1996 p. 28) in *The Sopranos*; the

thesis draws on Tan's assertion that pleasure is predicated on a pre-existing tension, the "resolution" of which prompts an "emotional catharsis" (Tan 1996 p. 35). The idea of catharsis as the key characteristic of pleasure is used to explore the possibility that viewing pleasure in *The Sopranos* is codified as feminine alongside identification; the thesis argues that the central tension of the series is the internal conflict between masculinity and femininity, which is resolved through the reaffirmation of femininity. Tan's work is considered appropriate to the aims of the project because his characterisation of pleasure as revolving around the "experience and expression of emotion" (Tan 1996 p. 24, discussing Scheff 1979) is something which is prohibited by the hegemonic model. The re-assessment of *The Sopranos* was prompted in part by Lotz's acknowledgement that *The Sopranos*, as one of the first male-centred serials, represented a "seismic shift" (2014 p. 64) in television production, and also in part by Albrecht's observation that recent television programmes, such as *Breaking Bad*, present the protagonists' turn to patriarchal configurations of masculinity as a form of self-fulfilment which confirms, and even celebrates, the "alluring" "mystique of masculine power" (Albrecht 2015 p. 71-72). While it is beyond the scope and ambitions of this project to address this issue, the work on *The Sopranos* done here may suggest a regressive, rather than a progressive trend in contemporary depictions of masculinity in popular culture. There are several concerns that must be addressed before the thesis can proceed with the analysis, namely, the nature of Lotz's and Albrecht's work on the medium and the influence it will have on the contributions made by this essay; as such, the thesis will begin with a discussion of the key characteristics of "Quality Television" (Albrecht 2015 p. 5) and the "male-centred serial" (Lotz 2014 p. 21). It should be noted that, as Lotz and Albrecht both base their definitions on the same generic characteristics regarding the format, the medium, the thematic and narrative preoccupation, and the historicity (Lotz p. 21, 33-34, 84, Albrecht 2015 p. 5, p. 67) the thesis will use "male-centred serial" as an interchangeable term for both; however, Albrecht's model (2015 p. 5) also incorporates critical and academic attention, and as such characterises the medium as "Quality Television" on the basis that "[...] certain scholars, critics and media producers have forwarded [the medium as

maintaining] greater aesthetic value than others, and [deserving of] scrutiny as works of art” (2015 p. 5).

Lotz states that male-centred serials “overwhelmingly originate” from cable channels funded by viewer subscriptions and pay-per-view media (Lotz 2014 p. 32), as opposed to those episodic or procedural shows that predominate on broadcast networks, funded through commercials and advertising. The archetypal protagonists of male-centred serials are middle-class, middle-aged, heterosexual white men, and the main thematic concern of the serial is the protagonist’s negotiation of a “masculine identity crisis” caused by “the revised gender scripts” for both men and women produced by the social, cultural, and political gains of second-wave feminism (Lotz 2014 p. 33-34). As a result, the male protagonist experiences:

“...difficulty [in] merging newly valorized aspects of masculinity, such as paternal involvement and nonpatriarchal marital relations, with residual patriarchal masculinities that require great responsibility of men for familiar provision” (Lotz 2014 p.84)

Lotz states that the historical context of this change mean that the “generational identity” of both the protagonist and the viewer¹ becomes:

“[...]an important consideration because of the degree to which those in the post-Baby-Boom generations[...] came of age in a culture negotiating gender politics very differently from those born previously.” (Lotz 2014 p. 27-28).

As a result of this, Lotz asserts that the “spectrum of masculinities” in the male-centred serial can be “plotted between poles of “patriarchal” and “feminist”” (2014 p. 35); however, she states that the male protagonists of these serials “[do] not presume that reinstating women’s subordination is the solution” (2014 p. 58) to this crisis of masculinity, nor do they blame “Women, wives and feminism” (2014 p. 84); instead they “blame their fathers” (2014 p. 21) and the “patriarchal masculinity” they represent (2014 p. 84). She suggests that, in the male-centred serial:

¹ And, indeed, the creators – (Martin 2013 p. 13)

[...]viewing pleasure [...] is not about identification with the character, but instead perhaps about the stimulation of considering one's own moral compass or of parsing the mixed emotions the shows introduce as viewers face a dilemma of wanting the criminal protagonists to elude apprehension so that the narrative can continue, while nevertheless knowing that apprehension is the deserved fate." (Lotz 2014 p. 80)

Where Lotz recognises the feminist possibilities of the male-centred serial, and the ways in which it could potentially reconfigure hegemonic models of masculinity, Albrecht describes his third-wave critique of masculinities as analysing "both the ways in which feminist discourses have shifted performances of masculinity and the ways in which traditional versions of masculinity continue to lurk in popular discourses" (Albrecht 2015 p. 9). He focuses on the potential of "Quality Television" as a genre to "rearticulate" patriarchal masculinities (2015 p. 18-19), and analyses "the ways in which discourses of masculinity and crisis circulate and work to ossify masculinity and exclude potential alternatives" (2015 p. 18). He recognises that while "[d]iscourses of crisis imply a diminution of male power and male privilege... those same discourses ... [can] work to rearticulate and reaffirm masculine power" (2015 p.18-19). As a result, he positions his critique of these programmes as belonging to feminism's third-wave, which, quoting Haywood and Drake (1997), he recognises as:

"...“a movement that contains elements of second wave critique of beauty culture, sexual abuse, and power structures while [sic] acknowledges and makes use of the pleasure, danger, and defining power of those structures” (3).” (Albrecht 2015 p. 9, quoting Haywood and Drake 1997 p.3)

The original contribution that this thesis is intended to make can be characterised as a negotiation between both Lotz's and Albrecht's approaches, and contends two specific aspects of their methodology. The essay argues that identification is in fact integral to the viewer's experience of pleasure in *The Sopranos*, and that, rather than working to "rearticulate and reaffirm" (Albrecht 2015 p. 19) the hegemonic model of masculinity, viewing pleasure in *The Sopranos* instead affirms

femininity, providing the foundation for a feminist configuration of masculine identity. In the first chapter, the thesis examines the way that masculinity is embodied in *The Sopranos*, looking at the ways in which Tony's size, strength, figure, and fashion choices work to both confirm and compromise narcissistic identification, and the extent to which this represents a cathartic "expansion" of the boundaries of masculinity. In the second chapter, the thesis analyses the usefulness of Tony's panic attacks as a motif for the performance of hegemonic masculinity, and argues that the male viewer's identification with the protagonist, and the pleasure it provokes, is predicated not on a narcissistic identification with Tony as an exemplar of masculinity, but an empathetic, and thus feminine, attachment to his femininity instead. In the final chapter, the thesis addresses the ways in which the series complicates the conventional enjoyment of male "phantasies of power, omnipotence, mastery and control" (Neale 1983 p. 5) through the use of both irony and verisimilitude in its formal representation of violence, and argues that the portrayal of violence in *The Sopranos* works to frustrate the catharsis found in participation in patriarchal fantasies in order to render them unpleasurable. The thesis turns first, though, to the theories that will inform this analysis, and addresses their most useful aspects.

Theory

This chapter provides an outline of the theories that were used to inform the analysis. The thesis first provides an explanation of Connell's sociology of hegemonic masculinity (2005) including the origins and intentions of Connell's work, the way in which the model itself functions to police the lives of both men and women, and a definition based on the attitudes, attributes, practices and behaviours that Connell recognises as accepted and valorised by the of hegemonic model of masculinity. The discussion then turns to the work of Mulvey and Neale and their psychoanalytic studies into viewing pleasure and the male gaze, focussing on the implications that their understanding of narcissistic identification with the "ideal ego" (Mulvey 1975 p. 12-13) has for Connell's "exemplar" of masculinity (Connell 2005 p.77). The thesis then examines Tan's work on viewer identification and pleasure, focusing specifically on his characterisation of pleasure as resulting from an "emotional catharsis", a release of negative emotions generated by "tension" in response to a "Complication" (Tan 1996 p. 25, 35-37, 59).

Connell et al, (1985, 2002, 2005, 2005)

Connell's sociology of masculinity, and the concept of hegemonic masculinity that it helped to popularise, was inspired in part by the "the essential feminist insight that the overall relationship between men and women is one involving domination or oppression" (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985 p.552), and that furthermore, such a relationship "would have profound consequences for the character of men" (1985 p. 552). According to Connell, the theories that did acknowledge the disparate "social power" of men and women adhered too closely to currents in feminist writing that viewed "masculinity as unrelieved villainy" and all men as "agents of the patriarchy in more or less the same degree", leading to a "highly schematic view of gender relations" which led male feminists into what he describes as a "paralysing politics of guilt" (1985 p. 552); a politics which, in other words, allowed no room for the reformation or rehabilitation of masculinity. Connell and his colleagues therefore proposed a new, "radical analysis of masculinity" which was intended to

address these omissions, a theory that would also account for differences of “sexual power...*inside* the sex categories” and thus the function of same-sex gender oppression; inspired by both gay and feminist critics, Connell was particularly interested in the way that relations between heterosexual and homosexual men worked in the production of “masculinity as a political order”, and how this affected which forms of masculinity emerged as “socially dominant” (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985 p. 552). Connell developed the concept of hegemonic masculinity as a result of empirical research to describe the set of attitudes, practices and behaviours that represented the most culturally “honoured” form of masculinity (Connell 2002), and thus the masculine ideal which structures and informs the performance of all masculinities. The focus of this project will be the implications that hegemonic masculinity has for the policing of the male gender role by other men, and the “physical, mental, interpersonal and cultural” effects it has on them (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985 p. 590).

Connell’s understanding of the “sex/ gender system” is that it is entirely historical, a product of the “patterning of social relations connected with reproduction and gender division” and thus subject to change (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985 p. 589-90, discussing Mitchell, and Rubin). While the “central fact” about this system is the “subordination of women”, Connell notes that these “relations” are not a contest between “homogenous, undifferentiated blocs”, and that the interplay between identities founded on gender, race, sexuality and class difference produce situations in which some groups of women hold power over other groups of men, as well as empowered and disempowered factions of men themselves (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985 p. 590). However, Connell recognises that the reason that these “contradictions between local situations and global relationships [remain] endemic” is because it is a central fact of the structure of patriarchal relations themselves; the artificial “fissuring of the categories of “men” and “women”” is essential to the functioning of “patriarchal power” (Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1985 p. 590). The fact that the social and cultural configurations of gender and sexuality are specific to historical instances is essential to understanding both the concept of hegemonic masculinity, an idea which Connell is careful to differentiate from the “essence[s]”, “syndrome[s]”, “condition[s]”, and “patholog[ies]” described by

sexologists and clinicians in much of the contemporary accounts of masculinity of the time (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985 p. 592, citing Money 1970, p. 425-440). Hegemonic masculinity, according to Connell, is not a fundamental fact about the nature and identity of men and boys, but concerns:

“...[the] question of how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth, and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate their dominance...Hegemony is always a historical situation, a set of circumstances in which power is won and held...it is not a matter of pushing or pulling between ready-formed groupings, but is partly a matter of the *formation* of those groupings...To understand the different kinds of masculinity demands...an examination of the practices in which hegemony is constituted and contested ...[in the case of a gendered hierarchy,] the political techniques of the patriarchal social order. ” (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985 p. 592-594).

Connell derives several key observations about the nature of masculinity and femininity from his understanding of hegemony; firstly, that “gender identities” are a product of social relations between individuals and groups of people structured by a society and culture that orders “the everyday conduct of life” through the “reproductive arena” and organises “human bodies into male and female” (Connell 2002). One’s body is a part of a “historical process”, both an “agent and object of social practice” in what Connell terms “body-reflexive practices” (Connell 2002) the interplay of one’s bodily actions and experiences with the awareness of the gendered configurations of practices and social relations (Connell 2005 p. 59-62). In other words, the “body-reflexive practice” is Connell’s method of accounting for the body’s impact on gender identity, of biology on the social, in a way that still refutes and denies any suggestion of biological determinism as a result of one’s sex; the “body-reflexive practice” refers to the attachment of (gendered) symbolic meaning to a man or woman’s experience of pleasure or pain through play, labour and sex, and its context within a psychodynamic space of “social injunction and prohibition” (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985 p. 695). Connell uses the example of adolescent boys and girls learning actively through practice to shape

their bodies and alter their appearances in order to live up to heterosexual ideals of attractiveness through fashion, cosmetics and exercise; it is in this way, as Connell observes, that, “particular versions of masculinity and femininity are materialised as meaningful bodies and embodied meanings.” (Connell 2002).

One’s gender identity is thus the result of a historical “configuration of gender practices”, and does not exist “prior to social behaviour, either as bodily states or fixed personalities” (Connell 2002). Gender is something which is done, which is practised, or, in Butler’s terms, performed (2011 p. 191). Butler, like Connell, recognises that there “is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the [...] expressions that are said to be its results” (2011 p. 34), and she explains that:

[...]the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is [...] a form of their legitimation. The performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender in its binary frame [and] gender is an identity constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a ...repetition of acts.

(Butler 2011 p. 191)

It is important to note that these historical configurations of gender identity are upheld through both discourse and ideology; individuals have their roles confirmed, “defined and sustained” (Connell 2002) through the rules, regulations and division of labour in institutional settings such as governments and corporations, through state apparatus such as systems of education and healthcare (Connell 2002), in the home and in the family, and through fictionalised representations in mediums such as film, television, literature, and advertising in the “commercial mass media” (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985 p. 594). Connell terms the cultures of these institutions, and the social practices that they espouse, “gender regimes”, and he identifies these regimes as complicit

with the “patriarchal social order” (Connell 2002). It is an order of which hegemonic masculinity is both an “expression” of men’s privilege (Connell 2002) - the “patriarchal dividend” - and at the same time, an integral part of the process of domination and subordination by which men acquire power over women (Connell 2005 p. 79-80).

The model of hegemonic masculinity refers to the most “honored” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.832), most “culturally exalted form of masculinity” (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985 p. 592), it is an ideal, an “answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy” (Connell 2005 p. 72-77) and does not mean “total control. It is not automatic, and may be disrupted - or even disrupt itself” (Connell 2005 p. 37). While it occupies a place of “cultural authority and leadership”, it by no means represents a statistical majority amongst both men and boys, and many “other forms of masculinity persist alongside” the hegemonic model; although it is a “normative standard” (Connell 2005 p. 79), the model “may only correspond to the characters of a small number of men” (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985 p. 592), and there is a “distance, and a tension, between collective ideal and actual lives” (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985 p. 592). However, it is “highly visible” (Connell 2002), and “very large numbers of men are complicit in sustaining [the model]” in part perhaps because of what Connell suggests is “gratification through fantasy, compensation through displaced aggression” (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985 p. 592); hegemonic masculinity in its most pure and perfect form is often only embodied in “exemplars” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005 p. 846) such as celebrities or “fantasy figures such as film characters” (Connell 2005 p. 77), through which male spectators derive vicarious pleasure.

The attitudes, behaviours and practices that mark the hegemonic model are closely implicated in both the patriarchal hierarchy of power between men and women, and the subordination of marginalised masculinities. In the workplace, in recreation, in their personal lives, and in their relationships, the hegemonic model idealises aggression, violence, and domination

(Connell 2005 p. 82-85), and exalts competition and achievement in both public and private spheres (Connell 2002). Stoicism is prized, and any form of mental or emotional weakness is ridiculed by a patriarchal order which “prohibits forms of emotion, attachment and pleasure” (Connell 2005 p. 85); physical “strength, endurance...and toughness” too are honoured, and illness, injury, disability and age can thus compromise the “bodily performance” of masculinity, which is an essential part of the hegemonic model (Connell 2005 p. 54-55). In their interpersonal lives, men are expected to be “bread-winners” (Connell 2005 p. 29-32), bringing home a working wage to support their wives and children, and in sex, virility, potency and conquest are all idealised traits (Connell 2005 p. 55); in the workplace, manual labour, skill, expertise, and authority in management are equally valued (Connell 2005 p. 29, p. 36). That men and women both should be invested in the rehabilitation and reformation of masculinity is the driving principle of their work; the “range of toxic effects” in which the hegemonic model of masculinity is implicated describes an array of brutality and violence arrayed against women and marginalised peoples, including “rape and domestic violence...homophobic violence, and racism” (Connell 2002, also discussing Hearn 1998, Tomsen 1998, Tillner 2000). However, Connell also acknowledges the “heavy price some men pay for living in the current system”, “patterns of ill health and mortality” arising from a reluctance to use the healthcare services, “high levels of victimization” of violence and “imprisonment”, limited avenues of employment and education, and the rejection of “personal issues [such as emotional and mental well-being and relationships] as topics of reflection” (Connell 2002, discussing Hearn 1998, Martino 1994, Tillner 2000, Tomsen 1997, Tomsen 1998, Walker et al. 2000, and Schofield et al. 2000).

Mulvey (1975) and Neale (1983)

Feminist scholar Laura Mulvey's psycho-analytic critique of the male gaze and its operation in narrative cinema, as well as the work of those academics that expanded on her studies, will be useful here in providing a theoretical framework with which to evaluate viewer pleasure and identification in these serial dramas. Her concept of the male viewer's narcissistic identification with the "ideal ego" (1975 12-13) seems particularly suggestive of Connell's "exemplar" (2005 p. 77); indeed, this essay contends that the two can be considered functionally interchangeable. Mulvey describes the visual pleasure of cinema for men as resulting from the reduction of the female form to a fetishized object of erotic desire, and the male viewer's Lacanian identification with his image (1975 p.8-9):

A male movie star's glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of the gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror. The character in the story can make things happen and control events better than the subject/ spectator, just as the image in the mirror was more in control of motor co-ordination. In addition to woman as icon, the active male figure (the ego ideal of the identification process).... is free to command the stage, a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action. (Mulvey 1975 p 12-13)

The male character, as a "more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego" (Mulvey 1975 p. 12-13), compares extremely favourably with the "exemplar" by virtue of the fact that they can be said to perform an exemplary version of hegemonic masculinity. Stephen Neale (1983 p. 5) is in agreement with Mulvey; he expands Mulvey's original analysis in his own essay on the subject of the male gaze in cinema, and in a discussion which treats at length with violence, he evokes the manner in which traditional, patriarchal forms of hegemonic masculinity inform the identification with, and presentation of, men on film:

Inasmuch as films do involve gender identification, and inasmuch as current ideologies of masculinity involve so centrally notions and attitudes to do with aggression, power and control, it seems to me that narcissism and narcissistic identification may be especially significant. Narcissism and narcissistic identification both involve phantasies of power, omnipotence, mastery and control. (1983 page. 5)

However, the aspect of Neale's analysis which is most engaging for the purpose of the project is his understanding of castration anxiety as relating to the construction of masculinity and the protagonist as "ideal ego" (1983 p. 7); his analysis registers this anxiety as stemming not just from the female form, but from male bodies and masculine performances too:

The construction of an ideal ego, meanwhile, is a process involving profound contradictions. While the ideal ego may be a "model" with which the subject identifies and to which it aspires, it may also be a source of further images and feelings of castration, inasmuch as that ideal is something to which the subject is never adequate. (Neale 1983 p. 7)

It is this ambivalence, the idea that the viewer experiences an intermingling of pleasure and anxiety through viewing the performances of hegemonic, patriarchal masculinities onscreen, that presents an opportunity for further analysis, and suggests the possibility of a potential resolution of these contradictory impulses.

