MEN READING FICTION: A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READER, (CON)TEXT, CONSUMPTION AND GENDER IDENTITY.

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Abstract

This thesis is a qualitative study of men's talk about fiction reading. Based on 38 interviews with male readers and 13 book group sessions with four male participants it draws upon the theories of Bourdieu (1986) and de Certeau (1988) to analyse how men's consumption practices may in part be constitutive of articulations of gendered identity. My analysis of the qualitative data begins with a focus on the interviews, looking at how Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus can be extended to look at the power of the media as a form of 'meta-capital' (Couldry 2003) and gender as a form of symbolic power. The interview analysis identifies a link between gender and genre, with masculinity articulated by negation of culturally feminised texts. Moving towards a more specific analysis of the articulation of the self as gendered, I then consider how the book group participants talk about a series of texts. Firstly focusing on culturally masculinised genres (horror, techno-thriller, science fiction and militaristic action/adventure) the group discussions measured the value of a text by how 'realistic' it was. Subsequently the book group participants were asked to make their own selections to focus on the 'symbolic work' (Willis 2000) of consumption. Each of the books chosen contained elements of comedy pointing to the importance of this genre to performances of masculinity. The readers also revoked their previously established valuation of 'realism' in favour of proximity to the text. Finally, the analysis turns to culturally feminised genres (modern romance, chick lit, feminist fiction, and a 'classic' romantic comedy) where discussions once more emphasised readers' constructions of self in opposition to femininity.

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Chapter One - Introduction

This chapter introduces the theoretical background that informs my thesis and provides an outline of the research undertaken, identifying how my work contributes to academic debates. I begin with a brief overview of the focus of the research and then move to highlight the three main strands that comprise the basis of my thesis, identifying how these are drawn together in an innovative way. I look at research into readers, approaches to the theorization of gendered subjectivity and finally work on practices of consumption. I then proceed to outline each of the subsequent chapters, highlighting the originality of my research. Finally, I offer a conclusion of the main points articulated in the chapter, emphasising my contribution to the field of cultural studies research.

The main focus of this thesis is fiction reading, in particular how men discursively articulate their gendered identity in relation to this cultural practice. Concentrating on men's reading focuses my research on the cultural group most commonly ignored in academic work in this area, addressing a 'structuring absence' in the field of studies on reading – work on male fiction readers. It has the broader aim of contributing to an understanding of the role of consumption in everyday life, albeit via one facet of cultural consumption. Empirically it is about how the social world and the world of fiction reading intersect, analysed through consumers' talk where "[t]alk *enacts* power relationships between speakers, as well as having a central role in the distribution of political meanings and the establishing of cultural values." (Wood 2009: 3) This research contributes to academic debates around the practices of reading and to an understanding of how men may use a specific form of cultural consumption (fiction reading) as an identity resource by considering the relationship between (con)text, reader and gender articulation.

Researching the reader

My thesis insists on the importance of reading as a fundamental aspect of consumption (de Certeau 1988: 167) and suggests that the complexity of reading as a cultural practice is worth taking seriously since "[u]nderstanding the practices of reading...contributes to an

understanding of how people create meaning" (Long 2003: *xvi*) and also how individuals negotiate, resist and are constrained by forms of symbolic power. It is social institutions such as the education system that overdetermine a reader's relationship to the text (de Certeau 1988: 171): "The educational system performs the social function of systematically regulating the practices of reading and writing by governing access to the means of literary production as well as the means of consumption" (Guillory 1993: 19). Not only does the educational system function to regulate the means of consumption of works that are considered 'literary', it also serves to gender reading:

> The gendered construction and distribution of literacy in schools is Cartesian in design, extending the binary opposition ....so central to modernity and patriarchy: assigning bodily, romantic, affective, private genres to women and cognate, disciplinary, intellectual texts to men. (Luke 1993: *xii*)

The practice of fiction reading is culturally feminised, where fiction reading provides "a compatible and appropriate image of femininity" (Cherland 1994: 91) and the "reading of fiction has been historically associated with women" (Moss 1993: 124). According to Michael Danahy, "the feminization of the novel stems...from vast and powerful social and cultural forces" (1991: 6) which I would argue has been reified by scholarly work.

Janice Radway's (1984) seminal study of female readers of romantic fiction turned away from the fundamentalist notion of a text's authority since textual fundamentalism "obscures...the nature of reception (that is the process of interpretation and translation that occurs whenever we read a text)." (Fabian 1993: 89) The shift from text-centred research to a focus on the reader was taken up by feminists, "motivated by a desire to critique historical stereotypes of women's fiction reading that reduce it to a self-indulgent, frivolous activity, emblematic of a female sphere that is dismissed as leisurely and trivial" (Reed 2002: 182) and seeking to reclaim and revalue a culturally devalued feminine practice where the reading of women's novels was not a culturally validated activity in patriarchal culture (Fetterley 1986: 151-4). Following Radway's groundbreaking research there has been a proliferation in studies of female readers and/or of 'women's genres' including romance and women's magazines (for examples see Christian-Smith 1993, Cohn 1988, Dixon 1999, Fowler 1991, Hermes 1995, Modleski 1988, Owen 1997, Radford 1986, Taylor 1989) and more

recently, studies on modern women's fiction also referred to as 'chick lit' (Ferriss and Mallory 2006, Whelehan 2005). This has meant that "Although we have increasingly detailed insight in the use and interpretation of 'women's' genres by female audiences, we know next to nothing about the use and interpretation of 'men's' genres by male audiences." (Van Zoonen 1994: 125) Discussions of the links between gender and reading have thus tended to focus on women readers and the experience of men who read fiction has largely been ignored.

> To speak of female readership is to raise, whether directly or indirectly, the question of male readership. If the female readership was so central, one wonders what novel reading signified to the many men who also read novels, albeit, perhaps, in the closet. (Mayne 1988: 34)

Work on male readers has tended to focus on constructions of masculinity in men's magazines (see Benwell, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, Crewe 2003, and Jackson, Stevenson and Brooks 2001, Ross 2010) men reading pornography (Hardy 1998), or has appeared in brief references such as David Jackson's autobiographical study of masculinity construction in which he discusses how "boys' comics, in particular, played a small but significant part in the construction of my masculinity." (1990: 223) Adam Reed's (2002) work is a notable exception to this, and is an ethnographic study of men's fiction reading focusing on fans who attend conventions based on the work of a particular author. Nevertheless, there is a paucity of empirical research into men's fiction reading, which this thesis aims to begin to address.

It has been argued that "reading groups represent a particular form of cultural consumption that has not yet been widely explored by the academy." (Poole 2003: 259) As Elizabeth Long stresses, the powerful and pervasive ideology of the solitary reader means "the importance...of groups of readers and their modes of textual appropriation has been invisible to scholarship." (1993: 195) The solitary reader has taken centre space in academic study, but "by construing reading as a solitary activity, one risks ignoring its social frame – the institutional processes that shape reading practice and the shared values that exist between sets of readers" (Reed 2002: 184). As Reed goes on to argue, "one can only really speak of the activity of...reading seen in the context of local performances...by studying real

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readers in real contexts" (*ibid*: 198). Here my work addresses another absence in the academic field, the study of a male reading group which provides an opportunity for examining how fiction reading is used by men in the discursive construction of identity, and how group dynamics may affect the performance of masculine gender identity.

Theorising (gendered) subjectivity

In looking at "the ways in which men become constituted *as men* within... talk" (Edley and Wetherell 1997: 204) I refute essentialist approaches to identity, where the self is considered to be somehow fixed, determined and inherent, instead considering a broadly constructionist approach to be more appropriate where

> [s]ubjectivities and their more objectified components, identities, are formed in practice through the often collaborative work of evoking, improvising, appropriating and refusing participation in practices that position self and other. They are durable not because individual persons have essential or primal identities but because the multiple contexts in which dialogical, intimate identities make sense and give meaning are recreated in contentious local practice (which is in part shaped and reshaped by enduring struggles). (Holland and Lave in Wetherell 2007: 672-673)

This social constructionist perspective on identity is one in which "selves are *accomplished* in the course of social interactions; reconstructed from moment to moment within specific discursive and rhetorical contexts" (Edley and Wetherell 1997: 205). It focuses on the constructive and functional dimensions of discourse, and involves the analyst identifying patterns of consistency and variation therein (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 169). Inconsistency and variation are important in discourse and Edley and Wetherell suggest 'moving on' from the distinctions between top-down and bottom-up approaches to discourse which, combined, tell us that "people are simultaneously the products *and* the producers of discourse. We are both constrained and enabled by language" (1997: 206). Attempts to resolve or dissolve the 'paradox' are a mistake – expressing the paradox as a finding is much closer to the 'truth' of lived existence. As such, I examine "not only the ways in which men are positioned by a ready-made or historically given set of discourses or

interpretative repertoires, but also the ways in which these cultural resources are manipulated and exploited within particular...contexts." (*ibid*: 206)

When discussing the construction of masculine gender identity, it should be noted that discursive "strategy utilised by men is *not* masculine. It is however conducive to performing masculinity in social contexts." (Galasiński 2004: 14 6) Jus t as "we cannot afford taking 'women' as a straightforward, natural collectivity with a constant identity, its meaning inherent in the (biological) category of the female sex" (Ang and Hermes 1996: 333), nor can articulations of masculinity be tied to men. Recent research rejects "the assumption that gender...exists in individuals, guiding their behaviour" (Stokoe and Smithson 2001: 218), focusing instead "on plurality and diversity amongst female and male language users, and on gender as...something that is 'done' in context" (Swann 2002: 47). This movement sees a shift away from gender differences in interaction towards "gender's discursive articulation". (Stokoe and Smithson 2001: 218) Considering gender 'articulation' as a concept means that we "can theorize how neither gender nor media consumption have necessary inherent meanings; only through their articulations in concrete historical situations do media consumption practices acquire meanings that are gender specific." (Ang and Hermes 1996: 337)

In order to gain an understanding of structural dynamics one must examine the context in which social action takes place. Cultural studies in particular has focused on the subjective dimension of social relations and how "social arrangements and configurations are made sense of, so highlighting the complex intersections between public culture and private subjectivity and the transformation potentials that may arise there." (Pickering 2008: 18) Understanding social action must originate from the point of the social actor: "it is important to start from the representations that actors have of the world and the way these inform action and interaction" (McNay 2008: 12). However, the data gathered in the research process should not be regarded as somehow offering unmediated experience of cultural participation. In this research embodied interaction is not understood as a representation of authentic experience, although the "standing point of embodied actors is undoubtedly an important possible starting point for constructing new and expanded knowledge of the world." (*ibid*: 14) Experiential perspectives must be located within an

understanding of social structures and systems, and the study of subjectivity must be integrated into an analysis of power relations. In this way it can be observed that "[s]tructures determine what we do but are also inhabited and ways are chosen among them" (Pickering 2008: 21).

Theorising consumption

The value of combining theoretical approaches can be illuminating in this sense, and my thesis draws on the work of Michel de Certeau and Pierre Bourdieu as two of the most prominent cultural theorists of consumption. I present a brief outline of these approaches here, as a more detailed engagement with these theories follows in chapter two. De Certeau's approach highlights the possibilities of agency, offering a view of the indeterminacy of social practices which do not necessarily align with cultural structures, and the use of Bourdieu's concept of habitus grounds an analysis of subjectivity and agency in the possibilities and constraints of embodied existence. For Bourdieu subjectivity is fundamentally relational in nature and is constituted through embodied social interaction. This relational subjectivity is inseparable from its 'location' or specific social context – to use Bourdieu's term, the 'field'. Inequalities of power permeate the interactions that take place across fields of action and in my research "attention to micro-level detail is supplemented with a macro-level layer of analysis in order to focus on the historical, social and political contexts of identity construction." (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 9)

Although Bourdieu and de Certeau take different approaches to theorising consumption, with the former emphasising the importance of the macro-structural forces and the latter more concerned with the agentive micro-practices of everyday life, it is my contention that using the strengths of each approach can work towards minimising the weaknesses of the other. "Bourdieu's basic model of social action implies an identifiable, relatively closed place where the fit (or potential fit) between dispositions and situations is worked out" (Couldry 2005: 357). This emphasis on the structured nature of social action "leads to an important gap in his work. He analyzes how people acquire the competencies and the dispositions to be involved with certain kinds of culture and how they both perceive and judge a broad

array of cultural objects. But he does not spend much time conceptualizing their *engagement* with culture beyond that level." (Long 2003: 23)

In contrast to this de Certeau's work focuses precisely on people's engagement with culture, on the "ways of using" (1988: 30). De Certeau conceives of everyday life as dynamic and potentially heterogeneous to strategic cultural norms, suggesting that forms of self-representation do not always correspond to static and normalising hegemonic images (McNay 1996: 63). Criticising Bourdieu for what he refers to as methodological errors of isolation and inversion (1988: 62), misreadings of de Certeau's own work replicate this in inverted form where "the practices of the subordinate rather than the dominant...are treated in isolation from the context of constitutive power relations and thereby accorded ontological primacy in the form of inherent resistance." (McNay 1996: 68) Such interpretations of de Certeau's theory have been evident in previous work in cultural studies which has celebrated the resistant tactics of the everyday, according them an intrinsic contestatory nature. However, for a study of cultural consumption to have any wider meaning, power must remain a central concept. Agency and resistance can only be determined by analysing the effect that actions have on the power relations within which they are embedded – they must be viewed within the context of institutional forces. Bourdieu's sociology emphasizes how individuals are differently constrained by the uneven distribution of symbolic power (Couldry 2005: 359) and on this view "[c]onsumption becomes a means of articulating a sense of identity and, perhaps even more crucially, *distinction* from others...consumption practices are socially structured, functioning as an index of, for example, class or gender difference." (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 167 emphasis in original)

Chapter outlines

Through supplementing an analysis of micro-practices with Bourdieu's theoretical emphasis on the surrounding power relations that structure everyday life, the "imputation of a resistant status to the everyday per *se* is called into question" (McNay 1996: 66), and my research seeks to illuminate "the false distinctions between micro and macro, and

demonstrate how discourses flow in and out of constitutions of identity, self, private and public", (Gray 1999: 31) suggesting that readers are both agentive and positioned by structural forces. My integrative theoretical framework seeks to contribute to a better understanding of how gender is articulated through practices of media consumption, and this is detailed in chapter two.

Chapter three explains how my research was designed to facilitate analysis of the discursive articulation of gendered identity in relation to fiction reading, adopting a multi-method approach. 38 interviews were conducted on men's reading habits and 13 book group sessions involved the selection of a novel which was then presented for the group to read. All responses were recorded and subsequently transcribed. While the use of multiple methods in cultural studies research is relatively standard practice, the establishing of a reading group for research purposes was innovative, enabling an exploration of how a group of men responded to culturally gendered texts (both masculinised and feminised), and also an investigation into an under researched area – book selection: "[h]ow actual readers choose from the vast universe of possible books to read...has remained mysterious." (Long 2003: 115) After the empirical research was completed the data collected was analysed and is presented in five chapters, grouped thematically to highlight patterns across the data set. My analysis begins with themes arising in the interviews and then examines the gendering of genre as a bridging chapter – each of the chapters following this uses genre as the logic for their division. This structure is used to guide the reader through my material and also reflects the thematic grouping of texts within the book group sessions.

In chapter four I begin by looking at what it means for men to be readers of fiction in contemporary culture. Drawing on interview material I examine what impact marketing and mediation have had upon conceptions and practices of reading. Bourdieu names the foundations of social reproduction historically as the family, the church and the education system (2001: 85) and adds that more recently, to complete the catalogue of the institutional factors of the reproduction of gender division one should also take into account the role of the state (*ibid*: 87). However, in today's mediated world, "It represents a major gap in Bourdieu's vast oeuvre not to have analyzed the implications of this media-generated

spatial ambiguity for the proper place, if any, of social reproduction." (Couldry 2005: 357) By looking at reading in a social context and by viewing media practices as they are discursively negotiated, and (re)produced at the level of social interaction, we might begin to take steps towards a greater understanding of the part that the media has to play in people's identity construction.

Using Bourdieu I argue that in contemporary culture the media can be thought of as a form of 'meta-capital' (cf Couldry 2003). For some readers media discourse is explicitly drawn upon as an organising principle for reading practices, while for others media representations of fiction reading are to be resisted and can be used to provide the basis for distant readings of popular texts. Masculine identity as rational, independent and autonomous is articulated in opposition to the idea of being a 'target' for media marketing practices, and the construct of a feminised consumer is used in a range of ways as a point of contrast for the male readers to define themselves against. For most of the men interviewed, being a reader means being a reader in a media culture. However, the pervasiveness of the meta-capital of the media does not extend to all readers in quite the same way. A crucial structuring of identity emerges in this chapter, with masculinity constructed in opposition to femininity, and feminised 'others' are located in a range of ways.

My fifth chapter focuses on the gendering of genre: "Genre theorists have typically assumed that texts with similar characteristics systematically generate similar readings, similar meanings and similar uses...[r]eader expectation and audience reaction have thus received little independent attention. The uses of generic texts have also largely been neglected." (Altman 1999: 12) Addressing this I look at how genres are perceived as gendered, and how generic texts are used by readers in identity construction. Work that focuses on gender and genre has tended to concentrate on specific genres and their audiences, and my research suggests that genre is more widely gendered than previously implied. Looking at how this concept is invoked by readers is telling, and can reveal the wider workings of cultural power, "re-centering meaning as a dynamic process fought over in the interplay between mediated and non-mediated realities." (Wood 2009: 5)

I focus on the constructions of masculinity within a localised context, rather than at a structural level: "While masculinity is understood to be a fluid, socially constructed concept that changes over time and space...it is often only discussed at the structural level with little consideration given to the strategies men use to negotiate masculinities in their everyday lives." (Coles 2009: 30) Combining Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity with Bourdieu's concept of gender as a form of symbolic power enables research into negotiation of masculinities at an interactional level and chapter six looks at how gender is articulated in the micro-social context of the book group. Retaining a focus on the importance of genre the reading group sessions are divided in terms of generic classifications. The first four books read by the group were chosen because the genres they belonged to are considered to be culturally masculinised; horror, action, thriller and science fiction. The discourse generated in these sessions is largely representative of what one would expect – culturally masculinised genres allow for the articulation of hegemonic masculinities, and masculinity is constructed in opposition to femininity.

The seventh chapter sees the major turning point in terms of identity performance of the group members. The group members were asked to make individual choices for the group to read meaning that their chosen text would act as a symbolic resource, where the book chosen stands in for the reader. It is here that interpretive slippage in the formerly agreed upon terms of 'evaluation' established by the group can be seen, and 'realism' becomes a negative descriptor for a text. Feminised discourses appear to have cultural power in this context, an unexpected finding which I wanted to view positively as potentially resistant to and transformative of culturally prescribed gender roles. However, while gender articulations may be more fluid when participants make their own choices about what to read and when they are less aware of themselves as gendered, when texts that are culturally strongly gendered are reintroduced the participants revert to articulations of hegemonic masculinities.

In chapter eight we see that masculinity is strongly performed in relation to cultural goods that are perceived as gendered demonstrating the participants' compliance with patriarchal cultural structures. Masculinised 'objective' reality is contrasted with 'unrealistic' feminine

subjectivity, and a model of gendered power relations is posited in which sex and power become conflated. Textual poaching appears as a form of genre-shifting, where the group members collaborate, acting as an interpretive community. Conceiving of textual poaching in this way enables us to see that it can occupy multiple positions in relation to power, rather than simply being seen as an 'art of the weak' (de Certeau 1988: 37). Most of the feminised texts are treated in dismissive terms by the group, with the exception of *Pride and Prejudice* which exists as a (rare) form of symbolically legitimated feminised cultural capital, and the group members are not culturally licensed to reject the text on the basis of it not being 'good'. Using Bourdieu's concept of habitus to analyse my emotional response to a moment in the research process provides a key point of difference in this chapter.

"An assumption is often made that emotions are a block to objective analysis…[however an analysis of] emotions can inform not only a greater understanding of ourselves, but also those who are the subjects and co-producers of qualitative research." (May 2002: 13) Gender can be an interpersonally generated identity but it is important to recognise that localised constructions of (gendered) identity are structured in a socially and culturally wider sense through 'systemically generated hierarchy' (McNay 2008: 121) – identities are mediated through structural dynamics. The body acts as a site of both regulation and resistance and this is incorporated into Bourdieu's theory through the experiential emphasis of the habitus. As such I also consider how cultural capital may be embodied and as a result *felt* in interactions. Self-reflexivity is important here, as is a consideration of embodied gender identity in context and the emotions experienced at the point of disjunction between personal experience and the system of symbolic domination (patriarchy). Finally, the conclusion draws together my arguments, addresses limits to my study and indicates how this work might be developed in future research.

Conclusion

The reading of fiction is a social process, and talk about this offers insights into how power and gender are negotiated, resisted, and (re)produced. The symbolic power of gender is articulated through social actors, and an analysis of their talk can contribute to a further

understanding of this power at work. Addressing the lack of cultural studies work on men's fiction reading my work recognises the importance of examining the relationship between gender and genre, and my contribution to this field is a critical discussion of how gendered articulations of identity relate to genre as a system of difference. I suggest that theories of consumption can be usefully applied and extended to enhance our understanding of articulations of identity. By focusing on how men talk about fiction reading, I seek to contribute to an understanding of culture, power and social stratification. Overall, the thesis demonstrates the significance of gender to cultural consumption and the articulation of identity for male fiction readers.

Providing a foundation for my data analysis, the next chapter outlines my theoretical framework focusing in more detail on the work of Bourdieu and de Certeau. Firstly I look at the ways in which the work of these theorists has been drawn upon in cultural studies, examining their uses and limits for my study, while emphasising the importance of an integrative approach. My subsequent chapters also expand upon the theories outlined, suggesting that theory can be usefully reworked and developed in the light of empirical evidence.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

In this chapter I provide an overview and critical analysis of the two main cultural theorists that inform my work – Michel de Certeau and Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu is a "figure who is known…primarily for his 1979 *La Distinction*." (Brown and Szeman 2000: 14). The theory that he develops within this particular study provides a key focus for my own work, and I undertake an outline and analysis of the theoretical framework and terminology put forward within *Distinction* (1986). The more recent publication (in English) of his work on *Masculine Domination* (2001) raises issues that are also relevant to my research, as it attempts to "chart the problems of subordination, differentiation and hierarchy, and to expose the possibilities, as well as the limits, of gendered self-hood." (Dillabough 2004: 489). I will examine academic critiques of his models, and also how ideas proposed in both *Distinction* and *Masculine Domination* have been used and applied to studies of cultural consumption, before considering the uses and limits of Bourdieu's ideas for my own thesis.

I then undertake an outline of elements of de Certeau's theory and terminology in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, in which he made a turn towards focusing "investigation on the way people operate, the way they 'practice' everyday life." (Highmore 2002: 147) This is one of the reasons that "[o]f all the important theoretical writings in France in the 1970s and 1980s, Michel de Certeau's is most germane to cultural studies." (Poster 1992: 94) *The Practice of Everyday Life* "remains the core Certeau work for cultural studies. Because everyday life constitutes a field of analysis that is not directly covered by any discipline other than cultural studies, that text's predominance seems entirely justifiable." (Driscoll 2002: 382)

In line with much of the work that has been influenced by the theories of de Certeau, part of my thesis is based on his notion about "the productivity of consumption." (Driscoll 2002: 385) De Certeau's work is also notable for its terms 'strategy' and 'tactics': "De Certeau's definitions of strategy and tactics are, by now, quite famous, judging by the sheer number of times they have been cited." (Buchanan 2000: 90) Even though "the theoretical reflections

concentrated around Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984)...have in different guises 'been one of the most influential models for cultural studies in recent years'" (Morris 2004: 675), it would be incorrect to assume that such an influential work has been academically well received. According to Ian Buchanan: "The considerable critical interested generated by de Certeau's work has not, so far, evolved into acceptance" (1997: 175). And so, my work considers and analyses the critiques of his theory, as well as examining how his concepts have been applied in other studies that have particular relevance to my own. Having reviewed the literature thus far, I will then discuss the uses and limits of a de Certeauian approach in my own thesis. I also consider influential theories of masculinity and gender performance. Finally I suggest that combining these theoretical approaches, and drawing on their respective strengths is fruitful for an analysis of consumption practices.

Firstly, then, an outline of the model that led to the memorable statement that: "Taste classifies and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make" (Bourdieu 1986: 6).

According to Bourdieu: *Distinction*, gender and language

The fundamental principle underlying Bourdieu's work on *Distinction* is that of the habitus. The concept of 'habitus' is an "important device for transcending the sterility of the opposition between subjectivism and objectivism." (Jenkins 2002: 74) For Bourdieu "social action is neither entirely determined nor entirely arbitrary. The notion of habitus is crucial here. The habitus concerns a dynamic intersection of structure and action: it both generates and shapes action." (Adkins 2003: 23). The habitus exists as a set of dispositions which incline agents to act in certain ways. These dispositions are inculcated, and as such early childhood experiences are particularly important: "the drilling carried out at the earliest stage of educations inscribes the fundamental structures, characteristic of a social formation or class, in the form of durable dispositions in the body *hexis* first of all" (Liénard and Servais 2000: 87). These dispositions become second nature and are structured in the sense that they unavoidably reflect the social conditions within which they were acquired: "the habitus

is a matrix of dispositions...which results directly from the material conditions of existence, and hence practices, of a class or class fraction." (Thomas 2002: 13) Habitus provides individuals with a sense of how to act in their daily lives – a sense of what is appropriate and what is not. (Thompson 1992: 12-13) Habitus can be described as the values and dispositions gained from a person's cultural history that generally stay with them across contexts. They allow for some flexibility and improvisations, but are largely determined by where a person has been in a culture (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002: 36). In other words:

> The habitus produces enduring (although not entirely fixed) orientations to action. But while the habitus structures and organises action, it is also generative. Specifically, the habitus is productive of individual and collective practices; practices which themselves are constitutive of the dispositions of the habitus. (Adkins 2003: 23)

However, practices should not be seen as a direct result of the habitus – the habitus is only a *basis* for the construction of practices: "Practices are produced in and by the encounter between habitus and...the constraints, demands and opportunities of the social field...within which the actor is moving." (Jenkins 2002: 78) This notion of 'field' is also important in Bourdieu's model of distinction. He defines field

> as a competitive system of social relations, operating under the rules specific to its domain—be it the economic, the political, the educational, the cultural, the social, or any other. ... [E]ach of these fields is...semiautonomous and functions by its own rules. (Hipsky 2000: 190-1)

Because each field functions by its own rules, a person's habitus may interact differently with each one. "[W]hen individuals act, they always do so in specific social contexts or settings" (Thompson 1992: 14). Accordingly, particular practices are not the direct product of the habitus, but rather of the relationship between the habitus and social contexts (or fields).

Bourdieu's model of distinction also suggests that "struggles for recognition are a fundamental dimension of social life and what is at stake in them is an accumulation of a

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particular form of capital" (Bourdieu cited in Webb *et al* 2002: 71). His notion of different forms of capital has been taken up widely within cultural studies – as shall be demonstrated later. There are several types of capital referred to in *Distinction*; cultural, economic, educational, social and symbolic. This list has been expanded in further academic work to include such terms as "'popular cultural capital' (Fiske 1992)…'subcultural capital' (Thornton 1995)" (Hills 2002: 50), and 'physical' capital (see Shilling 2004). The accumulation of these types of capital is influenced by a person's background, and is regarded by Bourdieu as a marker of class: "[f]or Bourdieu, classes are sets of agents who occupy similar positions in the social space, and hence possess similar kinds and similar quantities of capital, similar life chances, similar dispositions, etc." (Thompson 1992: 30)

Bourdieu's model of *Distinction* is class-based: "at equivalent levels of educational capital, differences in social origin…are associated with important differences in competence." (Bourdieu 1986: 63) A definition of cultural competence is useful here:

> Cultural competence can be broken down into three basic components –
> knowledge about the legitimate stock of cultural capital, mastery of the intellectual
> and social skills surrounding its use, and the ability to deploy this knowledge and
> skill to advantage in social situations. (Murdock 2000: 135)

Cultural competence effectively converts or transposes cultural capital into social capital, and is dependent on a person's social history: "class position imposes invisible constraints by systematically structuring people's access to the necessary cultural competences." (Murdock 2000: 136) Class position is evident in "the manner of using symbolic goods, especially those regarded as the attributes of excellence" (Bourdieu 1986: 66), and use of symbolic goods "constitutes one of the key markers of 'class' and…the ideal weapon in strategies of distinction" (*ibid*). So it can be clearly seen in Bourdieu's model that "the major dimension of social inequality involved in…uses of cultural materials is social class; class and culture form parallel and mutually overdetermining worlds." (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999: 9) So what is meant by strategies of distinction?

> That which is held to have distinction is the opposite of that which is vulgar. Each
> has meaning only in relation to the other. It is the relation that makes the meaning.

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The distance between that which has distinction and that which is vulgar both measures and marks the difference between groups within the social hierarchy (Moore 2004: 447).

Distinction is constituted in opposition to 'vulgar' or 'popular' taste, where "popular reaction is the very opposite of the detachment of the aesthete who…introduces a gap – the measure of his distant distinction" (Bourdieu 1986: 34). Bourdieu himself relates this opposition to the reading of fiction, where 'popular' taste naively invests in fiction, 'pure' taste on the other hand performs suspension of naïve involvement. (Bourdieu 1986: 5) As my own study involves looking at fiction reading, this is an idea that I shall return to later. The detachment and distance that equates to 'dominant' taste in this model is associated with class not only through education which "provides the linguistic tools and the references which enable aesthetic experience to be expressed and to be constituted by being expressed" (Bourdieu 1986: 53), but also through economic means: "Bourdieu employs a…materialist image by invoking "distance from necessity" as the sine qua non of distinction" (McCall 1992: 841). In other words:

> Whereas the dominant aesthetic is associated with autotelic formalism, a refusal of practical or ethical function, a refusal of the facile and the vulgar, and with intertextual rather than mimetic codes of reference, the 'popular' aesthetic is defined as having a primarily ethical basis and subordinating artistic practice to socially regulated functions. (Frow 2000: 47)

In this short outline of key ideas in *Distinction*, I have attempted to demonstrate how Bourdieu's work outlines "an economy of cultural goods" (Bourdieu 1986: 1) in a primarily class-based model. I now move on to consider Bourdieu's work on gender.

"Pierre Bourdieu's writings constitute a powerful attempt to construct a corporeal sociology, an approach towards the structuring of human relationships and identities centred around the socially shaped embodied subject." (Shilling 2004: 473) In *Distinction*, "gender does not appear as a form of capital" (McCall 1992: 843). This is because "Gender, class and race are not capitals as such, rather they provide the relations in which capitals come to be organised and valued." (Skeggs 1997: 9) Conceiving of gender as a form of symbolic power emphasises its nature as an organising principle for social practice, and also

suggests how it is "a legitimating power" (Swartz 1997: 89) predisposing individuals to (re)produce social distinctions: "symbolic systems...serve as *instruments of domination.*" (*ibid*: 83)

In *Distinction* "gender, ethnicity, age and geographical origin rank as secondary principles of societal division...age and gender are considered *general, biological* forces which obtain specificity from social class position." (McCall 1992: 841) *Masculine Domination* (2001) takes gender as its focal point. Bourdieu's work on domination derives from his study of the Kabyle, where "women are socially produced objects who are exchanged between men" (Lovell 2000: 37). For Bourdieu, gender is socially and historically constructed – it is an arbitrary creation based on biological difference that is embodied in bodily hexis: "The embodiment of the gender order is thought to occur through what Bourdieu...referred to as 'bodily hexis' as a symbolic form of power" (Dillabough 2004: 493). Bourdieu's work suggests that:

> not only are peoples' bodies inscribed with culture, but that the body's engagement in social and cultural practice also profoundly shapes the individual's entire disposition and set of tastes that structure behaviour, social action and access to resources. (Light and Kirk 2000: 164)

For Bourdieu, 'manliness' is developed by social games, but these can only be entered into once the body has been 'trained': "[i]t is through the training of the body that the most fundamental dispositions are imposed, those which make a person both *inclined and able* to enter into social games most favourable to the development of manliness" (Bourdieu 2001: 56).

The reproduction of masculine domination relies to a certain extent on female complicity (Bourdieu 2001: 39-40) but Bourdieu notes that while women suffer from masculine domination, "[m]ale privilege is also a trap, and it has its negative side in the tension and contention, sometimes verging on the absurd, imposed on every man by the duty to assert his manliness in all circumstances." (Bourdieu 2001: 50) Education and familial socialization are the main mechanisms for the perpetuation of masculine domination, as "in Western

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societies, masculine domination is accomplished by the workings of educational institutions and particularly through the cultural capital acquired by men." (Fowler 1997: 135)

Like many other theorists, Bourdieu sees gender as relational: "Manliness, it can be seen, is an eminently *relational* notion, constructed in front of and for other men and against femininity, in a kind of *fear* of the female, firstly in oneself." (Bourdieu 2001: 53) To say that manliness is constructed 'in front of and for other men' stresses its social nature, and hence its social mutability: "a Bourdieuian perspective...assumes that gender is always a socially *variable* entity, one which carries different amounts of symbolic capital in different contexts." (Moi 2000: 330) The value of conceiving of gender as a form of symbolic power, mediated through the habitus is that it simultaneously emphasises the embodied nature of enduring orientations to action, and also that enactments of masculine domination must be read through social structures. The social structures that enactments of masculinity are read through are durable and stable, and so although performance may vary in different contexts, "Bourdieu...certainly does not underestimate the difficulties of breaking loose of patriarchal shackles." (Moi 2000: 327) It is important to remember that "any interpretive reading of masculine domination cannot take place outside of actual social practice or a recognition of power relations." (Dillabough 2004: 497) As such, I will now briefly discuss how the 'social practice' of discourse has been discussed in Bourdieu's work on *Language and Symbolic Power* (1992).

Language and Symbolic Power retains several of the key ideas from *Distinction*. Richard Light and David Kirk suggest that "Bourdieu's concept of habitus offers a very powerful means of understanding how corporeality and gender are interdependent." (Light and Kirk 2000: 164) Due to that fact that "habitus and social structures are mutually constituted through corporeal practice" (Light and Kirk 2000: 164) and discourse effectively *is* a form of 'corporeal practice', habitus is manifest in language and discourse. "The fact that different groups and classes have different accents, intonations and ways of speaking is a manifestation, at the level of language of the socially structured character of the habitus." (Thompson 1992: 17) Bourdieu states that "relations of communication *par excellence* – linguistic exchanges – are also relations of symbolic power in which the power relations

between speakers or their respective groups are actualized." (Bourdieu 1992: 37) The symbolic power at stake in linguistic exchanges called for a 'new' kind of capital to appear in Bourdieu's work – linguistic capital.

According to Bourdieu, "different speakers possess different quantities of 'linguistic capital'" (Thompson 1992: 18), and the accumulation of linguistic capital is dependent on the speaker's social background. As such, "Bourdieu…saw discourse as one of many social processes that contribute to social differentiation" (Dillabough 2004: 479). With differentiation being a marker of distinction, discourse can be viewed as a marker of social class: "accent, grammar and vocabulary…are indices of the social positions of speakers and reflections of the quantities of linguistic capital (and other capital) which they possess." (Thompson 1992: 18) Here, the idea of competence put forward in *Distinction* becomes important once more: "practical competence involves not only the capacity to produce grammatical utterances, but *also* the capacity to make oneself heard, believed, obeyed, and so on." (Thompson 1992: 7-8) Discourse fashioned with practical (and cultural) competence contains evidence of a speaker's social position, and therefore has the ability to endorse authority in a speaker. The exercising of authority "is legitimated in two directions: by the position or social status that gives the right to its exercise and by the recognition of those who are subject to it." (Lovell 2003: 6) Bourdieu's "concept of performativity in which the authority of performatives derives from the power of social institutions on the one hand and, on the other, the *habitus* which tacitly recognises that authority, suggests no easy freedom to adapt or change the self." (Lovell 2000: 31) A lack of freedom and opportunity for change has resulted in Bourdieu's model of distinction being labelled as deterministic.

Examining the field: critiques of Bourdieu

Bourdieu's model of habitus has been open to the accusation of determinism due to its essentially circular nature: "objective structures produce culture, which determines practice, which reproduces those objective structures" (Jenkins 1982: 270), and "in stressing the unconscious nature of embodiment, and refusing to engage with the question of consciousness, an implicit form of mechanistic determinism has crept into Bourdieu's

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implementation of habitus." (Noble and Watkins 2003: 520) However, while "Bourdieu's concept of human agency has been broadly criticised for its determinism" (Hofmeister 2000: 1), this type of reading has not gone uncontested. According to Terry Lovell:

> *Habitus*…has the potential for acknowledging the hold of institutional norms through practice without losing the promise of agency, because *habitus* is defined
> – as generative rather than determined. …Through *habitus*, social norms are incorporated in the body of the individual subject. (2003: 3)

Emphasis on the *generative* nature of habitus is also reiterated in the work of Lois McNay, where she claims that "the charge of determinism is a common criticism of Bourdieu's work…[t]hese claims fail to recognize, however, the force of Bourdieu's insistence that habitus is not to be conceived as a principle of determination but as a *generative* structure." (1999: 100) She elaborates on this further, explaining that "[b]y stressing that habitus and 'le sens pratique' are essentially lived categories, theoretical space is opened for explaining elements of variability and potential creativity immanent to even the most routine reproduction of gender identity." (McNay 1999: 101) Thus while determinism may seem to be a possible reading of Bourdieu's work, it would not be accurate to say that his theory precludes the possibility for change. For Bourdieu "social change…[is] understood to be potentially at issue when there is a lack of fit between habitus and field…a dissonance between the feel for the game and the game itself." (Adkins 2003: 26) In other words:

> In Bourdieu's model, although the habitus accords a disproportionate weight to primary social experiences, the resulting closure is never absolute because the habitus is an historical structure that is only ever realized in reference to specific situations. Thus, while an agent might be predisposed to act in certain ways, the potentiality for innovation or creative action is never foreclosed (McNay 1999: 103).

For Bourdieu "there is no such thing as a purely disinterested act. All activities…are informed by the notion of self-interest to some extent" (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002: 12-13) The economic metaphor, based on investments in forms of capital assumes a calculating subject intent on maximising investment returns in forms of capital. (Hills 2002: 55) "In Bourdieu's frequently reductive account of social interests, the primary (often, it seems, the exclusive) function of possession of cultural capital is that of maintaining and

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extending social status." (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999: 263) Can this be said to always be the case? Lyn Thomas refers to this by drawing on the work of Mary Mander, for whom there may be ludic "practices which cannot be reduced to...struggles for ascendancy" (2002: 17).

Bourdieu's work is also accused of being reductive in terms of the correlation between social class and cultural taste. A "key assumption in Bourdieu's work is that there is a single powerful and universally binding scale of cultural legitimacy which produces the effects of social legitimation". (Bennett *et al* 1999: 269) According to Lovell:

> The social field is not always already (or ever?) fully constituted, fixed and unequivocal. Institutions and practices depend not only upon everyday performances which instantiate them, but also on contests between more or less powerful social actors with different 'stakes' in the field. (2003: 9)

Monolithic legitimacy is assigned to 'high' culture, but this is not established by Bourdieu, it is assumed (Frow 2000: 50). Frow is also critical of Bourdieu's work with respect to the relationality of cultural forms: "while recognizing that the choices made by the *dominant* class are fully relational, Bourdieu is much more ambivalent about how choices are made within the 'popular' aesthetic." (Frow 2000: 49) This criticism is echoed in the work of Tony Bennett, Michael Emmison and John Frow, where they highlight the fact that "*Distinction* pays little attention to popular culture...[t]he other major gaps in his work...have to do with his lack of interest in questions of gender and of race and ethnicity." (Bennett *et al* 1999: 12) Questions of gender are addressed in *Masculine Domination*, but these are still open to academic criticism.

Lois McNay criticises Bourdieu's work with respect to gaps in his gender theorisation. According to her critique: "Bourdieu does not seem to recognize that masculine and feminine identities are not unified configurations but a series of uneasily sutured, potentially conflictual subject positions...Bourdieu has no conception of multiple subjectivity" (McNay 1999: 108). She elaborates on this, explaining how

recent work on masculinities has revealed that with regard to 'dominant' forms of subjectivity, the habitus cannot be said to always ensure unproblematic alignment between the demands of the field and subjective dispositions. Kaja Silverman (1992), for example, has argued that the dominant conception of masculinity is an idealized fiction and is, therefore, a position that cannot be filled within the social realm. (McNay 1999: 108)

Bourdieu's theory does not account for disjunction between potential and realized subjectivities, and as a result there is "no recognition that apparent complicity can conceal potential dislocation or alienation on the part of individuals." (McNay 1999: 107-8) Here, McNay invokes the work of Janice Radway. Although Radway herself does not attempt a Bourdieuian analysis of her respondents' reading habits, McNay suggests that the female romance readers in this study provide an example of how the appearance of passive complicity with conventional feminine subjectivity may conceal attempts to actively negotiate culturally prescribed feminine roles: "Radway's study provides a far more complex picture of contemporary gender relations than Bourdieu's notion of masculine domination and female complicity." (McNay 1999: 108) Radway's study does present a more complex picture of gender relations than Bourdieu's theories account for, but this may be explained in terms of his methodological approach. Bourdieu does not analyse the functioning of social hierarchies of distinction in actual social interactions (Thomas 2002: 20). He acknowledges this in his own work, declaring that:

a survey by closed questionnaire is never more than a second best... [i]t leaves out almost everything to do with the modalities of practices[.] ...[T]he way things are done and the way things are talked about, blasé or off-hand, serious or fervent, often makes all the difference (at least when dealing with *common* practices, such as viewing TV or cinema). (Bourdieu 1986: 506)

In my own research modalities of practice are extremely important, especially as I deal with a 'common' practice, that of fiction reading. It is particularly this loss of the nature of practices in the methods of social science that de Certeau is so opposed to. Traces of modalities of practices are evident in the data I have collected, and form an important part of my analysis. A turn towards analysis of 'the way things are talked about' in cultural studies is perhaps evidence that 'modalities of practices' should be taken seriously. It is to cultural studies that I now turn, to examine how Bourdieuian concepts may be usefully

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applied to studies of cultural consumption. The examples of academic work that I consider here do not represent a broad selection of the innumerable pieces that have been informed by Bourdieu's ideas. Rather, the selection that I offer is chosen for its specific relation to my own study. Each of the studies I refer to here takes 'readers' or 'reading' as their focus.

Reading (with) Bourdieu: studies of cultural consumption

A study of women's reading groups by Marilyn Poole is of interest to me because part of my thesis looks at the discursive production of gender identity in a male reading group. Her engagement with Bourdieu's ideas is brief, but nevertheless still illuminating for the purposes of my research. For Poole, "[a] question that underpinned this study was whether the book selection by the groups reflected a hierarchy of taste preferences: for example, high-, low-, or middle-brow (or variations of these)." (2003: 273) Most of the female reading groups that were part of this particular study were middle class, and their choices of books seemed to reflect this: "The readers in this study only read what might be termed "good" books in their reading groups—that is, not mass marketed romances, formulaic fictions, detective novels and the like." (Poole 2003: 273). In line with the middle-class or 'middle-brow' taste that Bourdieu describes, she notes that "[t]extual analysis seemed to be almost non-existent. Occasionally, structure and themes are mentioned, but only superficially. Opinions on books are generally based on subjective, rather than literary, criteria." (Poole 2003: 273) This is an example of what Bourdieu refers to as 'proximate' reading, indicating a lack of aesthetic distance, and a lack of educational capital that is ascribed to the 'lower' class fractions.

In an attempt at a form of counter-distinction, the reading groups "rejected what they perceive as literary or academic jargon and the specialised language of literary critics and the academy" (Poole 2003: 276), thereby separating themselves from the 'intelligentsia' (or dominated bourgeoisie). In Bourdieu's analysis, the middle class is adjacent to the 'dominated' fraction of the bourgeoisie, and he states that: "[e]xplicit aesthetic choices are in fact often constituted in opposition to the choices of the groups closest in social space, with whom the competition is most direct and most immediate" (Bourdieu 1986: 60). Poole

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sums up the books chosen by the groups as ""middle-brow"…while they avoid what might be called "trash", they also shun the literary *avant-garde*" (2003: 277).

Lyn Thomas's work applies a Bourdieuian analysis to identity construction in talk. My work follows a similar format, but specifically looks at masculine gender identity as constructed in discourse. The talk Thomas analyses is focused on readings of *The Archers*, a popular radio 'soap', and *Inspector Morse*, a popular television series. For Thomas, Bourdieu's most important legacy is the concept of cultural capital. She anticipates that in her study "Bourdieu's concept of cultural capitals will be particularly useful…since it is likely that talk about media texts will reveal different kinds and levels of cultural capital." (Thomas 2002: 27) She also envisions that some of her readers may attempt to 'distinguish' themselves, as some of them are her personal contemporaries – feminist scholars. Her results partially concur with her predictions:

> In analysing…intellectuals, who focused on form rather than content, and played games with the texts, as well as the rejection of avant-garde forms by more 'middle-brow' taste, I have produced some illustrations of Bourdieu's theory. And yet, it is also clear that the picture is more complicated than his structures would suggest… The differences between class-based taste cultures identified by Bourdieu exist, but they are fissured rather than monolithic structures (Thomas 2002: 175).

It can also be seen that her results partly challenge Bourdieu's conceptual framework, the main contention being that "gender is a major complicating factor, which is not encompassed by Bourdieu's theory of taste." (Thomas 2002: 175)

Gender also proves problematic when applying Bourdieu's theories to another example of reading research. A study of Australian culture by Tony Bennett, Michael Emmison and John Frow looks at the gendering of reading "before considering how gender interacts with other social variables" (Bennett *et al* 1999: 148) and applies a Bourdieuian-inspired analysis to the collected data. They found that "both what we read and the kinds of cultural values and interests invested in our reading are significantly influenced by our gender formation." (Bennett *et al* 1999: 155) And in terms of reading, "the role reading plays in articulating distinction of class is closely connected to its gendered associations." (Bennett *et al* 1999:

148) For Bennett *et al*, gender becomes the primary principle for the identification of tastes, and "the class salience of particular forms of cultural capital is affected by gendered relations and practices that have their own histories, contemporary formations and effects." (1999: 169)

There is also work on readers which uses Bourdieuian terms in its explanation, but that does not directly refer to Bourdieu. An article by Joke Hermes and Cindy Stello provides a good example of this, where they find that their readers attempt to construct a middle-class identity through the reading of 'popular' detective fiction. They do this by drawing on the identities of 'the collector' or 'the specialist', as markers of 'middle-class' distinction. (Hermes and Stello 2000: 225) This is significant to the extent that "[t]o be a reader is to be a certain kind of person. There is the obvious connotation of being literate, and also of having cultural capital, a claim to knowledge and a certain standing" (Hermes and Stello 2000: 223).

For Poole then, female reading groups provide an excellent example of how Bourdieu's theories on class and reproduction of taste may still be accurately applied; middle class culture of the book groups reproduce middle class (or middle-brow) taste in books. However, not all studies of reading have revealed results that are in such strong agreement with Bourdieu's theories. Thomas's research reveals that class based taste cultures are not as monolithic as Bourdieu presents in his own work, and the work of Bennett *et al* reveals the importance of gender in the identification of tastes, something that is missed in the work of Bourdieu.

Having examined how Bourdieu's theories have been applied and tested in other academics' research, I shall now examine the uses and limits of Bourdieu's theories in relation to my study.

<u>Valuing capital: Bourdieu and masculine gender identity construction</u>

Bourdieu's engagements with discourse as an important means of assessing power and capital distribution are particularly important to my own work, which involves analysing the discursive articulation of gender identity. "What is crucial and distinctive about Bourdieu's notion of masculinised discourse is that it is characterized as contingent; it depends upon a structural and communicative culture for its operation and expression." (Dillabough 2004: 495) According to John Thompson, Bourdieu

> portrays everyday linguistic exchanges as situated encounters between agents endowed with socially structured resources and competencies, in such a way that every linguistic interaction, however personal and insignificant it may seem, bears the traces of the social structure that it both expresses and helps to reproduce. (1992: 2)

The transcriptions of 'linguistic exchanges' or discourse that form the basis for my empirical research bear evidence of these traces - socially structured resources are drawn on and mobilised at different moments, and in the book group sessions differences in the levels of distribution of cultural and educational capital within the group are evident as there are struggles over bids for masculine status.

According to Toril Moi, "One of the great advantages of Bourdieu's theory is that it not only insists on the social construction of gender, but that it permits us to grasp the immense *variability* of gender as a social factor." (2000: 329) Such 'variability' in gender as a social factor is demonstrated by the assertion of masculinity and masculine gender identity through very different forms of capital on display.

> Bourdieu's notion of the field provides a way of thinking through... [the] differentiation within gender identity. His insistence on the autonomous logic of each field suggests that gender relations are not reproduced in an invariant way...At the same time, his understanding of gender relations as a fundamental form of symbolic domination guards against a completely fragmented view of the way in which gender identity is constituted. (McNay 1999: 112)

Fundamental to my research is the idea that the symbolic power of gender means that "other social distinctions – such as those of class- may be played out through categories of gender." (Adkins 2003: 29) Graham Murdock asks "Is class position necessarily always the major stratifying principle underlying cultural consumption? How important are the cross-cutting dimensions of stratification – sex, age and life-cycle stage, and ethnicity?" (2000: 139) In *Distinction* Bourdieu's treatment of gender as a secondary variable contradicts "claims elsewhere in his work that gender is a major social division; indeed that gender is the paradigmatic form of symbolic violence." (Swartz 1997: 156) Addressing this, my analysis is gender focused, and for my purposes class becomes a secondary analytic category.

Incorporating elements of class-based analysis into my work raised a significant question - how does one classify respondents? As Bennett *et al* point out in their study: "Bourdieu provides no obvious guidelines as to how his conception of class can be replicated" (1999: 17). It is clear that for Bourdieu "the major social classes are distinguishable according to their 'overall volume of capital' that is, their 'set of actually usable resources and powers – economic capital, cultural capital and … social capital'." (Milner 1999: 138) However, an indication of how to actually measure these forms of capital is absent. For much research "[t]he occupational structure has long been used as a proxy for 'class'" (Crompton 2000: 165) which creates issues when classifying the long-term unemployed and those in full time education. Despite Bourdieu's criticism of occupational categories as measures of social class, stating that such categories "are "bureaucratic" rather than "scientific" categories...Bourdieu himself employs occupational titles as the principal indicator of positionality" (Swartz 1997: 161) in his model of social space. In *Distinction* his classes are aggregates of occupations (see Bourdieu 1986: 504). According to Bridget Fowler

> The mistake in reading Bourdieu is to assume that he is concerned with habitus as a product of class experience alone. Certainly, for him, each agent's habitus is formed by their class, but also by their gender and their own occupational field. We can reasonably talk of a working-class habitus but also of a farming habitus, a military, scientific or an artistic habitus. (1999: 2)

Incorporating these elements into my analysis, I refer to the various occupations of my respondents, as well as examining how class divisions may be played out through gendered identity in the book group meetings (see chapter six). I did not ask participants to self-identify class background when interviewing them, since this would not have given me access to some kind of experiential 'truth'. Also, attempting to discuss class with research participants is not necessarily a straightforward matter, as Fiona Devine notes in a reflection on her research into class-based social mobility, discussions about class caused 'discomfort', 'awkwardness' and undermined her rapport with respondents (2004: 203). For the interviewees with whom I spent limited time, I refer to occupations when analysing their responses. Since the book group sessions offered a more longitudinal perspective and I knew the participants beforehand, I was able to draw on knowledge about their family backgrounds as well as their occupations (cf Hermes 1995: 200-202). David Morley warns that referring to people's class background and using descriptives such as 'middle class' doesn't mean that you can generalise them as representatives of these groups (1992: 125), and as such these 'labels' are only used to describe localised interactions.

As well as difficulties with the classification of the people involved in my study, there are also problems with Bourdieu's notion of legitimate cultural capital as both monolithic and universally recognised. As noted earlier, Bourdieu's argument "simply *assumes* the legitimacy of a fixed and monolithically legitimate 'cultural capital' rather than considering how 'cultural capital' may, at any single moment of culture-in-process, remain variously fragmented, internally inconsistent and struggled over." (Hills 2002: 48)

Bourdieu's ideas constitute a macro-theoretical approach to cultural consumption, and for critics of this type of model "[i]t is surely self-evident that the behaviour of individual actors is considerably more quirky and indeterminate than macrotheoretical models suggest" (Langer 1988: 124). In my own research the difficulty in defining the 'field' of the reading group perhaps means that Bourdieu's approach cannot always account for "micro-interactional processes" (Lareau and Weininger 2003: 569) and for moments of "culture-in-process" (Hills 2002: 48). Questions have arisen when undertaking my research that Bourdieu's theory seems unable to account for, for example, what happens when capital is

misrecognized or goes completely unrecognized? The economic metaphor of *Distinction* depends on the recognition and 'trading value' of the different forms of capital. If capital goes unrecognized surely it cannot be traded on, and thus becomes devalued. Likewise, if cultural capital is used for exclusion as Michèle Lamont and Annette Lareau suggest (1988: 158), its power disappears with unawareness. Lamont and Lareau point out that the metaphor of exchange "is less suitable...where cultural consensus is weak, and where the definition of high status cultural signals, and their yields varies across groups." (1988: 159) With my book group consisting of men of different ages and class fractions being brought together it is perhaps more appropriate to view capital as a process, not a product and study how capital is negotiated and struggled over: "The day-to-day processes and micro-level interactions in which individuals activate their cultural capital...to attain desired social results – i.e., the study of cultural reproduction in action – is an interesting topic...neglected by...researchers" (Lamont and Lareau 1988: 163). For Lamont and Lareau, further work on cultural capital that examines it and locates it in the micro-social contexts of everyday life "stands to make an important contribution to research on culture, power and social stratification" (1988: 165). It is to the micro-social contexts of everyday life that my chapter now turns, focusing on the theories, uses and limits of the work of Michel de Certeau.

A very (extra?)ordinary culture: consumption and/as production

De Certeau's initial focus is on the nature of consumption, which he argues has been "commonly assumed to be passive and guided by established rules" (1988: xi). His writing marks a break from this tradition, making clear that he does not view consumers as passive:

> a rationalized, expansionist, centralized, spectacular and clamorous production is confronted by an entirely different kind of production, called "consumption" and characterized by its ruses, fragmentation...its poaching...its quiet but tireless activity, in short by its quasi-invisibility, since it shows itself not in its own products...but in an art of using those imposed on it. (de Certeau 1988: 31)

For de Certeau consumption is another type of production: "consumption is creative, productive and full of possibilities... consumers...*make* use of things. They appropriate what appears alienable, and in so doing they turn the world to their advantage (*détournement*)."