Tan (1996)

Tan analyses the ways in which the stories, characters, themes and techniques of feature films can be said to evoke affect and emotion in the audience, drawing on a wide variety of psychological and psychoanalytic theories to describe these effects on the viewer. Basing his conclusions on the findings of a number of studies into cinema-going audiences, he identifies “entertainment” (Tan 1996 p.16, citing Austin 1988) as the primary motivation for watching feature films, and “interest” as the principle emotion evoked by them. He characterises “entertainment” and “interest” (1996 p.16, citing Austin 1988) as the experience of emotion, and he examines the different types of emotions that the viewer derives from the “psychological functions” (Tan 1996 p. 16) of the feature film, chief amongst which is “catharsis” (Tan 1996 p. 37). Tan draws his definition of “catharsis” (Tan 1996 p. 37) from Freud’s psycho-analytic theory on film, describing the similarities between the functions of the feature film and that of the joke in Freud’s theory, observing that both involve a “saving”, theorised by Freud to be “a major source of pleasure” (Tan 1996 p. 18, discussing Freud 1905/ 1940); this “saving” involves the generation of tension and then its subsequent release or “resolution”, and Tan characterises “tension reduction” as “the single most comprehensive motive” for watching feature films (Tan 1996 p. 35-37). Catharsis, then, he defines as “the regulation of affect on the part of the viewer”, an “emotional catharsis which is significant but “small-scale”” (Tan 1996 p. 35). This is later echoed by Tan’s study of the research into the “emotional arousal” experienced by viewers of television, particularly television drama, which Tan holds to be the format closest to the traditional feature film (Tan 1996 p. 23-24, discussing Tannenbaum 1980, 1985). Tan, discussing the work of Scheff (Tan 1996 p. 24; Scheff 1979; also Scheff and Scheele 1980), states that Scheff:

“...assumed that television entertainment results in catharsis, defined as the experience and expression of emotion. Like Tannenbaum [cited above, 1980, 1985], he took it for granted that the emotional arousal brought about is not in itself pleasurable and can be described as a combination of such emotions as fear, anger and embarrassment.”

The experience of these negative emotions, like the introduction of tension in the set-up of a joke, is necessary for the eventual arrival at catharsis, and enhances the pleasurable “release” of these emotions and feelings (Tan 1996 p. 24). The viewer’s emotional “investment” in, or sympathy for, the character with which they identify, has the effect of amplifying the tension inherent to their situation, and the viewer anticipates a “return” on this investment in the form of catharsis (Tan 1996 p. 48, p 98). However, while distance is integral to its experience, (Tan 1996) “excessive distancing” prevents the evocation of “unpleasant emotions” and thus prevents catharsis; if the reverse occurs, and there is little to no distancing, the viewer is “overwhelmed” by these emotions and cannot be relieved of them (Tan 1996 p. 24). Tan (1996 p. 26) speculates that viewing feature films can be seen as a “mimetic leisure activity” and, drawing on the work of Elias and Dunning (1986), states that such an activity is:

“...an enclave in the midst of everyday life, where emotional excitement can be kept within bounds, resulting in emotional catharsis. This forms a kind of compensation for the monotony and boredom of modern society.” (Tan 1996 p. 26)

In other words, part of the viewer’s pleasure relies on the fact that the emotion experienced is done so in a “safe” environment, with none of the mental or emotional burdens that such feelings would elicit in a real life situation.

Entertainment can also function as fantasy and wish fulfilment; this includes the attainment of “as yet unrealized [or indeed, unattainable] goals” and the fulfilment of desires that in ordinary life “must be repressed” (Tan 1996 p. 20, discussing Klinger 1971). In the first instance, Tan states that “laying aside the oppressive rationality of everyday life” to embrace and immerse oneself in fantasy is a “source of pleasure that [is] highly motivating” (Tan 1996 p. 20); but Tan acknowledges that there are more complicated mechanisms at work than escapism. The first is identification with “powerful persons”, described by Tan (1996 p. 26, discussing Mulvey 1975) as one of the “most famous forms” of fantasy, akin to “wish fulfilment through daydreams” (Tan 1996 p. 26, discussing

Klinger 1971). A powerful person, especially a fictitious one, is likely to have greater agency than the average film viewer, and thus the opportunity to enjoy a much wider variety of events, experiences and sensations, a factor which aligns with another aspect of fantasy; the opportunity for the expression, albeit vicariously, of taboo thoughts, feelings and behaviour. The feature film “gives the spectator an opportunity to transgress social norms and codes of behaviour, albeit within strictly determined boundaries” (Tan 1996 p. 21, discussing Prokop 1974), and this experience of acts otherwise prohibited in everyday life can enable a cathartic expression or “regulation” of emotion in itself (Tan 1996 p. 26); indulgence or participation in the fantasies of feature films is, according to Tan, “capable of reducing the intensity of emotions” especially “those of an aggressive nature,” (Tan 1996 p. 26, discussing Freud 1905; Freud 1945) thus functioning as a form of mood or “affect” management (Bryant and Zillman 1984 and Zillman 1988, discussed by Tan 1996 p. 24). Watching films which feature sex, violence, or sensational behaviour (Tan 1996 p. 122) can result in a release of stress or tension built up in real life through “goal substitution [...] which involves expressing the aggressive response [or urge] in imaginary or symbolic form” (Tan 1996 p. 26). However, another school of thought suggests the opposite; rather than decreasing aggressive urges, the pleasurable stimulation afforded by catharsis serves to reinforce the emotions and the “cognitions that accompany these emotions”, demonstrating their usefulness in attaining “prosocial” goals (Tan 1996 p. 27-28). According to Tan, the work of Bandura suggests the possibility that “certain emotional behaviour, not least aggression, can be learned via the fantasies in the medium” (Tan 1996 p. 27 discussing Bandura 1973); Tan characterises these effects as “affective learning processes” (1996 p. 28).

The idea that films are capable of reinforcing certain beliefs or behaviour is directly related to the understanding of feature films as ideological tools and as vehicles for knowledge; the feature film is “constantly allocating to the viewer not only a physical view of the scene but also an ideological position with respect to the reality being portrayed” and thus imparting a political message (Tan 1996 p. 21, discussing Browne 1975; MacCabe 1976). While this point of view can

disrupt a prevalent ideological bias or present an alternative position, the ideological content of a film does not have to be rhetorical or persuasive, and viewers can in fact derive pleasure from seeing their values and ideals corroborated rather than challenged, fulfilling a need to have one's views validated (Tan 1996 p. 22). The corroboration of one's political or ideological views can also play a role in reinforcing one's social bonds and identity; "...the recognition of socially shared views can fulfil the individual's need for a sense of belonging," and "sharing a variety of ... feelings" with others while watching a film "reinforces the realization that one is part of a community rooted in one and the same worldview" (Tan 1996 p. 23). The viewer derives pleasure from a "sense of participating in the events and institutions depicted, of being part of the human drama" (McGuire 1974, cited by Tan 1996 p. 23). However, pleasure can also be derived from having one's beliefs challenged, or one's worldview expanded. As Tan states:

"...In many cases, art is about something. It sets people thinking and reveals new perspectives. A work of art does not speak to its beholders directly, but rather involves them in a process that leads to insight, whether it is a question of a truth, an ideal, or a possibility."(Tan 1996 p. 29)

It would be difficult to measure the "objective learning effect" of the feature film, and just as difficult to qualify what they are capable of teaching the viewer about reality, giving the question of individual interpretation (Tan 1996 p. 27, p.29); however, what is important, according to Tan, is the fact that viewers believe themselves able to derive some beneficial lesson from feature films, being taught something about "everyday life ... reality and other people" and discovering resolutions to problems and dilemmas (1996 p. 27, also discussing Atkin 1985). Tan (1996 p. 29) notes that Langer's work (1953) asserted that films were capable of providing "well-rounded insight into both our inner life and external reality," and that Gurvitch (1956, 1973) argued that drama could "be seen as a model of social reality," capable of yielding "new perspectives on social conflicts" and providing "solutions" to these problems (Tan 1996 p. 30). Tan's concept of pleasure has been covered as comprehensively as the ambitions of this project allow; it is time then to return to his understanding of empathetic identification.

He defines empathy as “all the cognitive operations on the part of the viewer” that enable them to intuit the “situational meaning for the character”, and he defines the “empathetic emotion[s]” that this gives rise to as “characterized by the fact that the situational meaning structure of the situation for a character is part of the meaning for the viewer” (Tan 1996 p. 171, 174). Tan defines “situational meaning” itself as the significance, or emotional impact, of the events of the narrative on the characters, and this significance is “determined by his or her intentions and psychological traits” (Tan 1996 p. 171-173, also discussing Bordwell 1985, 1989). The “meaning for the viewer” can be characterised as the “anticipation” of a “return” on their “investment”, or “interest”, in the character, which is itself dependent on their “knowledge of, and feelings toward[...]” (Tan 1996 p. 154) the character; as such, the “situational meaning” for both character and viewer are intrinsically linked. In its simplest terms, if the viewer has positive feelings towards the protagonist, they will want the hero to achieve his or her aims, and fear his or her failure, and, of course, the opposite applies for the antagonist, as their defeat will be desirable instead (Tan 1996 p. 181, p. 174). In this sense, then, viewer can be said to identify with the character because he or she “adopts the protagonist’s goals” as their own (Tan 1996 p. 173, discussing Oatley 1992, 1995), and the source of this identification is “sympathy”, chief amongst the empathetic emotions and, “alongside interest, the most important sensation evoked by the feature film”.

Sympathy arises from the “attraction” the viewer feels towards a character as a result of the “perceived similarity... between one’s own attitudes and views on the important issues of life” (Tan 1996 p. 168). These “source” or “value concerns” (Frijda, 1986, cited by Tan 1996 p.168), which Tan states are “more or less universal”, mean that the “vicissitudes of the characters” have a “heightened relevance” because their “intentions and aims [...] touch the concerns of the viewer” (Tan 1996 p. 168), which increase the tension (1996 p. 48) inherent to the situational meaning of a character’s circumstance. Sympathy can be “tonic”, as an “affective disposition”, or general sympathetic inclination towards the character, or it can be “phasic”, as an emotion evoked by a specific instance or action, such as an admission of “vulnerability” or a “special sacrifice” made “on

behalf of the Good Cause or another sympathetic character” (Tan 1996 p. 176-177). It is both a “positive emotion” and a “pleasurable experience”; “warm feelings” such as sympathy are “the most important aspects of our relationships with family, friends, and partners”, and “the real or imaginary experience” of these relationships is, according to Aaker, Stayman and Hagerty, (1986, discussed by Tan 1996 p. 178), accompanied by “a warmth” and a “physiological” state of “arousal” (Tan 1996 p. 178). It is for this reason that sympathy is marked by both “equality and reciprocity” (Tan 1996 p. 178); the character occupies a position that is neither superior nor inferior to the viewer, and the “action tendency” that the emotion evokes is “an inclination to seek proximity and intimacy, a sharing of thoughts and feelings...a sense of cherishing and being cherished [and the tendency] to give...and receive” (1996 p. 178). Tan states that of these tendencies, “only proximity and intimacy can be realized” in the viewing of feature films; while the viewer can never share their feelings, “major characters disclose to the viewer intimate feelings in an oblique fashion” through the communication with other characters, an exchange which the viewer is party to and thus can share. Finally, sympathy is distinguished from “admiration”, in which the character is superior to the viewer, and “compassion”, in which the character is inferior to the viewer, by the action tendencies they promote; in the first instance, “imitation” and a desire for “proximity” are aroused, but intimacy is foreclosed, and in the second, “an inclination to help, and to console” (1996 p. 179).

In conclusion, then, the thesis draws the following ideas from the work of Connell and Butler in the analysis; that gender is not an essential aspect of the identity of men and women, that it is, instead, something which is performed, and that this performance itself is constituted through a combination of culturally valorised acts, attributes, attitudes and behaviours. In the case of hegemonic masculinity, relevant traits for the purposes of the analysis include physical and social power and control, aggression, and mental and emotional fortitude. From the work of Mulvey and Neale, the thesis extrapolates that narcissistic identification with the “ideal ego” (Mulvey 1975 p. 12-13) is founded on the male protagonist’s ability to perform his masculinity more perfectly than the viewer. From Tan, the essay extracts the characterisation of pleasure as resulting from “emotional

catharsis" (Tan 1996 p. 35), which occurs due to the release of negative emotions induced through tension. The essay also recognises his model of identification as being founded, not on narcissism, but on empathy, as particularly appropriate for an evaluation of *The Sopranos* which seeks to explore the possibility that both identification and pleasure are experienced due to the affirmation of femininity.

Embodying Masculinity in *The Sopranos*

"All I know is, he never had the makings of a varsity athlete."

Uncle Junior – "Where's Johnny?" (Caleo 2004)

This chapter will focus on the embodiment of masculinity in *The Sopranos*; it will evaluate the ways in which the body is presented as affecting the performance of masculinity, and as a result, the viewer's identification with Tony. The thesis will first explore the extent to which Tony's size, strength, and physical power conform to the hegemonic model, and thus support the viewer's narcissistic identification. The discussion will then turn to an examination of Tony's weight and figure, and the degree to which this compromises, or complicates, viewer identification and pleasure. Finally, the essay will discuss the significance of the costume design in *The Sopranos*, and how it works to deconstruct the cinematic iconography of the Mafia.

Tony's body poses an interesting complication to the kind of conventional, narcissistic identification that Mulvey describes. On the one hand, Gandolfini's height, weight and build give Tony immense physical power and presence. Gandolfini towers over most of the cast, and his large stature, broad shoulders and bulky figure are explicitly recognised as intimidating by Melfi's soft-spoken, diminutive therapist after a chance encounter; he describes him as "this big, Bluto sorta guy" (4.4 Winter 2002) after a brief confrontation in a parking garage which leaves him shaken. In 3.4 (Green and Burgess 2001) Melfi herself realises that the "big head" and "massive shoulders" of the Rottweiler who attacks her rapist in a dream is an allegory of Tony, a symbol not just of "murderous rage" and aggression, but of masculine power and protection; she recalls that the Rottweilers were descended from the dogs that guarded Roman camps. She states that she felt "a sense of relief" upon waking, as though she was "safe", and her therapist observes that she seems to feel "empowered" by her connection with Tony, something which Melfi concedes (3.4 Green and Burgess 2001). Tony frequently uses his size and strength to bully and threaten his inferiors and, of

course, to physically subdue or dominate his enemies throughout the series. Tony delivers a brutal beating to Ralphie Cifaretto in 3.6 (Winter and Stabile 2001) and then, after a prolonged fight, physically overpowers and throttles him to death in 4.9 (Green and Burgess 2002). In 6.5, (Winter 2006) Tony re-asserts his “alpha male” status in the Soprano crime family - something he feels he’s lost after a physically debilitating stay in the hospital - by picking a fight with the most muscular member of his crew and then violently beating him into submission. And, in the very first episode (1.1 Chase 2002), Tony grabs a sullen and recalcitrant Christopher by the collar and hauls him out of his chair to demonstrate his anger and displeasure with his nephew’s petulant threats— even when he calms down and becomes tender with Christopher, the grip he maintains around the back of Christopher’s neck communicates both affection and unspoken threat, a reminder of Tony’s dominance. It is a scene which Chase recalls as being scripted to require only a “little wake-up slap” to snap Christopher out of his moping, but which Gandolfini asked to deliver as though he was “really upset with him” and would “really go after him”; in the audio commentary for the episode, Chase says that after seeing how Tony could “turn on a dime” and go from “concern” to “menacing” and “scary rage”, it “crystallised” the essence of the character (1.1, Chase 2002).

In light of the above examples, Tony does seem likely to appear a more powerful version of most male viewers, one who exerts physical mastery over others and literally embodies hegemonic masculine traits of power, domination and aggression;. However, while Tony may be physically powerful, he is far from the peak of health, fitness and virility. He is suffering from many of the problems that typically plague middle-aged men, including obesity and hair loss, and his well-being has deteriorated as a result of his voracious appetites; he is an unrepentant womaniser, having at least three long-term mistresses (Irina Peltsin, 1.3 [Saraceni 2002], Gloria Trillo, 3.8 [Green, Burgess, and Kessler 2001] and Valentina La Paz, 4.8 [Konner 2002]) and countless one-night stands over the course of the series, and over-indulges in eating, drinking, and smoking to his clear detriment. Tony’s heavy, laboured breathing becomes one of his more recognisable mannerisms (6.19 Winter 2007), his health and weight is something that his men acknowledge, if rarely have the courage to voice

(4.10 Winter, Green, and Burgess 2002, 5.10, Green and Burgess, 2004), and Tony himself seems sporadically self-conscious of, and unhappy with, his figure (5.2 Weiner 2004): in 6.5 (Winter 2006), for example, he ruefully laments that his stay in hospital cost him muscle mass but not fat. Tony's fatness, seen in this way, is symptomatic of his laziness, his "greed, over-indulgence and distinct lack of self-control" (Santo 2002 p.74, discussing Stearns 1997 p.54-55) and carries implicit associations of a "weak and degenerate mind" (Mitchell 2008 p. 182, discussing Gilman 2004 p. 30). His body becomes the bearer of a "range of negative and emasculating qualities" which seem to be entirely antithetical to an "idealized definition" (Santo 2002 p. 73) of "middle-class...white, heterosexual manhood (Santo 2002 p. 84, discussing Kimmel 1994 13-22), one which is defined by the perceived "virtue[s]" of discipline, restraint, and self-control (Santo 2002 p. 83-84, discussing Kimmel 1994 p. 13-22) and signified by "external superficialities" like the fit body (Santo 2002 p. 84-85). However, while "the male body on *The Sopranos* is regularly shown to be soft and unfit", as Santo observes, it is not often shown to be to the characters' disadvantage, nor does it seem to compromise their masculine status:

Male fatness on the Sopranos is very rarely an overt signifier of failure, at least not in the traditional sense. Tony Soprano has no difficulties in attracting women, has not been denied work, and is too feared to have his weight openly mocked by his peers, even those few who are fit. (Santo 2002 p. 72).