(Segrott and Doel 2004: 608) This production cannot be seen in the actual product consumed because "between the person...and these products...there is a gap of varying proportions opened by the use that he makes of them." (de Certeau 1988: 32)

That consumption-as-production is manifest in 'ways of using' in de Certeau's theory is particularly important. It is, for example, why he argues that statistical analysis is inappropriate for the analysis of practices of everyday life: "he opposes quantitative or statistical analyses because they reduce the active side of consumption to the appearance of passivity" (Poster 1992: 102). For de Certeau, statistics can only capture *what* is used, not the ways of using: "such study can grasp only the material used by consumer practices...not the *formality* proper to these practices, their surreptitious and guileful "movement," that is, the very activity of "making do."" (1988: 35) Mark Poster summarises this, stating "De Certeau complains that the quantifying methods of social science reduce the understanding of consumption. They see cultural products 'merely as data on the basis of which statistical tabulations of their circulation can be drawn up'. [As such, ...] the 'form' of consumption missed by the 'technocratic rationality' of social science is its construction of 'spaces and languages'." (2004: 413)

De Certeau describes how consumers trace "indeterminate trajectories" (1988: 34) and "these "traverses" remain heterogeneous to the systems they infiltrate and in which they sketch out the guileful ruses of *different* interests and desires." (*ibid*) He finds the term 'trajectory' somewhat unsuitable to describe practices because a trajectory is "a mark *in place of* acts, a relic in place of performances: it is only their remainder, the sign of their erasure." (1988: 35) As an 'initial schema' he suggests a distinction between the terms 'strategies' and 'tactics':

> I call a *strategy* the calculation...of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power...can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats...can be managed....[E]very "strategic" rationalization seeks first of all to distinguish its "own" place (de Certeau 1988: 35-6).

It is here that de Certeau's specific concept of place becomes important; it is described as a "proper" place: "strategies tend to enforce a mastery of space through sight...[and] these spatial strategies transform uncertain time into readable space." (Segrott and Doel 2004: 610)

De Certeau defines tactics "[b]y contrast with strategy" (1988: 36) and describes a tactic as

> a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus...The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it...It does not have the means to *keep to itself*, at a distance, in position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection...It operates in isolated actions blow by blow...What it wins it cannot keep...In short, a tactic is an art of the weak. (1988: 37)

Tactics have no 'proper' place and thus can only create 'space' in the place of the other, and are determined by the absence of power. "Tactics are procedures that gain validity in relation to the pertinence they lend to time" (de Certeau 1988: 38). In other words, "[t]actics, deprived of a proper place and without mastery over time, are "ways of doing" or better yet, "of doing with"." (Chartier 1995: 90)

In order to give his definition a more concrete basis, de Certeau describes everyday practices that he sees as being of a tactical nature: "[d]welling, moving about, speaking, reading, shopping, and cooking are activities that seem to correspond to the characteristics of tactical ruses and surprises: clever tricks of the "weak" within the order established by the "strong"" (1988: 40). It is one of these activities in particular that I now examine in de Certeau's work because it is relevant to my own – reading.

Reading, according to de Certeau is a fundamental part of consumption, and he claims that "the binominal set production-consumption can often be replaced by its general equivalent and indicator, the binominal set writing-reading." (1988: 168) He argues that what needs to be put in question is "the assimilation of reading to passivity." (1988: 169) By conceiving of consumption as a form of production, this passivity is challenged: "Defined as 'another

production', cultural consumption – for example the reading of a text – can thus escape the passivity traditionally attributed to it." (Chartier 1988: 41) For de Certeau 'everyday'

> readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging so someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they sis not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves. Writing…resists time by the establishment of a place…Reading takes no such measures against the erosion of time…reading has no place. (1988: 175)

Reading as a kind of poaching is characterised "by advances and retreats, tactics and games played with the text" (1988: 175) where it becomes "in its own way, inventive and creative." (Chartier 1995: 90)

De Certeau's account of reading is, of course, a great deal more complex than my descriptive outline given here. I will, however, return to his theories of reading and the reader in greater detail when I discuss how I will use it for my own argument. For now, I shall turn to how de Certeau's discussions of reading have been taken up in other academic work.

Reading "poaching": de Certeau and the cultural studies 'reader'

"[B]y far the best known…'popularizer' of De Certeau in media and cultural studies is John Fiske" (Moores 1993: 130) and it is his use of de Certeauian analysis that I shall discuss first. The tone of Fiske's work is undoubtedly celebratory when discussing the 'resistant' tactics of consumers:

> The fact that the system provides only commodities, whether cultural or material, does not mean that the process of consuming these commodities can be adequately described as one that commodifies the people into a homogenized mass at the mercy of the barons of the industry. People can, and do, tear their jeans. (1989: 25-6)

People tearing their jeans is only one act of 'resistance' that Fiske celebrates as tactical. He also uses the concept of popular tactics to encompass window shopping, listening to Madonna records and "old age pensioners who walk in the warmth of the mall's concourses

during the cold winter season." (Moores 1993: 132) For Fiske, it seems that every act of consumption is a speech-act or a communication: "All the commodities of late capitalism are "goods to speak with"" (1989: 34), and popular culture "is shot through with contradictions, the "contra" element of its "diction" derives from the...readers of its...texts." (1989: 105)

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Critiques of Fiske in his enthusiasms for the (over)active audience are numerous, and the problems with his application of de Certeau are well recognised. According to Highmore's argument, Fiske is misreading de Certeau's theory: "For de Certeau the turn towards studying everyday culture was not about finding new cultural texts to interpret, value and celebrate; instead it was an attempt to focus investigation on the way people operate, the way they 'practise' everyday life." (Highmore 2002: 147) This critique is reinforced by David Morley, who says that "[w]hile de Certeau's work is evidently of great interest, the dangers of a partial interpretation of that work, which over-stresses (if not romanticizes) the element of popular resistance, have been clearly identified by, among others, Frow (1991)." (Morley 1992: 29) Fiske is considered to have romanticized the resistance of the consumer, not only by Morley:

> Fiske appears to be declaring optimism all round – putting his faith in subordinated people to make do with what the system provides, so that everything they touch turns to resistance...[h]e writes about consumers in the same romanticized style which De Certeau used when dedicating *The Practice of Everyday Life* to 'the ordinary man' as 'common hero'. (Moores 1993: 131)

Roger Silverstone also identifies a problem in Fiske's work: "[A] mistake is made when the everyday and the popular are treated as coterminous" (Silverstone 1994: 163) and Fiske's application "is simultaneously an oversimplification of de Certeau's arguments and also a misreading of the politics of everyday life." (*ibid*) Ian Buchanan's main criticism of Fiske's work concerns his (mis)use of the terms 'strategy' and 'tactics': what "Fiske does is ontologise strategy and tactics: he transforms into users what de Certeau determined very particularly to be 'ways of using'." (Buchanan 1997: 184) In other words:

> The problem with Fiske's rendering of de Certeau is that he does not draw a sharp enough distinction between use and user. An activity which invests a product, or phenomenon, with individuality is correctly referred to as tactical, but the agent performing that activity is not. (Buchanan 1997: 184)

Confusing the terms that de Certeau puts forward in his work is not a criticism to be applied to Fiske's work alone. Many theorists ignore de Certeau's framing remarks expressing hesitancy over his terms. As a result, "concepts like 'strategy' and 'tactics' have...become unruly orphans" (Buchanan 2000: 2).

Kendall Phillips employs de Certeau's terminology when discussing the 'textual strategies' of the character Batman and the 'plastic tactics' of Barbie in his "reading" of popular cultural artefacts. He describes Batman as an example of strategy: "Based in their proper places, strategies control their surroundings, observe all activities, and capitalize on their knowledge. Batman, then, can be seen as an exemplar of de Certeau's notion of strategies." (Phillips 2002: 132) As has already been noted by Buchanan "it is only possible to operate tactically or strategically; one cannot be tactical or strategic." (1997: 184) Phillips also overlooks de Certeau's subtle distinction between space and place: "Tactics are a mode of everyday resistance, the ways in which we adapt to *spaces* of dominance and seek to create within these *spaces* a *place* of our own, even if only temporarily. Barbie, quite clearly represents this kind of adaptability." (Phillips 2002: 133, emphasis added) For de Certeau there is no "space" of dominance, he specifically points out that strategy originates from a 'proper' *place*.

De Certeau is also used by those seeking to account for or investigate the 'reading' of television programmes. One of the first academics to take up de Certeau's theories in his work was Roger Silverstone. For Silverstone, "his arguments are of considerable relevance...they offer a possible route for the exploration of the relationship between television as a medium, as institution and as technology, with its audience." (Silverstone 1989: 84) Silverstone (like Fiske) sees the creativity that comes with de Certeau's suggestions about consumption, and sees transformative potential within his ideas: "Buying, using, reading, watching – none of these activities leaves the subject, the object or even the system untouched. To assume that it does (as he suggests Bourdieu does) misunderstands

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consumption's essentially dynamic, not to say creative, nature." (Silverstone 1994: 120) However, contra Fiske, Silverstone cannot be accused of simply viewing de Certeau's work in a celebratory manner. While he acknowledges the positive possibilities in using de Certeau's ideas, he also notes that on the other hand "we can recognise the scale and extent of...imposition, and see in the same activities a kind of superficial scratching...making marks but not affecting the structures" (Silverstone 1994: 121).

Other work that draws on de Certeau's ideas with specific relevance to my own study are those which focus on book reading, but these have an historical focus. Both Roger Chartier and Erin A. Smith attempt to reconstruct the reading habits of different historical reading 'communities'. Smith looks at how readers may have interpreted "hard-boiled" detective novels and pulp magazines in the 20s, 30s and 40s. She describes reviewers of Dashiell Hammett's novels as ""poachers", to use Michel de Certeau's term—readers whose own concerns and preoccupations determined which aspects of the text were most salient. Such idiosyncratic reading practices...are common in contemporary audience studies." (Smith 2000: 7) Despite referring to the prevalence of this type of reading, Smith neglects to cover any of de Certeau's ideas in detail – she briefly mentions reading as poaching once more to note that minority groups "ethnic, female, gay and lesbian writers are poachers – readers who appropriated complex and often contradictory texts in ways that addressed their own needs, goals and situations." (Smith 2000: 168)

Chartier engages with de Certeau's work in a more thorough way in his numerous works on the history of reading and historical readers. He uses de Certeau's theories to think through some of the problems facing the historian of reading. He acknowledges that "reading...rarely leaves traces, is scattered into an infinity of singular acts, and purposely frees itself from all the constraints seeking to subdue it." (Chartier 1992a: 50) He also mentions de Certeau's notion of reading as poaching: "to locate the network of practices and rules of reading specific to diverse communities of readers...is a primary task for any history concerned with understanding, in its differentiations, the pragmatic figure of the "poaching" reader" (Chartier 1992a: 51). De Certeau's work does not provide Chartier with the answers of how to conduct a study of historical readers, but it does provide a point of departure and a line

of guidance for his work: "to detect how material forms affect meaning, to locate social difference more in real practices than in statistical distributions—such are the paths outlined in our attempt to understand…this "silent production" which is the activity of reading." (Chartier 1992a: 59)

The idea of the "silent production" of consumption is drawn upon in Henry Jenkins' *Textual Poachers* which theorises the practices of television audiences through the work of de Certeau. For Jenkins "fans become a model of the type of textual "poaching" de Certeau associates with popular reading…[f]ans construct their identity through borrowing and inflecting mass culture images" (1992: 23). Jenkins discusses the freedom of the reader in silent reading where he points out that "[t]he separation of speech from reading frees the reader to engage in the nomadic poaching that de Certeau ascribes to popular reading practices." (1992: 62) In his argument, it follows that modern readers can hold the text at a distance and can gain mastery over its meanings because they are free from its physical hold on them: "The autonomy of the eye suspends the body's complicities with the text…it makes the written text an object and it increases the reader's possibilities of moving about" (de Certeau 1988: 176). While de Certeau does indeed discuss a "distancing of the text" as a condition for the reader's autonomy, I disagree with the continuation of Jenkins argument where he states: "De Certeau's endorsement of critical distance disappoints in its refusal to recognize the most profound aspects of his own argument: poachers do not observe from the distance" (1992: 62). For de Certeau, a distancing of the text does not equate with "critical" distance for the 'popular' reader. One should not forget that while he talks about the withdrawal of the body, he does not discuss what happens to the *mind*. While generally we may not read aloud anymore, reading is still a practice that affects the body: "Reading is not only an abstract operation of the intellect: it puts the body into play and is inscribed within a particular space, in a relation to the self or to others." (Chartier 1992a: 53) Also, de Certeau is not necessarily *valuing* the suspension of the body - he actually suggests that "[w]e should try to rediscover the movements of…reading within the body itself." (1988: 175) His positive evaluation of the body and the voice is clearly expressed in the work of Silverstone: "Everyday life is the site of 'guerrilla warfare': of the oral against the literary; the voice against the text; the body against the machine; the consumer against the

producer." (1989: 79) However, not all work that engages with de Certeau's theories accords value to the notion of the 'invisible production' of consumption practices and I now discuss some of the critiques that have been put forward about *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

Critiques of de Certeau

The "quasi-invisibility" of the arts of everyday practice provides a problem for most of de Certeau's critics. "Certeau specifies the everyday as the "cultural activity of the non-producers of culture, an activity that is unsigned, unreadable and unsymbolized." Thus...this cultural activity is opposed, first and foremost, to *cultural analysis*" (Driscoll 2002: 381-2). De Certeau locates "practices in the domain of the ineffable...beyond the sphere of legibility and so also beyond the reach of analytical description." (Bennett 1998: 179) Even Ian Buchanan who regularly defends de Certeau's arguments in his work says that "it must be admitted that de Certeau does go to some lengths to specify as vividly and fully as possible the elusiveness of the topic, the primary problem is not, as one might expect, that the everyday is impossible to see...but rather that it is impossible to represent." (Buchanan 2000: 48) Of course one cannot represent the everyday in its entirety, but I would argue that it is not *impossible* to represent at least an element of the everyday.

John Frow also points to the fact that research into reading is "rendered difficult" by the lack of 'traces' left behind by its practice, after all "reading produces no storage of information; it is pure process, without textual form." (1995: 57) With the reading experience so difficult to access, Frow further suggests that "the appeal to a pristine (and invisible) *experience* of the text is both unwarranted and in principle dangerous." (1995: 58) For Frow the danger occurs when in the "absence of realized texts which can be subjected to determinate analysis...the analyst will inevitably construct such an object." (1995: 59) Culprits of such object "construction" are named as David Morley and Janice Radway in Frow's work – he says they make the mistake of confusing responses given in interview with the direct experience of the text.

For Tony Bennett, "de Certeau's approach has real limits which need to be respected…[his] text has, in the main, been indulgently received in a manner that has legitimated an indulgent critical practice" (Bennett 1998: 168). The 'indulgent critical practice' that he highlights is also apparent in the work of Meaghan Morris, who again alludes to the problem of an analyst's construction of an object for study. "By explicitly turning to de Certeau, Morris is, in part, responding to those profoundly sincere but overly critical reinflections of his work that have used it to uncover those various 'resistances' and 'tactics' where, ultimately, '[t]he people are…the textually delegated, allegorical emblem of the critic's own activity'" (Seigworth 2000: 229).

Bennett also argues that de Certeau fails to account for specific forms of resistance: "What de Certeau's account of everyday practices most lacks, that is to say, is anything approaching an adequate sociological or historical description of those practices that would be capable of locating them within, and accounting for them in terms of, specific social milieux." (Bennett 1998: 174) In his discussion of street walking, Steve Pile identifies a criticism similar to Bennett's. He notes that "De Certeau…does not discuss different social and spatial practices of walking, involving who is doing the walking, how and why they are walking, under what circumstances." (Pile 1996: 228-9) De Certeau's reason for this lies in the nature of consumption: "the "marks of consumption" are "invisible" and transient, fluid and uncontainable, not open to direct examination or reproduction and hence, de Certeau's dependence on metaphorical evocation rather than ethnographic documentation." (Jenkins 1992: 223)

For Brian Morris, the most important of the limits to de Certeau's notion of resistance stems from his "opposition between 'the official' and 'the everyday', and his subsequently rigid differentiation between strategies and tactics. Social practices…rarely conform to this either/or model." (Morris 2004: 679) While it is true that "de Certeau develops his account of tactics by means of a contrast with strategy" (Bennett 1998: 175), it is clear that this 'contrast' is easy to misconstrue. "The most persistent and damaging distortion of de Certeau's theory has been the enshrining of the idea that strategy and tactics are oppositions in the dialectical sense." (Buchanan 1997: 188) And yet this is how many critics

receive his model: "it becomes clear, on closer inspection, that de Certeau's account of tactics constitutes less an exception to the bipolar logic of resistance than the extreme case of that logic, one in which it is carried to excess" (Bennett 1998: 177). Samuel Kinser also identifies this 'extreme' logic in de Certeau's model: "a "polemological" model of relations between powerful and powerless people's everyday behaviour needs to be supplemented and modified because polarities of power are rarely so stark as to pit omnipotence against nothingness" (Kinser 1992: 75). Ben Highmore explains why this reading of de Certeau's model is inaccurate:

> What makes de Certeau's manoeuvre so awkward (and seemingly so easy to mistake) is this use of binary terms to challenge the structures of binary thought. Semantically overlapping, terms such as 'strategies and tactics' refuse to be straightforward antagonists…[they are] non oppositional binary terms. (Highmore 2002: 154)

In de Certeau's work, there is the suggestion that strategy can be transformed into tactics: ""The weaker the forces at the disposition of the strategist, the more the strategist will be able to use deception." I translate: the more the strategy is transformed into tactics." (de Certeau 1988: 37) Claiming that "[p]ower in *The Practice of Everyday Life* tends to be depicted in a top-down fashion with the oppressed 'man in the street' pitted against the powers-that-be" (Morris 2004: 681) is an oversimplification of de Certeau's argument, due to the fact that

> strategy and tactics do not divide the social between the powerful and the powerless, but rather discriminate between different types, or modalities as it might also be put, of power. This means that strategy and tactics are adjacent rather than complementary; they distort and ramify one another, but they do not depend on one another. (Buchanan 1997: 188)

Referring to *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Beryl Langer criticises de Certeau's writing for its lack of focus on gender: "[t]he book is…gender blind, defining humanity as male (the ordinary "man" and "his" resistance to domination) or in gender neutral terms like "user" and "consumer" which gloss the relations of domination and subordination *within* these categories" (1988: 23). Langer furthers her criticism by adding that "in ignoring the profoundly gendered nature of everyday life, de Certeau ignores the differential constraints

imposed on users, and the ways in which dominant modes of representation...assist in the continuing domination of some "users" (women) by others (men)." (1988: 123) It is true that in *The Practice of Everyday Life* no mention is made of gender, and how this may affect everyday practices. This omission requires a corrective and is addressed in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Such varied critiques as the ones outlined above are testament to the fact that "de Certeau's texts have the same porous density that he finds in the everyday: they are relatively 'open' to different readings, they are capable of supplying the material for very different kinds of arguments." (Highmore 2002: 156) One final argument I wish to put forward is identified in the work of Nick Couldry. This time the critique relates to how de Certeau's ideas have been used in cultural studies:

> De Certeau's concept of 'tactics' has, unfortunately, tended to be used in cultural studies only in the narrow context of the power relations between textual producers and consumers, with 'tactics' being seen as a form of resistance or alternative cultural production. While this may sometimes be important, it obscures the wider point de Certeau raises: *how do people interact not just with single texts, but with contemporary textual fields?* (Couldry 2000: 73)

This important question leads back to the specifics of my own research, to use de Certeau's own words: "the story of man's travels through his own texts remains in large measure unknown." (1988: 170) As has been identified in my introduction, there is very little work which pays attention to men's reading practices, and my work attempts to contribute to the story of men's travels through the textual field of fiction reading. By studying individuals as well as those in a reading group situation, I aim to locate fiction reading within social and institutional frames, and look at how the practice of reading may be used as part of the process of identity construction:

> In the everyday world...fragmentations and disputes...become the raw material for a defensive set of narrative practices: tactics, which are to be found embodied in the citations and recitations of daily life. These practices are social....Through these practices all kinds of identities are claimed and constructed, including individual ones. (Silverstone 1989: 88)

Using the concept of consumption-as-production, I aim to "make sense out of a practice (reading) that only rarely leaves traces" (Chartier 1992b: 1-2), and I now focus on the challenges of analysing such a practice.

"Poaching" de Certeau: a tactical approach to identity construction

"Michel de Certeau...contrasts writing – conservative, fixed, durable – and reading – always of the order of the ephemeral" (Chartier 1992b: 1-2). While Chartier is referring to the problems of undertaking a historical study of readers, the challenge outlined above is pertinent for my modern-day study of readers. This problem is also highlighted in the work of Brian Rigby, where he points out that:

> If one were to try and understand the culture of the people, the creativity of the people, one would...have to give full weight and importance to what is by definition ephemeral and instantaneous: the element of play, celebration, transgression and subversion in the life of the people, none of which tends to leave permanent traces. (Rigby 1991: 18)

If permanent traces of everyday practices are not left, how can they be analysed? "What procedures are involved in the textualising of the practices of everyday life – what must be done to make the everyday sayable?" (Buchanan 1997: 185-6) If consumption-production is practically invisible, and if "the everyday is in effect invisible to the analytic gaze" (Chaney 2002: 50), how, then, is the analyst to get access to these practices?

The answer lies in the traces left by such practices. Consumers produce "indeterminate trajectories" that "remain heterogeneous to the systems they infiltrate and in which they sketch out the guileful ruses of *different* interests and desires." (de Certeau 1988: 34) These indeterminate trajectories are marks left that stand in for acts. For the analyst, it would seem that these traces left by consumption as production are the only way to access practices. As an example, de Certeau provides the image of a child 'annotating' his text book: "The child still scrawls and daubs on his schoolbooks; even if he is punished for the crime, he has made a space for himself and signs his existence as an author on it." (1988: 31) The very trace left by this 'trajectory' is a sign of the movement that is longer there. The

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example used here is of a trace that is physical in nature, but under normal circumstances, reading "rarely leaves traces, is scattered into an infinity of singular acts, and purposefully frees itself from all the constraints seeking to subdue it." (Chartier 1992: 50) The traces of reading that I hope to locate in my study are discursive and are thus oral traces. It is here that "[t]he trace left behind...[must be] substituted for the practice" (de Certeau 1988: 97):

> On the one hand we have the possibility of archives at least bearing traces of the tactical side of life; on the other, orality is hard to imagine at all within writing. De Certeau, in the end, privileges the possibility of registering 'voices' within 'texts', and partly this is because the project of constructing a general poetics of the practices of everyday life is itself dedicated to a practice of listening, inscribing and describing. (Highmore 2002: 168)

In order to register these 'voices' within my text, and as a means of collecting traces of practices, my work is empirically focused, using transcribed recordings of interviews to inform my analysis: "If the art of speaking is an art of operating and an art of thinking, practice...can be present in it." (de Certeau 1988: 78) Not forgetting that "all reading is not necessarily individual, silent and solitary" (Chartier 1992: 58), my study also examines the discourse produced by a male reading group.

De Certeau's work on the nature of reading is also significant to my own research. Here he provides us with the image of "the reader as poacher, encroaching on the terrain of the cultural landowner (or text owner) and "stealing" what he or she wants without being caught and subjected to the laws of the land (rule of the text)" (Fiske 1989: 143) and also puts forward the idea of the "literal" reader whose "overdetermined operations...must be analysed according to their function in a social and institutional network." (Ahearne 1995: 169) This is not to say, however, that only "proper" "literal" readings are overdetermined; acts of consumption are always imbricated within hierarchies of cultural value and webs of complex power relations. Specifically in a reading group there are different "norms and conventions of reading, defining for each community of readers the legitimate uses of the book, the forms of reading, and the instruments and procedures of interpretation." (Chartier 1992: 51)

De Certeau outlines two main types of reading, 'literal' and 'tactical'. Literal reading takes the 'proper' place of the text as its focal point. "By its very nature available to a plural reading, the text becomes a cultural weapon, a private hunting reserve" (de Certeau 1988: 171) and a pretext for socially legitimised intellectuals to give the "literal" (proper) interpretation of a text. This "proper" reading becomes the strategic reading forced on the everyday reader by various socio-cultural mechanisms. The most obvious example of this is schooling, in which the teacher holds the 'passport' to legitimate or "proper" readings of a text. Any students that dare to challenge "literal" meaning by coming up with their own readings of a text "are scornfully driven or cleverly coaxed back to the meaning "accepted" by their teachers" (de Certeau 1988: 172). "Literal" reading is likely to be viewed by the reader as 'reading as work'; after all, only scholarly exegesis results in "proper" meaning being revealed. Tactical reading, on the other hand, is a reading practice that takes the reader as its focus: "A tactical reading (also called textual poaching) uses the text as a point of departure for a meaning-making practice that empowers the reader: it does not present itself as a coherent and consistent explanation of textual practice." (Cranny-Francis, Waring, Stavropoulos and Kirkby 2003: 130)

In his work, de Certeau ascribes this kind of reading to everyday readers:

> De Certeau perceives popular reading as a series of "advances and retreats, tactics and games played with the text," as a type of cultural bricolage through which readers fragment texts and reassemble the broken shards according to their own blueprints, salvaging bits and pieces of the found material in making sense of their own social experience. (Jenkins 1992: 26)

Use of reading as cultural bricolage for the production of (gender) identity is fundamental to my study. "[G]iven that the tactical reading is an articulation of the subject's perception of their own positioning, an understanding of the tactical response can be an important tool for the analyst in understanding that subject's self-perception" (Cranny-Francis *et al* 2003: 135). De Certeau views consumption as a kind of production and "consumption practices involve us in some kind of creative work. Our individual and social identities are defined through them." (Silverstone 1989: 80) Through talk about consumption practices we see how the social identity category of gender may come to be constructed in or through talk

about our interactions with everyday objects such as books: "Certeau's everyday life might be productively rethought as the practice of the subject through the position of everyday life, as the set of tactics and technologies by which the self is constituted (however transiently) within culture." (Driscoll 2002: 395)

At a more abstracted level we can see how "audience study might also be understood as "strategic" or "tactical"—expressions de Certeau uses to emphasise a spatial politics of knowledge production." (Hay 1996: 366) As Bennett points out, there has been a tendency in cultural studies to track down resistances (in particular those of minority groups) and "when it has found them, it should take their side." (1998: 168) The concept of resistance has been used extensively but "has received relatively little sustained theoretical attention, but has rather been taken on trust as 'a good thing' and certainly 'to be encouraged'. Where a theoretical lineage has been called for, this has usually been supplied by reference to Michel de Certeau's accounts, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*" (Bennett 1998: 167). While this is part of what de Certeau's work entails, it should be noted that "everyday life does not necessarily entail a pattern of resistance in Certeau's analyses, [but] this is often how *The Practice of Everyday Life* is read in cultural studies." (Driscoll 2002: 394) De Certeau's work is not concerned with the tactics of audiences and readers that are marginal:

> de Certeau...is concerned with the 'perambulatory tactics' of everyday practices, in which people...are credited with the ability to be creative in their manipulation, for their own ends, of the resources available to them. Moreover, de Certeau is concerned to analyse this process not 'at the margins', in the occasional activities of minority/spectacular sub-cultures, but in the everyday practices of mass culture. (Morley 1992: 217)

My work uses de Certeau's ideas in a study of an 'audience' that is not in fact marginal or sub-cultural, rather one that is 'marginalised' or culturally exnominated and has, up until now, been ignored by academia. I return to an earlier point raised by Buchanan which has an important part to play in the originality of my research. Buchanan points out that "[s]trictly speaking, it is only possible to operate tactically or strategically; one cannot be tactical or strategic." (1997: 184) Though tactics may have been defined as "of the weak" (Silverstone 1989: 82), "the art of the weak does not necessarily require that its operator *be*

weak. What is tactical, and therefore belonging to an order of the weak, is only the action, the relation not the agent." (Buchanan 1997: 187) This distinction between the action and the agent means that it is possible for men to be positioned (by patriarchy) to operate in a strategic manner, and yet to *perform* tactical operations in terms of their reading. This becomes significant when we begin to consider reading as a means of identity construction, and as a juncture at which it is possible to challenge narratives of men as powerful: "it is in these unremarked incidentals that one is more likely to find the evasiveness that escapes the logic of instrumental rationality." (Chaney 2002: 50)

From what I have outlined above, it is possible to see de Certeau's benefits for gender theorists, where "an understanding of tactical reading can lead to valuable insights into the ways in which conservative gendering practices are resisted and transformed, which might in turn provide models for the reconceptualisation of gendered relationships and identities." (Cranny Francis 2003: 135) Also, by considering consumption as a productive act "de Certeau's argument enables consumers with agentive capacity with respect to both the pervasiveness of the institutions of production, as well as with respect to the techniques of power which operate through and within them in myriad ways." (Saltmarsh 2004: 449)

As analysts we must not forget that "the speech *act* cannot be parted from its circumstances" (de Certeau 1988: 20). Likewise, the everyday practices and ways of using fiction cannot be transported into another place (the place of analytical study) without the loss of what is essential to these practices – the *practicing* will only remain as a trace. Recording and transcribing the practices of both productions provides a scriptural 'trace' for analysis. Transcribing the oral transforms it: "the voice [is] simultaneously "cited"...and "altered"" (de Certeau 1988: 161). I do not suggest that my recorded interviews and book group sessions stand in for the direct experience of reading. Rather I consider this mode of exploration as resulting in a different kind of production in itself. The act of reading produces a reading of a text and speaking about this reading as a completed practice produces a tertiary text which is accessible to me as a researcher. The experience of reading is not in this case invisible or transparent, it is mediated through discourse and is analysed as such. De Certeau's complaint with any attempt to access the 'voice of the people' is that

there is "no such "pure" voice, because it is always determined by a system (whether social, familial, or other)" (1988: 132). The fact that the voice (and the practice it articulates) is determined by a system is an integral part of my work. I examine how both the practice and the voice can be either legitimated or exnominated by a system (patriarchy), and look at how readers choices may be shaped by social systems.

Theories of masculinity/performance

If "language using is an 'act of identity'" (Cameron 2001: 170) then it is possible to examine how identity is constructed using discourse analysis. Cultural studies' examinations of gender performance have used discourse analysis of "what men say...[and] the social practices implied therein." (Gough 2001: 169) These studies have informed my own work as they contribute to the "growing consensus that language lies at the heart of understanding men and masculinity...insisting that masculinity (and gender more generally) is something constructed in and through discourse." (Edley 2001: 191) Treating discourse as an important way of constructing masculinity is central to my research, highlighting the "fiercely *contested* nature of masculinity...the possibilities for masculine self-definition in different periods and the struggle which occurs to establish certain constructions as hegemonic and dominant" (Edley and Wetherell 1997: 204). Jackson, Stevenson and Brooks assert that "the performance of gender is recursively monitored and subject to regulation through patriarchal institutions and ideologies" (Jackson *et al* 2001: 13) and that these structures may be negotiated or resisted, but it is through them that gender becomes culturally recognisable.

A key contributor to theories of masculinity, Raewyn Connell rejected "the conceptual singularity of masculinity...[opening] up new possibilities for understanding it as a socially constructed multiplicity." (Howson 2006: 2) Academic work now widely accepts that 'masculinity' is in fact composed of *masculinities* and "when we link masculinity to culture...it immediately becomes evident in terms of enactment masculinity is a diverse, mobile, even unstable, construction." (Beynon 2002: 2) It is Connell's framework that has meant "[m]uch of the theoretical work currently circulating in the study of men and

masculinities revolves around the concept of hegemonic masculinity." (Coles 2009: 31) Recognising masculinity as a social practice means that it can be conceived of as multiple and must be contextually located.

Connell's term 'borrows' from Gramsci's (1971) analysis of class relations where hegemony is "a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes" (Connell 1987: 184). Gramsci suggested that the control of the dominant class "involved the active consent of dominated groups" (Hearn 2004: 54). Connell points out that although hegemony does not refer to ascendancy based on force, it is not incompatible with it, and that hegemony does not mean 'obliteration of alternatives' or total cultural dominance (1987: 184). Hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to women and subordinated masculinities and it is heterosexual (*ibid*: 186).

The use of this concept has been widespread – Connell and Messerschmidt reported in 2005 that a search for 'hegemonic masculinity' returned more than two hundred articles using the term in their title or abstract (2005: 830). Despite multiplicitous use of the term, there are those who critique it, suggesting for example, that despite Connell's emphasis on historical and cultural specificity "there has been widespread application of the term in many and various ways, and this can be a conceptual and empirical weakness" (Hearn 2004: 58). Also, despite empirical studies that investigate how hegemonic masculinity is lived by men, the concept still tends to describe male power at a structural level (Whitehead in Coles 2009: 33). Tony Jefferson asks "Is the relationship between hegemonic and the various subordinated masculinities structured?...[I]f structure is simply the outcome of prior practice, albeit constrained practice, how does practice produce, and continually reproduce, something as systematic as the gender order?" (Jefferson 1994: 15) An answer to this may be posited if we supplement Connell's work by drawing on the concept of habitus and on the symbolic power of gender in Bourdieu's work. I suggest that the theories of Connell and Bourdieu can be usefully combined, since "both acknowledge the necessity to consider individuals and how they perform gender while simultaneously considering the effects of social structures" (Coles 2009: 43n3) and for both theorists gender is fundamentally

relational. This combinatory approach is explicated more fully in the data analysis chapters that follow.

Another key theorist in the field of gender studies is Judith Butler: "Judith Butler's writing has been remarkably influential, challenging the very ontological status of identity itself." (Nayak and Kehily 2006: 460) Her writings argue that "genders are produced through performance or iteration...the subject is the effect of the discourses that compose it" (Colebrook 2004: 242). Where I refer to the 'performance' of gender in my work, this is not in a Butlerian sense. Although both Bourdieu and Butler draw on Austin's concept of 'performativity' (see Lovell 2000: 15), their approaches diverge when it comes to embodiment; Bourdieu's is socio-centric, and Butler's is linguistic. According to McNay, the problem with Butler's account of agency "derives from her tendency to subsume the social within the linguistic" (2004: 182), detaching it from social context. In contrast to this Bourdieu's work can be used to understand "gender as a lived social relation rather than *pace* Butler, as a location within a discursive structure." (*ibid*).

It is a lack of focus on indeterminacy, ambivalence and dissonance at the level of the individual that results in Bourdieu's account of (gendered) subjectivity being labelled deterministic:

> with his model of what might be described as 'almost sheer domination', Bourdieu shows himself to be a social theorist of constraint. Butler upbraids him for failing to see the way in which ambivalence is inherent in these habitual processes of inclination to conform to the objective demands of the field. (McRobbie 2005: 141)

By emphasising the fit between habitus and field, the individual can be seen as a passive bearer of social positions and the notion that the incorporation of structures into the corporeal are never fully complete is marginalised. It is an account of power which undeniably emphasises structural compliance: "Bourdieu's analysis of the production and reproduction of social life lacks a convincing account of social change." (Mottier 2002: 353) Just as Bourdieu may sometimes read like a structuralist, "[e]qually, in spite of her emphasis on performativity as well as performance, Butler reads at times like a voluntarist whose individuals freely don and doff their masks" (Lovell 2000: 15).

While Bourdieu's concept of embodiment focuses on the social, "Butler's basic premise is that identity is a *discursive* practice, a discourse we both inhabit and employ, but also a *performance* with all the connotations of non-essentialism, transience, versatility and masquerade this implies." (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 33 emphasis in original) Contra the work of Judith Butler, Bourdieu's notion

> of gender performativity (or the embodiment and expression of social relations) is not simply about transgressing authority. Rather, his view of the performance of masculinity has an anti-essentialist character in that male domination can be traced to historical ideas that are embodied by social actors in the present...Arbitrary enactments of masculine domination are expressed and, therefore, to be read differently through social structures, discourses, relations and bodily representations[.] (Dillabough 2004: 494)

Butler's work suggests that gender is an 'act', in the sense that gender is 'done' in context rather than being 'fixed': "identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results' (Butler 1990: 33). Gender in Butlerian terms is conceived of as a mutable process, as a "constituted *social temporality*" (*ibid*: 141) and is linguistically focused. Although the "linking of linguistic agency to the reiterative structure of language is a deliberate move by Butler to circumvent crudely voluntarist interpretations of performativity as the freely willed performance of gender identity" (McNay 2008: 167) this ultimately takes her focus away from the ways in which "gender is objectified and reified, both through conditioned bodily responses and social institutions." (Fowler 2001: 323)

What Bourdieu's "praxeological perspective offers [is] a sophisticated reconfiguration of the theory of action" (Mottier 2002: 350). Bourdieu's model incorporates emotional dispositions in the form of habitus, social context in the form of field and also social structures; the relationship between these aspects is an active one, and a space opens up, "the space of possibles means that interactions within a field can...override the entrenched dispositions of actors, pushing them to unexpected or nonconformist types of actions." (McNay 2004: 185) Bourdieu's theory viewed in this way "is neither voluntaristic nor deterministic, recognising both constraint and creativity involving 'regulated liberties'" (Kenway and McLeod 2004: 535). In Bourdieu's work "gender does not constitute a specific social field as is sometimes

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assumed, but enters into the 'game' of the different social fields in ways specific to each field" (Krais 2006: 128), and it is precisely this that I have attempted to emphasise with the notion of gender as a form of symbolic power. The experience of social actors cannot be deduced from social structures, and must be at the centre of social analysis as emphasised in de Certeau's work. However, an understanding of experience does not offer a complete perspective. Bourdieu's approach focuses the study of the social within a broader context, "tracing the links between the phenomenal immediacy of experience and abstract systems of power that operate at one remove from every day activity." (McNay 2004: 182) Supplementing de Certeauian analysis with Bourdieu's theoretical approach insists on the persistence of symbolic norms within the diversity of masculine and feminine behaviours (McNay 1999: 112), and this, as the subsequent chapters will show, is resonant with my empirical data.

A combinatory theoretical approach: using Bourdieu and de Certeau

From the theoretical outlines presented in this chapter it is clear that Bourdieu and de Certeau emphasise differing aspects of consumption. De Certeau is particularly critical of Bourdieu's concept of the habitus, and "[w]hen de Certeau...depicted popular culture in terms of its active manipulation of dominant culture, he was, of course, looking for ways of countering the vastly influential schemes of Pierre Bourdieu." (Rigby 1991: 157) For de Certeau, Bourdieu's construct of the habitus is described as a blanket thrown over tactics "as if to put out their fire by certifying their amenability to socioeconomic rationality" (1988: 59). What de Certeau objects to is "totalising theory and sees in even such a sensitive and suggestive concept as the habitus a form of closure against the everyday which denies its dynamics, its contradictions and its indeterminacies." (Silverstone 1994: 162) However, as he himself notes: "There must be a logic of these practices" (de Certeau cited in Colebrook 2002: 543). De Certeau is resistant to the notion that subjects conform to an internalized logic that they cannot evade, but

> if consumption can always be seen as an active process, it is also one that always moves within (or against) structural constraints. That is its dialectic. It is with the variety of those fundamental processes as they are 'worked out' by people in

different social/cultural locations that we should be concerned. The question is that of the social distribution of the material and symbolic forms of 'capital' with which consumption is achieved (or 'performed'). (Morley 1992: 217)

Any analysis of practices of consumption must locate itself within the wider structural constraints that shape an individual's action. To ignore this is to slip from the perspective of discourse analysis to the level of lived psychological experience which sees theorists impute rather than demonstrate a radical element to the popular practices under scrutiny (McNay 1996: 66).

"Everyday life appears in use, in practice, as de Certeau is at pains to argue, but that use itself is preconditioned by...capital in Bourdieu's [terms]" (Silverstone 1994: 164). Tensions between imposed meanings and created ones, controlled behaviour and the free, the passive and the active "can be observed in everyday behaviour and traced through the study of the individual and the group. They can be deciphered through ethnographic...case studies" (*ibid*). Through Silverstone's suggestions, we can see that the everyday may not be as invisible to the analytic gaze as de Certeau's work initially suggests: "it is in the dynamics of the particular that we will be able to identify, if not fully comprehend, the forces of structure: the forces both of domination and resistance" (Silverstone 1994: 164).

The theoretical 'impasse' between social structure and individual agency is characterised in the work of these cultural theorists, each retaining

> distinctive foci: Bourdieu's 'generative structuralism' examines the formation of the 'fields' within which cultural institutions and works operate and take on meaning, and the 'dispositions' which cultural agents bring to their work; Certeau develops what one might call a cultural pragmatics that focuses on the often unpredictable re-employments to which users subject the cultural resources at their disposal (Ahearne 2004: 12).

Despite their differences language is a central focus for both theorists: "Both Bourdieu and Certeau understand language in relation to other social practices, and both scholars view language as a social phenomenon, rather than merely as an abstract formal system."

(Bucholtz 1999: 205) Just as the studies of texts which construct identities and subject positions are incomplete unless they consider what people actually do with them, so

> studies of the ways in which people resist, negotiate, or appropriate some feature of their world are…inadequate and misleading without careful analysis of the cultural meanings and structural arrangements that construct and constrain their "agency", and that limit the transformative potential of all such intentionalized activity. (Bucholtz 1999: 206)

I suggest that these approaches can be usefully combined since in de Certeau's work, the proper place of the strategic is what makes tactics possible and creates the possibility for 'interstitial agency': "For de Certeau, it is the dynamic practices of everyday life that work against the hypostatising tendencies of the institution. No matter how pervasive the domination of a particular institution, there is always that which escapes and remains other to its orbit" (McNay 1996: 64). His work recognises that institutions are not "opposed to human liberty but are on the contrary conceived by Certeau as its necessary condition." (Ahearne 2010: 3)

Since social structures are never fully 'panoptic', the possibility of alternative lived relations is alive – in the place of the other, space can be created. In the fissures of hegemonic cultural power lies a distanciation between self and structure where non-conformity can exist. The potential for change exists "not as opposition or externality but as dislocation" (McNay 1999: 104). Using Bourdieu's notion of habitus "guards against a conflation of the potentiality for autonomous action with a celebration of its subversive political significance" (McNay 1999: 105) and warns that "individual agency is not necessarily aligned with resistance" (Lovell 2003: 14).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on the work of the two main cultural theorists that inform my analysis. From Bourdieu, I retain the notion of 'habitus' which shapes enduring orientations to action. For Bourdieu, practice is a result of an interaction between habitus and field. In his theory, forms of capital are central to differentiations in class, and gender as a socially

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variable enactment must be read through social structures. Using the notion of gender as a form of symbolic power means that we can see how gender can provide the relations through which capitals come to be valued. Bourdieu's theory emphasises the difficulty of breaking loose from patriarchal cultural structures, but the generative nature of the habitus allows for the possibility of change, and the potential for innovation cannot be foreclosed. Despite his sophisticated concepts, Bourdieu does not fully account for multiple subjectivity, and does not focus attention on dislocation and dissonance at the level of the individual, and his work lacks accounts of modalities of practices. Since Bourdieu does not focus on social *interactions*, my Bourdieuian framework is supplemented with elements of de Certeauian theory.

De Certeau's work emphasises the potential mutability of consumer practices, conceiving of consumption as active appropriation on the part of the individual. Considering consumer 'tactics' in this way enables us to see how capital may be resisted (see chapter four). Rather than using de Certeau's work to 'celebrate' resistance, I use it to look more closely at the ways of practising everday life, and by separating 'use' from 'user', we see that his concepts of 'strategies' and 'tactics' work as a non-oppositional binary. Use of de Certeau's ideas can result in analysis conflating a situated response with direct experience since de Certeau's work does not fully locate everyday practices and does not account for them in terms of social context. Using Bourdieu's socio-centric theory is essential here, to situate the experience of social actors in relation to the broader cultural context.

De Certeau's theory is gender-blind, ignoring the differential constraints placed on consumers, and so a Bourdieuian emphasis here becomes useful again, relocating gender as a primary form of symbolic power which acts across the fields of consumption practices in different ways. De Certeau's work is useful for its focus on reading and identity construction, where reading acts as a practice through which identities are claimed. An analysis of tactical reading as 'poaching' can give an indication of a subject's self-perception and also offers the potential for agentive capacity and ultimately resistance to hegemonic cultural norms, showing that "the everyday is defined by but never coterminous with dominant norms." (McNay 1996: 67).

It is clear that Bourdieu's and de Certeau's theories differ, with Bourdieu's emphasis on habitus and the tendency towards reproduction of social structure and de Certeau's focus on the individual as agentive, with practice seen as potentially challenging and/or revising the social order through acts of appropriation:

> For Certeau...the individual is much more agentive, because the focus of investigation is subversion as well as reproduction of the social order... But where Bourdieu considers practice to be a reproduction of social structure, Certeau views it as an appropriation, an act of agency. The point, then, is to understand how culturally shared resources (such as language) are made to serve the specific social needs of individuals. These needs may enforce the social status quo, but
> they may...[also] challenge or revise it. (Bucholtz 1999: 206)

What is important here is the possibility of a unified analysis, one that suspends potentially contradictory ontologies to synthesise a combinatory theoretical approach, studying the agency of individuals who may resist and subvert social structures while also retaining an examination of the structures that shape, influence and are (re)produced by the individual. In looking at both structures of social reproduction and resistance we can meaningfully bring together the theoretical approaches of both Bourdieu and de Certeau: "While the game is defined by the governing rules which make it playable, it is in the play itself that the game comes alive and, in that vitality, gains its uniqueness and significance." (Silverstone 1994: 169)

The discussion of this theoretical framework that informs my analysis is refined, extended and developed as it is applied during analysis of my empirical data. However, before proceeding to analysis, I first address questions of method, describing my research design and methodological approach.

Chapter Three - Methodology

The following chapter outlines the aims of my research and critically evaluates the methodological approaches used in my study. After a brief introduction I present a summary of the research design, moving on to consider how gender may impact upon methodology and data generation, in particular looking at how the data may have been coloured by the gendered subjectivities of both the participants and myself as the researcher. The subsequent sections examine my chosen research methods in closer detail, focusing on the data gathering processes used. The final parts of this chapter evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different theoretical approaches to data analysis before giving a summary of the main arguments put forward.

Introduction to the study

Situated within the field of 'audience studies' my research is concerned with the consumption of cultural products, asking "[w]hat is the relationship between externally produced cultural goods and individual…gender identities?" (Cruz and Lewis 1994: 1) It aims to consider "the way in which gender [is] implicated in the negotiation of a consumer or commodified identity" (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 202). As Skeggs, Thumim and Wood argue, scholars who agree on a shift towards 'individualisation' and suggest that forms of identity are becoming more particularised and reflexive suggest that "selfhood is increasingly resourced by mediated symbolic forms, yet there is still very little empirical research that details how this process works" (2008: 6). My work seeks to address this absence by conducting empirical research into how fiction novels as mediated symbolic forms can be used by men to construct and perform both shared and individualised forms of gendered identities, using "ethnographic method to understand how specific social subjects interact with cultural forms" (Radway 1988: 367).

While not strictly ethnographic in the traditional sense which would involve the "study of situations that would have occurred without the ethnographer's presence" (Hammersley

1992: 163), my research is ethnographically influenced, attempting to locate the participants in their social contexts and seeking to consider the situated knowledge produced. As Joke Hermes writes, the role of the "ethnographically inspired reception analyst…is based on trying to understand how texts make sense to others, in the context of their lives." (Hermes 1995: 147)

Detailed exposition of research methods is vital since "each research encounter offers a particular mode of articulation that relates as much to available resources and powerful contexts as to the actual 'findings'". (Skeggs *et al* 2008: 12) Considering discourse as 'context-shaped' and framed by research methods involves looking at how participants' actions may be enabled and/or constrained by a given setting (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 99) taking the standpoint that "[r]esearch practices do not simply 'capture' or reveal the world out there; they generate the conditions of possibility that frame the object of analysis" (Skeggs *et al* 2008: 20) Research interactions are shaped by the social context of the encounter: "[d]ifferent settings allow or inhibit the ability of the research participants to position each other in terms of class, social and personal differences, and commonalities, adding contextual and interpretive information" (Manderson *et al* 2006: 1318). I begin my discussion of research methods with a summary of my research design.

Summary of research design

Given the nature of my research which seeks to analyse how men discursively construct a gendered identity in relation to their fiction reading, qualitative methods are the obvious choice to provide the necessary discursively-generated data. Conducting this research involved thirty eight interviews with men about their fiction reading habits and thirteen fiction reading group sessions with four male participants[1]. The number of respondents is comparable with other qualitative ethnographic studies[2] and all interviews and book groups were recorded and transcribed in order to render the discourse as data suitable for analysis.

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[1] Portraits of participants in the research can be found in appendices B and C.
[2] Mary Ellen Brown's (1994) study of soap opera viewers uses 30 interviews, Janice Radway's (1984) study involved interviewing 16 people, with questionnaires filled out by 42 people, and Jackson, Stevenson and Brooks (2001) conducted 20 focus groups for their study, Ann Gray (1992) interviewed 30 women for her study of women's use of the VCR, Dariusz Galasinski (2004) interviewed 55 individuals.

Each of the participants "gave their informed consent and were reminded that they could elect not to answer particular questions or withdraw from the study at any point" (Gough 2004: 251). Recognising feminist attempts to counter power differentials in the research process (see Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2002: 190) participants were offered the opportunity to give feedback on my interpretation of the data but declined to do so.

Asking men about their reading habits in interviews, and running a reading group meant that I had access to descriptions of experiences. I was unsure of what data my research would produce and therefore what theory would develop from this, and so I intended to use a grounded approach: "[g]rounded theorists start with data." (Charmaz 2006: 3) This is where qualitative research can differ significantly from quantitative methods: "[q]ualitative research refrains from setting up a well-defined concept of what is studied and from formulating hypotheses in the beginning in order to test them". (Flick 2007: *xi*) Whereas quantitative researchers test preconceived hypotheses, grounded theorists offer emergent hypotheses for other researchers to pursue. With interview and observation material "[d]ata is generated during the research process rather than collected for analysis. Ideas, themes and theory evolve in interaction with participants rather than being confirmed/tested by an assessment of existing material." (Davis 2008: 60) Qualitative research is concerned "with the ways that people construct, interpret and give meaning to...experiences" (Gerson and Horowitz 2002: 199) and aims to "discover or develop new concepts rather than imposing preconceived categories on the people and events they observe." (*ibid*) This is important because "[a]ttending to experience is to utilise an analytical resource. Analytically it requires the tools for interrogation which we can bring from cultural theory, but as a resource it can also be used to interrogate the abstract formulations of theory. It is a two-way process." (Pickering 2008: 28)

More than one method of data collection was used since "multiple methods and observation points... [can be] used to record and cross-reference" (Davis 2008: 61). I began with the book group sessions and then conducted the interviews to expand upon and cross-reference emergent patterns that I had noticed developing in my data. The use of multiple methods in research is often referred to as 'triangulation', where "a combination of

complementary methodologies is used by...researchers in the study of the same phenomenon through different case studies" (Hermes 1995: 207). Triangulation can be useful as a means of strengthening the validity of qualitative research through the incorporation of different responses to the same research topic, where validity refers to the accuracy of the representation of the subject and context studied (see Gray 2003: 71), however, in ethnographic research, while "[v]alidity (or the extent to which the data present a true picture of that which is described) is supposedly high, reliability (or the replicability of the research) and representativeness (the generalizability) are said to be negligible." (Hermes 1995: 205-206) While "[a]ddressing validity is often seen as methodologically sufficient" (Hoijer 2008: 284) issues of replicability and generalisability cannot be ignored. When commenting on (then) contemporary writing on men and masculinity, Clatterbaugh asserted that this work was primarily "anecdotal; that is, it...generalizes upon individual experience and draws conclusions about men in general" (1990: 159) resulting in a 'false universality' that ignores the reality of different men and different situations. In order to prevent the pitfalls of generalisation and 'meta' narrativisation it is necessary to address who or what our informants represent (Hoijer 2008: 279). If we consider social life to be constantly shifting, plural and changeable then from this position, generalization is not possible or even desirable. As Ien Ang writes:

> the situational embeddedness of audience practices and experiences inevitably undercuts the search for generalizations that is often seen as the ultimate goal of scientific knowledge. In a sense, generalizations are necessary violations to the concrete specificity of all unique micro-situations (1991: 164)

Generalising from a small number of respondents may be problematic but macro-social trends can be analysed by examining micro-social processes (see Gerson and Horowitz 2002: 201). The "requirements of generalisability, replicatability, or, indeed, representativeness are that the 'results' or 'findings' of the study can be applied to similar phenomena in different contexts" (Gray 2003: 73) and small-scale studies can produce valuable insights which can be transferred into different contexts (*ibid*) - intensive studies are not always about 'individual' attitudes, rather they can be about shared formations within a given context (see Johnson 1997).

The analysis in this work emphasises the situated nature of the knowledge production: "[r]ather than seeking universal knowledge, the emphasis is on situated knowledge. What matters is not arriving at context-independent general knowledge, but producing well-described situated knowledge" (Kvale 2007: 143). Articulations within a research situation are dependent on subject positions which can be strongly affected by the research methods used and consideration should be given to how the research and its methods produce data. Specifically interviewing and focus groups are types of interaction where data is generated *in situ* – the design of the research project can allow participants access to different modes of articulation. Participants deploy their available cultural resources to produce articulations of self that are *made* in context, rather than 'found'. Considering research in this way challenges traditional methodological emphasis on excavation ('findings'), instead emphasising the conditions of possibility in the research encounter. This, alongside utilising more than one method of data collection, was intended to help prevent the framing of subject positions as observable realities rather than 'modes of articulation' generated through available classed and gendered capitals (Skeggs *et al* 2008: 20). It is to a more detailed consideration of gender and research method that I now turn.

Gender and methodology

"[M]ost of the work on media consumption and gender has concentrated on women and still does so…reflecting the more general bias in society that women are the problematic sex" (Hermes 1995: 150). Seeking to address this imbalance while focusing on the relationship between fiction reading and gender, all of my informants were male. Historically, the use of gender as an analytical category has been problematised, with feminist researchers suggesting that research "must start from a discussion of practices and activities rather than assuming that these follow from having a particular type of sexed body." (Hermes 2005: 151) Although it is regularly stated that "masculinity is complex, multidimensional and experienced differently within a myriad of changing and different cultural, historical and social locations" (Carter 1996: 7) many previous studies have often made "essentialist sounding claims (implicitly or explicitly) about the way *women* perform *femininities* and *men* perform *masculinities*" (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 56 emphasis in

original). These studies often take a tautological approach, starting with men's talk and then examining how masculinity is constructed in it (see Coates 2003). In such work there is no notion that people may not be performing gender (see Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 56, Galasinski 2004). Gender is not always relevant, and as such should not be 'imposed' by the researcher.[3] It cannot be assumed that a certain facet of identity is relevant to discourse prior to the analysis of the data. However, to pursue an oppositional approach to this is also rather restrictive – the refusal to draw on extra-textual knowledge to inform the analysis means limiting the scope of the research, particularly in relation to gender(ed) articulations. The nature of the symbolic power of gender means that often it is necessarily misrecognised: "the workings of power and oppression are often necessarily implicit" (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 64 see also McNay 2008). Dominant versions of masculinity can be extra-discursive in the sense that they may not be directly 'announced' by the speaker but this does not mean that they are extraneous to the data being analysed: "hegemonic masculinity can exist as part of our common sense. Dominant definitions of masculinity are reproduced in a multitude of conversations which take place every minute of every day." (Edley 2001: 138) I believe that a hybridisation of elements of these theoretical approaches points the way forward for studies in the discursive construction of gender identity – the micro-level interaction must be attended to in detail to avoid reductive analysis at an abstracted level, but the macro-level structures at work must be recognised if the researcher is to avoid denial of the importance of the historical and cultural 'forces' at work in discourse. It seems that "social categories can and must allow us to say something about the wider social and cultural networks of power" (Gray 1992: 30).