Mitchell is in agreement, noting that Tony is imbued with "virility and power" despite his weight, which is itself is both "strength and weakness"; he observes that "Tony's weight...significantly adds to his ability to instil fear in his enemies" and "adds to an accumulation of signs that signify his affluence, influence, power, heterosexuality and masculinity" (2008 p. 184-185).

In contrast, the fit bodies of the middle-class men in the series are exposed as a "facade" which, far from signifying "integrity", "honor", "good character", "inner resolve", or any of the constellation of desirable masculine traits, instead disguise "deviance" and "over-indulgence" of

their own consumerist habits (Santo 2002 p. 83-85). Kimmel argues that the twentieth Century brought about a crisis in masculinity in the West due to the rise of marketplace economics and the decline of the ideal of the “self-made man” (Santo p. 84, discussing Kimmel p. 13); as a result of the “erosion of the relationship between manhood and production” (Santo p. 84, discussing Stearns p. 118) masculinity was redefined according to success “in the capitalist marketplace...[and the] accumulation of wealth, power, and capital” (Kimmel p. 13, cited by Santo p. 84). However, for middle-class men, jobs in the service industry and in management resulted in a lack of “clearly meaningful work” which led to a “crisis in values”; divorced from labour and production, masculinity became oriented around “consumption”, specifically, *what* was consumed, and *how*. This led to shift from an “inward-focused” masculinity to an “outwardly visible masculinity...concerned mainly with its [own] appearance”; while initially, the “fit body” became an expression of the character of the man, of self-restraint in an age of consumerism, and a sign that “masculinity had survived the move to the suburbs”, this “external masculinity” became “separated from its representational purpose of revealing the man within and became the principle means of assessing “real” masculinity” (Santo p. 84, discussing Kimmel p. 22). Indeed, the fit bodies of the men in *The Sopranos* are revealed as empty symbols, and Tony’s masculinity is not undermined by his juxtaposition with his lean, law-abiding, middle-class peers, but re-affirmed by it. Middle-class men such as Artie Bucco, Tony’s civilian best friend, are variably depicted as weak, impotent and cowardly; (4.3 Imperioli 2002) or, in the case of Davey Scatino, a store owner and gambling addict who possesses even less self-control than the mobsters (2.10 Renzulli, Green and Burgess 2002), as an abject failure as a father and husband; at best, as in the case of Melfi’s therapist, Kupferberg, ex-husband, Richard, and colleague, Dr. Cusamono, middle-class men in *The Sopranos* are depicted as pretentious hypocrites (3.4 Green and Burgess 2001, 1.10 Bosso and Renzulli 2002) who, despite their moral posturing, are just as fascinated with Tony’s criminal lifestyle as they claim to be appalled by it. This is not to say that fatness is valorised while fitness is vilified, but rather that the fit body in *The Sopranos* is not something which is demonstrative of a person’s masculine nature, and instead reveals the

constructed categories of masculinity and its performative essence. Fatness, however, is not something which is consciously practised, and lacks any such artifice or pretence; given that it is embodied by powerful, masculine men in the series, it cannot be read as connoting emasculation or effeminacy. Fatness and fitness cannot be reduced to a dichotomy between masculine and feminine essences, or natural and unnatural bodies in the programme, but Santo argues that the process by which fitness is achieved - dieting, exercise and self-restraint- is presented as a form of self-denial tantamount to self-abuse; he describes sport as a “somasochistic performances of violence upon the body” (Santo 2002 p. 87), citing the animal howls of pain that Tony makes while working out in 1.10 (Bosso and Renzulli 2002). It is for this reason that Tony’s body is an object of both “empathy” and “envy”; Tony’s body represents a “revolt” against the “sanctimonious norms” of a culture that “desires consumption but punishes its indulgences”, and as such, it “embodies his freedom and disregard for the social constraints that other middle-class Americans unhappily impose on themselves” (Santo 2002 80-91). In this sense, fitness and fatness can both be characterised as “body-reflexive practices”(Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985 p. 695); the interplay between bodily experience and pre-existing gender configurations that help to construct the gender identity of the individual. In this sense, fitness is the normative “bodily-reflexive practice” shaped by “social injunction and prohibition” (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985 p. 695) which Tony has, in effect, unlearned through the corporeal pleasure of consumption, and the association of weight with “virility”, “power”, and “masculinity” (Mitchell 2008 p. 184-185); fatness then constitutes a new body-reflexive practice which, if it does not qualify as a unique gender configuration in its own right, represents a partial movement towards one.

Tony’s body thus becomes the site of “multiple and contradictory readings” (Santo 2002 p. 83), yet the seemingly antithetical associations it engenders are what enable a proposal for the potential redefinition of masculinity, or, at the least, a prospective movement towards its redefinition; Tony’s weight is key to this project, and the multiple functions it serves allow the audience to both invest in and critically evaluate contemporary notions of masculinity. In the first

place, Tony's size and strength, as well as his position as the primary protagonist in the series, mark him out as a viable candidate for the kind of narcissistic identification described by Mulvey (1975 p. 12-13); he represents "a more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego" who, "by means of identification" the male audience are able to "[participate] in his power" (Mulvey 1975 p. 12-13) and indulge in "phantasies of ... omnipotence, mastery and control" (Neale 1983 p. 5). His formidable height and build, his propensity for violence, and his aggressive, domineering behaviour also mark him out as a potential "exemplar" of masculinity (Connell 2005 p. 77), as he embodies many of the traits Connell attributed to his model of hegemonic masculinity; to this extent, one can consider Connell's "exemplar" (2005 p. 77) and Mulvey's "ideal ego" (1975 p. 12-13) to be functionally interchangeable. On the other hand, Tony's physical flaws and imperfections - particularly his weight - disrupt the perception of Tony as an "ideal ego" (1975 p. 12-13) and subvert the spectator's narcissistic identification with him, positioning Tony as an equal of the spectator instead of a superior (Tan 1996 p. 174-180) and thus, somebody who is deserving of "sympathy" as much as "admiration". The male audience may not mirror Tony's fatness but his weight can be understood as metonymic with other physical flaws likely embodied by the male viewer; as a result of this, his corpulence classifies his body as something which is ordinary rather than exceptional, something which Donatelli and Alward (2002 p. 65) observe:

Without the careful make-up, lighting, and cut pecs that give soaps' leading men their dignity, [Gandolini] is also too large for the screen because of the soap propensity for extreme close-ups. Tony (played perfectly by James Gandolini) comes across as bearlike and sweet but physically gross with his large gut...But it's kinda cute seeing men as the target of an unforgiving camera for a change, especially compared to the false dignity which lighting gives them in the Godfather trilogy. (2002 p. 65)

Tony's girth signifies his failure to uphold the strictures of hegemonic masculinity, connoting emasculating qualities such as weakness and lack of self-control, and undermining any assessment of Tony as an exemplar; yet his performance of his gender is not noticeably impaired by his weight,

given that he is a wealthy, powerful and successful mobster, considered within the show to be both physically intimidating amongst men and sexually desirable amongst women. Narcissistic identification of the kind described by Mulvey (1975 p. 5) is still therefore possible, along with all of its attendant pleasures, yet Tony's fatness has the effect of neutralising the threat to the spectator's self-image that accompanies identification with the "ideal ego" (Neale 1983 p. 7-11):

While the ideal ego may be a "model" with which the subject identifies and to which it aspires, it may also be a source of further images and feelings of castration, inasmuch as that ideal is something to which the subject is never adequate. (Neale 1983 p. 7)

Neale's work introduces the idea that identification with the "ideal ego" can be understood as a masochistic activity, but it also presents the possibility of linking Santo's ideas about fitness and sadomasochism (2002 p. 87) with a more generalised view of the construction and performance of hegemonic masculinity, to the effect that the practice of masculinity *itself* can be considered masochistic. The pursuit of an impossible ideal of manhood, one to which the subject can never hope to be adequate, seems likely to be little more than a process of self-flagellation. In this sense, Tony's inability to perform (or embody) his gender perfectly can be seen as a source of "emotional catharsis" (Tan 1996 p. 35) for those male spectators who identify with Tony and share his feelings of anxiety and inadequacy surrounding the status of their own masculinity; in Tan's terms, (1996 p. 37) *The Sopranos* offers male viewers the opportunity to release the stress and tension that finds its source in the contrast between their individual performance of masculinity, and its inadequacy compared to the ideal from which it derives. Tony's body becomes an object of envy not just because he is free to consume what he likes (Santo 2002 p. 80), but also because he is free to break the restrictions of the hegemonic code without suffering a collapse of identity. Tony's own masculine ideal is still derived from the hegemonic model, however flawed his own personal performance may be, and he demonstrates so many of the attributes that define hegemonic masculinity that those areas he neglects (or even disdains) do not compromise his status as a man; as a result, Tony allows the audience to imagine different ways of being men and different ways of

performing masculinity. It would be tempting to characterise Tony as an exemplar of a new model of masculinity, but Tony as a character is too invested in retrograde, patriarchal constructions of manhood to offer an effective redefinition or reinvention of masculinity. *The Sopranos* is not interested in redeeming or remaking masculinity, however, but in unmaking it, challenging and deconstructing the assumed categories of hegemonic masculinity, and testing and transgressing its limits and boundaries. Its project is a liminal movement towards emancipation, and one of the central strategies deployed to achieve the aims of this project is the subversion of conventional sources of viewing pleasure. The “gratification through fantasy” (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985 p. 592) offered by exemplars and the affirmation afforded by narcissistic identification with an “ideal ego” (Mulvey 1975 p.12-13) is subverted by Tony’s imperfect performance of his masculinity, and undermined by the cathartic pleasures his portrayal provokes. In this sense, Tony’s body can be said to act as a perfect synecdoche of the serial’s project; not only is his fatness symptomatic of indulgence in prohibited pleasures, but it is symbolic of his implicit rejection of the hegemonic model - his expanding waistline exceeds the constrictions of both the hem of his pants and the equally repressive constraints of hegemonic masculinity.

The costume design echoes this ethos of liberation in much the same way as the casting; the outfits that clothe the body are as significant as the body itself in *The Sopranos*. The iconography of the series seems to have been created to consciously oppose the imagery of the films that make up its heritage; the dignity and stifling austerity of Vito Corleone’s three-piece suit (Coppola, *The Godfather* 1972) has been replaced in Tony Soprano’s wardrobe by bowling shirts, bathing gowns and, despite Carmine Sr.’s stern (and telling) remonstrance that “a Don doesn’t wear shorts” (4.1 Chase 2002), summer shorts, (1.1 Chase 2002) while elsewhere amongst the sedentary Sopranos crew, jogging suits have become an ironic norm (3.4, Green and Burgess 2001, 2.4 Chase 2002) Tony’s everyday outfits favour function over form, and tend towards casual, comfortable clothing, as do those of his cronies; indeed, there’s no distinction between “work” and “weekend” clothes for the New Jersey mob. This is significant precisely because, as Larke-Walsh states, the costume in

gangster cinema is a “visual trope” through which “myths of the Mafia” are constructed. Costume acts as “a signifier of power, virility and belonging, as well as affluence” and “provides clues to an individual’s credibility as a gangster type within genre conventions and Mafia myths, which are ... dependent on ethnicity and masculine ideals” (Larke-Walsh 2010 p. 10, 27). He expands on this idea further, arguing that the suit is an especially important element of Mafia iconography because the “suited criminal suggests crime as a business”; as a result, “the tailored suit” has become “the uniform of the Mafia [embodying] all the conventions of generic iconography” (Larke-Walsh 2010 p. 70-71). The costume of a gangster is “an extension of a character’s identity, or masculinity” (Larke-Walsh 2010 p. 70-71), which is itself an “imaginary, fictional, and ultimately destructive ideal” (Bruzzi 1997 p. 80 cited by Larke-Walsh 2010 p. 70-71). This “destructive ideal” is suggestive of Connell’s model of hegemonic masculinity itself, Santo’s “sodomasochistic” (2002 p. 87) standards and Neale’s impossible “ideal ego” (1983 p. 7), and while the decision to clothe Tony in polo-shirts and slacks (1.1 Chase 2002) cannot be said to represent his conscious rejection of such an ideal – clearly it is an ideal he subscribes to, even if he does not live up to it (1.1 Chase 2002) - it does create a juxtaposition between the iconography of the cinematic Mafia and the outfits of Tony Soprano. The effect of this juxtaposition is that the ideal and the iconography it begets are revealed as fictive and illusory, which positions *The Sopranos*, and the reality it depicts, as a more authentic alternative to a specious and unachievable ideal. These are all useful concepts with which to approach the text, as the choice of Tony’s costume seems intended to inform the audience’s estimation of the mob boss as a man, or rather, his relationship to the dominant ideology of masculinity; while the mythology of the Mafia is deconstructed, rather than shaped, by the costume design in *The Sopranos*, it still provides clues to the “credibility” (or lack thereof) of Tony Soprano as a gangster in relation to the pop culture archetype, and is suggestive of both his identity, and the extent to which he embodies and performs hegemonic masculinity.

In the first place, Tony’s frequent appearances in vest, boxer shorts and dressing gown, whether trudging down the driveway to fetch the paper (1.1 Chase 2002) or sweeping into the

kitchen to accost his wife or children with an affectionate embrace or kiss (3.9 Imperioli 2001, 4.9 Green and Burgess 2002), have the effect of making Tony appear as an “open and vulnerable...sympathetic figure” (Yacowar 2002 p. 128). The viewer is privileged with an intimate insight into Tony’s private life, where he is at his least guarded and least conscientious; unwashed, unshaven, still clad in his sleeping clothes, it is a sight totally at odds with the immaculate grooming of Vito and Michael (*The Godfather* Coppola 1972) and this brief vision of a mundane morning ritual emphasises, for want of a better phrase, Tony’s humanity and ordinariness. This insight into the banal reality of the thoroughly domesticated Don’s everyday life therefore serves a dual purpose; to position Tony as an equal of the audience, and prompt feelings of attachment and “sympathy” (Tan 1996 p. 174) in the viewer – feelings that are themselves antithetical to the stoicism and detachment demanded by the model of hegemonic masculinity. If the gangster’s suit signifies “power, virility...and masculinity”, then the fact that Tony’s dressing gown becomes something of like his signature outfit (Donatelli and Alward 2004 p. 64) is especially telling, given that it signifies the opposite; while Tony might not represent a new model of manhood, the masculinity he embodies and performs is at least achievable, and crucially, both invites and acknowledges feelings of sympathy and vulnerability. Secondly, the abandonment of an “official” uniform and the adoption of informal attire in the everyday operations of the Soprano crew re-orient work as being something closer to play. If the function of the suit in the gangster film genre is to suggest that crime is a “business” (Larke-Walsh 2010 p. 70-71), then the apparel of the Soprano crew seems designed to work against such a reading, depriving the business world of its dignity and mystique and characterising the work of Tony’s crew as a form of recreation. It is not just Tony’s fatness, then, but his outfits as well that signify his freedom to ignore the unspoken rules and regulations governing both masculine conduct and the socially sanctioned standards of the middle-class; as such, his clothing as much as his weight marks him out as an object of envy to those who are compelled to adhere to the impositions Tony rejects. The use of casual clothing in the day-to-day operations of the DiMeo crime family also evokes a collision, or even confluence, of the “masculine” public sphere and

the “feminine” private sphere; the office becomes an extension of the home, and as such it suggests a domestication, and feminisation, of the professional space and the men that occupy it. The association of “family” with the on-screen Mafia has been a commonplace since “Coppola’s *The Godfather* both revived and revised the gangster-film genre” (Yacowar 2002 p.232); Yacowar recognises *The Godfather* as the first text to move away from the “overweening individualism of the classic film”² to a “corporate model that saw the Family as family and validated its criminal activities by principles such as family identity and fealty” (Yacowar 2002 p. 232). In his discussion of Jameson’s work on *The Godfather*, Toscano (2014 p. 456-457, discussing Jameson 1990 p. 9-34) states that the Corleone family in *The Godfather* is a nostalgic, idealised vision of a benevolent patriarchy, presented as an ““object of Utopian longing”” (Jameson 1990 p.33 cited by Toscano 2014 p. 457); yet the criminal clan which shares its name is a solemn fraternity which seems to evoke family only in the most formal sense. Despite the significance afforded to the title of Godfather, the structure of power more closely resembles a feudal hierarchy or a royal dynasty than that of the average American nuclear family, especially given the pre-occupation with honorifics (“Godfather”, “Don”, “caporegime”), ritual gestures (the fish in the vest), and ceremonial displays of respect such as kissing the Don’s ring (Coppola 1972). In *The Godfather*, both the family *and* the “Family” are romanticised, “mythic” entities (Gini 2004, cited by Toscano 2014 p. 455); however, as Toscano argues, while *The Sopranos* “tries to be comparable to *The Godfather*”, Chase also “suburbanizes the Mafia narrative genre” (Toscano 2014 p. 456), presenting an entirely demythologised Mafia family. Tony’s crew is just a “small business” compared to the “empire” or “corporation” of the Corleone family, and as a result, he is much more involved in the day-to-day running (1.1 Chase 2002, 1.4 Cahill 2002, 3.8 Green, Burgess and Kessler 2002) and street-level operations of the outfit (Toscano 2014 p. 457). He is more of a “middle manager” (Toscano 2014 p. 451) than an emperor or C.E.O, and his relationships with the men under his command are much more informal and intimate as a

² To which he refers to Hollywood movies from an earlier period, such as *Public Enemy* and *Little Caesar* (Yacowar p. 132)

result; the gang, colloquially known as the “guys” (1.10 Bosso and Renzulli 2002), spend more time playing cards and indulging in idle banter and gossip than they do in anything resembling traditional work (1.6 Renzulli 2002 3.8 Green, Burgess and Kessler 2002, 4.3 Imperoli 2002). The dynamics of the New Jersey mob may not mirror those of a traditional nuclear family to an exact degree, but the casual clothing is nonetheless demonstrative of a laissez-faire atmosphere entirely at odds with the stultifying formality of Vito’s private study; it is telling that Tony is not “Don Soprano” or even “Boss” to his men and business associates, but “T” or “Ton” (2.1, Cahill 2002, 3.13 Chase and Konner 2001), and shows of respect, rather than the ritualistic ring-kissing of *The Godfather* (Coppola 1972) are small kindnesses such as offering to fetch drinks, sandwiches, or seats (6.5, Winter 2006, Green, 6.19 Mitchell and Burgess 2007). Indeed, the physical gestures themselves seem to express feminine emotions and attachments, and support the suggestion that, in *The Sopranos*, not only do masculinity and femininity collide, but the private and public spheres they represent; as Rotundo (2002 P.52-53) observes:

But there are other, more subtle virtues that hold together the male sub-village – “the family” – of organised crime. Beneath the macho surface of these all male families, there is love and affection. The men constantly exchange hugs, kisses and pats on the cheek. And they readily verbalise this affection.