Considering gender and power in the context of research methods raises the issue of reflexivity: "If scholars are to usefully contribute to our understanding of the social structuring of gender-based power and inequality and of the mechanisms for social change, it is important that they remain reflexive in their social theorizing" (Petersen 2003: 66). Reflexivity is a key element in feminist ethnography (see Nightingale 2008: 106) where 'conscious subjectivity' "has replaced the 'value-free objectivity' of traditional research...[helping] to break down the power relationship between the researcher and

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[3] This is discussed further in chapter six, where I examine moments of 'gender-neutral' textual engagement.

researched" (Cotterill and Letherby 1993: 72 in Arendell 1997: 342) and critical reflection by the researcher about their impact upon the fieldwork is considered to be of value:

> Sensitivity to the relationship between the researched and the researcher is a key issue in qualitative and feminist methodologies...It requires that the positions the interviewee and the interviewer take are made visible, and that the power dynamics between these positions are reflected upon. (Soilevuo Grønnerød 2004: 32)

However "it is not enough merely to acknowledge that the self intrudes upon ethnography. We need to view the 'intrusive self' as a resource...[this] means conveying the context and your place in it." (O'Reilly 2005: 223) As part of this process it is necessary to consider how gender may impact upon the research process: "[D]iscourse analysis...makes it possible, many believe, to identify processes of persuasion, and of ideological transmission: in short, power at work in language." (Barker and Brooks 1998: 109) Power relations are particularly important in cross-gender research, especially when women are conducting research with male respondents (see Lee 1997) since "[t]o open one's self to interrogation is to relinquish control and thus to put the masculine self at risk." (Schwalbe and Wolkomir 2001: 93) Being in the position of 'researcher', controlling the direction of the research encounter by asking the questions results in situational power. Accordingly, such a threat to the masculine self may be compensated for, given that "power is a very significant, pervasive aspect of men's social relations, actions and experiences" (Hearn 2004: 51). This is why questions of power are significant, and must be taken into account during analysis of the data. The research situation "is a peculiar type of encounter in which masculinity is threatened...[and] the interviewer controls the interaction". (Schwalbe and Wolkomir 2001: 91) Terry Arendell comments in her work that when attempting to question her interviewees, they tried to take control of the situation and questioned her back (1997: 353). McKee and O'Brien also "reported men taking the lead, questioning questions and interrupting the interview." (1983: 150)

A similar issue with 'ethnographic' research is discussed in Ellen Seiter's case study of her own problematic interview with two male television soap viewers. As she claims, we "need to ask what it means to ask someone else about television viewing...[this] can be a touchy

subject, precisely because of its association with lack of education, with idleness and unemployment, and its identification as an 'addiction' of *women* and children." (Seiter 1990: 62 emphasis added) The problems she encounters are partially ascribed to the difficulties of unstructured interviewing, but are also largely about gender. Here, a female researcher asking male interviewees about a feminised television genre is met with considerable resistance. Though "[m]uch of the work of doing gender is taken for granted and thus made invisible" (Ferree 1990: 869 in Arendell 1997: 347), the relationships between participants and the researcher are "influenced by the identities and histories of those involved, researcher and researched alike. Gender identity is a major factor in these interactional dynamics." (Arendell 1997: 365) My gender identity appeared to be most pertinent in the book group situations (for more detailed discussion of this, see chapter 8 page 198) and this is something which will be considered in the next section which looks at 'focus group' methods in more detail.

Data gathering: book groups

Finding members for the book group sessions saw participants drawn from a network established around a public house where I had casual employment as bar staff during university vacation periods – a form of convenience sampling. I mentioned the research I hoped to undertake and three staff members plus a regular patron of the pub volunteered to attend monthly sessions to discuss fiction books that I would give them to read. The structure of the groups was developed so that the first five sessions were dedicated to four masculinised genres.[4] The subsequent four sessions were ones in which participants made their own choices for the rest of the group to read, and the final four sessions were committed to the discussion of four feminised genres.

Although these book group sessions did not strictly conform to a particular type of qualitative research practice, they can be seen as being related to a focus group format. Focus groups are often conducted at a location organised by the researcher, such as a

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[4]The first two sessions covered one book, for the first session I asked the participants to read half of the book, and then complete the book for the second session. The group members unanimously rejected this for future sessions, explaining that they preferred to read a book as a whole.

seminar or conference room – and as such, respondents are likely to feel that they are on the researcher's territory (Aull Davies 1999: 106). It is here that my research differs. The reading group sessions took place in the pub - a location familiar to all of the participants. This meant that the respondents were comfortable in their surroundings, and it also highlighted the importance of research context, as the location of the sessions allowed each of the participants access to differing levels and types of 'capital' according to their positions in relation to each other outside of the research setting. Similar findings were noted in research conducted by Skeggs *et al* who discovered that the content of the discussion in their focus groups was dependent on various cultural resources available to participants to authorize themselves and also related to the broader context in which the group meeting was conceived (2008: 20).

Focus group participants are also often recruited to form homogeneous groups (see Aull Davies 1999), Mary Ellen Logan and Helen Huntley go as far as to suggest that "focus groups work better when they are socially homogeneous…[and] gender differences affect the nature of group interaction" (2001: 626). This presented an issue for my research, given that the participants were male and I was a female 'moderator', a role that is designed to facilitate and gently direct discussion rather than being involved in the interaction. In this instance I had questions relating to the book that had been read which would be directed to the group but I tried to allow relatively organic flow of conversation. Being well known to each of the participants meant that I was often seen as part of the group which occasionally resulted in me being drawn into discussions, and yet as the organiser of each session, attending with a series of questions, I was also regarded as being an 'outsider'. I was also labelled as 'out group' relatively frequently on the basis of my gender. The participants were aware that I was interested in male opinion about particular genres and books and would remind me that certain genres were 'for them' and not 'for me' (see chapter 6 page 115).

Running book group sessions over a period of thirteen months allowed for more longitudinal data collection and came much closer to ethnographic research with talk that was less strongly dominated by me as the researcher. While focus groups have "often been treated as a *transparent* description of opinion or unmediated report of practice" (Benwell

and Stokoe 2006: 194) I would argue that any form of recorded data whether focus group or interview must be treated as a situated account of identity articulation. Since the participants are always aware of the recording being made, it cannot be claimed that the data captured is naturally occurring and representative of 'real life'. However, while "clearly not an instance of 'naturally occurring' talk, the focus group bears more resemblance to this than a one-to-one interview where the researcher's presence and questions inevitably play a dominant role." (Thomas 2002: 65) With the length of time covered and repeat sessions with the same participants I was able to observe a micro-social context in which detailed responses to texts and content were given. As such, the data is 'thicker' than that of interviews, evidencing complex interactions, group processes and the shifting relationships between participants. In addition to this, I conducted a series of interviews to draw upon themes that had developed in the book groups and also to incorporate a greater number of viewpoints: "Interviewing provides a way to uncover the motives, meanings and conflicts experienced by individuals as they respond to social and interpersonal situations and conflicts" (Gerson and Horowitz 2002: 215) and it is this method of data gathering that will now be discussed in more detail.

Data gathering: interviews

Recruitment for interviews was through "friendship pyramiding" (Hermes in Jackson *et al* 2001: 163) or 'snowballing', another form of convenience sampling. As interviewees could not be remunerated for their time and needed to be accessible to me locally in order for me to be able to meet with them to undertake the interviews, recruitment through friends and colleagues seemed to be an appropriate approach. In many cases "the fact that the...participants were known to the interviewer can, in fact, be regarded as an advantage in that they appeared comfortable and talkative." (Gough 2001: 174) I asked friends and colleagues if they would be available for interview, and asked whether they knew anyone else who might be willing to talk to me. I also asked a friend to place an advert on their workplace noticeboard, offering a cup of coffee in return for an interview about their reading habits. Although this inevitably resulted in a non-random sample of interviewees, many of whom were educated to postgraduate level, it should not be forgotten that in

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research "there can be no perfectly representative subject, nor any method of selection which is truly 'imperfect'...The articulate, informed and compliant will always be better represented in scholarly text than their opposites."(Athique 2008: 39) Indeed, the fact that many respondents were highly educated meant that they were articulate and informed about the research process, and as a result were comfortable with the interview process.

The type of interviewing that I carried out was semi-structured: "[i]n situations where you won't get more than one chance to interview someone, *semistructured interviewing* is best." (Bernard 2000: 191) Adopting a semi-structured approach means that interviewers can "invent questions on the spot in order to follow up interesting leads...[meaning] that respondents...[can] discuss different topics." (Seale 1998: 205) Using semi-structured interviewing I was largely able to ask interviewees the same questions, enabling some comparison work to be done at the analysis stage but also allowing the men to express relatively freely how they saw their reading habits and what this meant to them: "[i]n adopting a semi-structured interviewing format, participants were given the scope to introduce topics and themes which had not been anticipated." (Gough 2004: 251) In contrast to structured interviewing the researcher and respondent have greater flexibility, allowing the wording and order of questions to be altered and even avoided if inappropriate and allowing the interviewer to ask follow up questions they may not have foreseen prior to the interview situation.

The geographical context of the interviews varied slightly as each took place at the convenience of the respondent. A small number of interviews took place in the respondents' homes, some in the respondents' offices, but most were on 'neutral' ground in local cafes and bars allowing for an informal setting, and providing a relatively anonymous space (see Manderson *et al* 2006: 1318). Although this was positive in the respect that most interviewees felt comfortable, public meeting places are not always ideal for conducting interviews due to interruptions and high levels of noise which can affect the clarity of the recording. Considering the social context of the interviews is also vital since the interviewer is in a position of power when they are determining the topics to be discussed – usually the interviewer asks and the interviewee answers. As such "we should not regard a research

interview as an open dialogue between egalitarian partners. The research interview is a specific professional conversation with clear power asymmetry between the researcher and the subject." (Kvale 2007: 14) Interviewee response to this asymmetry can vary significantly – for example, in some instances subjects attempt to exert counter-control by refusing to answer questions, or challenging and questioning the researcher. As a researcher one should remember that "[n]either texts nor readers exist in a vacuum. Both are shaped by and participate in a social and material context." (Ashley 1989: 136) With interviews in particular, special arrangements must be made for them to be conducted: " interviews are formally bracketed, and set off in time and space as something different from usual social interaction". (Aull Davies 1999: 94-5) As such, interviews cannot provide access to 'truth' and no single interview can be said to offer more than a limited insight into social forces/processes, the "research interview is an inter-view where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee." (Kvale 2007: 1) However, interviews are useful for broader social analysis, since "'interviewing is understood as an interactional event in which members draw on their cultural knowledge'" (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 194) and patterns begin to emerge as the number of interviews grows (see Gerson and Horowitz 2002: 211).

Each data collection method "has its strengths and weaknesses in terms of what it assumes...its macro or micro-level foci, the degree to which it can be said to represent a social phenomenon, and the simple practicalities in using it" (Davis 2008: 61), but if we take a reflexive perspective in social research "it must be accepted that different methods of data gathering will necessarily produce different results. But these results need not be regarded as irreconcilable...such varied results may indeed contribute to a more complete and valid analysis" (Aull Davies 1999: 106). As has been mentioned previously, multiple method triangulation allows for the collection of much richer and more complex data which have the potential to be analysed in numerous ways. The final section deals with data analysis, including means of transcription and discourse analysis.

<u>Data analysis</u>

Just as the discourse produced within a research context is not an unmediated reflection of experience, so transcription is not a transparent representation of discourse – both are articulations and have been subjected to interpretation: "[r]ather than being a simple clerical task, transcription is an interpretative process". (Kvale 2007: 92) When transcribing one needs to consider questions about whether to include pauses, emphases in intonation, emotional expressions such as laughter – and how much detail about these should be indicated. There are no strict rules governing this – much is dependent on the intended use of the transcript (see Kvale 2007: 95). "Transcription is not a mechanical process of representing speech in written form but, as with translation, is affected by underlying theoretical assumptions. Such assumptions must be made visible" and should be theoretically informed (Aull Davies 1999: 115). Phonological and phonetic approaches were rejected on the basis that transcriptions of this kind would be extremely time consuming, difficult to read and interpret, and very few segments of text can be usefully studied, limiting the scope of the research. This level of detail is not relevant given the analytical methods I have chosen - when looking at the use of discursive repertoires and the broader ideological content of talk, features of speech delivery can actually impede analysis. On the basis of these analytical methods the form of transcription used is a simplified adaptation of the Jeffersonian system (see Appendix A), aiming to present the data largely orthographically (using conventional spelling for words, talk is presented in sentences with conventional textual punctuation) to render it comprehensible, maintaining the integrity of the discourse (see Wood and Kroeger 2000: 83) but also retaining 'hearable features' that may be absent in more basic 'playscript' orthographic representation of speech (see Potter and Hepburn 2007: 309).

Transcription in its representational capacity also has the potential to impact on the understanding and the analysis of the data as it is laid out – the conventions that the analyst chooses to use can and do ascribe meaning so the researcher must also be aware of identity work during transcription. While choosing to utilise an adapted form of 'Jefferson lite' (see Potter and Hepburn 2007) I have also attempted to replicate the sound of words used by

the participants. This is not, however, intended to position myself in relation to the participants in the manner that Hollway and Jefferson (2000) are criticised for in their work: by dropping one particular respondent's 'h's' they signify working class identity and the authors take up a 'subject position', that of "the 'educated analyst' versus the 'ignorant participant'." (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 150) I believe that it is important to represent discourse in a textual form that is as close as possible to the sounds made by participants, and I would argue that to 'clean up' discourse and present each respondent as having the 'same voice' means that the data becomes an inaccurate record.

As I was present at all interviews and book groups my understanding and experience of these will be evident in both transcription and analysis. Although this may be considered a weakness by some, I would argue that my data gains a richness that would not be available if someone else were to have interviewed and/or transcribed the sessions. Nevertheless consideration must be taken of the impact that the researcher will have on the data that is produced, by virtue of their presence, their interventions, and their questions. It is important to remember that an interviewee is answering an interviewer's questions – very often this is 'written out' of researchers' work, with respondent's discourses contextually unframed. Jonathan Potter and Alexa Hepburn refer to this as the 'deletion of the interviewer' (2007: 309), and argue that it is preferable to include fuller statements rather than heavily edited isolated quotations and text should include interviewer's questions and comments so that the context for a person's response can be seen. My interviews involved 'briefing' "in which the interviewer defines the situation for the subject, [and] briefly tells about the purpose of the interview" (Kvale 2007: 55). To make the interview set up transparent for the reader, this 'briefing' is included as part of the interview schedule Appendix (see Appendix E, page 262) and data extracts that are discussed frequently include questions as they were put to the participants (see chapters six to eight).

Regarding discourse as form of social practice I sought access to men's cultural experiences of reading through the ways in which they talked about it: "the idea of discourse as social practice offers a way of seeing how we experience the world, in part through the *representational* capacity of language." (Litosseliti and Sunderland 2002: 13) It is important

to remember that language is representational and not simply a transparent replaying of some kind of essential 'truth'. This is particularly so for the 'unnatural' nature of interviews and focus groups where the respondent is aware of being recorded, and is also aware that the researcher is seeking information. It should be recognised "that statements from...interviews are not simple representations, true or false, of what people think." (Jensen 2002: 240) However, while there may be no essential truth represented in language, and although language "does not act like a mirror faithfully reflecting the world, ...[with] no easy route through self-description to the true nature of worlds and minds beyond" (Wetherell 2007: 663) this does not make respondents' statements any less useful, and Jackie Stacey warns against confusing narrative and fiction: "To argue that audiences produce narrative accounts of their responses...is not to say that they may as well have made them up!" (Stacey in Mills 1994: 6) Considering consumers' talk is important for a study of identity, given that "it is able to capture the fine-grained and sometimes contradictory or ambivalent accounts and identity work of consumers, which is arguably more fruitful for a discursive study of identity than the many studies which view the consumer in abstract economic terms." (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 193)

In order to analyse the data collected and transcribed, discourse analysis is used. Although strongly focused on transcripts "discourse analysis is very much compatible with a grounded theory approach." (Hermes 1995: 205) Using discourse analysis means that discursive regimes can be observed at both micro and macro levels (see Gray 2003: 164) and "the focus is on how the talk is constructed and what the social consequences are of the different discursive presentations of a social situation" (Kvale 2007: 113). Discourse analysis is somewhat of an umbrella term, covering many different types of data analysis which attend "to the influence of sociocultural representations on everyday talk and the speaking practices in given conversational contexts." (Gough 2004: 245) My chosen method of discourse analysis is a combination of discursive psychology and linguistic ethnography. Discursive psychology broadly covers "forms of psychology which also focus on language use and on discourse as social action...focusing specifically on questions of identity and people's investments in particular identity positions." (Wetherell 2007: 662) Discursive psychology considers the importance of interpretative repertoires, and how these relate to the

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construction of identity. According to Joke Hermes "all media or media genres have their own sets of everyday repertoires. Discursive formats such as everyday repertoires are important to audiences because they are built on different kinds of imagined identities, whether communal or individual." (1999: 82) Linguistic ethnography emphasises the importance of the context of discourse: "linguistics takes language as its object while ethnography, of course, privileges culture. Linguistic ethnography, as a marriage of the two, investigates acts of communication in their contexts." (Wetherell 2007: 661) Linguistic ethnography studies discursive patterns found in interactions, and holds that "close analysis of situated language use can provide both fundamental and distinctive insights into the mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in everyday activity." (Rampton *et al.* 2004: 2)

Conversation analysis (CA) was rejected on the basis that in order to look at the construction of a gendered self within discourse-as-data, it is necessary to look at larger sections of data than conversation analysis allows for:

> Hegemonic masculinity may not get mentioned in name, but it is a mistake to imagine that what it describes is entirely absent from everyday talk. The point is that it may not be visible at the level of a single utterance or turn; more often than not, it requires analysis of broader tracts of data. (Edley 2001: 137)

Conversation analysis limits itself to small extracts of data, partly through the extremely complex transcription system, and also through its attention to the details of conversational interactions, mandating that "analysts cannot claim the relevance of any identity category unless it can be shown that it does some business for the interacting parties." (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 63) Conversation analysts argue that we only have access to "language-in-use", not to people's mental states and how they describe these states moment to moment, declining to investigate people's investments in subject positions and reaching 'above' or 'below' the data for explanations. This type of analysis, however, "leads to the collection of a particular kind of data – small fragments of interactions transcribed in great detail. And, it leads to an especially narrow analytic gaze on that data and its context." (Wetherell 2007: 671) Nigel Edley goes as far as to suggest that "restricting one's analytic attention in the

manner prescribed by CA not only invites missed opportunities, but also risks a form of ideological complicity." (2001: 137)

In contrast to this, discursive psychology looks at the use of interpretative repertoires which serve "as a back-cloth for the realization of locally managed positions in actual interaction…and from which…accusations and justifications can be launched." (Wetherell 1998: 400-401) Interpretative repertoires are "broadly discernable clusters of terms, descriptions, common-places…and figures of speech often clustered around metaphors or vivid images and often using distinct grammatical constructions and styles." (Potter, Wetherell, Gill and Edwards 2002: 168) Repertoires should not be seen as infinitely flexible resources that are knowingly invoked by people: "a particular form of discourse may have consequences which have not been formulated or even understood by the speaker or writer and on any specific occasion there may be powerful constraints on the discourse used. There is a clear tension between seeing people as active users, on the one hand, and seeing discourse as generating, enabling and constraining, on the other." (Potter *et al* 2002: 169) The value of discursive psychology is that it takes a step away from the level of the local to consider broader stretches of talk and the cultural and ideological context in which statements are made where "talk is connected to wider cultural and institutional forces such as hetero-patriarchy and consumerism" (Gough 2004: 263) Discursive psychology takes "a 'synthetic' approach to analysis, which combines…attention to conversational detail with wider macro-structures and cultural-historical contexts." (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 41) In this way the analyst draws from the world 'outside' the text on the page to illuminate the data, since arguably "people's discourse is incomprehensible unless we import some extra-textual or *intertextual*…resources."(*ibid*, emphasis in original)

Conclusion

This chapter has taken research methods as its focus, considering the use of multiple methods, the impact of gender on the research process and the theories that can be used for data analysis. A multi-method approach is used to combine 'thinner' broader data from interviews with 'thicker' ethnographically influenced focus group data. By asking what do

readers "do with the *text in the real world?*, a way is offered for "audience" to mean more than merely receiver or reader of others' encodings." (Brunt 1992: 76) The interview data represents "a direct engagement with the accounts of the usually silent audience, elicited in a context independent from the site of consumption. By adopting an ethnographic and interactive approach to consumption, the profile of the reader and his input into the circuit of culture is afforded a higher degree of meaning." (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 201)

Methodological implications are evident when examining cultural and social networks of power in relation to gender as a social category since the dynamics of gender may affect the direction and content of interviewing, and men may find interviews 'threatening' to their public persona of non-disclosure (Charmaz 2006: 27). I argue that how gender is constructed and negotiated in research should receive greater attention (Arendell 1997: 365). Elements of discursive psychology combined with ideas taken from linguistic ethnography provide the basis for analysing the data to examine the ways in which people's language contains evidence of relation to broader cultural conventions at work, particularly focusing on the role that gender plays for the male consumer when negotiating the consumption of culturally feminised goods. Asking the question "*how* exactly are identities discursively produced or performed?" (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 35) my research engages with consumers to identify patterns of identity construction, and I argue that research "should be reflective and…situated in existing cultural and structural contexts." (Coffey 1999: 12)

Having outlined the methodologies used to construct my corpus of data, the remaining chapters proceed to analysis. The next two chapters present my analysis of the interview data, focusing on the mediatization of fiction and perceptions of gender and genre. Providing a foundation for more detailed analysis of gender articulation in the book group discussions, chapter four begins with an examination of discursive constructions of gendered self in the interviews conducted.

Chapter Four - Cultures of Consumption

This chapter takes the interview data generated as its focus. I begin by discussing the contemporary cultural frame for reading, extending Bourdieu's theoretical framework to consider the impact of the media upon the field of popular fiction and conceptualising the media as a form of 'meta-capital' (cf Couldry 2003). From this base, I move to examine readers' responses to the mediatization of fiction, developing de Certeau's theory of 'reading as poaching' to discourses that circulate around a text, not just directly from the text itself. Using 'Richard and Judy's Book Club' as an exemplar it can be seen that the 'meta-capital' of the media does not translate into patterns of consumption – the readers interviewed used mediatized discourses as a negative foil in order to present themselves as autonomous individuals – thereby demonstrating resistance to forms of capital. The feminised 'other' is located in a range of ways by the male readers and this appears to be a crucial structuring of identity; these men are concerned to differentiate themselves from 'others' perceived as feminised. My work then moves on to consider the importance of context when considering empirical data, and examines the responses of readers who described their reading habits in different terms to the rest of the respondents. The readers in this section are readers in a print culture, demonstrating that there is not simply one cultural mode of reading for pleasure.

Media 'meta-capital' and the mediatization of fiction

In recent years, increased marketing and mediation of fiction has come to mean that separating out 'reading' as an activity has become more difficult: in "attending to how the social world is experienced on its everyday ground, we have to recognise that the media are an intrinsic, regularly experienced feature of that ground, influencing how people see the local world around them and interpret events" (Pickering 2008: 25) and while we "do draw lines between situated and mediated experience, our lives are a complex mixture of both" (*ibid*: 24). Focus on the consumption of cultural products leads to a consideration of what social actors "think about the media and the media's relevance to what they do" (Couldry 2003b: 16); in this case in particular how the media is relevant within the 'field of reading'

(see Bennett *et al* 2009) to the cultural consumption of novels where the novel is a purchasable commodity as much as it is a means of literary communication (Todd 1996: 6).

While there is a sizeable body of research dealing with consumer culture and everyday life and also work that investigates media consumption through the use of ethnographic fieldwork, what has been less frequently seen is empirical work bringing these strands together: empirically based "analyses of consumption that pay sufficient attention to the significance of the media" (Janssen 2002: 6) and the 'mediatization' of culture. As a term "mediatization refers to the process through which mediated cultural products have gained importance as cultural referents" (*ibid*: 14-15). A consideration of the impact of mediatization upon the field of reading is timely since "[w]e find ourselves at a unique moment in history when the internet, radio and television coverage converge with the printed book, but little is known about how this media convergence influences readers' negotiation of cultural taste hierarchies" (Rehberg Sedo 2008: 189). Despite the fact that "Bourdieu provides little help concerning the role of modern media in society, including media's influence on habitus and lifestyle formation" (Hjarvard 2009: 163), I suggest that his theoretical framework (particularly the concept of symbolic power) can be extended to illuminate the impact of mediatization on the field of reading in terms of what this means for the fiction reader and how they discursively articulate (gendered) identity.

The media are "a source of taken-for granted frameworks for understanding the reality they represent (an influence, potentially, on action in all fields)" (Couldry 2003: 653). With this potential to influence action in all fields, it can be argued that the media carry a form of symbolic power. Nick Couldry has suggested that Bourdieu's theoretical framework can be usefully extended by considering the media as a form of 'meta-capital', similar to the power of the state (2003: 666). In Bourdieu's writings the state structures relational positions in the field of power. The field of power is not a field in the usual Bourdieuian sense – it is horizontal, existing across all fields, throughout social space in general. In a similar way, the "media's meta-capital may affect social space through the general circulation of media representations" (2003: 668) and thus carry a form of symbolic power.

Couldry posits that the media's symbolic power should be conceptualised as a form that is "necessarily misrecognized", that "some concentrations of symbolic power are so great that they dominate the whole social landscape ...and their underlying arbitrariness becomes difficult to see" (2003: 664). This form of 'strong' symbolic power (to use Couldry's term) is the type that I shall later refer to in my discussions of gender; an underlying structure of misrecognition "that works precisely because of its pervasiveness across social space, on account of its totalizing force." (Couldry 2003: 665). To describe the media in such a way is to potentially give consumption "the appearance of something...progressively immobilised...as a result of the growing mobility of the media as they conquer space." (de Certeau 1988: 165) While I agree that the media's symbolic power acts upon social space in general rather than emerging from a specific (bounded) field (although this may be useful to characterise media *production*), my empirical data does not support a notion of its 'totalizing force'. As a result I distinguish between two forms of symbolic power, firstly the primary symbolic force of gender which is exerted below the levels of consciousness and the control of the will and is exerted at the deepest levels of the body: "Symbolic force is a form of power that is exerted on bodies, directly and as if by magic, without any physical constraint; but this magic works only on the basis of the dispositions deposited, like springs, at the deepest level of the body" (Bourdieu 2001: 38), and secondly the symbolic power of the media as a form of 'meta-capital', the influence of which is more conscious, less embodied and therefore more open to negotiation.

"[B]y construing reading as a solitary activity, one risks ignoring its social frame – the institutional processes that shape reading practice and the shared values that exist between sets of readers" (Reed 2002: 184) One way of reintroducing the social frame of reading is to look at the impact and importance of the mediatization of fiction, and what this means for readers. Considering the media as a form of meta-capital enables us to see it as an 'institution', one that can shape reading practice and help to create shared values between readers. Within the field of reading the meta-capital of the media acts (or is taken up by actors) in different ways. While "[a]ll actors in specific fields are likely also to be actors in general social space and general consumers of media messages" (Couldry 2003: 668) the symbolic power of the media does not simply translate into an easy influence over what

counts as legitimate symbolic capital in a given field: "Cultural meanings and social implications are always negotiated in relation to a number of contextual parameters." (Janssen 2002: 7) Definitions of prestige within a field may be in part determined by the symbolic power of the media but this conferral of symbolic power and its 'conversion' into different species of capital does not go uncontested, as my empirical data shows. Media exposure or endorsement does not always act as a significant form of symbolic capital in a field; however it can act as an explicit or latent organising principle for acts of consumption.

The first data extracts below demonstrate how the meta-capital of the media can act as a legitimate form of symbolic capital for readers who reproduce media discourses that surround highly mediated texts. Several of the readers I interviewed made reference to the 'Harry Potter' series of books (1997-2007), and also to Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2003). The first respondents here refer to the 'Harry Potter effect' and the 'Harry Potter phenomenon':

> Adam: I'm wondering also if the Harry Potter effect has had a- that that's another way reading has become much more of a phenomenon. I mean they talk about her as the one who saved reading.

> Alex: obviously the main thing I think over the past five to ten years has been the Harry Potter phenomenon.

> Fred: obviously I think everyone is reading Harry Potter books, aren't they? They seem to be, yeah, I guess I notice on the news, they have quite a lot about books, yeah, the Harry Potter books especially.

> Toby: [referring to science fiction/fantasy genres] I don't think huge numbers of people typically wrote in it, that has changed since like the Harry Potter phenomena or *Lord of the Rings*.

Adam (31, PhD student), Alex (38, university lecturer), Fred (25, PhD student) and Toby (29, EFL tutor) are here appropriating and reproducing media-legitimated journalistic hyperbole and stating it as fact – for Adam, 'they' (the media) talk about J K Rowling as the saviour of reading, and Alex cites the 'Harry Potter phenomenon' as the main thing he has noticed in terms of an increase in media coverage of reading. Fred refers to the news coverage of Harry Potter books, and deduces from this that 'everyone is reading Harry Potter books'. For

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Toby, the Harry Potter 'phenomena' and the media promotion surrounding the filmic adaptation of the *Lord of the Rings* novels (1954-5) has made getting published in the science fiction/fantasy genres easier. "[T]he Potter phenomenon" (Gelder 2004: 34) and its branding have also been discussed in academic work (see Blake 2002, Striphas 2009, Wannamaker 2008) again lending weight to the notion of the meta-capital of the media as a structuring force in the field of reading. In the next extract Adrian refers directly to the media and its 'effects' on people's choices:

> Amy: so how do you choose the books that you read now?
> Adrian: difficult to say really, uh, I mean- I don't know [...] I suppose you might pick things up in papers, even subconsciously, things people tell you, things you get off the box, if you like watch a culture show or whatever or anything! News, uh trawl through the web and pick something up [...] I still think there is a kind of mood or movement out there where you sort of pick up what should be good and what should be crap, you see? Yeah, like I say, I think it tends to be media more than anything.

For Adrian (41, civil servant) knowledge about cultural goods can be transmitted 'subconsciously' from watching television, surfing the web or reading a newspaper; viewing the media as a form of meta-capital can explain how "[c]onsumers often have quite extensive knowledge of the meanings of things before they actually acquire them." (Janssen 2002: 14) However, this knowledge acquired about cultural products prior to the act of consumption means that consumers can consciously negotiate, circumnavigate and 'resist' this meta-capital when articulating their identities as further discussion of Adrian's views will demonstrate (see page 99) .

Positioning oneself in relation to media meta-capital appears to be a balancing act – on the one hand the mediatization of fiction enables readers to negotiate the multiplicity of texts on offer and can act as a guide in terms of book selection, but on the other hand these readers seek to present themselves as rational, active individuals who are not passively affected by the symbolic power of the media. Masculinity is "continually couched as rational, independent and isolated" (Ferrebe 2005: 9) and so although the men interviewed do not make direct reference to how their self presentation as active, independent

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individuals contributes to articulations of culturally acceptable masculinities I would nevertheless argue that this is the case: "The strength of the masculine order is seen in the fact that it dispenses with justification: the androcentric vision imposes itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses aimed at legitimating it." (Bourdieu 2001: 9) The notion of the masculine order dispensing with justification is evident in the response below, as is the balancing act between articulation of the masculine self as active and self-controlled, and use of the symbolic power of the media:

> Jack: [...] Actually I really enjoy listening to the um the um, what's it called? When they critique- the book review on radio five. That's really good, enjoy that, that's actually sometimes when I've heard things on there that actually sparks me to think "I want to read that" they talked about *Cloud Atlas*
>
> Amy: um do you feel that you've been targeted by any of this media coverage?
>
> Jack: no.

Here Jack (30, deputy picture editor for a newspaper) states that he listens to a radio show where books are critiqued, and this has an influence on what he may subsequently read. Despite admitting to using a form of mediatization to guide his reading choices, he reacts against the idea of being 'targeted' by media coverage and flatly denies this without any form of justification. This exchange resonates with my distinction between forms of symbolic power. When the masculine self is challenged through the suggestion that a male reader may be targeted by media coverage, Jack immediately and unequivocally rejects this, despite the fact that this directly contradicts his previous statement. Here we see that the symbolic power of gender exists below the level of consciousness: "The effect of symbolic domination...is exerted not in the pure logic of knowing consciousness but through the schemes of perception, appreciation and action that are constitutive of habitus and which [exist] below the level of the decisions of consciousness and controls of the will" (Bourdieu 2001: 37). In order to preserve a masculine sense of self appropriate in patriarchal society, the meta-capital of the media is rejected, suggesting that while symbolic power in the form of meta-capital may be amenable to conscious negotiation and 'resistance', the symbolic power of the gender order is less so.

Another means of positioning oneself in relation to media meta-capital is to preserve a sense of masculine agency by presenting oneself as a 'taste leader' and as having read a novel before there is media coverage of the text. Sam (31, civil servant) cites Dan Brown as one of his favourite authors. Referring to the criticism that others have levied at *The Da Vinci Code* he says:

> Sam: the story itself is a really good thriller novel, even if you want to just call it a cheap airport novel. But the way it introduced a lot of um, of subject matters, so it wasn't just fiction, there was an awful lot of science and fact in there, stuff which made you want to find out more [...] but I read Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* a long time before he was quite famous [...] I read it before anyone else so I was saying "read this", so I was the one to say "read this, this is brilliant".

By claiming that the book introduces 'science and fact' he seeks to reclaim the value in the text even though he recognises that others may perceive the book as a 'cheap airport novel'. The mixture of fact and fiction is here linked to learning and valued as such. His claim about the value of the book is later substantiated by tying it to a discourse of masculinised individualism and leadership – he read the text *before* the author was famous and recommended it to people. In the following extract Jack uses a similar discourse to validate one of his choices of novels:

> Jack: [...] I picked up *The Life of Pi* because the cover was fantastic [...] bought it, and read it, thought it was brilliant asked around friends "oh I just read this amazing book, have you read it?" and they're like "oh no not heard of it, not heard of it". Six months later it was being short listed for the Booker Prize and then it won it! And I was like "I knew that was going to win!" (2) Because it was so good.

Here Jack presents a clear timeline – he read the book when his friends had not heard of it, and also before it was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, so the chain of authenticity stems from the reader rather than the cultural prize. "[T]he Booker, like all prizes, is primarily a media event" (Street 2005: 825) and the media therefore "create the profile of the prize and articulate the cultural value that the prize represents." (*ibid*: 831)

Jack poaches from the meta-capital of the media whilst simultaneously distancing himself from it - his reading of *The Life of Pi* was completed six months before the publicity appeared, demonstrating that he was therefore not 'influenced' by the media meta-capital that surrounds the cultural prize. He does, however, use the symbolic power conferred by the media prize to validate his choice: "In the case of the Booker prize [symbolic profits] are gained...via an association with literary fiction, a form of writing traditionally perceived to have high status." (Norris 2006: 142) Framing his experience of mediatization in this way fits with a masculine discourse of individualism and means that his presentation of self avoids conflation with the identity of someone influenced by the media.

Resistance to the meta-capital of the media is also performed through the historicizing of favourite books which are rejected once the texts become 'popular' and highly mediated:

> Ian: [...] Tolkien was my favourite author at one point [...] but then, when all this media- when all this happened recently I sort of don't like it that much anymore.

There is a sense here that this media promotion disrupts Ian's (24, civil servant) perception of himself as being an 'individual' reader. He does not want to be seen as part of the crowd who 'jump on the bandwagon' when something becomes popular – he makes it very clear that he read Tolkien before the author became widely known, and once the mediatization of the text began (with the then 'recent' promotion of the *Lord of the Rings* film adaptations) the appeal of the author diminished. Ian liked Tolkien when he was a 'cult' author: "The word "cult" is used...to identify anything that is offbeat and kind of quirky, usually something that is not commercially successful but has a devoted following" (Whissen 1992: *xv*). In this way, the cult text is opposed to the mediatized text in terms of its commercial success. Drawing upon the notion of the cult text, in the extract below Neil (48, private music tutor and sculptor/painter) also refers to *Lord of the Rings*, a 'strange choice' at the time he was reading it:

> Neil: [...] I had a fairly (2) strange choice twenty years ago [...] of books that most people haven't read, and I am still reading those sort of books really [...] I remember at seventeen um, this- this guy came up to me,

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and he knew I read a lot, back then, and he said "try this book", he said, "it's amazing", and it was *Lord of the Rings*, and we were the only two people in the school- it was a really big school, you know, who'd read *Lord of the Rings*, it was sort of before- it was a cult book, but it was before it was really very popular sort of thing.

While Neil's choice of *Lord of the Rings* is firmly located in the past with his teenage reading self, he characterises himself as still reading 'obscure' books and is therefore articulating a strong discourse of masculinised individualism reading 'books that most people haven't read'. Although it is not Neil himself who discovered the book, he was one of only two people in a large school who had read the novel: "many cult books have small...audiences and are relatively unknown outside a narrow circle" (Whissen 1992: *xv*). Neil's choice of cult novels is important in relation to his identity articulation, deliberately separating his reading from mediatized culture and presenting himself as a reader in a print culture – a fuller discussion of which appears in the third section of this chapter.

Discursively articulated resistance to the meta-capital of the media takes different forms, but there is still evidence "[m]ediatization means that a growing number of...'decisions' (whether consciously or not) are influenced by mediated experiences." (Jansson 2009: 250) In the excerpts below each reader expresses an aversion to popular, mass-market fiction in order to avoid the 'sameness' that is associated with target groups and to mark out individuality:

Will: [...] I tend to shy away from reading uh popular or mass market fiction, I don't know why, just seeing everybody on the tube reading *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* just makes me not want to read it, ever. Uh, it is probably elitist, but, you know, I will just hold my hand up there, I generally am not that affected by advertising and modern middle mass market literature.

Mike: [...] I'm going to sound like I'm stalking J K Rowling now but I put off reading her stuff- things like Harry Potter for <u>ages</u> because of the kind of mass media furore about that, you know? [...] I'd be put off by being told, you know, you must read this, it is the best thing, you know. I react badly to that kind of- not exactly pressure, but kind of exultations saying you know, this is good, you <u>will</u> like it um, type stuff.

Jack: […] now I feel compelled <u>not</u> to read Harry Potter because everyone else has. Just out of spite. She's got enough money, she doesn't need my money! Yeah and also I'm not going to see any of the films either I'm- I'm that dead against it.

Although Will (29, university researcher), Mike (33, university lecturer) and Jack all state that they are actively 'put off' reading a text that is both popular and highly mediated, their actions are affected by what is termed 'indirect mediatization' which is "when the media and their symbolic world in terms of form, content, or organization increasingly influence an existing activity." (Lundby 2009: 5) In these cases, indirect mediatization influences male readers' activities by orientating them away from rather than towards mediated texts and in doing so these readers are simultaneously locating themselves as distant from the feminised identity of the consumer. According to Diane Barthel, "[a]dvertising has encouraged a "feminization" of culture, as it puts all consumers in the classic role of the female: manipulable, submissive, seeing themselves as objects" (1992: 148). In order to avoid conflation with the identity of the feminised consumer these men act against 'mass media furore' by avoiding mediatized fiction and concurrently presenting themselves as *active subjects* in relation to the meta-capital of the media as opposed to 'submissive objects'.

An application of de Certeau's notion of the reader as 'poacher' is useful here. Henry Jenkins explains how "de Certeau describes readers who are essentially isolated from each other; the meanings they "poach" from the primary text serve only their own interests and are the object of only limited intellectual investment." (1992: 45) Jenkins describes how for fans, reading is a social process shaped by discussions with other readers, which may affect their future readings. In this instance, the readers are not 'fans' but nevertheless as a result of the mediatization of fiction, reading has increasingly become a social process and it is my contention that poaching as a form of reading is no longer limited to the primary text. These readers poach from the media using the discourse of media promotion of texts to position themselves against the meta-capital of media. 'Media talk' allows for distant readings of texts and 'interpretive communities' can be formed around this without readers ever having read the content of the text in question. In the extracts above the resistance is not to the texts themselves but rather to the mediated discourses that surround them. In the following example it can be seen how Chris (32, EFL teacher) appropriates the power of

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the media by reproducing the mediated discourse surrounding the Harry Potter books while at the same time delegitimating value of the media's meta-capital:

> Chris: like Harry Potter stuff, I think that is the best thing that has ever happened to children's reading in years, isn't it? Because it is good, and imaginative and it was marketed right [...] it was the book itself that did it, it didn't have to be some kind of toss that then everyone was going "oh, please read it", it sold itself, like if a book is really good it should sell itself really, by word of mouth, or what have you.

Chris's description of the success of the Harry Potter books refers to them as "best thing that has ever happened to children's reading" echoing media discourse about 'Harry Potter' being "hailed as the saviour of children's fiction" (Hill 2002). He explains that the books were "marketed right", but then proceeds to distance the success of the text from the meta-capital of the media. De Certeau's work describes "popular practice as a fleeting appropriation, one which diverts the purposive rationality of an established power" (Morris 1990: 29) and this is what Chris's articulation does here – he fleetingly appropriates media discourse to support his argument and diverts the symbolic power, turning it back on itself – a good book doesn't need marketing and media promotion, "it should sell itself"; "it was the book itself that did it". Similar to Chris's response, Ian also associates the mediatization of fiction with commercialisation and marketing, presenting this as a negative discourse and resisting the meta-capital of the media. When asked what he would never read, Ian responds:

> Ian: ok I am going to say it now, J K Rowling [...] I have upset so many people, with how badly I hate this woman [...] this woman came in, and it has nothing to do with the book side of it, I don't care about that. It's selling your soul. She sold her soul, as an author, to make money, and exploiting children at the same time. As you can see I really do have an issue.

For this reader, J K Rowling represents all that is bad about commerce – she has sold her soul to make money. Drawing on a cultural distinction between concepts of 'literature' and 'popular fiction' where the former is produced with artistic integrity and the latter is commercially driven, for Ian "[i]t is as if popular fiction is...simply a matter of commerce,

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nothing more or less than a 'product'" (Gelder 2004: 35). The Harry Potter series is not just viewed negatively for its 'exploitation' of children, it is also portrayed as lacking sufficient intellectual stimulus by Adrian who articulates an 'anti-fan' reading of the text:

> Adrian: [...] too many people are reading Harry Potter and stuff like that, and I think, I really think kids are capable of more than that, you know?
> Amy: have you read any of the Harry Potter books?
> Adrian: no, I've got to admit, no I haven't, well, I could go and read a page, I know I could go and read a page and say that is crap, but I know it is crap anyway.

Jonathan Gray discusses how non-fans in his research on *The Simpsons* were able to provide in-depth analysis of the show, even though they may have never seen an episode or only watched 'snippets' in passing. Gray's focus is on television viewers, and this leads him to make some (arguably) spurious assumptions: "while books...may at least ask for a more fan-like proximity with the text, television offers multiple viewing positions and distances." (2003: 68) The footnote which accompanies this statement though is illuminating – "we must be careful of over-estimating a book reader's...level of engagement. After all, many books are merely leafed through...and books...can also live through media talk alone." (*ibid*: 79 n3) It is this 'media talk' which allows readers to respond to texts in an 'anti-fan' way; "those who strongly dislike a given text or genre" (*ibid*: 70), even though they have never read the text itself. The increase in the mediation of certain novels allows for this kind of distant reading to be made of texts. In Gray's view, if we understand how an anti-fan's text has been constructed then audience studies "will take substantial steps forward in understanding textuality and appreciating the strength of contextuality." (*ibid*: 71) These anti-fan readings of the Harry Potter novels work through a distanced poaching of media discourses rather than a direct poaching from the texts themselves, suggesting that de Certeau's notion of readers as poachers can be rethought and extended: "readers are not simply poachers; they are also "nomads,"...not constrained by permanent property ownership but rather constantly advancing upon another text, appropriating new materials, making new meanings." (Jenkins 1992: 36) The nomadic, poaching reader is no longer constrained by the text itself and can appropriate materials and make meanings from mediated discourses that surround texts.

While de Certeau is concerned with the productive, active nature of consumption, "Bourdieu gives excessive emphasis to the individual's general strategies of capital acquisition, compared with other forms of individual agency (e.g. individual practices of creativity)." (Couldry 2005: 359) This is where we can see the need to open up a "pathway between de Certeau's interest in imaginative ways of 'making do' and Pierre Bourdieu's preoccupation with the structured distinctions of consumer behaviour…[w]hat we require is a theory and method that recognizes both creativity and constraint in quotidian life." (Moores 1993: 104) The value of using de Certeauian theory here is that it highlights how media discourses can be subject to 'tactical raids' by readers, and by poaching from the media, consumers can both appropriate and 'resist' forms of (meta)capital. "Reading, according to de Certeau, is a tactic and therefore dependent on the structures and spaces created by strategies." (Hermes 1995: 19) If we understand strategies and tactics "as a binarism, the terms…affirm belief…that de Certeau is too often deployed…to conceptualize how…audiences "evade" the socially structuring role of media" (Hay 1996: 367). However, it is my contention that there can be no clear separation of these into binary opposition since tactics operate *within* strategies. Strategy is undoubtedly the more powerful force but power is not held definitively and instead is subject to internal fragmentation and negotiation (Hills 2005a: 84-5). As such "we can conceive of these practices as, in a sense, parasitic upon the institutions on which they feed" (Ahearne 2010: 3) and see the value of combining macro- and micro-theoretical approaches to consumption (see chapter two).

The next section of this chapter uses the example of 'Richard and Judy's Book Club' to further illustrate how readers negotiate the meta-capital of the media, claiming 'distinction' for themselves as readers by distancing themselves from the symbolic power of the media and tactically avoiding unification with "the subordinate, feminine term 'consumption'" (McGuigan 2010: 151).

Mediatized promotion of fiction – 'Richard and Judy's Book Club'

> Since it started in 2004, the Richard and Judy book club – a weekly segment on
> Richard Madeley and Judy Finnigan's weekday television show – has established

itself as the most important single influence on book buying in Britain. One in four of all books now sold has been endorsed by Richard and Judy. (Butcher 2008: 26)

'Richard and Judy's Book Club' became a regular part of the *Richard and Judy Show* in 2004 and ran until 2008. Books were chosen by Amanda Ross, head of the production company that produced the show and were divided bi-annually into a winter book club ('best reads') and a 'summer reads' section. Ten books were featured weekly for the winter book club and six to eight books were presented as the summer reads. When featured on the show each book would be described by Richard or Judy and introduced by the author in a videotaped insert (the author did not appear on the show as on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*). Invited celebrity guests discussed the book on the show with Richard and Judy and then the opinions of members of the public (belonging to a chosen book group) were presented, again as a videotaped insert. Viewers were then informed that they could access reading notes for each book and also view the other selected books online.

At the time the interviews took place, the show's book club was widely promoted and marketed with 'Richard and Judy's' book selections placed prominently in bookstores, often in window displays. "Mass mediated publicity for books, via such broadcasting initiatives as...*Richard and Judy's Bookclub*...is celebrated within the book industry for precisely 'spreading the word about books'." (Wright 2007: 4) And yet "[d]espite its huge effect on book sales, Richard and Judy is ignored by academia." (Bloom 2007: 18) With brands being considered as "one of the most important modes of communication in the modern media environment" (Danesi 2006: 3), I now direct my attention towards the brand of 'Richard and Judy' and their book club, looking at how this brand may act as a symbolic resource for the articulation of masculinities.

When the male readers interviewed were asked if they were aware of an increase in media coverage of fiction reading many responded that they had heard about the Richard and Judy book club. The notion of the Richard and Judy book club as "an institution that is more important to sales than the established prizes such as the Man Booker and the Costa" (Edge 2007) is drawn on in the following response:

Alex: [...] I mean I am of a certain age now when my mother and mother-in-law, these people read a lot. I mean, they have a lot of time on their hands and they do take notice of what Richard and Judy say and it's much more important than this was recommended by so-and-so, now this is very very important, much more so than the Booker or the Whitbread prizes.

Alex's summary of the importance of Richard and Judy is illuminating in terms of his description of those it has impact upon. His 'certain age' is 38, suggesting that both his mother and mother-in-law are around retirement age where 'they have a lot of time on their hands'. *They* are the ones who take notice of what Richard and Judy say, rather than Alex himself. Here Alex draws upon the meta-capital of the media to highlight the importance of this book club on book sales, but he resists being aligned with it - the gendering of 'they' (the ones who do take notice) is exclusively female indicating that the influence of Richard and Judy falls squarely on the feminised consumer. Evidence for the symbolic power of the meta-capital of the media is borne out by multiple respondents - knowledge of the Richard and Judy book club is widespread, even for those who do not own a television:

Ben: [...] In the UK Richard and Judy run some sort of book club, which results in massively increased sales for some of the books that are featured on it, although whether they actually get read is probably a different question. And there is, uh the phenomenon in the United States with Oprah Winfrey, which is where they probably nicked their ideas from I should think, um, yeah. I know there has been more coverage of this book group type thing, but it's not something I am aware of. Because I don't actually own a telly.

Despite the fact that Ben (37, office worker) doesn't own a television he still shows knowledge of media promotion of fiction (even though he claims it is not something he is 'aware' of). "[T]he traditional view of the consumer as *passive* has led to a common thesis which links the discursive role of the consumer to femininity" (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 190 emphasis in original) and Ben draws a distinction here between the reader and the consumer. The consumer is someone who buys books (and has contributed to the 'massively increased sales' of those selected for the show) but is conceptually distinct from the reader who *actually* reads them. The Richard and Judy book club is further devalued

with Ben's supposition that they have stolen the idea from the Oprah 'phenomenon'. Margaret Wetherell argues that "subject positions are not merely 'taken up' in a passive way, but do highly situated, interactional 'work'. At the same time they are attached to prior, culturally familiar discourses situated within already-circulating, shared repertoires and thus a *resource* for the micro exigencies of identity work in talk." (Wetherell in Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 161) For the readers in this study, the Richard and Judy book club exists mainly as a negative construct for the readers to define themselves against – positioning themselves as active readers who are not targeted by media promotion and are therefore not directly influenced by the symbolic power of the media. For these readers there is an already-circulating shared repertoire of the viewer of Richard and Judy as 'the mainstream consumer' from which they wish to distance themselves: "consumption historically has tended to have been equated with femininity rather than masculinity, at least stereotypically." (Edwards 2000: 136) The Richard and Judy show and its book club are overwhelmingly feminised by these readers. When asked "who do you think that the Richard and Judy book club is aimed at?" the following responses were given:

Adrian: I suppose Richard and Judy is sort of the housewife stuff really.

Ryan[5]:   middle-aged housewives with nothing to do ((laughs)).

Lee[6]:   I would say- I would say that is aimed at a female audience, um, and I thing that is because the show is predominantly aimed at a female audience (2) without a doubt.

Alex: [...] the Richard and Judy thing you have to say that if you look at the audience demographic- the demographic of the audience which is generally female based isn't it.

Liam[7]:   [...] predominantly middle aged females, probably um, probably middle class, uh, who, yeah, stay at home mothers.

Even though all respondents stated that they had not watched the show the interviewees presented a solid and consistent idea of the show's audience – female, middle-aged and middle class. For these readers masculinity is articulated by distinguishing the self from the

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[5] 28, agricultural engineer
[6] 35, assistant editor of a newspaper
[7] 29, customer services

other (the female 'target audience') and also from the Richard and Judy 'brand'. According to Bloom, the increase in book sales attributed to Richard and Judy was largely due to "purchases [being] prompted by seeing the book with the Richard and Judy sticker in leading bookshops" (2007: 18). For these readers this branding is also represented as 'other':

> Mike: and I'm aware obviously of the Richard and Judy club, actually that is something that would probably put me off buying a book, the uh, *The Time Traveler's Wife* which was recommended to me by a friend and then I bought the copy in Waterstones, it had a big non-removable kind of sticker on the front cover saying 'as recommended by Richard and Judy' ((laughs)) [...] I would have chosen a copy without that, but I couldn't.

Mike's awareness of the Richard and Judy book club originates from part of their branding material – the sticker placed on the front of 'selected' books. He 'others' the brand by declaring that this would put him off buying a book. Even though he has purchased a book that was recommended by Richard and Judy, his discursive framing prevents association with the brand – the novel was suggested by a friend, and he only bought a copy with a sticker because there weren't any without. "Michel de Certeau was interested in the distance between the logic of production of social objects and what people indeed do with such objects...[considering] these usages of social objects as practices of *bricolage*" (Zittoun 2006: 71). Looking at the uses of social objects, and considering the distance between the logic of production and a social object's use value for an individual leads to the significance of negation. Resisting the symbolic power of the media as part of the logic of production of cultural goods, "[t]he notion of use implies the reverse notion of *nonuse*" (Zittoun 2006: 72). It is through the avoidance or 'nonuse' of cultural goods that these men claim distinction from 'groupthink' – a "term used by social scientists to designate the set of assumed ideas, values, beliefs, and lifestyle modes that are shared by a group of people living in the same, or similar, social framework based on a shared culture." (Danesi 2006: 9) They distance themselves from the (feminised) mass consumer in order to individualise their consumption:

> Ray: [...] I think the sticker on the book, I would assume, and this is a third person, I don't, but other people do [...] it must be some kind of a

> marketing tool where even if people do not watch Richard and Judy they expect a certain quality [...] I'm totally aware because the sticker is so present, but it would actually be the kind of thing that would make me not buy a book, unless I know more about it but I think the thinking must be that people would then be more likely to buy it.

Here Ray (32, PhD student) explicitly distances himself from the brand by referring to his analysis as being in the 'third person', it is not what *he* thinks (he emphasises "*I* don't"), but what *other people do*. It is the 'other people' who use the sticker as an arbiter of cultural worth, and result in the sticker being a successful marketing tool. Instead for him, as in Mike's remarks above, the branding would make him not buy a book. In order to resist the meta-capital of the media and present themselves as active, rather than being targeted by media promotion, the interviewees negate the idea that Richard and Judy's book selections influence their choices:

> Josh: in fact I've seen- I saw- what did I see recently? It was Richard and Judy sticker on a book that I had just read, oh, it was *The Historian* it had a Richard and Judy book club sticker and I thought ((ugh!)) what is <u>that</u> doing on a book I've read?

Josh (24, civil servant) vindicates his choice of *The Historian* (2005) by claiming to have read the book before it was chosen as part of the Richard and Judy book club. He expresses disgust at the 'taint' of the Richard and Judy sticker appearing on something that he has read, thereby potentially 'contaminating' his choice. Later on in the interview he referred to another overlap between his reading and the book club selection:

> Josh: [...] I mean I've read *The Time Traveler's Wife* and I know that was from the Richard and Judy book club, but that wasn't why I read it.

Although he admits to reading a book club book, he denies the book club any originary force – it wasn't the reason he read the book. In the extract below, Dan (27, civil servant) avoids his tastes being aligned with Richard and Judy's by presenting a similarity in literary taste stemming from the reader rather than the brand:

Dan: […] I thought it was a sticker um, it says Richard and Judy's book club 2006-2007, but it has actually got it printed on the cover so I can't take it off! It's really tacky! ((laughs)) Uh, but apparently one of Richard and Judy's books of the year. Um, yeah, so I am aware of- I think it's a good thing, I suppose uh, you know, it's never a bad thing to have people reading more books, and you know Richard and Judy really liked *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell um, I really like David Mitchell, so uh, so I thought that was quite forward thinking of them.

Here the words of de Certeau are illuminating. Discussing the (false) assumption that the public is shaped by the products imposed on it, he argues

To assume that is to misunderstand the act of "consumption". This misunderstanding assumes that "assimilating" necessarily means "becoming similar to" what one absorbs, and not "making something similar" to what one is, making it one's own, appropriating or reappropriating it. (de Certeau 1988: 166)

Richard and Judy's book club selection is presented as acceptable via this latter definition of assimilation. Dan likes the author David Mitchell, and Richard and Judy promoted *Cloud Atlas*. Since the mediated selection fits in with *his* tastes, rather than the other way around, his act of consumption discursively frames Richard and Judy's choice as similar to his. In this way the commonality of tastes can be tolerated as Richard and Judy being 'forward thinking'. Luke (52, self-employed caterer) is more generous in his assessment of the Richard and Judy book club, asserting that they pick very good books:

Luke: often apparently they pick very good books, I have actually read some of the ones they've recommended but not because they recommended it […] yeah, they do- apparently pick very good books […] so I'm not knocking them you know.