It is a tendency Nochimson identifies as well, and she recognises physical contact, and the expression of affection, not just as occurring between men, but as something inherent to their business:

Tony Soprano’s rich physicality is a particularly important part of his characterization [...] He has made touch an integral part of Tony’s management technique: embracing, kissing, shaking, and smacking the men whom he leads. (Nochimson 2002 p. 6)

The thesis will revisit the separation of public and private spheres at length at a later point, but at present, it suffices to say that Tony’s costume is suggestive of an easing, or expansion, of the limits

and boundaries of masculinity, and crucially, a capitulation to emotion which is itself pleasurable and cathartic; Tony and his crew have sacrificed the dignity and decorum of the suit – and all that it signifies - for their own ease and comfort. The incorporation of casual clothes and leisure wear into the iconic (or iconoclastic) costumes of *The Sopranos* symbolises the “diminished” status of their “masculinity” (Brod 2006 p.1) compared with their cinematic forbears (Brod 2006 p.1); yet, in highlighting the disparity between an impossible ideal and an achievable reality, it not only renders the ideal itself undesirable, but tacitly absolves the characters (and by extension, the male viewer) of the failure to perfectly perform their masculinity.

This chapter analysed the extent to which Tony’s size, strength and build supported narcissistic identification. While his use of his body corresponded with masculine ideals of power and domination, the effeminate and emasculating tendencies surrounding his fatness suggested that the narcissistic aspect of the male viewer’s identification was compromised. However, instead of compromising identification, the association of girth and virility in *The Sopranos* suggested that it instead allowed viewers to enjoy identification with Tony without experiencing feelings of inadequacy and anxiety. The analysis of the use of costume to deconstruct Mafia myths, in conjunction with the analysis of the embodiment of masculinity in *The Sopranos*, suggested that while *The Sopranos* did not represent a new model of masculinity, it represented a pleasurable transgression of the limits of the hegemonic model.

Performing Masculinity in *The Sopranos*

"I'm a man, you're a woman. End of story!"

Tony Soprano, "Pax Soprana" (Renzulli 2002)

This chapter begins with an analysis of the panic attack as a motif for the performance of masculinity in *The Sopranos*, and by extension, the ethos of the series. The thesis argues that as the panic results from the repression of emotion, something which occurs because the expression of feelings is considered feminising and emasculating under the model of hegemonic masculinity, Tony's panic attacks characterise the performance of masculinity as "sodomasochistic" (Santo 2002 p. 87) and self-harming. The thesis discusses Tony's personal ideal of manhood, and then examines his deviation from it through the feminine acts, attributes and attachments he displays. The discussion also examines the extent to which Tony's femininity facilitates both a reciprocal feminine identification and the experience of pleasurable' feminine' emotions; the argument then accounts for the impact that this could have on affective learning. The essay then evaluates the extent to which an empathetic identification could instead be predicated on shared patriarchal values. Finally, the essay concludes that the central conflict in *The Sopranos* can be characterised as existing between masculinity and femininity, a conflict which results in a pleasurable catharsis through the affirmation of femininity.

Tony's weight and outfits are both the result of conscious, volitional choices, yet perhaps the most obvious motif of the show's credo, and the most significant use of the body as symbol in *The Sopranos*, are the involuntary panic attacks which cause Tony to lose consciousness and ultimately send him to a psychiatrist (1.1 Chase 2002); critically, while the effect of these attacks are physical, the cause is psychological, and as such, they represent a bridge between the performance of masculinity, and the ideal of manhood that inspires it. Tony's episodes of anxiety are emasculating on multiple levels, representing a total breakdown of the hegemonic model of masculinity. Firstly, they cause Tony to lose control of his body and, in extreme cases, to lose consciousness itself (1.1

Chase 2002), rendering him physically weak, passive, helpless and dependent; the loss of independence, and apparent lack of physical “toughness” or “endurance” it betrays, is considered contemptible according to Connell’s model (Connell 2005 p. 54-55). Secondly, the attacks are brought on by powerful and unmanageable upsurges in repressed emotions and feelings, meaning that Tony loses control of his body precisely because he has lost control of his emotions (1.1 Chase 2002, 1.13 Chase 2002) ; a display of mental and emotional weakness entirely incompatible with valorised masculine traits such as stoicism and emotional restraint. Thirdly, even the name itself, “panic attack”, is suggestive of hysteria, and all that the sexist history of the word connotes– to faint is to become feminised, to swoon, to succumb to overwhelming distress and fear, and thus to display none of the courage and steadfastness demanded by the model.

Tony’s panic attacks establish what Miklitsch (2007 p. 203) describes as the “series’ core ‘problem’ [...] the ‘internal’ [difference] between masculinity and femininity”; because “[m]asculinity is [...] defined in negative terms”, as Ricci (2014 Loc. 2658) observes, its performance is predicated entirely on the proscription of perceived feminine attributes:

Real men don’t cry, are not sensitive; they repress emotion and act macho. Manhood for these individuals is proved through confrontation. To be a man is to amputate one’s heart and body and substitute them for an avatar of prolific virility and gender domination [...]Their reality is role playing, of being the tough guy, of climbing to the top of the heap [...]of constant self-denial, along with the continued abrogation of emotion. (Ricci 2014 Loc. 2658)

The violent imagery of Ricci’s characterisation of manhood as an “amputation” of the “heart” and “body” seems to uphold the idea that the performance of masculinity is inherently “somasochistic” (Santo 2002 p. 87), a form of self-directed violence, but what is at the core of this violence is a rejection and repression of “the feminine other” –the “heart” - in men (Ricci 2014 Loc 2426-2460); it is characterised as violent precisely because the attempt to contain emotion is an unnatural mutilation of the self. Tony’s episodes seem to epitomise the

message of the series; the panic attacks are presented as the inevitable collapse of an inherently unstable and unsustainable model of masculinity. They can be read as the physical symptoms of a crisis of masculinity, and as symptoms of this crisis, they suggest that masculinity itself is pathological – a condition. Hegemonic masculinity is an impossible ideal which collapses under the weight of its own contradictions, and Tony’s panic attacks are the perfect motif for the series precisely because they reveal one of its central contradictions. Tony’s anxiety attacks are not triggered by the perceived threat of physical danger or harm, but the fear of painful feelings and emotions brought about by intra-familial conflict; for the most part, Tony’s episodes all occur in domestic spaces, firstly, at a family barbecue after the ducklings fledge, secondly, at a nursing home (“retirement community!”) during an argument with his mother (1.1 Chase 2002), and thirdly, in his mother’s house (1.2 Chase 2002). It is a fear of having to confront the psychological damage and pain that his mother has caused him (1.13 Chase 2002), and the feminising effect of becoming vulnerable to these emotions, that trigger Tony’s attacks; as such, it exposes the fundamental contradiction at the core of the construction of masculinity, namely, that it is founded on the *fear* of femininity, an emotion which is itself antithetical to the hegemonic model. Tony is left trapped in an inescapable double-bind because the performance of masculinity implicitly affirms the emotion that it seeks to deny. It is not just self-denial that these men practice through their performance of masculinity, then, but the active denial of the self; it is for the reason that – to borrow Dr. Melfi’s phrasing - “the centre cannot hold” (5.10 Green and Burgess 2004). Tony’s loss of consciousness and bodily control is, in essence, equivalent to the total negation of the self, and this appears to be an exaggerated metaphor for the consequences of a life lived according to this toxic code; the performance of masculinity requires the effacement of one’s identity, the absolute abjuration of the self, an unachievable objective. Much as Tony’s girth strained against the proscribed boundaries of the normative masculine body, his repressed emotions accumulate and increase in intensity until they become overwhelming, exceeding Tony’s

capacity to contain them; yet while Tony's size abetted his (albeit compromised) performance of masculinity, the panic attacks completely overturn it, presenting an irreconcilable aberration with the model of hegemonic masculinity.

The thesis has already established Connell's model of hegemonic masculinity, but thus far, Tony's own ideal of manhood has been assumed rather than explored; it is important, however, to establish how far Tony's own internalisation of this ideal reflect Connell's model, in order to come to a meaningful conclusion about his deviation from it. In one of his first therapy sessions with Doctor Melfi, Tony laments the loss of an ideal of manhood which seems to sustain the core principles of the model of hegemonic masculinity, even down to the evocation of an exemplar:

Let me tell you something. Nowadays, everybody's gotta go to shrinks and counsellors and go on Sally Jesse Raphael and talk about their problems. Whatever happened to Gary Cooper? The strong, silent type? *That* was an American. He wasn't in touch with his feelings, he just did what he had to do. See - see, what they didn't know is once they got Gary Cooper in touch with his feelings, they wouldn't be able to shut him up! Then it's dysfunction this, and dysfunction that, and dysfunction *va fangool!* (1.1 Chase 2002)

The message seems clear: in order to qualify as a real man, one must be both "strong" and "silent". The real man is a man of action, not words, *doing* what he has to do; a real man has no need to acknowledge, express, or explore his feelings. It is a sentiment that Tony explicitly links to the construction of masculinity later in the series, in an argument with Carmela over his desire to send A.J to military school; Tony states that A.J needs "toughenin' up" and will learn "respect" and "discipline" at the school, and, attacking Carmela over A.J's parenting, he declares that:

We tried it your way for fifteen years now, with the Berry Brazleton, the validating his feelings. And that fuckin' school did the same thing, and what a surprise! He thinks the world runs on his feelings! Well, he's gonna go learn to be a man! (3.13 Chase and Konner 2001)

The episode's title, "Army of One", is a fitting metaphor for the ideal of manhood Tony hopes to instil in A.J; a cool, logical entity, independent and self-reliant, whose constituent parts are governed with total discipline and self-control, operating in a state of perfect order that represents the ultimate antithesis to emotion and attachment. One learns to be a man by recognising that one's feelings are entirely alien to manhood, and the "experience and expression of emotion" (Tan 1996 p. 24) in *The Sopranos* are recognised as emasculating by Tony's peers as well; Phil Leotardo expresses his contempt and disgust for John Sacrimoni after a very public display of emotion at his daughter's wedding in the following exchange:

PHIL:

I'll tell you one thing, and I'm not ashamed to say it: my estimation of John Sacrimoni as a man just fucking plummeted.

TONY:

Give him a break, will ya? It's an emotional day.

PHIL:

To cry like a woman? It's a fucking disgrace.

PAULIE:

His fucking coach turned into a pumpkin.

PHIL:

Well, even Cinderella didn't cry.

TONY:

When it comes to daughters, all bets are off. I've seen tougher guys than John cry at weddings.

PHIL:

Well, lemme ask you this. If they can make him cry, and if he's that weak, what the fuck else can they make him do? (6.5 Winter 2006)

Tony himself, when confronted with the reality of his emotions, has a tendency to deny, displace, or de-value his feelings; when questioned about his initial diagnosis, he becomes defensive, deflecting and disavowing the suggestion of anxiety by saying that “*They* said it was a panic attack, ‘course, the blood work and neurological work came back negative” (1.1 Chase 2002). He is similarly evasive when asked about depression, offering the rhetorical “Could I be happier? Yeah. Who couldn’t?” (1.1 Chase 2002); he projects his situation onto the world at large in order to diminish the significance of his own mood and emotions. In a later scene, when moved to tears by the loss of his beloved ducks, he distances himself from his feelings by referring to himself in the third person, casting his grief, and submission to it, in an ironic, self-mocking light: “Aw, Jesus, fuck! Now he’s gonna cry” (1.1 Chase 2002). Tony is averse to admitting any negative feelings of sadness or pain because it necessitates the acceptance of his vulnerability; any feelings of hurt, humiliation, or distress that he does feel are transformed and projected as gender-appropriate anger and aggression at the people around him – two of the few emotions endorsed by the hegemonic model. When Melfi tries to persuade Tony that his mother wants to kill him, he becomes enraged, over-turning furniture in her office and physically menacing her (1.13 Chase 2002), and if he is kept from directing his rage at the source of his woes, then he inflicts his anger upon himself - as Melfi states during the course of his therapy, “Depression is rage turned inward” (5.10 Green and Burgess 2004). In either case, the association of pain, violence, and destruction with the denial of emotion and vulnerability suggests that in denying his own suffering, and refusing to value it, Tony essentially denies himself the pursuit of pleasure and happiness. Indeed, it is only by emphasising the corporeal symptoms of a mental and emotional disorder that Tony seems amenable to treatment; Tony is only reluctantly persuaded to endure his initial therapy sessions because Melfi opts to describe his anxiety attacks as “black outs” instead of “panic attacks”, and characterises them as “legitimate psychiatric emergencies” by virtue of the fact that they could physically endanger him (“Suppose you were driving and you passed out?” – 1.1 Chase 2002). Melfi’s subtle shift in focus to the somatic symptoms of Tony’s condition, and their hazardous, wounding potential, repositions his treatment as “an attempt by him

to regain control over his body” (Santo 2002 p. 77) in order to offer Tony a reason to commit to the therapy; in doing so, it effectively displaces the emotional cause of his episodes onto their physical manifestation, such that addressing Tony’s unhappiness and emotional state is the method, rather than the goal – an objective less incompatible with a model of masculinity that prohibits the valuation of emotion. However, by the end of the first episode, Tony is persuaded by Melfi to accept the curative power of talking therapy, and the beneficial effects of expressing his emotions, after misattributing his good mood to his anti-depressants; in a comic moment of commiseration with Artie Bucco at the climax of the episode, a sage-like Tony reflects: “Know what I’m figuring lately? Talking helps.” (1.1 Chase 2002).

The fact that Tony accepts that talking is, if not a cure, then a palliative in treating his depression and anxiety, suggests that accepting and expression emotion has equally curative potential for the “condition” of masculinity; in fact, as Miklitsch (2007 p. 190) suggests, “the psychoanalytic scenario” in *The Sopranos*, and, thus, Tony’s treatment itself, “is coded as distinctly ‘feminine’”:

Take, for example, the title of the show. A soprano is someone who sings with a high-pitched voice—like a woman. Now, given the blood oath of omertà that binds, via the threat of death, the ‘boys’ who make up a Family (e.g. the Soprano Family), to willingly engage in the ‘talking cure’ is to ‘sing’. In just this sense, Tony’s proper name reflects his fractured identity, since in the particular criminal subculture he inhabits, to be a man is to eschew words, to remain ‘strong’ and ‘silent’ like Gary Cooper, not to engage in the sort of affective dialogue that defines psychoanalysis. (Miklitsch 2007 p. 190)

It is a diagnosis with which Ricci agrees, noting that in the masculine subculture of the Mafia talking, especially, is characterised as “feminine” because it is the antithesis of action:

The Mafia is by definition a secret society that has historically not only excluded the feminine principle but has, in its efforts to remain undiluted and masculine, violently negated anything

remotely reminiscent of weak, passive, and unsightly feminine attributes.[...] One of the many chauvinist dictums promulgated by the mob is that “Words are feminine” (Le parole sono femmine)[...] words thwart action. They have the power to still and mute the left-brained linear, rational[...] action-oriented attributes normally associated with the masculine. (Ricci 2014 Loc 2426-2460)

Tony Soprano is not just a compromised exemplar of hegemonic masculinity, but an explicitly feminised exemplar, by engaging in “affective dialogue” (Miklitsch 2007 p. 190), he seems to be opening up to the possibility that masculinity can co-exist with femininity - that while they are fundamentally opposing terms, they do not necessarily need to be mutually exclusive traits. He still espouses a conventional, patriarchal ideal of masculinity, one that comfortably aligns with Connell’s hegemonic model, and he likes to see himself as an avatar of this ideal, “a hard, cold, captain of industry type”, or “tough guy”, as Melfi herself describes him (3.12 Chase 2001); and, given the way that his physicality is portrayed, he seems to live up to this standard as a strong, powerful, aggressive “alpha male” (6.5 Winter 2006). Yet, he also thinks he has to play the part of the “the sad clown” in front of his friends and family (4.10 Winter, Green and Burgess 2002) someone who is “laughing on the outside, crying on the inside” (1.1 Chase 2002); Melfi herself notes that his “rage” and aggression is “a big, loud, flaming, self distraction from feelings that are even more frightening”, namely, “sadness” (2.13 Chase and Kessler 2002). Tony himself seems aware, then, that masculinity is something that is practised, performed or displayed, given that he characterises it as a role that he is forced to play; the “sad clown” is a mask he allegedly wears to disguise his feelings, but, as Melfi astutely observes, it is not “humour” (4.10 Winter, Green and Burgess 2002), but anger and aggression that are used as a mask for his emotions. The performance of masculinity, then, projected outward, can be read as a disguise for an inner femininity; Tony’s body is revealed as an empty signifier in much the same way as the fit body was in Santo’s reckoning, as it does not reveal the character of the man that inhabits the body (Santo 2002 p. 84, discussing Kimmel p. 26), but

attempts to refute it. In this sense, *The Sopranos* reveals that if femininity is “symbolically defined by lack” (Connell 2005 p. 70), masculinity is defined by lack in an entirely literal sense.