Luke's use (and repetition) of the word 'apparently' is key here, articulating a displacement of self from the discourse he is using. He uses the term to disavow direct knowledge of the books that are chosen, thereby distancing himself from the book club, despite the fact that he has read books they've 'recommended'. Similar to the responses above, any potential links in cultural taste are severed by claims that he did not read the books as a result of Richard and Judy's recommendation. When the meta-capital of the media cannot be "assimilated" to the reader it is sharply delineated as 'other' and linked to negative

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discourses of commercialism. Commercialism operates in direct contrast to literary fiction which is regarded as having value: "You have one lot of books that are products [...] really obvious commercial fiction that sells in shedloads, and then you have a much smaller group of books that have cultural value." (Walsh 2008) In the following extract Joe (40, PhD student) distances himself from the book club by laughing and articulates resistance to the bourgeois lifestyle they are 'pushing' on the show, a lifestyle which he believes to be unsustainable:

> Joe: [...] do I want to know about the Richard and Judy book club? God no! ((laughs)) [...] they're pushing a certain attitude to reading and a certain novel, which isn't necessarily the <u>best</u> fiction, but pushing a life which is not sustainable, it's the bourgeois novel.

Joe refers to Richard and Judy as 'pushing' an unsustainable life on consumers, and also to the type of novel, described as not being the 'best' fiction – the bourgeois novel. For Joe, "the brow line of the book choices falls between high and middle" (Farndale 2007: 6) and his assessment makes it clear that this is something he views negatively. Richard and Judy are not 'promoting' novels, they are "pushing" them - "[t]here is a sense that this is very much about corporate dealing" (Goring 2007: 15) and Joe dissociates himself from this type of reading by stating that he doesn't even want to know about the Richard and Judy book club.

Mark Poster suggests that "[b]rands function to fix in our minds that commodities come from companies. In the domain of cultural objects, brands have not worked well. Consumers identify cultural objects not with corporations...but with stars/directors, musicians and authors." (2004: 421) For these readers branding is not compatible with the cultural field of the literary, of which they are a part:

> Chris: I would never imagine that they would recommend anything that I would want to read, in fact if they did I would probably actively not read it
> Amy: why?
> Chris: come on, it's Richard and Judy [...] I am not saying anything about their reading tastes or anything, but if they are obviously pushing something, like- like for financial reasons, I would never trust anything like that because it's obviously been parked on someone's agenda,

> because someone is being given a kickback to put the book on the show, and I would be extremely surprised if they chose a book on the book's own merit, there is obviously something else going on, it's commercial television, so no.

Here Chris uses the same discourse drawn on by Joe, that of 'pushing' and its negative links to commercialism. He distances himself from the identity of the Richard and Judy consumer by claiming that anything they endorse he would *actively* not read, thereby positioning himself as an active reader. "'Richard & Judy' is a private enterprise attempting to delve into the cultural arena of literature...readers question...the motivation of the producers and the formats of the programs" (Rehberg Sedo 2008: 201). The discourse of book pushing is also drawn upon by Adrian:

> Adrian: [...] what can you say? It is just pushing books basically, isn't it? It's a lot of rubbish, yeah, it is.

The resistance to televised book promotion expressed by Joe, Chris and Adrian works to support a discourse of individualism compatible with an articulation of masculine independence. By distancing themselves from the culture of book 'pushing', they are again resisting association with the feminised mainstream consumer. In their study of British cultural tastes, analysed using a Bourdieuian framework, Bennett *et al* assert that "[n]ew technologies [and] new platforms for delivery...do not easily allow the establishment of an agreed value for particular items or modes of appropriation, which might amplify a store of cultural capital that can subsequently be exchanged." (2009: 151) Contra this, my empirical data has shown that the 'new' platform of the television book club does have an established and agreed value for these male readers – it is consistently feminised and devalued and use of the Richard and Judy brand is characterised by negation.

Using the case of the Richard and Judy book club it can be seen that the "[m]edia play a decisive role in the consumption of cultural objects" (Poster 2004: 417) but consumption is never fully determined by the media. The Richard and Judy show is considered by these respondents to be of low cultural value and its audience are feminised and fused with the notion of the passive consumer. The readers interviewed gave similar responses to those

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studied by Rehberg Sedo who "generally admit neither to watching 'Richard & Judy Book Club' nor to reading the book picks *because* they were recommended by the couple. And, if they had read a particular title, they said that had done so (sic) before the book appeared on the list." (2008: 202) These male readers discursively articulate dissociation from the feminised consumer, showing how media meta-capital can be resisted and negatively positioned within hierarchies of cultural value in the field of reading. By regarding mediatization as subject to (con)textual poaching we can situate the meta-capital of the media within regimes of symbolic power and see how it can be consciously negotiated by cultural agents. De Certeau's theories do not ignore systems of domination rather for him "practices of self are always determined, but never fully imposed, by the cultural context" (McNay 1994: 156) and extending de Certeauian theory shows that "consumers are selective users of a vast media culture whose treasures...hold wealth that can be mined and refined for alternative uses." (Jenkins 1992: 27)

De Certeau argues that "The autonomy of the reader depends on a transformation of the social relationships that overdetermine his relation to texts." (1988: 173) It is my contention that conceiving of the symbolic power of the media as a form of meta-capital, and one that is potentially amenable to conscious 'resistance' shows how the media has, in part, transformed the social structures that overdetermine a reader's relationship to texts. The mediatization of fiction enables the reader to occupy multiple positions in relation to the text, and a reader in a media culture is no longer confined to the 'proper' of the text to ascertain its meaning: "readers are travelers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write" (de Certeau 1988: 174). For many readers the meta-capital of the media can act as a frame of reference prior to consumption: "mediated information and narratives are frames par excellence, trimming and editing the object of their attention for us with significant power and skill" (Gray 2010: 3). However, this is not true for all readers, as the following examples show.

<u>Reading in a print culture</u>

The first reader I discuss here is Neil, whose preference for unusual books has already been identified (see page 81) through the framing of his choices as 'cult' texts. The relative obscurity of the books he reads is an important factor in his cultural consumption:

> Neil: no, I ignore all forms of advertising and stuff like that, I- like this book *Pather Panchali* I read about it in a- I read about it in one obscure travel book before I went to India last time, and I spent- not very long but I did go in to several bookshops in India, and in about the fourth one I found it, its- you know, even now it is quite rare to find it, they had it in English, obviously, that was quite rare, and um, I read it, it was fantastic, [...] it just moved you to tears actually as you were reading it, um, so that's how I like to find my books, the sort of books that most people have never heard of actually [...] it's a snob thing [...] ((laughs)) no, it's not a snob thing, but I find they are the books often that almost died out because they are too serious for most people, they are just beautiful sometimes.

Here he positions his tastes in opposition to mediatized cultural products and proceeds to give an example of how he finds his books. His description "that's how I like to find my books" is important – rather than his choices being directed or influenced by others, it is *he* who finds the books, making him an 'active' reader. His tastes are distinct from the popular by virtue of being books "that most people have never heard of", meaning that he is not a consumer "of popular culture and...[therefore not] subject to the factors that determine consumption patterns within this broader context" (Nell 1988: 26). Drawing on the cultural notion that historically an inverse relationship has developed between esteem and popularity where "the term 'bestseller' became a derogatory epithet among cultivated readers", (Pickford 2007: 84) Neil claims distinction by distancing himself from the identity of the 'common' reader. Having read about a novel in an 'obscure' travel book, he sources this 'rare' book in India by searching through bookstores. Referring to his choices as "too serious for most people" he is distancing himself from what he sees as superficial 'feminine' tastes and engaging with what he see as more 'serious' masculine cultural tastes (Bennett *et al* 2009: 228) which have cultural value. 'Serious fiction' is linked to education, carrying

associations of prestige or cultural authority (Connor 1996: 15-16) and is repeatedly referred to by Neil:

> Neil: I would say (2) my favourite genre in fiction is European fiction, right? French, German, and Russian (2) and a tiny little bit of Italian [...] and I am talking very serious novels here [...] I mean, I am just wondering how to describe it.[...] I like what you would call really serious literature about life and death [...] you know, really existential literature, it's that sort of thing.

Neil repeats the word 'serious' and shifts from talking about fiction to novels and then refers to 'serious literature'. "Literary fiction is usually defined by negation – it is *not* formula fiction or genre fiction, *not* mass market or best-selling fiction" (Connor 1996: 19) again enabling Neil to distinguish his reading from the leisurely, trivialised literacy associated with women (Long 1993: 182). Presenting his reading tastes as intellectual and serious culturally codes his reading as masculine. Contrasting his own reading with his daughters' tastes he identifies existential literature as not feminine:

> Neil: [...] women on the whole are not existentialist, it's not- you know, I have met very few women existentialists [...] I mean when you look at what the girls [his teenage daughters] read, this is interesting, when you look at what the girls read they love Jane Austen, and I know men who like Jane Austen too [...] and you know, I think she is a great writer too, but they love those books about human relationships, and things like that, which- and there is nothing wrong with that, but I tend to read books about the individual, sort of battling on his own through the universe if you like, what is the meaning of life? (2) For an individual.

Here we see how "[a]esthetic choices are not made in a vacuum: they are made in negative relation to other *kinds* of object which could have been chosen" (Frow 2000: 49). Distinct from his daughters who "love those books about human relationships", he tends to read books about the struggle of an individual, a common theme in cult fiction: "In most cult books one is likely to encounter at least one lonely figure…alone, aloof, apart; in a word, alienated." (Whissen 1992: *xxvii*) Research by David Bleich into gender and reading finds that gender affects the 'approach' the reader takes to a text, and ultimately pleasure in a text, stating that "men are more instinctively distant from the reading" (Bleich 1986: 261),

while conversely women have a greater readiness to enter the world of a novel. However, Neil's appreciation of existential literature is not based on a rational, detached subjectivity that has often been linked to the serious (male) reader, his definition of what makes a book good draws on the notion of affective response:

> Amy: ok, so what makes a book good or bad in your opinion?
>
> Neil: it has to have (2) it has to be very serious, and it has to be brilliantly written, lyrically written, so I'm looking for- I'm looking for a poignant lyrical book, nothing needs to happen, uh, but it has to be about something moving.

The culturally accepted image of men as rational and self-present is transgressed here and the feminised affective/sensory pleasures of reading are valued, but powerful discourses surrounding gender-appropriate behaviour are still in evidence as Neil distinguishes "between escape reading and books that are challenging or demanding" (Appleyard 1994: 165), with the latter coded as masculine.

> Neil: to me fiction is the most powerful form of writing, because it's not about anyone in particular, therefore it can be about anybody and it can be about you, and I think it's- its uh, it can be wonderfully evocative (2) about life and (2) to me a book is only any good if it actually makes you live more- better, more fully, so I never read a book for entertainment except very very rarely I might read a Dickens [...]
> so I am not reading to be entertained, if I want to be entertained I will get a bottle of wine out ((laughs)) and friends round [...] but I am reading because I want to be woken up, inspired in some way [...] moved if you like, which is why most literature just leaves me completely cold, you know, it's just small talk, or- I don't know, books- what are they called? Detective stories and things like that [...] not that I am criticising other people who do read that sort of unmitigated pap.

Describing cult texts, Thomas Whissen explains "Entertainment, amusement, diversion, distraction – these are not their goals. They expect, they invite, they demand a response." (1992: x) The books Neil chooses to read provide him with an insight into his own life, helping him to live "more fully", inspiring him. "Reading...is understood in de Certeau's writings not as passive absorption of information, an effect of the book...but as creative

processing" (Frow 1991: 58) and in this way Neil's reading is characterised as *active*, rather than passive, a tactical use of a text. This type of affective reading is valued for its ability to heighten consciousness rather than 'dull' it, where reading acts as "a vehicle for self-exploration and enlargement of ...experience." (Appleyard 1994: 169) Here Neil positions himself in opposition to the most commonly invoked "discursive mantra" (Hills 2002: 67) that readers use when discussing fiction – escape. While this is a cultural discourse widely associated with reading for pleasure (see Appleyard 1994, Bennett *et al* 2009, Radway 1984), it is also culturally loaded: "[t]he notion of 'escapism'...[is] often a pejorative dismissal of cultural products compared to either disinterested aesthetic appreciation or notions of personal development" (Wright 2006: 130). Presenting himself as a reader of serious literature Neil is implicitly drawing on an ideological distinction where "the reader of Literature is contemplative, while the consumer of popular fiction is 'distracted'. The former, it is implied, is therefore *closer to life itself*...while the latter is removed from it, made to occupy some other, fantasy space elsewhere. Hence the general assumption that popular fiction is escapist." (Gelder 2004: 37)

Another reader who articulates his reading as active is Adrian - similarly he does not read to relax or be entertained, his reading of fiction is described as 'work':

> Adrian: [...] People get into a safe mode where they read this stuff, you know, a lot of people find it hard work when something makes you think, you know, it puts you out of your box, [...] outside the comfort zone, you know, and you know, *Finnegan's Wake* is going to take ages for me, well it'll probably take the whole summer really [...] that's another thing I think, you get used to working a bit while you are reading, it's not really hard work, it's just not sitting there in a vegetable state, reading this crap as a means of killing time. I don't read as a means of killing time, you know, I read- why do I read these? Because I think they are the best minds, you know, I am reading the best thoughts of the best minds, they have got something to say.

Framing his consumption as labour, Adrian's reading tastes are placed hierarchically above the reader of pulp fiction whom he describes negatively as being in a 'vegetable state' – a state of complete passivity. For Adrian, having to work at what he reads demonstrates its cultural value: "the best thoughts of the best minds". Adrian's reading can be described as

tactical since tactical reading is "reading which, at some level, empowers the reader" (Cranny-Francis *et al* 2003: 130). Reading *Finnegan's Wake* (1939) will take him a long time, again opposed to the popular fiction which is "usually read quickly rather than 'closely'" (Gelder 2004: 38). The logic of consumption of literature is opposed to that of popular fiction. Institutionally framed by the educational system students of literary fiction are "taught to read slowly and carefully, 'seriously' and 'deeply" (*ibid*: 5). Further distinguishing his reading from popular taste Adrian talks about what makes a good book:

> Adrian: [...] I think what makes a great book is far more than techniques, or maybe anything explainable, I don't know, I think it's because they write sort of strangely.
> [...]
> yeah, I just think there is a lot of fiction out there that is much of a muchness, the same old hackneyed stuff, tired writing, nothing new, nothing inventive, that's what makes a good book, is um, there is some sort of genius in Joyce's writing, I don't know what it is, perhaps it's just his sort of uniqueness, and perhaps it is just um, it's just new, hasn't been done before and it works.

Literature is cerebral, complex, creative and often defined by its 'intense formal artistry', dispensing with the need for a story or plot (Gelder 2004: 19). For Adrian it is Joyce's "uniqueness", novelty, and genius, his non-conformity with conventional narrative structure, expressed as a 'strangeness' to his writing that makes his books great. In a similar vein, Joe characterises his reading as oppositional to popular taste by expressing a preference for Surrealism and Dada:

> Joe: I tend to be a little eccentric in my reading tastes [...] oh yeah I quite like Surrealism and Dada, which is like really arrogant
> [...]
> that's how I would characterise most of my reading, eccentric, to the point of nearly self destructive ((laughs)).

Joe describes his reading tastes as 'eccentric', marking them as unconventional or unusual. With Surrealism and Dada movements partially defined through their opposition to traditional aesthetics, Joe also refers to himself as a Derridean thereby claiming a

deconstructionist identity, one that seeks to expose the binary oppositions which "underpin the formation and cultural legitimacy of certain dominant ideas" (Lewis 2002: 34):

> Amy: mm hmm, so what makes a book good or bad in your opinion?
> Joe: ah! ((laughs)) you're asking a Derridean ((laughs)) you can't! There is no good or bad
> Amy: really?
> Joe: you really can't say that, no! Really. You can't. On point of principle. There is no good book, no bad book, there's only a book.

Refusing to be drawn on value judgements "on point of principle" Joe refers to his theoretical affiliations thereby linking his consumption to the Academy. Although he claims that there is no good or bad, the unspoken suggestion here is that being a Derridean implies a form of the good, symbolically differentiating his tastes from (feminised) popular culture and legitimising them through links to the (masculinised) symbolic power of the institution of education.

These readers of books *as* books are not readers in a media culture but the texts encountered are always culturally mediated (Bennett *et al* 2009: 286 n7). The examples given here demonstrate that it is important to separate out the type of culture in which books are consumed – for readers in a literary or print culture the education system acts as the structuring force for their cultural consumption. Consumers engage with cultural objects for different purposes, and from different standpoints, generating different meanings and pleasures. Participants within the field of reading occupy different positions in relation to the novel, and those with the deepest degree of investment are more likely to read modern literature than genre fiction (Bennett *et al* 2009: 98). The positionality of agents is also articulated relative to the notional presence of other agents in the field: "[a] cultural field is therefore understood as a dynamic site constructed from the sum of participants understood as a body of diverse and mobile agents engaged in *particular* and *relative* forms of social imagination." (Athique 2008: 38) This is not to suggest that individuals are somehow free-floating and able to choose their subject positions. Habitus carries with it the reminder that structure exists both within and without, framing, shaping and 'regulating' behaviour and choice. Mediated cultural products do not always have importance as

cultural referents for readers but however independent from or resistant to popular culture and the media readers claim to be, their symbolic use of cultural goods still places them within cultural taste hierarchies.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that Bourdieu did not fully consider the impact of mediatization on cultural consumption in his theories and that Bourdieu's theories can be usefully extended to conceptualise the media as a form of 'meta-capital' which structures relational positions in the field of power and this power acts across all fields. This power can be seen in the appropriation and reproduction of media discourses around popular fiction in interviewees' responses. However, mediatization of fiction does not translate into straightforward compliance with the symbolic power of the media – closer analysis reveals that the respondents express ambivalence towards literary prizes, and celebrity book endorsement may serve to act as a negative foil for articulations of masculinities. Examining empirical data and applying de Certeauian concepts to readers' use of media discourses has revealed that meta-capital can be consciously resisted through forms of tactical reading and meta-capital is not monolithically legitimate. We also see that some readers do not read through the media, instead positioning themselves as readers of books, in a print culture. This demonstrates that there is not one cultural mode of reading for pleasure, and it is necessary to examine the context in which books are consumed: "the text has meaning only through its readers; it changes along with them; it is ordered in accord with codes of perception that it does not control." (de Certeau 1988: 170)

The next chapter continues to draw on the interview data, focusing on the construction of masculinity through the consumption of gender appropriate texts. For these readers genre is used as a resource to provide symbolic differentiation from feminine consumption practices.

Chapter Five – Gender and Genre

To speak of the cultural mediation of fiction is to invoke an important part of the process of interaction between text and reader – the identification of genre. Seeking an understanding of how genres operate culturally, and following Jason Mittell's argument that it is "useful to conceive of genres as *discursive practices*" (2001a: 8, emphasis in original), my discussion now turns to examine how genre intersects with gender for readers and how these articulations may relate to systems of cultural power.

Previous work in cultural studies on gender and genre has typically focused on the gendered 'use' of a particular genre, most notably work by feminist scholars on the culturally feminised and devalued genres of romance, soap opera and women's magazines (see for example Brown 1994, Hermes 1995, Hobson 1982, Radway 1984). While there are studies that take a wider view of genre in relation to reading and popular fiction (see Bloom 1996, Gelder 2004, McCracken 1998) and work that looks at how literary preference may map onto gender (see Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999, Bennett *et al* 2009) there is a significant absence of work that investigates readers' cultural perceptions of the gendering of genres, and how the subsequent consumption of these genres may be involved in the articulation of gendered identities for readers: "we should know more about what individuals' 'textual fields' are like...[y]et this is an area where cultural studies has done very little research." (Couldry 2000: 73) I contend that genre is more widely gendered than has been previously implied, outlining a map of the reader's contemporary textual field by looking at how the male respondents described their preferences in terms of genre and examining how linking genre to gender maps onto articulations of gender as a form of symbolic power.

The articulation of gendered identity through genre consumption

De Certeau characterizes reading as "advances and retreats, tactics and games played with the text" (1988: 175), essentially a conscious, productive act of consumption. Considering consumption as a productive act is important when looking at genre choices and how this

relates to gender identity articulation. "Genres are not neutral categories but are situated within larger systems of power and thus come "fully loaded" with political implications." (Mittell 2001a: 19) For the readers interviewed, reading practices are "influenced by the place that particular genres occupy within hierarchically organized systems of cultural classification" (Bennett *et al* 2009: 22). Even though these readers claimed not to conceptualise their reading in gendered terms, when asked what genres they favoured it became clear that "in relation to different genres gender differences are...significant" (Gray 1992: 251-2). Many of the readers interviewed professed a liking for science fiction:

> Doug: yeah, um, science fiction, I suppose cyberpunk, um, sort of thing, computer hackers and [...] advanced technology, nanites and all that sort of stuff, I think that is great.

Doug's (28, unemployed) discussion of science fiction shows that he is knowledgeable about the genre, naming a subgenre – cyberpunk – as part of his favourite genre. His focus here is on the linking of science fiction to (nano)technology and computing, providing a compatible image of his reading choice with articulations of masculinity: "Tastes for science fiction...might be considered 'masculine' through the affinity between this genre and technical and technological forms of expertise to which men lay claim." (Bennett *et al* 2009: 105) However, this particular genre is not always associated with cultural value, an awareness of which is indicated in the responses of Toby and Matt (36, civil servant):

> Toby: my absolute favourite genre I suppose would have to be uh, fantasy or science fiction (2) but with the disclaimer that for the most part the genres are horrible, uh, for the most part it is full of really ill-conceived ideas, and trite, poor levels of writing, [...] some of them have predicted developments in society and technology which are many decades ahead.

> Matt: I read a lot of- well, when I say its science fiction, it's not really [...] well, I like Ray Bradbury, I like Philip K Dick and I like J G Ballard, a lot of the stuff they have written, is not what- it's not really science fiction, but people think it is, see, because they don't really know about the author they just assume- like if you go to Waterstones all these books in science fiction, they're not even like (2) it's just sort of mainstream books, so I don't really know.

Toby acknowledges that both science and fantasy are 'for the most part' poorly written, but links the value of the texts to the notion that some writers have 'predicted' technological developments with impressive prescience. Matt's response also indicates an awareness of the potential cultural (mis)interpretation of his liking for science fiction and so attempts to distance himself from this by naming authors and claiming that these do not really belong to the genre. Referring to the generic distinctions as laid out in a bookshop he claims that the authors he likes are not like all the other books that fall under the label of science fiction, and in an attempt to avoid what people 'assume' he positions his tastes as 'mainstream' presumably to avoid conflation with the negatively perceived identity of the science fiction aficionado: science fiction "is at once very popular...and ghettoised as a genre for 'anoraks'" (Lacey 2000: 167). In these descriptions we can see how "genres are never entirely neutral categories. They — and their critics and theorists — always participate in and further the work of various institutions." (Altman 1999: 12) To Altman's list we can add that audiences also participate in the cultural work that surrounds genre. If genres carry meaning and can be placed within hierarchies of cultural classification, they have potential use value in their deployment. Kyle's (30, forklift truck driver) discussion of his favourite genres aligns his tastes with historical popular/adventure genres (see Gelder 2004):

> Kyle:　　　　favourite genres? Now there's a hard one. Uh mostly action really, you have to- like Napoleonic, really good, battling it out, when people have this idea of chivalry and when gentlemen were gentlemen and you could have a decent scoundrel, a decent villain. Not like today, I read a story not so long ago and oh it was set in modern times, oh, I was very disappointed in it [...] Sharpe books definitely, I re-read them all the time, my favourite book is *Sharpe's Eagle* not a very big book compared to the rest of the Sharpe books but it has everything you need, you have intrigue, you have murder and rape you have <u>revenge</u>, you have more murdering you've got to have our hero Sharpe doing all of it, you have jewels, you have you know, physical intrigue, yeah, it's all there [...] yeah, there's a lot of killing which is like "oh yes!" [...] it's all done properly, in the historical notes on the back you can go and see these places that he's written.

Adventure (or action, in Kyle's term) played out in a historical setting appeals to Kyle and allows him to draw on discourses compatible with the articulation of masculinity — there is violence (murder, rape and killing), a strong male character that the reader can identify with

("our hero"), and the books are also historically accurate, linking them with a discourse of realism. Ann Gray describes themes that appeared in her study of women's media use when asking respondents about genre, noting a division along gender lines with male genres considered to be hard, tough, real, serious and factual and the action and effects of these genres summarised as heroic, public, societal and physical (1992: 160-1). Kyle's description of his favourite novel maps directly onto this, displaying his reading tastes as appropriately masculine. Realism also forms the basis for Lee's preferred genre:

> Lee: [...] Um, I like crime, um, and I collect biographies and autobiographies [...] I like crime, I used to be a crime reporter, so, if you had to put me down to one genre it would be crime. I love a good crime book, fiction or factual [...] the gorier the better, the more disturbed the better, yeah. I mean, I have read most of the West books, books on the West case.

Lee's commentary here links his appreciation of crime with realism in several ways. He juxtaposes crime with his collection of biographies, and then proceeds to draw on his personal history as a crime reporter before elaborating that he likes crime books that are fictional or factual. Aligning himself with the hard/tough/factual elements of male genres he states his preference for gory and disturbed stories, again connecting this to reality by referring to the 'West case' (the murders committed by Rosemary and Fred West). Scott (25, works for the police) also expresses a liking for crime and adventure, showing how the linking of genre to gender as a system of difference can elucidate the workings of cultural power:

> Scott: uh, as I said, crime and adventure for definite, that's- you know, I don't like- when I say that I don't mean sort of the Andy McNab and that style of things, because they are- well, they are meant to be based in reality, but they are not.

Scott makes a distinction between crime and adventure (which he values) and the Andy McNab style books, which also arguably belong to the genre of adventure fiction. He places his tastes hierarchically above this particular type of popular fiction that falsely claims to be based in reality. In criticising McNab's books for their lack of realism he is concomitantly inferring that the crime and adventure he chooses to read have value because they are

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based in reality. In Ben's response below, the links between genre and gender can be understood in Bourdieuian terms, where the symbolic power of gender is largely unconscious, influencing cultural consumption to ensure compatibility between (gendered) habitus and the field of reading:

> Ben: I sort of like science fiction I guess but that probably only because that is what I read and that is what I'm used to. I haven't read any Jane Austen, and I don't think I'm likely to, it's just not something I read.

"Bourdieu understands practice...not to be fully consciously organized...[operating] below the level of consciousness and language through a 'feel for the game' [...] a pre-reflexive, non-cognitive form of knowledge which often cannot be explicitly articulated." (Adkins 2003: 24) Ben's description of what he reads is notable for its lack of agentive force – he only 'sort of' likes science fiction because this is what he is used to. It is described as being what he reads, rather than what he *chooses* to read, and this carries forward into his description of what he doesn't read. He hasn't read and is not likely to read Jane Austen's novels because it's "just not" what he reads. Dispensing with any form of justification for his inclination towards science fiction (a culturally masculinised genre) and rejection of Jane Austen (a culturally feminised author) his discourse acts as an expression of the symbolic power of gender, in which gender divisions are perceived as 'just the way things are' (see Bourdieu 2001). In this way we can see that "gender is an important structuring force in the organisation of cultural tastes and practices" (Bennett *et al* 2009: 232) and one that links to genre as a system of difference.