Thus far, the examples of the feminine qualities that Tony evinces have exclusively concerned the internal experience of emotion, something that is implicitly alluded to by the text, but not explicitly displayed and affirmed by Tony himself; however, outside of his panic attacks, there are many occasions where Tony outwardly displays feminine traits and attributes throughout the series, and can even be said to be enacting, if not performing, femininity. The performance of femininity would necessarily entail the practice of what Connell terms “emphasized femininity”, which stems from the “global subordination of women to men”, and which is characterised by “compliance” to “the pattern of femininity [...] given most cultural and ideological support”; this subordination provides the “essential basis for differentiation” from which “the construction of femininity” is derived, and as such, is displayed by “large-scale patterns in [...] particular social milieu” such as the “display of sociability[...] compliance with men’s desire for titillation [and] the acceptance of marriage and childcare as a response to labour-market discrimination” (Connell 1987 p. 183-190). In Tony’s case, then ‘enacting’ femininity seems more appropriate, because in the first place, it is something done in defiance, rather than compliance, of gender norms, and because in the second place it is volitional, in the sense that enactment can be read to mean putting into effect emotions which are an essential part of his being, and only characterised as feminine by the hegemonic model of masculinity; a woman’s performance of femininity, and thus, her submission, is neither volitional nor reflective of an essential aspect of her character. However, Tony *can* be said to inhabit gender roles that are reserved for women through his enactment of femininity; specifically, motherhood. He consistently evinces a great capacity for caring, compassion, and almost maternal nurturance, and he readily affirms affection and attachment in a way definitively prohibited by the hegemonic model. He frequently displays a tenderness towards animals that becomes something of his trademark; in 4.5 (Green and Burgess 2002) he sits beside his beloved horse, Pie-O-My, when she falls sick, caressing and comforting her gently, and he genuinely grieves for the loss of the family of

ducks in 1.1 (Chase 2002) It is a tenderness he displays towards his son and daughter, too; he makes sincere, if sporadic, attempts to bond with his children, and genuinely loves and cares for them (1.5 Chase and Manos jr. 2002, 2.10 Renzulli, Green and Burgess 2002); while he may rarely verbalise his affection, he regularly demonstrates it through physical displays of tenderness, hugging, kissing, and tousling hair (1.1 Chase 2002). While his parenting style towards A.J is distinctly patriarchal, making regular and vehement assertions that A.J needs to toughen up (3.13 Chase and Konner 2001), Tony breaks down in helpless, angry tears after recounting to Melfi that his son has started to express suicidal thoughts in 6.17 (Weiner and Chase 2007), saying: “Your kids, though – it’s like when they’re little, and they get sick - you’d give anything in the world to trade places with them, so they don’t have to suffer”; it is a maternal impulse entirely at odds with his previous parenting, and it recurs in 6.19 (Winter 2007), after A.J’s failed suicide attempt. He cradles his sobbing son in his lap, voice choked with emotion as he strokes his hair and soothes him in motherly fashion, murmuring “You’re all right, baby - you’re all right, baby”; for once, he speaks to A.J tenderly, abandoning his repeated refrain that he needs to learn to be a man, and finally recognises his son’s emotional pain and suffering as valid. His use of the word “baby” to comfort A.J infantilises him, and in that moment, Tony’s connection with A.J is closer to the traditional bond between mother and child than father and son, transforming the relationship dynamic to mirror that of Carmela and A.J’s (“He was our happy little boy!” - 6.19 Winter 2007). Tony’s maternal impulse is not just restricted to his children, and in fact extends to his other relatives, too; when he finds out Uncle Junior has injured himself in an accident, he looks over his ailing uncle with clear concern and worry, before lifting him and carrying him, bridal style, to drive him to the hospital (2.2 Green, Burgess and Renzelli 2002). While his marriage may be dysfunctional, and he may “equate love with money” (4.4 Winter 2002) demonstrating his affection through the giving of gifts, rather than emotional support, his naked need for Carmela’s nurturing presence is noted by Melfi in one of their therapy sessions (“she may leave you, but you’ll never leave her” 3.12 Renzulli 2001); the fact that Tony is emotionally dependent on his wife contravenes the independence and self-reliance expected of a “real man”. On

rare occasions, and without psychiatric prompting, Tony is also capable of admitting feelings of hurt and humiliation, and in doing so, making himself vulnerable; he confronts Junior over comments he makes over Tony's athletic ability, describing them as "hurtful" in 5.3 (Caleo 2004) and in 1.1 (Chase 2002), as dealing "a tremendous blow to my self-esteem". In one of the series' most touching moments, Tony asks Uncle Junior why, with his memory failing, he never remembers or says "something good", and instead always says "something mean"; choking up, he asks Uncle Junior: "I mean, don't you love me?". Junior's lip quivers, and his eyes fill with tears, but unlike Tony, he cannot acknowledge his emotions, nor admit vulnerability; yet Tony expresses his desire to be loved, and his pain at its absence (5.3). Tony regularly expresses his love for his friends and family, men and women both, although, admittedly, it's often done obliquely to a third party; when cautioned about Junior's irascibility, he forewarns Hesh that "I love that man" (1.1 Chase 2002), repeats the same warning to Vin Makazian when he reveals that Pussy is an FBI informant "Like him? I fuckin' love him!" (1.11 Renzulli 2002), and of Christopher, his nephew and protégé, he says "I love him like I love my own son" (4.10 Winter, Green and Burgess 2002).

The importance that Tony places on filial love, affection and attachment, and his comfort with displaying it, even amongst his friends and colleagues, represent a significant deviation from the model of hegemonic masculinity (especially in the homosocial environment of the Mafia) because it places value on prohibited, feminine emotions of intimacy and closeness, and valorises interdependence, rather than independence, as well as "cooperation, loyalty, honour, and the supremacy of group interests over the individual" (Rotundo 2002 p. 48). Yet, paradoxically, this feminine principle is in keeping with Tony's own personal ideal of manhood, and, in fact, Tony characterises himself as a "good man", and defends his virtue, precisely because he loves his family (6.19). This would seem to confirm the possibility of an alternative model of manhood that exists as a negotiation between masculinity and femininity, but it also suggests that male identity and manhood are not synonymous with masculinity. This presents a problem for Mulvey's psychoanalytic model, as it prohibits, if not prevents, the possibility of narcissistic identification

(Mulvey 1975 p. 10) on the part of the male viewer; if Tony *is* considered a femininised exemplar, someone whose performance of masculinity is subverted by an interior femininity, he may be said to exemplify a new model of manhood, but he cannot be considered an exemplar of hegemonic masculinity. As such, it is unlikely that the male viewer would consider him a “more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego” (Mulvey 1975 p. 12-13), and thus identify with him on the basis that Tony is capable of achieving an ideal to which they themselves are inadequate. The limits of the psycho-analytic model, at least for the purposes of this thesis, have been reached; while it may still be possible, in individual instances, to enjoy an identification with Tony characterised by a narcissism, the fact that Tony’s performance of his gender is far from the “ideal” of hegemonic masculinity suggests that there are multiple processes of identification at work. Indeed, as Clark (2014 p. 460) suggests, it could be that Tony’s femininity, rather than this masculinity, with which viewer’s engage:

“... viewers’ acceptance and enjoyment of these programs is possible, in part, because these representations appear to actually abide by feminist proposals about gender. The men of quality television are gender fluid. They express feminine attributes of emotional display, attachments to and cherishing of maternal care, compassion for others, and sensitivity to the feelings of others. This fluidity also suggests that gender can be disengaged from sex, and that gender binaries are false and restrictive cultural constructs. The [men] of postfeminist television are no strangers to sexual dominance over women, violence, success, and pressures of the public sphere workplace, and all-round hard-working/living existence. As such, they qualify as archetypal masculine men, ‘real’ men. However, they also carry with them the assurance that they are well and truly, under this façade, not as firmly opposed to femininity (and, by extension, the women who are charged with this characteristic) as they first appear. (Clark 2014 p. 460).

The question remains, then, how such an identification, founded not on narcissistic masculinity but on femininity, could be framed. In the first chapter, it was suggested that Tony’s imperfect performance of masculinity afforded the male audience a form of catharsis

because it provided relief from the anxieties that arose from feelings of inadequacy surrounding their own performance of their gender (Neale 1983); that, in essence, Tony, as a “real” man, authorised the failure of the male viewer to perform his own masculinity. However, this catharsis was a modification of the narcissistic model of identification, not a form of identification in its own right, and in order to fully account for the viewer’s engagement, an independent model is required. Edward Tan’s (1996 171) model of viewer identification in the feature film suggests itself precisely because it is based on “empathy” and something which exists in diametric opposition to “narcissism”, and which is itself a “feminine” emotion because it suggests sensitivity, concern, and compassion.

Of the two types of sympathy described by Tan, “phasic” sympathy (1996 p.177-178) seems the most immediately suggestive of the kind of processes at work in viewer identification in *The Sopranos*; indeed, the form and content of the series seem to work in harmony to encourage the kind of empathetic identification described by Tan. In the first place, it is possible to see Tony’s psychiatric sessions as “coded as distinctly feminine”, not just because Tony himself is engaged in the feminine activity of “affective dialogue” (Miklitsch 2007 p. 190), but because the viewer’s engagement with Tony is also coded as a feminine identification. DeFino (2004 p. 84) states that *The Sopranos* is a “walking tour through the mind of a postmodern gangster”, and that “the purpose of Tony’s therapy is not prescriptive but expository and critical, allowing us unique insights into his past and his professional and personal trials”. The viewer is thus made aware, in “oblique fashion”, of Tony’s innermost “thoughts and feelings”, thus contributing to the portrayal of Tony as a “round” and fully developed character, and the confession of these emotions often constitutes an (albeit compromised and partial) “admission of vulnerability” (Tan 1996 p. 177-178) on Tony’s part (1.1). As Harold notes:

[...], the gangsters in *The Sopranos*, especially Tony, are portrayed in deeply psychological and often quite intimate ways...Through Tony’s sessions with Dr. Melfi, we get to know Tony’s

feelings much better than we could otherwise. In those sessions, we get to understand his childhood (through flashbacks), his hopes and concerns, and his fears. We get a very strong picture of Tony as a complete human being. The character himself is a rich and complex one. In addition to being a gangster (with all that implies) we also learn that Tony tries, in his own way, to be a good father and husband, that he cares deeply about his children and wants them to do well. We learn that he loves his friends deeply, even those (like Big Pussy) that he ends up killing. (Harold 2004 p. 140-141)

These acts fulfil the pre-requisites for the experience of the “pleasurable emotion” of sympathy and indeed “strengthen” a pre-existing sympathetic disposition; they also trigger on the viewer’s behalf the action tendency to reciprocate this “intimacy” and maintain “proximity” (Tan 1996 p. 178). The desire to “give” and “receive” (1996 p. 178) is a desire to be open, to share one’s own emotions, to engage, in other words, in feminine “affective dialogue” (Miklitsch 2007 p. 190), and to admit one’s vulnerability, in a manner equivalent to Tony. The conclusion that the thesis derives from this, then, is that the viewer, their pleasure, and their identification with Tony are all subject to feminine coding, and predicated on the feminine attributes, acts, and attachments displayed by Tony himself, and described in detail above. This presents the possibility of a potent subversion of the model of hegemonic masculinity on the grounds of “affective learning”, wherein the viewer learns new “emotional behaviour[s]” due to the experience of pleasure associated with these emotions, encountered through the fantasies fostered by entertainment (Tan 1996 p. 27-28). If the male viewer achieves an empathetic identification with Tony because of his feminine attributes, and this identification is itself pleasurable precisely because it calls up the same attributes that Tony displays, it suggests that through watching *The Sopranos*, not only will the male viewer become aware of the possibility of a different way of performing masculinity, but that in the process of watching, he will actively start to perform and practice a this new kind of masculinity itself.

However, instances of “phasic” sympathy seem to exist in contradiction of “tonic” sympathy (Tan 1996 p. 177-178) in *The Sopranos*. Tony’s inability to perfectly perform his gender, and his

anxieties surrounding the status of his masculinity, mark him as both an equal of the male viewer, and demonstrate what is likely to be a shared concern with their imperfect practice of masculinity; however, Tony's demonstrates positive "attitudes and views" (1996 p. 168) towards the hegemonic model of masculinity (1.1 – Chase 2002, 5.13 - Chase, Green and Burgess 2004), something which seems to preclude the possibility of empathetic identification on the grounds of femininity. Indeed, Harris suggests that, as a result of the preoccupation with "'white, middle class, male anxieties'" (Santo 2008 p. 33-34, cited by Harris 2012 p. 447) in HBO serials such as *The Sopranos*, these dramas assume the existence of a shared concern with a "crisis in masculinity" (Harris 2012 p. 444) on the part of the viewer because:

...In Santo's view then, HBO self-consciously interpellate the viewer as a white, male middle-class subject constructing this position not, as the mantra went in the 1980s and 1990s, as a 'norm' but as an elite and a beleaguered one. (Harris 2012 p. 447 discussing Santo 2008 p. 33-34)

This characterisation of white, middle-class male viewers as "elite" and beleaguered" seems to suggest that these men are being made martyrs for their masculinity, and that as a result, series' like *The Sopranos* validate the hegemonic model from which the viewer's masculinity derived. These views are echoed by Toscano (2014 p.468, 452) as well, who ascribes a "nostalgic" preoccupation with the loss of patriarchal power and authority to *The Sopranos*, and describes the serial as "antifeminist" because it portrays men as being victimised by women. He sustains Harris' assertion, stating that *The Sopranos* "focuses on the suburban middle-class and their anxieties", and argues that Tony represents "an American Everyman" who "just wants to make money and provide for his family" (Toscano 2014, p. 455, 465-466; however, his "patriarchal alpha male status" is compromised by "the major problems" caused by female relatives (Toscano 2014 p.459-461). It is a "situation" which "follows a theme common in...sitcoms" in which "the father is emasculated by the women in his life", and Toscano reads this as expressing "a fear in contemporary culture, especially for conservative audiences, that women will somehow destroy men or weaken them" (Toscano 2014 p. 459-461). Carroll also observes similarities to situation comedy with *The Sopranos*, and his

discussion of audience identification seems to recognise an equal tendency to relate with Tony on the grounds of his emasculation, listing points of commonality with the viewer that construct Tony as a sympathetic character precisely because he is a failed patriarch:

Tony is this bizarre amalgam of the ordinary and the exotic. He is a family man beleaguered by everyday trials of the sort that one might encounter in a sit-com, or a soap-opera, or to a certain extent, in one's daily life... Especially in terms of the quotidian side of Tony's existence, many of us can recognize our own lives in Tony's- broken water heaters, rebellious or otherwise misbehaving children, querulous elderly relatives, marital tensions, annoying extended family members and overbearing in-laws, and so forth. (Carroll 2004 p. 123-127)

As such, this seems to suggest that "cognitive" and "affective" learning are working to opposite ends in *The Sopranos* (Tan 1996 p. 28). On the one hand, the viewer learns new "emotional behaviour[s]" through a feminine identification with Tony's femininity (1996 p. 27). On the other hand, as entertainment can offer "informal schooling in the dominant ideology" (Tan 1996 p. 22, discussing Jowett and Linton, 1989), the viewer can derive pleasure from the validation of their beliefs and values (Tan 1996 p. 22); in this case, the viewer can experience pleasure through an empathetic identification with Tony's masculinity, instead of his femininity, and the shared patriarchal "'source'" and "'value concern'" (Frijda 1986 cited by Tan 1996 p. 168) of the hegemonic model. This suggests the possibility that the tension between masculinity and femininity in *The Sopranos* is irreconcilable, and irreducible; while this may be true of Tony, it is not necessarily true of the viewer, and the generic tradition to which *The Sopranos* belongs can provide an alternative to this binary opposition.

Tony's therapy sessions are not the only formal aspect of the series that is presented as feminine. As Harris observes, both the medium and the genre of *The Sopranos* are marked by feminine associations; she states that "television" was associated with a "'feminisation of culture'" (Harris 2012 p. 443, discussing Baudrillard 1983) because of "the 'feminine' connotations traditionally attached to melodrama" and, by extension, all the feminine and "sentimental appeals

to emotion” that the “melodrama” connotes (2012 p. 446, citing Santo 2008 p. 33). The “melodrama” was “said to be television’s dominant generic form”, and was “exemplified by soap opera” (2012 p. 446, citing Santo 2008 p. 33); as Donatelli and Alward observes, “by far the greatest part of any episode [of *The Sopranos*] is spent in domestic space and dialogue”, and as such, “there is no question that *The Sopranos* takes its place in a tradition of prime-time soaps” (2002 p. 64). The “private, domestic sphere” in *The Sopranos* is “represented [...] by the classic spaces of the kitchen and dining room” (Miklitsch 2007 p. 193), which themselves evoke positive emotions due to their pleasurable association with maternal care and nurturance (the preparation of food, ergo, the provision of need) and family unity (shared meals, shared space, shared intimacy), but are also pleasurable purely because of the aesthetics. The warmth of the lighting and the opulence of the set décor in Tony’s mansion, the wide-open spaces of the open-plan kitchen, and the wide-angle shots that are used to encompass the ensemble cast, (something which is particularly evident in the viewer’s introduction to the Soprano family in the first episode, via the ducks - 1.1 Chase 2002) achieve the effect that “the sets themselves become objects of beauty, downright sensual delights to watch” (Martin 2013 p. 15). The soap opera, with its emphasis on “the private and the intimate” (Harris 2012 p. 448), and its propensity for fostering “emotional intensity” (Donatelli and Alward 2002 p. 64), seems particularly adapted to meet the criteria of Tan’s model for empathetic identification. The viewer is afforded a privileged insight into the private and personal lives of the Tony and his family, at a time when they are at their most “open and vulnerable” (Yacowar 2002 p. 129). The viewer is encouraged to immerse themselves in the intimacy of his affective attachments to his family and friends (5.8 Imperioli 2004), and allowed to share in tender moments in which he expresses, or affirms through gesture, his love and care for his wife and children (1.1, Chase, 2002, 3.7 Konner 2001); as such, they are invited to enjoy “the imaginary experience” (Tan 1996 p. 178) of these relationships, and this enjoyment is based on a feminine triple-bind of “prohibit[ed] forms of emotion, attachment and pleasure” (Connell 2005 p. 85). Tony himself clearly places a great deal of value on love, family and kinship, and it can be said to be his primary “value concern” (Frijda 1986,

cited by Tan 1996 p. 168); the ducks that fledge and leave him disconsolate in the first episode prompt him to the epiphany that his anxiety and depression are founded on the fear of losing his family (1.1 – Chase 2002), or, more specifically, as Schulman characterises it, the “loss of nuclear family warmth” (Schulman 2010 p. 30) ; in 5.13 (Chase, Green and Burgess 2004) he tells Johnny Sack that “what we are here for, in the end, is to put food on the table for our families, our sons; the future”; and in the final scene of the first season, Tony, Carmela, Meadow and A.J enjoy a quiet, intimate meal together at Artie’s restaurant, where Tony raises a glass to toast his family, and fondly intones to his children, “someday soon, you’re gonna have families of your own”, and when they do, it’s important to remember “the little moments – the times like this, that were good” (1.13 – Chase 2002). It is a refrain that is repeated throughout the series, by Meadow in 3.13 (Chase and Konner 2001), “About what you once said, how you have to max out the good times with the people you love - God, am I learning that that, like, is so true”, and by A.J in the finale, “Right, focus on the good times [...] Isn’t that what you said one time – “try to remember the times that were good?” (6.21 Chase 2007). Tony’s goal, and the goal which the viewer then “adopts” (Tan 1996 p. 173, discussing Oatley 1992, 1995), is to spend time, and share intimacy, with his family, but it is a goal which he himself thwarts.

Tony’s anger, aggression, callousness and selfishness and his attempts to reinstate patriarchal power, control, and authority in his home – in other words, all of his masculine acts, attributes and attitudes – create a distance between both himself, his family, and the viewer; as such, they prevent sympathetic identification with Tony, and thus, the “pleasurable experience” of sympathy (Tan 1996 p. 178), as Carroll observes:

We are still repelled by a great many things he says and does. Our capacity for sympathy for Tony is limited. Our appreciation of his relative merits in his fallen world does not impair our capability to be morally outraged by many of his criminal behaviours and ethically deviant attitudes, such as his racism and sexism (Carroll 2004 p. 134)

It is racism and sexism, of course, that define patriarchal gender configurations and the model of hegemonic masculinity; they are instituted through the subordination of women and marginalised masculinities. It is no surprise, then, that Tony displays both such qualities in his attempt to assert a patriarch's right; while he is, for the most part, happy and proud that his daughter is a "smart, beautiful, independent woman" (4.12 Winter 2002), he attempts to prevent her dating her black boyfriend by confronting him behind her back, and reciting a litany of racist terms of abuse (3.2 Chase 2001). Carmela's frustration and anxiety at her lack of financial autonomy causes rifts between Tony and herself throughout the series, especially as Tony repeatedly refuses to help her (4.9 Konner 2002) out of a desire to ensure her dependence on him, and his position in the household as breadwinner; even when he agrees to support her real estate project, he employs subterfuge to have the development of her spec house blocked after an argument with Meadow makes him realise that Carmela's involvement will prevent her from completely committing to the role of mother – and this blockage leaves Carmela immensely unhappy and dissatisfied, as well as upset with Tony (6.10 Weiner 2006)

In each case, Tony's actions thwart his own goals and violate his primary "value concern" (Frijda, cited by Tan 1996 p. 168). In addition, it is significant that Tony's attempts to exert patriarchal power and authority are performed in through secrecy and subterfuge. His status as patriarch is so tenuous that he cannot openly assert his power, but must resort to 'feminine' treachery to achieve his ends. Narcissistic identification with Tony as a patriarchal "ideal ego" therefore seems highly unlikely, because his performance of his patriarchal role is in no way "more complete" or "more perfect" (Mulvey 1975 p 12-13); yet empathetic identification is equally impossible, as Tony's behaviour compromises both his own relationships with his friends and family, and the viewer's relationship with Tony, preventing their "imaginary experience" of these connections (Tan 1996 p. 178) and thus frustrating their pleasure. The reason, then, that the "series' core 'problem' [is] the 'internal' [difference] between masculinity and femininity" (Miklitsch 2007 p. 203) is because Tony's performance of his masculinity, and his patriarchal practices, are presented as

a “Complication” (Tan 1996 p.59) that prevent the viewer’s experience of pleasure, and present an obstacle to his own intentions and goals; as such, Tony’s anger, aggression, and domineering tendencies evoke negative emotions of antipathy, anger and frustration on the viewer’s behalf, generating “tension” (1996 p. 35). The deployment of pleasure and displeasure that *The Sopranos* uses as part of a process of “affective learning” (Tan 1996 p. 35) aid its deconstructive project by reinforcing the gendered association of the experience of these emotions; the anger and aggression displayed by Tony, and evoked towards Tony on the part of the viewer as a result, are thus experienced as negative and unpleasurable because they are the source of the complicating problem, not its solution. As such, the tension between masculinity and femininity in the series can only be resolved through the reaffirmation of femininity, and the restoration of feminine “emotion, attachments, and pleasure” (Connell 2005 p. 85), and, to an extent, it is. In 2.9, Tony, already irritable at having been asked to get a vasectomy, unleashes a torrent of angry abuse at A.J. after he accidentally breaks a dish while getting food out of the fridge; Tony rebukes him for over-eating, unaware of the irony, and in an attack which is directed at A.J.’s perceived femininity, he yells “I’m supposed to get a vasectomy when this is my male heir? Look at him!” (2.9 Imperoli 2002). Tony’s anger and aggression, constructed specifically as patriarchal in as much as they characterise A.J as effeminate and emasculated, are presented as the source of the problem, which is itself the fact that Tony has hurt his son’s feelings, and has clearly upset A.J; the tension in the episode comes, in part, from pity towards A.J, and the frustrated desire to help and console him that results from the “action tendency” of compassion (Tan 1996 p. 179), as well as from the experience of unpleasant emotions of antipathy and outrage directed at Tony. The release of this tension through catharsis occurs at the end of the episode; Tony has calmed down, and approaches A.J in his bedroom, now contrite, with an apology and a propitiatory gift of pizza. Tony explains his actions, saying:

I hope you know I didn't mean it. I said it' cause all the anger and frustration of the last few days built up inside me and exploded. There's no excuse for that. I gotta learn to control my emotions around the people I love. I think you're the same way. I think, your feelings, you keep 'em inside,

and you and me, we react without thinking. That's why I get mad at you. I see myself in you. I couldn't ask for a better son, A.J. And I mean that. (2.9 Imperoli 2002).

Tony fulfils all the pre-requisites for empathetic identification in this scene; in doing so the audience is able to achieve catharsis. He shares his "thoughts and feelings" with A.J, and, by recognising those same feelings in A.J, not only validates A.J's own emotions by proxy, but re-affirms the mutual femininity of father and son, fulfilling the need for "intimacy", "proximity", and "reciprocity". The pizza he provides constitutes a "special sacrifice", and his apology is itself "an admission of vulnerability" (Tan 1996 p. 177-178); he satisfies the viewer's frustrated desire to "help" and "console" A.J, and, in saying that he "couldn't ask for a better son" (2.9 Imperoli 2002) Tony reaffirms his love, affection, and thus, "attachment" to A.J, ultimately fulfilling his narrative goal – to spend time with, and share intimacy, with his family. Sympathy for Tony is restored and enhanced by the expression of his emotions; and thus, in both form and content, catharsis is achieved through the re-affirmation of "prohibit[ed] emotion, attachment and pleasure" (Connell 2005 p. 85), and its incitement in the audience through identification.

In conclusion, this chapter analysed the performance of masculinity in *The Sopranos*, beginning with a study into the significance of the panic attack as motif, analysing the ways in which it represented the sadomasochism (Santo 2002 p. 87) inherent to the hegemonic model of masculinity, characterised by self-denial, and the repression of emotions and feelings. The analysis of Tony's own ideal of manhood revealed that, while he identified with the model's demand for mental and emotional fortitude, his emphasis of filial love and attachment represented a significant deviation from this model, and although he repudiated femininity, many of his acts, attributes and attachments were coded as feminine. In the evaluation of empathetic and narcissistic identification, the essay concluded that viewer identification with Tony could be characterised as feminine on the basis that it was prompted by the sharing of intimate thoughts and feelings, and reciprocated on the part of the viewer with a desire for intimacy and closeness. Finally, the thesis turned to a study of

the operation of catharsis and affective learning in *The Sopranos*, and inferred that, as the tension between masculinity and femininity is resolved through a catharsis that is both experienced as, and predicated on, the reaffirmation of femininity, the association of masculinity with negative emotions and femininity with positive emotions was reinforced.

Violence and Male Fantasy in *The Sopranos*

In this chapter, the thesis first discusses the ways in which empathetic identification and “situational meaning” (Tan 1996 p. 171, 174) are used to enhance the viewer’s experience of tension and intensify associations of violence with unpleasure. The essay examines, in brief, the ways in which the narrative structure of the *The Sopranos* works to demythologise and domesticate the depiction of violence. The essay then offers a character study of Christopher, analysing the ways in which his character engages with and problematizes the viewer’s own participation in patriarchal fantasies, before extending the analysis of his character into an evaluation of the distancing effect of irony, and the ways it is used to prevent the emotional investment necessary for catharsis. The thesis also analyses the extent to which verisimilitude, and the affect it produces, achieves the opposite effect of irony by emphasising the viewer’s proximity to the violence and, in preventing appreciation of the film as artefact, preventing the possibility of a cathartic release of negative emotion as a result. Finally, the chapter closes with a study of the ways in which the depiction of violence in *The Sopranos* is used to symbolise the tension between masculinity and femininity that defines the series. The discussion now turns to the analysis, beginning with an evaluation of tension.

In *The Sopranos*, violence is often meant to shock, appal, or even amuse, but it is almost never designed to gratify. It is rarely a vehicle for audience catharsis; instead of diffusing the tension or suspense inherent in a situation, it amplifies it, becoming another problem for the characters rather than a solution, and thus, offering no release of negative emotions. There are countless murders and beat-downs throughout the series which serve to exacerbate conflicts for the characters rather than resolve them, and as Lippman (2004 p. 145) notes, the viewer is thus conditioned remains in a “constant state of suspense and dread ...[anticipating] the next violent act, who will perpetrate it, and who will suffer for it”; they serve to disrupt the pleasure of the audience, and invite anticipation of violent retaliation. Ralph Cifaretto’s beating at the hands of a vengeful Tony in 3.6 (Winter and Stabile 2001) and then Tony’s pointed cancellation of Thanksgiving dinner in

3.8 (Green, Burgess, and Kessler 2001) has Ralph approaching Johnny Sack to ask for Sacrimoni's permission to kill Tony. After Ralphie is finally murdered by Tony over the death of his beloved racing horse, Tony's friends and captains meet for an informal dinner where they are challenged to "pull the plug" on their boss for killing somebody over what amounts to sheer sentimentality. The series repeatedly demonstrates the precariousness of Tony's position, and dramatic irony is used to great effect here to enhance the audience's understanding of the "situational meaning" (Tan 1996 p. 171, 174) for Tony; both friends and foes conspire against Tony, but Tony never learns of these developments, and thus can never act to thwart them; they are for the audience's eyes only, and heedless to the danger, Tony seems very much at the mercy of these unknown machinations. The "meaning for the viewer" is one accompanied by a tension generated through the "empathetic emotion" of "compassion"; the "action tendency" it provokes, a desire "to help" (Tan 1996 p. 171-179), is inevitably frustrated, and thus enhances the viewer's feelings of powerlessness and fear; as a result viewer's dread of violence and its inevitable return is a source of constant unease which persists even through scenes of ordinary, everyday life, where the looming threat of death should be at its most distant. As we have seen already, it is the warmth and humanity that is displayed in the domestic scenes between Tony and his friends and family that the audience can come to identify and empathise with the mob boss and his clan; yet the fact that these intimate, familial moments are couched either side of abrupt eruptions of violence creates an unresolvable sense of tension. In other words, the ever-present possibility of violence, and the toxic model of hegemonic masculinity it represents, is the source of a tension for which no catharsis can be achieved.

The fact that the murders and beatings in *The Sopranos* are "bracketed with homely domestic scenes" also affects the way the violence itself is communicated to the audience. As Donatelli and Alward note, "the greatest part of any episode" of *The Sopranos* "is spent in domestic space" and the violence itself is "handled economically" (2002 p. 64); the effect of these choices is "to make violence as domestic as going for a tennis lesson", and to minimise the significance of

Tony's public sphere activities in comparison with his conduct in the private sphere. The format of the series, as a soap, or at least, pseudo-opera, as well as the subject, style and tone, thus work to prevent the viewer's enjoyment of violence as "spectacle" (Tan 1996 p. 175); as Donatelli and Alward (2002 p. 65) observe, "everything that [the gangsters] do is undercut because they are cast in soap opera episodes that deny them the dignity of a full length Mafia movie". The impact of the outbursts of violence in the show are thus diluted by their ubiquity, the frequency at which they occur ensuring that they cannot be mistaken as pivotal moments which mark the arc or development of the characters involved; ironically, the thematic and narrative significance of these acts is the lack of significance they have to the characters. To the Soprano family, violence is habitual, routine, a part of the quotidian; as career criminals, it's just another day on the job, and for the most part, the characters assume an appropriately pragmatic approach to violence as a result.

Christopher, Tony's protégé and nephew, represents an exception to this rule; he openly expresses violent and vengeful "phantasies of power, omnipotence, mastery and control" (Neale 1983) in 1.3 (Saraceni 2002) and is desperate to perform a killing for Tony because he wants to become a made man; in this case, it would be more appropriate to say Christopher wants to be "made a man", as a mobster who has performed a hit in the *The Sopranos* is said to have "popped" their "cherry" (6.13, Frolov, Schneider, Chase and Weiner 2007). He presents an interesting possibility for analysis, partly because his personal model of masculinity seems predicated entirely on violence, and characterises violence as an integral part of its performance, but also because the other mobsters regard his attitude with absolute derision. Christopher's frame of reference for life in the Mafia comes from the movies he watched growing up; he craves the glamour, the hedonism, and the notoriety of the criminal lifestyle shown in films like *Scarface*, he identifies with the toxic machismo inhabited by the protagonists, and he is enthralled by the idea of violence as the ultimate act of masculine power and self-assertion. After being humiliated by Junior for stealing from his businesses, Christopher storms into the Bada-Bing, ranting at Tony:

CHRISTOPHER

I represent you out there, and I'm tired of puttin' my tail between my legs! This ain't negotiation time, this is Scarface, final scene, fuckin' bazookas under each arm, "Say hello to my little friend!

SILVIO

Always with the scenarios.

(1.3, Saraceni 2002)

Silvio's exasperated expression typifies the reaction of the senior Mafiosi to Christopher's violent tendencies, and Tony himself castigates Christopher for wanting to be "a big, bad guy", saying that his aggression is a symptom of "cowboy-it is" (1.10, Renzulli and Chase 2002). He explicitly links Christopher with a cultural exemplar of hegemonic masculinity typified by violence in a way that frames the comparison as mocking and highlights the fictive, unrealistic nature of the ideal; Christopher's internalisation of the ideal it represents is thus presented as juvenile, an investment in a childish fantasy. The viewer identifies with Tony, and is encouraged to share his stance; as such, the viewer is positioned to regard Christopher, and the violence he glorifies, with contempt. The fact that Christopher's unironic investment in violence characterises him as infantile encourages the viewer to see him as a boy, rather than a man, and this characterisation of Christopher as somebody who is, if not feminine, certainly not masculine, seems to suggest the possibility of an ideal of manhood which does not prioritise aggression and violence as part of its performance. Indeed over the course of the first season, Christopher himself discovers that violence does not make the man, and that furthermore, it provides precious little pleasure or catharsis.

In "The Legend of Tennessee Moltisanti", (1.10, Renzulli and Chase, 2002) Christopher seeks counsel with his criminal associates about the nightmares he is suffering after his first killing. Big Pussy, avuncular as always with cigar in hand, offers advice about recovering from murder-induced

trauma as blithely as any other professional talking shop: “That happens. The more of them you do, the better you’ll sleep. I had one prick chasing me for months in my dreams” (1.10, Renzulli and Chase, 2002). The matter-of-fact approach to murder, the casual, conversational tone, the suggestion that post-traumatic stress disorder is to mobsters what an aching back is to manual labourers; they each locate the events of the discussion in the realm of the domestic and the ordinary. This scene is coupled with Christopher’s plaintive protests to an impassive Paulie in the preceding scene. The mise-en-scene encompasses Chrissy as he sits, slumped on his couch, staring miserably at a laptop in his vest and boxer shorts. He is surrounded by empty beer cans, snack wrappers and take-out boxes in a dingy apartment lit only by a single dim lamp. The mess in his room, his slovenly, unwashed appearance, his gloomy expression, and his petulant tone of voice all paint a picture of depression and despair, but the opening of the scene is used to render Christopher’s existential crisis and self-pity comic, rather than tragic. Christopher is working on a film script, but the point-of-view shot of Chrissy’s laptop exposes his position as the titular “Tennessee Moltisanti”, and the “Legend” of the tortured artist it implies, as farcical; the misspelt, grammatically atrocious script on the screen robs Christopher’s speech of any potential pathos. One line reads “I must be loyle to my capo”, another, spoken by “Beautiful Girl”, says “Thank you!!!” (1.1, Chase and Renzulli, 2002). In another scene, Christopher’s script verges on the near incomprehensible, his lead character, Rocco, declaring “I thought I was daed but I manuged to get the drip on him” (1.1, Chase and Renzulli, 2002). Christopher’s frustrations seem to be that he has tried to manufacture, in his script, the meaning that he feels is missing from his own life, but found the subject matter inadequate; while he may try (and fail) to cast Rocco’s exploits as heroic, his own violent misdeeds have failed to award him with the “gratification” he expected, and as a result he plunges into depression. Paulie visits Chrissy in the manner of a kindly uncle; concerned for his well-being, and the following exchange takes place:

CHRISTOPHER:

That's it - I don't wanna just survive. Says in these movie-writing books every character has an arc, you understand? That everybody starts out somewhere, then they do something, or something gets done to them, it changes their life – that's called their arc. Where's my arc?

PAULIE

Kid, Richard Kimble, the Devil's whatever – those are all make-believe. Hey! I got no arc either. I was born, grew-up. Spent a few years in the army, a few more in the can. And here I am: a halfa wise-guy. So what?

CHRISTOPHER

I got no identity! Even Brendan Filone's got an identity, and he's dead! I kill that fucking Emil Kolar and nothin'. I don't even move up a notch. All I got is nightmares!

(1.10 Renzulli and Chase 2002)

Christopher's reference to arcs and characters, and indeed, the script itself, suggest that Christopher himself is trying to play a role, and characterise his masculinity as a performance based on hegemonic gender scripts. However, his performance of a masculinity based on the hegemonic model has resulted in a crisis, and loss, of identity, to the effect that masculinity is once again characterised as absence, or "lack" (Connell 2005 p. 70); the implication being that masculinity cannot be a viable basis for the constitution of one's identity. This represents a return to the idea of masculinity as "somasochistic" (Santo 2002 p. 87); Christopher's depression results from his attempt to perform a masculinity characterised by power, control, and violence, one valorised through fictional characters, but this performance has only resulted in his own emotional pain and anguish. He imagined his arc to be one in which his masculinity would be "tested" and "qualified" (Neale 1983 p.), one which was founded on the tension surrounding the uncertain status of his masculinity, and one which would be resolved through its reaffirmation; however, despite passing

the test, and performing according to his gender script, he has derived no catharsis, and thus no meaning, from his actions. The fact that Christopher is prompted to try to reconstitute his masculinity and identity through the protagonist of his script, and through him, attempt to simulate the gratification he cannot achieve in real life suggests, firstly, that violence can only result in catharsis in the realm of fantasy, and secondly, that the hegemonic model that valorises violence can only exist in fantasy as well.

The examples discussed above relate to Christopher's internalisation of violence, but they do not preclude the possibility that the presentation of the act of violence itself is a pleasurable spectacle; however, the styles and techniques used to portray scenes of violence in *The Sopranos* actively work to prevent the viewer's experience of catharsis. In 1.1 (Chase 2002), the framing, editing and soundtrack work to encourage an ironic interpretation of the scene, and irony is an effective measure to use to prevent "investment" of the kind described by Tan, given that it is characterised by a lack of sincere emotion. Christopher self-consciously styles and stages Emil Kolar's murder as though he is performing for a camera, even going so far as to provide his own soundtrack; Bo Diddley's "I Am A Man" plays throughout Satriale's Pork Store as Christopher mimes martial arts moves in the backroom, awaiting Emil's arrival. The choice of song immediately provides an insight into Christopher's self-image, but it not one in which the viewer can invest, because they are instead presented with the image of a grown man performing a poor imitation of a kung fu character; the emphasis on Chris's childish mimicry of violence suggests that any viewer that attempts an unironic investment in the performance of violent masculinity shares the same characteristics – that of a boy, not a man - and also actively constructs the viewer as someone who does *not* share Chris's priorities. This is not the only ironic device at work in the scene -after Christopher makes some awkward, culturally illiterate small-talk, he serves up some cocaine for Emil on a meat cleaver, resting it on the chopping block which Emil is literally and figuratively destined for. A close-up of the back of Kolar's head is shown as Christopher's gun is pressed to the back of his neck – a quick cut later, and the close-up shot is repeated as Kolar's brains are splattered on the chopping block. A low-

angle shot shows Christopher slowly swing the gun round to follow Emil's falling corpse, standing tall above him; he pauses, maintaining his pose, then delivers three shots, one after the other, evenly timed and spaced apart as though to draw out the moment, basking in his own imagined glory. Each bullet is followed by a cut to an extreme close-up of the black and white photos pinned to the wall: Dean Martin, Italian Rat Pack heart-throb; Humphrey Bogart, hardboiled noir legend; Edward G. Robinson of *Little Caesar* infamy. The scene is played out while the laidback drums of "I Am A Man" mark time in a heartbeat rhythm, and the brooding harmonica wails, his choice of music providing perfect insight into Christopher's self-image; Christopher seems to revel in the part he imagines himself to be playing, that of the cool, hard-man gangster, but those shots of the (fictional) masculine role models and exemplars he seeks to emulate skew the scene and paint his actions in an ironic light, turning his earnest homage into parody. The scene ends with Christopher turning to check out his reflection in the glass door of a refrigerator, unaware that the mise-en-scene has been composed to conspire against him. He turns to the glass with a slight swagger, then pulls a double-take as he notices the severed pig's head meeting his gaze; a more fitting counterpart for the feckless Mafiosi than the Hollywood legends on the wall, as the dead pig is every bit as oblivious as he is. The juxtaposition between Christopher and his fictional forebears invokes intertextual knowledge to achieve its ironic effect. The scene deploys genre conventions in order to satirise them, working to deconstruct, and ultimately devalue, the mythology in which Christopher is so invested. It is an example of what Donatelli and Alward (2002 p. 65) describe as a "kind of feminist metatext", in which "Tony and his mob friends are "framed" by rules of domestic television" and whose "actions are constantly subject to forms of irony and comedy"; the Soprano crew are not given "false dignity" by the narrative structure, the framing, the "lighting" or the "make-up", but are instead exposed and undermined as frauds by the format and structure of the show.

Irony is not the only form of comedy that is used to subvert the audience's interpretation of the violence depicted on screen. *The Sopranos* crosses into several comic sub-genres to emphasise the mediocrity of these once mythic mobsters. In the pilot episode, Tony's lawn-churning car chase

as he goes after one of his gambling debtors, accompanied by the doo-wop sounds of Dion and the Belmont's "I Wonder Why", has all the giddy thrill of a gleeful, boyish caper (1.1, Chase, 2002), an association which is encouraged by the fact that Tony evinces a childish delight in the chase, grinning as he swerves across the grass; if it is, admittedly, high-spirited, enjoyable and entertaining, the dissonance between the upbeat, bouncy soundtrack and Tony's nefarious deeds assure the viewer that Tony is a far cry from the mythologised Mafiosi of *The Godfather*. The various criminal blunders of Christopher and Paulie are also responsible for many of the series' moments of slapstick and farce, ensuring that the audience never take them as seriously as they take themselves. The assassination of Mikey Palmice sees Paulie more concerned with itching and bewailing the poison ivy rash he has just contracted than he is in carrying out the hit (1.13 Chase 2002). The most egregious of their criminal mishaps, however, has to be their bungled murder of the Russian Valery in (3.11 Van Patten and Chase 2001)

Christopher and Paulie visit Valery as part of a routine debt collection, but Paulie's lingering resentment of Russia for the Cuban Missile crisis, and even greater jealousy for his political enemy's possession of a coveted universal remote, causes the altercation to go violently awry. In a set-up reminiscent of similar scenes in *Goodfellas*, *Fargo*, and *Miller's Crossing*, Chris and Paulie are forced to take a trip to the Pine Barrens of New Jersey to bury the body. Paulie can't resist heaping a last indignity on the Russian, mocking him and making him dig his own grave; Valery unleashes a barrage of Russian curses and insults as he digs, beating his chest, before abruptly turning and whacking Christopher in the head with the shovel. The scene cuts to a long shot of the snowy woodland vista as Christopher falls to the floor, showing the Russian jabbing Paulie in the groin in classic slapstick fashion, and then springing nimbly out of the frame; leaving the two mobsters rolling around, gasping and groaning. A series of tracking shots are then intercut as the camera keeps pace beside the hunters and the hunted, though the predators seem far more panicky than their elusive prey. Christopher careens after Valery, firing blindly through the trees; blasting a chunk out of a tree, he nearly succeeds in actually blinding himself with the spray of bark, and is instantly rendered prone

again. Valery lopes easily through the woodlands as though out for a morning jog, out-pacing his pursuers despite being dressed only in his pyjamas, while the hapless duo stagger along in slapstick pursuit, firing haphazardly after him. At last, Paulie manages a lucky shot, winging Valery in the head; the clueless pair are left to watch, panting, baffled and perplexed, as the Russian somehow recovers, staggering over a ridge and out of sight. A medium-shot of the pair foregrounds Paulie's face, the gormless gangster's mouth agape with shock and dismay; as it cuts back to a long shot of Valery plunging into the trees, Paulie, utterly stupefied, offers an incredulous, mystified "...What the fuck?" (3.11 Van Patten and Chase 2001), a sentiment likely to be shared by the audience.

The use of comedy in *The Sopranos* is not as simple as mere parody, however, which would imply the exaggeration of the subject matter for comedic effect. In fact, the evocation of earlier works in the genre is used to achieve the opposite effect, emphasising the exaggeration present in the fictional figures and texts *The Sopranos* references, and thus positioning its prosaic reality as a more authentic, true-to-life re-telling of the gangster myth. Christopher and Paulie's farcical escapades in 3.11 (Van Patten and Chase 2001) may seem so absurd as to stretch credulity, but the economy of the camerawork in this scene is especially significant, considering that the chase should, in theory, meet all the requirements of an action sequence (Kuhn and Westwell 2012). A swift succession of back and forth cuts may be demanded by the distance between the characters in order to show the event in its entirety, but it is presented in a markedly minimalistic style, with few stylistic interventions to stress the impact of individual elements. The angle, distance, composition and movement of each shot remains remarkably consistent, alternating between eye-level medium shots and moderate long shots only; the chase may be breathless, gruelling, chaotic and clumsy, but it is recorded steadily and dispassionately, using tracking shots with no pans, tilts, zooms or swoops until the final few shots of the scene. The soundtrack, too, is entirely diegetic, with no music to lend the scene emotional resonance or comic effect. If action is defined as "spectacular movement" (Kuhn and Westwell, 2012) then it is hard to imagine anything less spectacular than two out-of-shape men nearly killing themselves as they try and fail to shoot a shoeless man in his pyjamas; it is

equally hard to imagine “narcissistic identification” taking place when the typical “phantasies of power, omnipotence, mastery and control” are replaced with phantasies of incompetence, ineptitude, and total disarray (Neale 1983 p. 5).

The deconstruction of these fantasies of power testifies to the sincere attempt made to portray violence authentically in *The Sopranos*, and not purely for the purposes of satire; while irony and humour is often used in the presentation of violence as part of *The Sopranos*' demythologising project, the comedy is often found in the context of its circumstances rather than in the depiction of the violence itself. The writers and directors of the show seem to be aiming for a kind of verisimilitude in their portrayal of violence which works to undermine any experience of the action as wish-fulfilment or fantasy, and the result of this realist approach is that there is little pleasure or catharsis to be found in its depiction. The creators employ none of the formal or stylistic flourishes common to other texts in the genre which would draw attention to the nature of the work as “artefact”, and thus distance the audience from its impact (Tan 1996 p. 24); to paraphrase Patsy Parisi in 3.12 (Chase and Renzulli 2001) when death comes in *The Sopranos*, “It won't be cinematic”. There are no stylised eruptions of vivid scarlet, no theatrical death throes, no scenes of tense and kinetic gunplay; violence is not to be enjoyed, even vicariously, as an extension of a kind of play, but is instead presented, at its most appalling, as a brutal, bloody and painful chore, an effort into which the Mafiosi literally put their blood, sweat and tears. In the episode “College”, Tony discovers former Mafiosi and FBI informant Febby Petruccio living under an assumed alias while touring colleges on the road with his daughter. Taking matters into his own hands, Tony ambushes Febby at a portable cabin out in some backwoods corner of Maine, and what follows is a prolonged sequence of sustained violence which stresses the ugliness of the work of killing. We see Febby crash to the floor from an extreme low-angle shot; Tony looms above him, red-faced, and sweating, his lips peeled back in a feral snarl. His teeth are bared and gritted in a furious grimace, and he practically gnashes them as he garrottes the choking Petruccio. A shot of Tony's hands, clenched into fists and bloodied by the wire biting into his flesh, pans and tilts up to a close-up of Tony's face as he grunts

and gasps, breathless with effort, sweat dripping from his brow and spit flying from his lips. The sight of the twine chafing Tony's hands elicits the audience's affect-response to wince-inducing effect, provoking the viewer to respond as though to Tony's pain. The two shots, hands and face, repeat, before Febby's expression turns slack and he goes limp, Tony slipping off him like a lover dismounting, exhausted by the extreme exertion. Febby's murder is typical of many instances of violence in *The Sopranos*. The murders and beatings handed out by these mobsters lack any of the style or finesse of Tarantino's casual killers; clumsy and un-coordinated, there is nothing cool about any of the criminals in *The Sopranos*, and as a result no audience member would mistake their on-screen surrogates as "more perfect" or "powerful" versions of themselves (Mulvey 1975 p. 12-13); the killer and the act of killing itself are made unattractive and unpleasant, and the deliberate triggering of audience affect, such that they simulate the somatic effects of the events on screen, reinforces the audience's association of violence with pain and suffering, rather than pleasure, through the process of "affective learning" (Tan 1996 p. 28).

Thus far, the thesis has addressed the manner in which irony and authenticity are used to disrupt the viewer's experience of pleasure and their identification with the characters, but the tension between masculinity and femininity characterised as the series' central thematic concern has not yet been explored. In one of their psychiatric sessions, Dr. Melfi takes an unusually strident position to the justifications and rationalisations that Tony offers for the violence inherent in his lifestyle; a defiant (and in denial) Tony makes the impassioned protest that the Mafiosi are soldiers in a "war", who believe in "honor and family and loyalty" and follow a moral "code" (2.9, Imperioli 2002). They are not "twisted and demented psychos who kill people for pleasure", it is "business"; they are "in a situation where everybody involved knows the stakes, and if you're gonna accept those stakes, you gotta do certain things". He seems to subscribe to the oft-repeated mantra in *The Godfather* that the matter of killing should be "business, not personal" (Coppola 1972), as though violence is only honourable if it is governed by masculine reason, rather than feminine emotion. Violence is unseemly and unprofessional if it flows from personal feeling, if the Mafiosi cannot

master his emotions but becomes unmanned by them. Christopher's characterisation as juvenile because he indulges in fantasies of violence seems to support this idea, and his unfavourable juxtaposition with the pragmatism of the senior Mafiosi has the effect of suggesting that there is a way to properly perform violence (and masculinity by extension) in accordance with the hegemonic model, based on a stoic, business-like approach. In *The Sopranos*, however, the matter of life and death is more often decided by whim or impulse than any kind of rational, guiding intelligence, and the motivations of the various murders are never more complicated than greed, vengeance, loss of self-control, and simple self-preservation. It is another return to the series' central dichotomy of masculinity and femininity, and also to its practice of demythologisation; in what seems a deliberate departure from *The Godfather*, violence in *The Sopranos* is almost always personal. Johnny Sacrimoni pursues a vendetta against Ralph Cifaretto to avenge his wife's honour over an insult (4.4, Winter, 2004); Uncle Junior is ready to go to war over disparaging remarks about him performing cunnilingus in 1.9 (Cahill, Green, and Burgess 2002); Christopher demands a violent, vengeful response to his humiliation at the hands of Junior's men (1.3, Saraceni 2002) and Phil Leotardo begins a fatal feud with his cousin's husband, Vito Spatafore, when Vito is outed as a homosexual (6.6, Chase, Winter, Green and Burgess 2006); in each case, real or imagined, the insults and injuries that the men are responding to are perceived as threats to their sense of masculinity.

The mobsters are caught in a vicious cycle in which any affront or show of disrespect, any physical, mental or emotional anguish inflicted, must be rectified through violent retaliation. This resort to violence, the most toxic manifestation of hegemonic masculinity, is the only thing that will negate the perceived feminising effect of any weakness or vulnerability displayed; in order to re-assert dominance and control, somebody else must be made subordinate. However, the inability of these men to endure even the most petty of aggravations with equanimity exposes their vaunted code of masculine conduct for the sham that it is; far from exemplifying the fabled stoicism of "the strong, silent type" (1.1, Chase, 1999), these mobsters become near-hysterical at the slightest of encouragements, demonstrating the excesses of emotion so antithetical to hegemonic masculinity.

The fact that masculinity is something that needs to be constantly re-asserted and re-established exposes it as performative rather than essential, and as performers, the Mafiosi prove themselves to be fragile, sensitive to criticism, and aggressively punitive to anybody who goes off-script; this, ultimately, is Vito's crime. He is, in all other regards, a respectable Mafiosi, by virtue of being a top earner (6.12, Winter, Chase and Weiner 2006); however, as an outed gay mobster, he is not merely performing poorly as a man, but, by engaging in homosexual relationships, he is inhabiting a different gender role entirely; one reserved for women in the Mafiosi's patriarchal ordering of male and female relationships.

Phil's hunt for Vito (6.7, Weiner, 2006) is the old-school mobster's attempt to redress what he sees as a travesty against the right and proper ordering of gender relations: men fuck, they are not fucked, and Vito's actions are viewed as an unforgivable transgression and an obscenity precisely because they throw into question what, to Phil, ought to be beyond question. It is with bleak irony, then, that Phil "comes out of the closet" to ambush the unsuspecting Vito in his hotel room, and watches his murder with perverse, voyeuristic, almost erotic enjoyment, his fingers slowly clenching as the bound and gagged Vito is beaten to death before him (6.11, Frolov, Schneider and Chase 2006). Phil might think of violence as a proper, masculine manifestation of heterosexual hegemony, and the enjoyment of it as asexual, but the scene seems to suggest it is an expression of sublimated sexual desire; the virulence of his hatred for Vito's homosexuality can perhaps be seen as a projection, and violent rejection, of those feminising qualities he so fears within himself. In his discussion of cinema, spectacle and "the male image", Neale argues that there is an implicit "eroticism" in the appreciation of the male image on screen, as it is a "source of contemplation" as an "other" *as well* as a "source of [narcissistic] identification" (Neale 1983 p.8, discussing Rodowick 1982 p. 8); however, he goes on to say that the anxiety that this may provoke "in a heterosexual and patriarchal society" means that the "male body cannot be marked explicitly as the erotic object of another male look" (Neale 1983 p. 8-9, discussing Willeman 1981 p. 16). The "erotic component" of the look "must be repressed" and disavowed in these scenes, typically "by playing out the sadism

inherent in voyeurism through scenes of violence” (Neale 1983 p. 8-9, discussing Willeman 1981 p. 16):

We are offered the spectacle of male bodies, but bodies unmarked as objects of erotic display. There is no trace of an acknowledgement or recognition of those bodies as displayed solely for the gaze of the spectator...We see male bodies stylised and fragmented by close-ups, but our look is not direct, it is heavily mediated by the looks of the characters involved. And those looks are marked not by desire, but rather by fear, or hatred, or aggression. (Neale 1983 p. 13)

It should be said that the argument of this essay is not that male violence is motivated by repressed homosexual desire, or that the act and observation of violence is somehow inherently homoerotic; neither is this the message of the episode. The argument is, rather, that in highlighting the incongruity of Phil’s erotic enjoyment, and furthermore, by making a gaze explicitly marked by desire the object of contemplation itself, as opposed to merely a mediating factor in the audience’s, the effect of the scene is to provoke the anxieties that Neale suggests are conventionally repressed and disavowed; by deliberately evoking the eroticism evident in Phil’s voyeurism, any conventional, unironic enjoyment of the scene, and by extension, violence itself, is problematized, and the position of a “masculine” viewer made apparently contradictory. This disruption of the audience’s pleasure is to some extent incidental, although it is entirely in line with *The Sopranos* demythologising tendencies as we have thus far seen; however, the significance of the scene is not in problematizing the audience’s pleasure, but Phil’s, and in further destabilising the binaries between masculinity and femininity that Phil seeks to restore. The mythic, hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity which Phil seeks to re-affirm, and which, according to Neale (1983), is theoretically proven through a male character’s performance of physical trials in “moments of contest and combat”, is in fact undermined by Vito’s murder, which rather than re-stating Phil’s masculinity serves instead to re-state Vito’s feminisation. Vito’s homosexuality, and Phil’s reaction to his murder, serve to implicate violence with violation; as Miklisch (2007 191) himself suggests, in *The Sopranos*, “death itself is

feminizing” because it is the ultimate form of bodily abnegation and passivity, and the fact that Phil’s enjoyment of Vito’s killing demonstrates that sadism and homoerotic voyeurism are not mutually exclusionary only serves to re-inforce this idea.

The discussion so far has focussed exclusively on scenes of violence that occur between men in *The Sopranos*. As has been demonstrated, this manifestation of violence is a method by which the men of the Mafia police the proper boundaries between masculinity and femininity, punishing any imperfect performance of masculinity in their peers and thus simultaneously proving their own manhood by demonstrating its “proper” practice. However, this definition of masculinity relies upon a hierarchical, binary relationship between men and women, and as such, it naturally follows that any woman who practises an improper form of her gender, and thus disrupts this male/ female binary, would present an equal threat to the hegemony of masculine dominance; considering that domestic abuse and sexual violence are two of the most toxic effects of hegemonic masculinity, it begs the question of how men police the conduct of femininity in *The Sopranos*, and how this policing is portrayed. The trend established thus far would seem to suggest that the approach taken to scenes of violence against women would attempt to subvert genre conventions and traditional formations of gender through its depiction, and indeed, in a strategic reversal of the genre’s tradition, the women of *The Sopranos* are rarely reduced to passive victims of violence. In *The Godfather*, (Coppola 1972) Michael’s sister Connie suffers a sadistic beating for refusing to play the obedient wife to Carlo, with her only hope of remedy being the interference of her father or brothers. In *The Sopranos*, when Tony’s defiant sister Janice refuses Richie Aprile’s demand to “put [his] fucking dinner on the table and keep [her] mouth shut”, she avenges the punch she receives from him by gunning him down where he eats. In an episode pointedly titled “The Knight in White Satin Armor” (referring to Janice’s wedding dress – Green and Burgess 2002), Janice is her own rescuer, and her brother’s only involvement is to clean up the mess she so capably creates. However, perhaps the most shocking scene of violence in *The Sopranos* is one which strategically

deploys, rather than subverts, gender stereotypes and genre conventions in order to achieve its devastating impact.

The savage, senseless murder of a touchingly naive and trusting stripper called Tracee concludes an episode which carefully cultivates the image of her passivity and helplessness in order to inspire the audience's pity and compassion (3.6, Winter and Stabile, 2001), utilising gendered tropes to achieve the devastating impact of its climax; it is precisely because she is explicitly coded as a *female* victim, one who is juxtaposed with her hypermasculine male aggressors, that the audience watch, with increasing distress and dread, her abuse and neglect throughout the episode. The deployment of these gendered tropes activates the "affect" attached to certain "social schema" (Tan 1996 p. 168, discussing Fiske and Taylor 1991), and call up a set of narrative assumptions as a result (Tan). Tracee's characterisation emphasises her youth, naiveté, femininity, and vulnerability; the tension introduced is the fear of her exploitation by the Mafiosi, and as a result, the "anticipation" (Tan 1996 p. 154) activated by the schema is the expectation of a male protector, for whom one naturally imagines Tony. However, Tracee is a stripper and a prostitute working at the Bada Bing!, and to the Mafia, she is little more than a product to be bought, sold and traded, exhibited as an object for male consumption and then used for their pleasure. Her vulnerability is accented by stripping outfits that leave her skin exposed and unprotected and the dental braces that she acquires midway through the episode lend her speech a child-like lisp which further emphasise her ingenuity and innocence. The only asset that Tracee has to use is her own body, and as such, the only chance that Tracee has of escaping exploitation is to find herself a male protector so that she can attain "feminine respectability" (Johnson 2007, cited by Toscano 2014 p. 462); as a result, she tries to sell herself as a wife and mother to an uninterested Ralphie when she becomes pregnant, falling in love with the picture of marital bliss that he later paints her and remaining totally oblivious to his true indifference. Tracee also attempts to foster friendships amongst her employers, offering Tony homemade date-nut bread as a guileless gesture of gratitude, mistaking a single act of kindness for genuine care and concern. However, Tracee's every overture of affection is dismissed,

disregarded or rebuked by Tony and his crew, who are keen to remind her that their relationship is professional, not personal, and Tracee ought to know her place. Tracee seems heedless to her transgressions, making repeated appeals for Tony's attention and affection despite being told that she "can't be doing stuff like this" because Tony already has a family, and won't accept her as a friend – partially because Ralphie has ownership of her, and partially because friendship would mean accepting Tracee as an equal (3.6 Winter and Stabile 2001). She is not a person, but property or livestock; Sil describes her as a "thoroughbred", and when Tracee misses work for three days, he treats her with as much compassion, striking her violently and reminding her that "that shaved twat of yours belongs to me" (3.6 Winter and Stabile 2001). As Miklitsch (2007) observes:

Silvio's casual reference to Tracee as a domesticated animal, one used for sport, suggests that the Bada Bing! 'girls' are 'something less than human', their 'body parts, whether silicon boobs or braces', mere 'investments' (Akass & Macabe , p. 71). In other words, Tracee is valuable and to be respected precisely to the extent that, like a racehorse, she embodies and exhibits her status as a commodity-body.

Tracee bears so many markers of the various patriarchal constructions of femininity that she seems to evoke the self-same sexist tropes and archetypes; the "woman-child" (Beauvoir 1953 p. 265), the "spoiled, wanton lost girl" (Toscano 2014 p. 462), the whore-with-a-heart-of-gold and, most significantly, the helpless damsel-in-distress. However, the stereotypes that she triggers are deconstructed, rather than perpetuated, by the episode, which works to expose their inessential nature. The pathos, poignancy, and, ultimately, the tragic irony of Tracee's character is that she is trying, and failing, to perform as the perfect woman for the men that surround her; operating by a "patriarchal script" (Akass and McCabe 2002, 160, cited by Miklitsch 2007 p. 196), she attempts to emulate the maternal nurturance of the mobster's wives with constant offerings of food and drink, and has offered herself up to be used as an endlessly obliging sexual object. Tracee has effaced her own identity to the point at which she has become a pastiche of the female "Other" that the construction of hegemonic masculinity relies on, yet instead of supporting this ideal of manhood,

her function is to condemn it; just as she cannot hope to practice a perfect version of her over-determined gender, she exposes the inadequacies and inconsistencies of the masculinity that the mobsters practice. If hegemonic masculinity is, for men, a utopian ideal then “University” exposes its dystopian reality; even in a situation where gender relations align with the hegemonic model, there can be no benign patriarchy, no utopian ordering of gender relations, if they are structured hierarchically. Tracee’s myriad abuses, received without resistance and thus absent of any suggestion of “contest” (Neale 1983 p. 12), serve to disprove, rather than prove, the masculinity of her assailants, in as much as they expose the impossibility of reconciling valorised attributes of courage and toughness with those of power and domination. There is no risk, and thus no courage, in subordinating the defenceless and the weak.

Tracee’s innocence and defencelessness frame her death as an unmitigated tragedy, foregrounding the sadism inherent in violent spectacle and enhancing feelings of pity and horror elicited in the audience. Her murder follows the merest of retaliatory slights to Ralphie’s manhood; after a heated exchange in front of an appreciative crowd of Ralphie’s associates, the seemingly affable gangster asks her if that’s “anyway to speak to a man in front of his friends?”, to which she replies, “Yeah, right. *What* man?” (3.6 Winter and Stabile 2001). Ralph follows her outside, appearing contrite, offering to marry her and take care of the baby, and Tracee, over-whelmed with gratitude, tells him that she loves him; only for Ralphie to turn on her with gleeful scorn, delivering a humiliating barrage of sadistic taunts and mockery and calling her a “little whore”. Tracee, devastated, slaps him, and is viciously back-handed in retaliation; looking at him with wounded spite, she asks Ralphie if “That made you feel good? Made you feel like a *man*?”. Ralph looks shocked and infuriated by Tracee’s blow – a fresh humiliation, a challenge to his dominance by a woman who, at last, has refused to be submissive - and her jibe at his manhood makes him go berserk, beating her brutally and relentlessly until, tellingly, her sobs and whimpers subside and her body grows still. The sound mixing of the scene is used to especially shocking effect, amplifying the volume of each blow to suggest the sickening force with which they land and the damage that they

deal, triggering the audience's affect response; it is a response that is intensified to intolerable amounts, as amongst Ralph's sickening abuses is the pummelling of Tracee's bare, pregnant stomach – something which renders her doubly vulnerable. Ralph's machismo is not only unable to withstand the mildest of affronts amongst his peers, but is intolerably exacerbated by Tracee's remarks; perhaps because she highlights the hypocrisy inherent to his masculinity and exposes an unpalatable truth. The valorised power, control and aggression that provided the foundation for Ralphie's masculinity, and which in this case are exerted through violence, are irredeemably compromised by their reliance on the active subordination of the weak.

It is no accident that Ralphie effuses over the violent scenes in *Gladiator*, as Miklitsch (2007 p. 194) observes, and his enthusiasm goes so far as imitation, something which ultimately ends in Georgie's maiming (3.6 Winter and Stabile 2001); once again, Ralphie's obsession with violent displays of masculine force mirrors narcissistic engagement with "phantasies of power, omnipotence, mastery and control" (Neale 1983 page. 5); however, unlike Christopher, Ralphie seems to derive both pleasure and catharsis from violence. He represents the absolute antithesis of the series' theme; the tension which he resolves through violence is femininity, represented by the brief moment in which Tracee challenged her subordinated position in the hierarchical relations between men and women. Catharsis for Ralphie is the restoration of absolute masculine power and control, and his murder of Tracee, a woman characterised by her over-determined femininity (wife, girlfriend, mother, daughter, whore, submissive, self-denying, endlessly obliging), symbolises the annihilation of the self that is implied throughout the series to result from an attempt to perform one's gender according to the hegemonic model. He is highly competitive, being the top earner of The Soprano crew, he is aggressive and abusive by nature, engaging in relentless mockery of his colleagues, and he is characterised by a total lack of empathy, remorse, or other feminising emotions; Tracee's death itself dismissed with a glib, off-hand remark – "What? It's my fault she's a klutz?" (3.6 Winter and Stabile 2001). Ralphie is, by Melfi's definition, a "sociopath" (Chase and Weiner 2007 6.19), and the performance of his masculinity is not a denial of an interior femininity,

but an expression of his true nature. Ralphie is the closest *The Sopranos* comes to a character that corresponds, in his entirety, the model of hegemonic masculinity, epitomising many of its valorised traits and attributes; he is, in other words, an exemplar of masculinity, and as such, it seems appropriate that the only empathetic emotions the audience reserves for him are disgust, contempt, and hatred.

This in itself presents a problem, however; if the viewer's feelings surrounding Ralphie are negative, then they suggest that Ralphie himself, and the anger and fear caused by his murderous acts and nature, are a source of tension that the viewer expects to be resolved. The audience anticipates justice, in the form of retribution, and in the world of *The Sopranos*, retribution is always violent; Ralphie's death, then, should meet all the requirements necessary to release these feelings of antipathy and enjoy a pleasurable catharsis. However, in 4.9 (Green and Burgess 2002), his eventual murder is coded as a transgression of femininity in a manner which parallels Tracee's death. Ralph's son has paid the price for his father's worship of violence; he is hospitalised, put into a coma, after being shot with an arrow while he and a friend were playing out a battle scene from *Lord of the Rings* in Ralphie's backyard. In a total reversal of Ralphie's erstwhile hyper-masculine persona, his son's wounding inspires him first with dread and panic, and then with over-whelming grief and sorrow; as Tony grabs him to keep him from attacking his son's friend, he falls into Tony's arms, and breaks down in tears, openly weeping. Ralphie's pain is palpable, and his unexpected emotional vulnerability, and the horror of his situation, must inevitably inspire some sympathy in the viewer, though doubtless diminished by Ralphie's previous deeds; in fact, the empathetic emotion that it calls on, specifically, is "compassion", with its action tendency to "help" and "console" (Tan 1996 p. 179). Ralph is feminised, and thus humanised, by his grief, and any tension generated by his hyper-masculinity is mitigated; as such, not only is catharsis from his death precluded, but the audience actively anticipates his consolation, or recovery. His murder, then, can only result in further frustration.

Ralphie's murder itself occurs at the end of a long and brutal duel to the death at the hands of Tony (4.9 Green and Burgess 2002), who suspects him of killing his beloved racing horse. However, unlike the gladiatorial combat of his favourite film, the duel does not take place in a dusty coliseum, but in his kitchen, a feminine domestic space marked as the sacred sanctuary of the family; Ralph himself is making eggs for Tony in his pyjamas, something which connotes femininity and maternal care (the preparation of food, the provision of needs), but also his openness and vulnerability in parallel of Tony's own frequent appearances in bathrobe and sleeping clothes (Yacowar p. 128). The fight itself takes place not with maces or flails, but kitchen utensils and cleaning products, and ends with Tony battering Ralphie to death just as Tracee was murdered before; Tony's murder of Ralphie is coded, therefore, as something approaching domestic abuse, an unconscionable violation of femininity. *The Sopranos* is evidently interested in engaging the viewer on the grounds of their own participation in the violence on screen, and Ralphie's murder particularly seems to suggest a parallel between the viewer and Melfi in 3.4 (Green and Burgess 2001); in the episode, Melfi suffers from post-traumatic stress after having survived a brutal incident of sexual violence by a stranger. As Nochimson (2002 p. 12) states, there is no distancing in the depiction of this scene, as "the violence in Melfi's life is too available in all its ugliness to evoke anything but horror". The viewer reacts with a "yearning for this terrible moment to foster in Melfi a desire to turn toward Tony as her protector and avenger", but "a more comprehensive understanding of events reveals that the show raises this desire in order to reject it" (Nochimson 2002 p.12). Melfi does fantasise over having her rapist "squashed like a bug" (3.4) by Tony, but, "[d]espite her rage, Melfi's use of Tony to avenge her is restricted to the world of the imagination - the proper use for a gangster fantasy" (Nochimson 2002 p. 12); in the case of Ralphie, however, the object of the audience's fantasies is delivered, though instead of provoking pleasure, it leaves the viewer numb. They are prevented from deriving catharsis from his death, or his possible rehabilitation, and neither can they fully grieve the passing of a character for whom their sympathy

is tenuous and negotiated. Much like Christopher, then, the viewer's participation in violent fantasies in *The Sopranos* offers no pleasure, and offers no meaning.

In conclusion, the thesis found that "situational meaning" (Tan 1996 p. 171, 174), and the frustration of compassionate "action tendencies" to "help" and "console" (Tan 1996 p.174-177), were used to enhance feelings of fear, helplessness and dread through dramatic irony. In Christopher's character study, the essay concluded that Christopher was used to construct the position of the viewer such that their investment in patriarchal fantasies of power was frustrated. In the examination of irony, the thesis argued that the framing, editing, and soundtrack of *The Sopranos* was frequently used to produce excessive distancing and thus, irony, preventing investment, and therefore, tension and catharsis. In the examination of verisimilitude, the thesis argued that the portrayal of the characters, and the presentation of violence, not only precluded narcissistic identification, but, through the triggering of affect responses and the simulation of the somatic effects of the events on screen, the association of violence with unpleasure was evoked and reinforced. Finally, the essay found that the use of violence to police the boundaries of acceptable performances of masculinity and femininity revealed a destabilising contradiction at the heart of the hegemonic model of masculinity.

Conclusion

The argument of this essay was that *The Sopranos* used gendered processes of pleasure, unpleasure and identification to deconstruct hegemonic masculinity as part of a demythologising project which used “affective learning” to achieve its aims (Tan 1996 p.28). In *Embodying Masculinity in The Sopranos*, the thesis argued that the accumulation of effeminate and emasculating traits surrounding Tony’s body, which otherwise suggested itself for narcissistic identification on the basis of its size, strength, power and sensuality, did not repudiate, but re-affirm Tony’s masculinity, due to the association of girth with “virility and power” (Mitchell 2008 p. 184-185). The essay argued that the effect of Tony’s weight was to suggest an easing and expansion of the limits and boundaries of masculinity, providing catharsis from the tension derived from inadequate performances of masculinity on the part of the viewer. In *Performing Masculinity in The Sopranos*, the thesis argued that Tony’s own ideal of manhood represented a significant deviation from the hegemonic model because, while he rejected mental and emotional vulnerability, love, kinship, and loyalty were a fundamental part of the performance of his masculinity. In the evaluation of empathetic and narcissistic identification, the essay concluded that viewer identification with Tony could be characterised as feminine on the basis that it was prompted by the sharing of intimate thoughts and feelings, and reciprocated on the part of the viewer with a desire for intimacy and closeness; as such, it was predicated on the feminine attributes, attitudes, and acts Tony displayed, and was founded on the viewer’s participation in “prohibit[ed] forms of emotion, attachment and pleasure” (Connell 2005 p. 85) The chapter concluded that, as the tension between masculinity and femininity is resolved through a pleasurable catharsis experienced through empathetic identification and predicated on the narrative reaffirmation of femininity, and as the primary source of narrative complication was the protagonist’s performance of masculinity, the association of masculinity with negative emotions and femininity with positive emotions was reinforced through affective learning. In *Violence and Male Fantasy in The Sopranos*, the thesis addressed the possibility that the

presentation of violence could afford participation in patriarchal fantasies of power, control, and mastery founded on the exercise of violence, and as such, reinforce the hegemonic masculine traits from which they derived through affective learning; however, the essay argued that instead, a formal approach characterised by verisimilitude deprived the viewer of the necessary distance to achieve catharsis which rendered the violence itself unpleasurable. This thesis presents only a partial examination of the performance of hegemonic masculinity in *The Sopranos*, and as a result, several issues went unaddressed; a proper exploration of the feminine aspects of the public sphere in *The Sopranos* would have illuminated the possibility that pleasure can be found in certain aspects of the presentation of, and participation in, patriarchal performances and fantasies. An analysis of this kind would also have benefited by a comparison with more recent texts in the field of the male-centred serial, to properly interrogate the possibility that the portrayal of masculinity in contemporary television represents a regressive, rather than progressive, trend; hopefully, future contributions will continue this line of inquiry.

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