Understanding both genre and gender as systems of difference highlights the importance of marking feminine tastes and genres as 'other' for male readers. Responses to the question "what would you never read?" meant respondents could present an image of themselves by stating what they are *not*: "people often gain a sense of their own identities through a process of differentiation. In other words, we define ourselves *negatively*, in terms of being different from somebody else. Those who are not 'us' define who 'we' are." (Edley and Wetherell 1997: 208) Men are "concerned to differentiate themselves symbolically from feminine tastes" (Bennett *et al* 2009: 233):

Amy: ok, um, what would you never read?
Scott: romantic fiction, without a shadow of a doubt. I have no interest in that, at all. Um, no, I couldn't say anything I would find interesting in that, as in- I like books about people who discover themselves, but it has to be quite a heavy subject to keep me interested, because I'm interested in that- that side of life, basically, there always has to be some form of- again, adventure, it has to be an escapism, and I don't find that an escapism, as in I think if you have got quite sentimental issues going on, and it is all about feelings and things like that, I will put the book down quite quickly because I'm just not interested, so, romantic fiction.

Luke: Mills and Boon ((laughs))
            [...]
Amy: why wouldn't you read Mills and Boon? (2)
Luke: I might quite enjoy it, I don't know. It's the name isn't it?

In Scott's case romantic fiction is 'othered' as uninteresting. For him, books have to have a 'heavy subject' to keep him interested, and he thus links romantic fiction with a notion of light subject matter and triviality. A good book needs to have 'adventure' in order to successfully allow Scott an 'escapism', and his disinterestedness in the feminised genre of romance allows him to articulate his consumption practices as appropriately masculine. Similarly, Luke rejects romance, identifying the brand name of Mills and Boon as the reason for not reading it. Masculine subjectivity is often expressed through denial of the feminine, and since subjectivity "is bound up in social and cultural discourses...[s]uch discourses necessarily ...privilege certain kinds of subjectivity...while de-privileging others" (Buchbinder 1998: 25) Thus it is not a revelation that "specifically 'feminine' genres such as...romance novels" (Ang and Hermes 1996: 326) are negated by these male readers. Respondents also referred to 'chick lit' when discussing what they would never read:

Dave: I'm really conscious not to draw attention to things like *Bridget Jones's Diary* but I have just done so ((laughs loudly)) so um, that kind of thing I probably wouldn't read [...] which I know probably makes me sound very hideously masculine, but ((laughs)) [...] I would be conscious of myself that I was reading that kind of thing [...] I think there is more stigma attached to it.

In his response Dave (24, PhD student) is aware that distancing himself from chick lit (epitomised here by its "defining example" (Whelehan 2005: 184), *Bridget Jones's Diary*) will make him sound 'masculine', even to the point of being "very hideously" so. Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts we can see here how a lack of fit between habitus and field can bring the usually latent organising principle of gender towards the level of consciousness, where cultural consumption of an 'inappropriately' gendered genre can result in "a dissonance between the feel for the game and the game itself." (Adkins 2003: 26) If Dave were to read chick lit he would be conscious of himself, meaning that he would be aware of his gender in relation to the stigmatised (feminised) cultural object. In the following response Ed (35, deputy editor of a newspaper) also draws a distinction between gender appropriate and inappropriate genres:

Ed:	I don't like what I term as the girlie trash novels, um, which my girlfriend <u>loves</u> [...] um, they're very relationship based, so and so had so and so's heart broken by so and so but it turns out he didn't- not really into that sort of, it's the light, fluffy romance style genre, never appealed to me in any way at all, I find it particularly dull
Amy:	so you don't borrow your girlfriend's books?
Ed:	nope, nope ((laughs)) and she don't borrow mine actually ((laughs))
Amy:	no?
Ed:	no, no
Amy:	you keep it separate?
Ed:	we don't yeah we don't have much in common with reading matter at <u>all</u>.

Ed labels his girlfriend's reading tastes as 'girlie trash novels', not just feminising them but also culturally devaluing them. Their romance-style genre is referred to as 'light' and 'fluffy' indicating a lack of substance and a triviality to the fiction, and is dismissed as "dull". Ed draws on cultural discourses surrounding the romance genre in a similar way to Scott, by claiming disinterestedness in relationship based novels he resists the interpellation of feminised discourses, in this case attaching the discourses to his girlfriend and simultaneously affirming his heterosexuality. Furthering his differentiation from feminine tastes he emphasises that he and his girlfriend share very little common ground when it comes to reading material.

Although most respondents disagreed with the suggestion that fiction reading might be seen as a gendered practice, they nevertheless articulated their own choices as being linked to masculine tastes. When asked if there were any genres that they considered to be highly gendered romance appeared as the most commonly perceived feminised genre, and the genres that the readers had previously identified as their favourites were nominated as masculine:

Doug: I think uh, technology and fantasy has always been a kind of male thing (3) I (2) yeah, there doesn't seem to be as many women interested in it [...] I know I like fantasy and science fiction but (3) I like the stuff that is quite believable, uh stuff that is sort of way out there, I just don't get into that as much [...] yeah, I guess the modern romance is definitely aimed at ladies (2) and the sort of science fiction again towards the men.

Ben: [...] I can see science fiction as being a boy's genre, um and there is masses of war stuff out there which is read by men on the whole. Um, likewise there is massive amounts of those bloody confessional books going "what a difficult childhood I had!" books, you know the ones, I would say those are aimed at women.

Scott: yeah, I do actually, um, I think you tend to find that, again, the- the adventure books I suppose are the ones which are where you have one guy who is big and tough and that is definitely aimed at men more than anything else, um, I'm not saying women wouldn't <u>read</u> them, but I don't think they'd- they'd <u>choose</u> to buy one of those books [...] I'd definitely say that, and again, romantic fiction, predominantly aimed at women, I don't know many men who would actually turn around and read that book, and <u>honestly</u> say they enjoyed it.

The responses of Doug, Ben and Scott identify their chosen genres as suitably masculine, and also draw on the notion of gender as a structuring force in consumption practices. Science fiction, fantasy and adventure are presented as male genres, and romance and 'confessional' emotional dramas are aimed at women demonstrating that "Whilst men have ready access to technical forms they have little attachment to texts tapping emotional capital, which is associated with other genres but most clearly with romances" (Bennett *et al* 2009: 105). Suggesting that this may in part be due to the lack of 'convertability' of emotional capital into other recognised forms of cultural capital, Bennett *et al* recognise the

persistence of a gendered literary hierarchy which sees readers attempt to distance themselves from feminised tastes.

Conclusion

What I have attempted to outline here is that "One of the most obvious ways gender influences our experience as readers is when it determines what books are made available to us or are designated as appropriate or inappropriate for our reading." (Segel 1986: 165) Mittell argues that "[b]y looking at genre as a contextual discursive process, we can situate genres within larger regimes of power and better understand their cultural operation." (2001a: 18) It seems that for these readers one of the prime functions of genre as a system of cultural classification is as a resource to provide symbolic differentiation from feminine consumption practices, allowing "the contemporary reconstruction of...masculinity through consumption" (Edwards 2000: 137) of gender appropriate texts. From these articulations it can be seen that structures of symbolic power are not ahistorical, rather they are the product of constant reproduction to which agents and institutions contribute (Bourdieu 2001: 34) and a cultural approach to genre can account "for the ways in which cultural agents articulate genre differentiation as constitutive of genre definitions, meanings and values." (Mittell 2001a: 19)

In this chapter the importance of genre in relation to the consumption of fiction can be seen as male readers' tastes conform to a gendered literary hierarchy - the cultural gendering of genre acts as an organising principle for readers. Instead of seeing genre as a static category that is intrinsic to texts, following Mittell I have argued that processes of genre definition are continuously in flux and subject to audience and industry interpretation. Conceiving of genre as discursively constituted means seeing genre as culturally and historically contingent and as dynamic and examining how genres are culturally evaluated situates genres within hierarchies of power relations, not least in their relation to gender: "by conceptualizing genre as a discursive process of categorization and hierarchization" (Mittell 2001b: 15) we can better understand the cultural functions of genre.

In order to investigate this in more detail, my analysis now turns to the empirical data generated by the reading group sessions:

> To understand how...[a] readership is formed and how cultural values are transmitted and negotiated then researchers need to involve themselves in the messy and time-consuming habit of finding ways to encounter the reader and challenge academic assumptions about how spaces of consumption are actually used. (Moody 2007: 58)

The following chapters are divided to correspond with the structuring of the book group meetings around the cultural gendering of genre – chapter six examines responses to masculinised texts, chapter seven analyses the group members' own choices and chapter eight focuses on feminised genres.

Chapter Six - Masculinised Genres

The following chapter examines extracts from the first five book group sessions[8]. The four book genres and titles used for discussion were chosen because they were considered to be culturally masculine, or at least masculinised (see Gray 1992: 81, Easthope 1992, Longhurst 1989). The first choice was horror – Stephen King's *The Shining* (1977). The second book chosen was Chris Ryan's *Greed* (2003) – a militaristic action novel. The third book was a techno-thriller – *Prey* (2002) by Michael Crichton. The fourth and final book in the section was *The Time Machine* (1935), by H.G. Wells, a 'classic' science fiction novel.

As mentioned in chapter three, the volunteers for the book group session were recruited from a public house at which I was a temporary seasonal worker. Having worked at the pub for two years, each of the participants were known to me personally and knew each other well. Mark, John and Tom all worked together at the pub, and Steve was a regular patron. At the time of the book group sessions Mark was 20 and worked as a part time bar attendant, kitchen assistant and waiter. He had completed A-Levels and commenced study as an English Language undergraduate midway through the reading group. John, aged 23 was the pub chef. He had completed GNVQ Advanced levels in Catering and Business and had one A-Level in Communication Studies, leaving education at the age of 18. Tom, 46, was the pub landlord. He left education at the age of 20 having completed two years of Business Studies at a Polytechnic institution. Steve was 45 and worked as a bricklayer. He left education at the age of 16 with a Certificate of Secondary Education[9].

This chapter develops the notion that for male readers one of the main purposes of genre as a system of cultural classification is as a resource to provide symbolic differentiation from feminine consumption practices, and so I examine how the book group participants use culturally appropriate gendered material to position themselves in relation to discourses of

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[8] When starting the book group, the first session was experimental – participants were asked to read half of the book before the meeting and then the rest of the book for the second meeting. At the second session it was decided that this served no real purpose and disrupted readers' experience of the narrative so each of the remaining sessions were based upon 'complete' readings of the texts.
[9] Further information about the participants can be found in Appendix C.

masculinity. The linking of cultural competences to gender does not ensure automatic authority, class also plays a part in the recognition of forms of capital showing that during moments of culture-in-process capital is internally fragmented and contested, its value contingent on situational legitimation.

Using Bourdieu's theoretical framework I consider gender as a form of symbolic power, this power existing as symbolic domination where "some linguistic strategies, variants, or genres are more highly valued and carry more authority than others." (Gal 1995: 174) The symbolic power of gender acts as an organising principle for the discursive strategies used by the book group members, where masculine forms of knowledge and expertise are valued by the group and femininity is routinely 'othered' and mocked. Use of humour to counter femininity demonstrates how comedy and joking act as a strong indicator of social boundaries and are compatible with performances of masculinity. The denial of feminine subjectivity and embodied responses to the texts are analysed in relation to the articulation of hegemonic masculinity. I suggest that the concept of hegemonic masculinity can be useful as an analytic tool when combined with Bourdieuian theory, which allows for greater variance in the articulation of masculinities than a strict application of the concept would permit. The final section of this chapter looks at moments where readers 'poach' from the text. It can be seen that tactical reading may result in emotional resonance with textual elements for these readers and as such is incompatible with the performance of hegemonic masculinity, which is predicated on emotional restraint. This type of reading is synonymous with 'proximate' reading, which is culturally feminised.

Using Bourdieu we see that the symbolic power of gender affects practices of consumption with a tendency to reinforce patriarchal cultural norms where masculinity is valued over femininity. However, using a de Certeauian approach can illuminate how tactical consumption may facilitate variance in articulations of gendered identity and a focus on the 'microphysics of power' reveals potentiality for gender-neutral textual identification.

Genre

"The issues of genre and target audience are explicitly and inextricably linked—genres are often defined (especially industrially) by whom their audiences are surmised to be" (Mittell 2001b: 20). Congruence between genre selections and gender were acknowledged directly by the group. Instantly recognized as compatible with their tastes, the response to being given the militaristic action/adventure novel *Greed* was universal acceptance:

Amy:	...does it look like the sort of thing you will enjoy?
John:	yeah
Amy:	yeah?
John:	honestly! I'll give it 10 out of 10!
Amy:	is it something you would read, do you think?
Steve:	yeah
Mark:	alright!
Tom:	a hit on Al-Qaeda sanctioned by MI5 (1)
John:	sounds like your sort of book Tom!
Tom:	yeah! Sounds like my sort of book, you see, yeah (1) yeah.

Just by looking at the cover John rates the book highly and Tom identifies a link to spy fiction, which is his 'sort of book'. Group masculinity is affirmed through the employment of the term 'us':

Mark:	I think, I think as Tom says, it's a particularly male kind of genre, isn't it, it's more men that would read it, so I think
John:	it was for us
Mark:	a male audience
Amy:	mm hmm
Mark:	it was more interesting than *The Shining*. Yeah, cause it is, mm, more of a male environment, so yeah, I found it more interesting to read

Discussing a military action novel allows for a creation of group identity based on the gender identity of the participants; while the discourse is about genre, the 'metadiscourse' is about gender (see Arendell 1997: 347). The concept of genre was not a regular feature in discussions about these particular genres, perhaps due to the fitting alignment between gender and the genres selected, but what became evident was that contra tendencies in literary genre theory to assume that "genres actually exist, that they have distinct borders,

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and that they can be firmly identified" (Altman 1999: 11) commercial generic classification was not always accepted by the group[10]:

Tom:	you see, I would have called that science fiction
Mark:	yeah
Tom:	but, then, I mean, science fiction is, and techno-thriller
John:	but it's not fiction, is it?
	[...]
Mark:	that is, that is science fiction. Because it's about science-
	[...]
John:	there is, there's a sense of realism in it, you can't call it fiction
	[...]
Tom:	it's only science fiction when it's been, in, when you put it in time perspective (1) um, so, you know, uh I don't know, I think it's, I think you're sort of (3) being a bit (2) pedantic when you say, well it's, what did you call it? Um (2)
Amy:	me?
Tom:	techno thriller, yeah, techno-
Mark:	really?
Tom:	well! I mean it is, techno-thriller is a very good description for it, but, um, it is science fiction at the moment, in 10 years, it won't be!

When talking about *Prey*, the techno-thriller novel both Tom and Mark dispute 'my' labelling of the text ("what did you call it?"), arguing that it should instead be classified as science fiction since the label of techno-thriller is a bit "pedantic". Even though 'my' classification is acknowledged as a "very good description", this is still rejected since the book *is* science fiction for these readers. Tom here positions himself as knowledgeable about science fiction, thereby presenting himself as acquainted with a culturally masculine domain.

Wright notes "the persistence of a gendered literary field...with men in particular tending to explain their reading in terms of practical, useful knowledge, with technical/trade journals or books relating to hobbies being chosen ahead of reading for pleasure." (2006: 130) Reading for pleasure from this perspective is synonymous with the feminised affective, escapist pleasures of reading (see Radway 1984: 52) and men's reading is contrasted with this, in accordance with patriarchal valuing of knowledge and reading for instruction (see

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[10] Genre also became the subject of intense debate during the book groups in which feminised texts were talked about, see chapter eight for further discussion.

Radway 1984: 112). Rational subjectivity and self-presence are culturally and socially legitimate manifestations of masculinity and so it is not surprising that the textual elements that these readers focus on relate to realism. Above John suggests that *Prey* cannot be referred to as fiction since there is "a sense of realism in it" creating a binary opposition between fiction and reality, and it becomes apparent that realism is important to the group members in relation to what they read:

> Tom: ...I thought it was very um, (1) thought provoking. No, it was. It was i-i-it actually is quite stimulating to the mind because you think (1) oh Christ! They can actually do this, you know. Or they're getting close, and you know, all (1) i-i-it sort of opens your eyes, it sort of, a side of technology that I hadn't really <u>thought</u> about, but yeah (1) yeah it does, yeah, it is very thought provoking, yeah, mm. Definitely.

Referring to *Prey*, Tom finds interest in the technology described which makes the book 'thought provking'. Far from being 'escapist', the novel is described in terms of a potential impact on 'real life'. For Tom, the point of the novel is to wake the reader up and alert them to the dangers of nanotechnology:

> Tom: ... I think the main thing is, what he is trying to do here is wake us up to the fact that when you, I mean ok you can create computers and miniature (1) phones or whatever, but, there's nothing wrong with that, but when you start messing around with genetics [...] they've taken that one step where they are using genetic material [...] and god knows what else, to, to create an artificial machine and yeah! I mean that in itself is <u>really,</u> that is a scary concept

In Thompson and Holt's study of masculinity and consumption, men's preference for techno-thriller novels are explained "in terms of the genre's...'realism' or plausibility in terms of its technical details...blurring the line between fiction and documentary reporting" (2004: 325), thereby masculinising their reading practices. Similarly, during the discussion about *The Time Machine* a preference for factual information was identified, resonating with other studies of cultural consumption and gendering of taste which suggest that men tend to prefer fact-based material: "Reading tastes for men include technical manuals, trade journals and other instrumental forms of reading" (Bennett *et al* 2009: 105 see also Morley 1986, Gray 1992, Bennett *et al* 1999, Hermes 1995, Wood 2009).

Tom:	what I think actually, Simon Finlay Wells, his beginning was actually a little bit more interesting, than the whole- than the story afterwards
Mark:	yeah
Tom:	for the simple reason that it's actually putting (1) some (3) how people were, I mean, from a <u>historical</u> point of view, this is a really interesting book because it-
John:	you're talking about more fact than fiction

John surmises that Tom's interest in the introduction to the book (which locates the text in its socio-historical context) is "about more fact than fiction", with Tom focusing on the historical value of the factual information rather than the novel itself. When a book is criticised, this is based on a lack of realism in the text:

Steve:	where- where is the families, looking for the people who have been killed? [...]
John:	there wasn't any inquest into that
Steve:	it don't actually mention about (1) well, looking into it (2) well no one pushing it that way
Amy:	no
Mark:	so- so there wasn't an overwhelming sense of realism you're trying to say

Here Steve points out that *Greed* fails to convince him on the basis that in the novel many people are killed but there is no mention of any kind of police investigation into the deaths. Tom, however, defends the book, stating that the story is "very believable" because this is how the secret service operate and stating that Steve is naïve to think otherwise:

Tom:	yeah, very (3) very believable (4) I mean that is how MI5 operate [...] yeah, um, if you read like Peter Wright's book, who was an ex MI5 man, he went to Australia because he couldn't get the book published here, there was a court injunction (1) I've <u>read</u> <u>that</u> <u>book</u> [...] they do, they do operate like that, I mean you can't be so naïve as to think the secret service don't (3) MI5 and MI6 do operate like that

Greed enables Tom to demonstrate gendered knowledge in the area of espionage. Tom bases his assertions on having read a book, *Spycatcher* (1987) which allows him to present himself as an authority on the subject of secret government services: "The valuing of

information, that is, of factual information, is clearly related to men's preference for... topics which coincide with areas of expertise" (Coates 1997: 124-125).

Moments of 'playing the expert' are common as performances of masculinity within group settings (see Coates 1997) particularly in relation to "technical and technological forms of expertise to which men lay claim" (Bennett *et al* 2009: 105). In the following example Tom's admission that he doesn't understand much about computer programming allows space for Mark to demonstrate superior knowledge based on technical experience, claiming competency in the culturally gendered area of computer science:

Tom: I read that code...but it didn't <u>really</u> mean a lot to me, no.
Mark: that's the sort of thing I used to do in visual basic, it was simple, not quite as detailed as the programs behind it,
Tom: yeah I know, but this is it, this is all about computer programming, which I don't <u>really</u> understand
Mark: I mean, I could possibly run you through a computer program

Similarly during a long digression based on topics raised by *The Time Machine*, three of the group members (Mark, John and Tom) had an argument about whether time travel is theoretically possible, facilitating Tom's association with a masculine form of expertise, physics:

Tom: the speed of light would actually be faster than 300,000 miles per (2) second, because (1) you would change that because the amount of energy in the universe, light can only travel as fast as the amount of energy there is, photons, and light is just a photon, right? Can only travel as fast as the energy that there is behind it, so to travel faster than a photon, is to use more energy than there is in the universe! So, how the hell can that happen? You're creating something out of nothing, you can't have more than there is there! (3)

The above are examples of how the participants draw on the gendered nature of the selected texts to present themselves as authoritative in masculine domains within the group. Their articulations of masculinity are linked to claimed types of expertise in gender-specific competencies. Having outlined how participants use culturally appropriate gendered material to effectively position themselves in relation to discourses of masculinity,

I now consider how the use of Bourdieu's theories may offer clarification of a moment when a claim for gender based competence is rejected by the group.

Occupational habitus and the establishment of legitimate capital

When considering performances of masculinity it must not be forgotten that "masculinity interacts with class background" (Laberge and Albert 1999: 250) and also with occupation. Pierre Bourdieu reminds us "that cultural consumption both intensifies and helps to reproduce class inequalities." (Fowler 1991: 115) Much like masculinity, which is considered not to exist prior to its articulation, for Bourdieu "social classes do not exist...what exists is a social space, a space of differences, in which classes exist in some sense in a state of virtuality, not as something given but as *something to be done*." (Bourdieu 2000: 12) During a discussion about the building depicted on the front cover of *The Shining*, Steve mobilises his practical 'bodily' capital, based on his occupational habitus (see Fowler 1999), in order to bid for masculine authority within the group:

Steve:	look! (2) Look at the place. You could put that in Scotland (4)
John:	you see, I'd say New England (2)
	[...]
Steve:	you wouldn't put that in America!
John:	yeah you would!
Steve:	no, because it wouldn't be timber!

Steve proceeds to explain that the picture on the front cover is inaccurate because it shows a wooden roof, rather than a shingled roof like the one described in the text. His attempt to place himself as well informed is partially successful, as the others admit that they do not know what a shingled roof looks like, and accept his argument based on the fact he has technical expertise due to his occupational habitus as a bricklayer. The above example provides an illustration of a moment where masculine identity is partially constructed through class: "working-class bodies are not without symbolic value (the appearance of strength and physical competence is a bonus within particular jobs and prized within the aesthetics of masculinity)" (Shilling 2004: 477).

What is interesting here is that as the conversation continues this gendered form of occupational capital becomes 'delegitimated' by the group: "If one's…capital is delegitimated then it cannot be traded as an asset; it cannot be capitalised upon…and its power is limited." (Skeggs 1997: 10) Later on in the conversation, when Steve endeavours to reinforce this practical expertise and repeats himself, his bid is rejected by John and Tom:

Steve:	yeah but it's English, not American!
	((sighs))
Tom:	we are not here to discuss the <u>architecture</u> Steve!
	((laughter))
Tom:	<u>please</u>!
Steve:	no, it is. Look!
John:	no, no, no, no Steve!

Tom dismisses Steve's input by reminding him of the purpose of the reading group, which is not about discussing architecture and John reinforces this by repeatedly saying "no" in response to Steve's contribution. This shows how "[m]asculinity is always bound up with negotiations about power, and is therefore often experienced as tenuous" (Roper and Tosh 1991: 18). While a bid for masculine authority (and consequently symbolic power) within the group may be successful once, attempting a direct repetition of a performative speech act renders it potentially ineffective and open to rejection.

It can be seen that the legitimacy of capital is not static, rather it is fluid, contestable and can be established only to be subsequently rejected within a micro-social context. Steve's final attempt to draw the group back this topic sees Mark joining Tom and John to ridicule Steve:

Steve:	can we just go back to the front now
John:	why do you keep harping on about these front pictures? Because it's the only picture in the book Steve? ((laughs)) (2) Is that not-
Steve:	English, Scottish that hotel, it's <u>not</u> an American hotel
John:	it could be New England, ok?
Tom:	Steve, when did you last go to America? (2)
Mark:	have you ever been to America?
Tom:	have you ever-
Steve:	I haven't been to America.
Tom:	well, no. Right, well, ok.

Mark:	you can't comment.
Tom:	you can't say! That is ridiculous!
John:	that could quite easily be in America! (2)
Tom:	John has been to America
John:	hundreds of times

John infantilises Steve by suggesting that his frequent references to the cover are because it is the only picture in the book, inferring that pictures are the only thing that Steve can 'read'. Even though Steve can claim an appropriately gendered competence, his capital is subordinated on the basis that its foundations are lacking a form of 'real' knowledge when Tom and Mark collude to question whether Steve has actually seen any buildings in America. When he responds that he has not, John's claim that the hotel pictured could be in New England is given credence and Steve's counter argument is dismissed as "ridiculous". Here we see that "[a]ll identities are not equally available to all of us, and all identities are not equally culturally valued. Identities are fundamentally enmeshed in relations of power." (Roseneil and Seymour 1999: 2) The power of fact based evidence and firsthand 'real' knowledge has been firmly established by the group as a tenet of hegemonic masculinity and a symbolically legitimated form of gendered capital. This series of excerpts show how cultural capital does not go uncontested – struggles over the legitimacy of cultural capital may occur *within* groups, particularly in relation to gendered material.

Hegemonic masculinity: constructions of the 'other'

Hegemonic masculinity is a form of masculinity or configuration of gender practice which is in contrast to other less dominant or subordinated forms of masculinity (Hearn 2004: 55). "[A]lthough Connell talks of a range of subordinate masculinities, hegemonic masculinity is always used in the singular." (Jefferson 2002: 71) Jefferson proceeds to ask if there is only ever one hegemonic strategy in a given historical moment, or whether hegemonic masculinity is more context-specific and fluid. In my analysis of the data presented below I suggest that Connell's concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' (1995) can be usefully extended by considering gender as a form of symbolic power, a latent organising principle that exists across social space and organises the relational value of capitals in different fields. Hegemonic masculini*ties* can therefore exist simultaneously since what comprises

hegemonic masculinity may vary according to situation and the concept of "habitus allows masculinity to be both transposable and adaptable...[i]mportantly, habitus also allows for individuality and difference in how men perform masculininty...their position depends on their relationship to others in the field...and the resources they have available at their disposal in the way of capital" (Coles 2009: 42).

The following examples cover a range of ways in which hegemonic masculinities can be constructed; by contesting female knowledge, negotiating implications of homosexuality, feminising the author and the novel, othering femininity and performing sexist jokes. The individual can be seen to reproduce the social structures of patriarchal domination, to use de Certeauian terminology, we see "strategic use of masculinity" (Skeggs 1997: 137n11).

Ellen Seiter reminds us that "[w]e cannot lose sight of the differences that exist between us and our subjects...differences that may be played out in conversation between interviewer and subject...are antagonistic differences, based on hierarchically arranged cultural differences." (1990: 69) One such hierarchical cultural difference arose during a discussion about computer programming in the techno-thriller *Prey*:

Mark:	depends on what you're programming. Doesn't it?
Amy:	it's bioinformatics programming, they actually do-
Tom:	((loudly)) I'm <u>sorry</u>! Say that again?
Amy:	bioinformatics-
Steve:	and you haven't even read the book
John:	((joking tone)) did you not know that?
	((laughter))

My use of the term 'bioinformatics' here indicates a higher level of cultural capital in relation to this topic in comparison to the rest of the group. Tom attempts to resist intellectual subordination to me by asking me to repeat myself, indicating his disbelief that I (as a female) am able to demonstrate competence in a masculinised area of expertise, and have knowledge about technology that he (as a man) does not, directly challenging my knowledge on the basis of cultural gender 'norms'. Steve contributes to the challenge by suggesting that I have not read the book. Not reading the book would mean not knowing what I was talking about, thereby 'delegitimating' my cultural capital. John's joking "did you

not know that?" is an ironic acknowledgement that he too has less knowledge about the topic, and the group laughter is recognition of my challenge to hegemonic, patriarchal gender norms.

Attempts to delegitimate capital are not limited to displays of cultural capital, they can also be seen in relation to articulations of social capital. Prior to the exchange shown here, Mark and John mention that they have been discussing Stephen King films in advance of the meeting, indicating that they are taking the meetings seriously and are extending their discussions outside of the spatiotemporal context of the book group. This seriousness and shared reference point between the two group members will not be tolerated by Steve, who disrupts their conversation by making a reference to Mark and John having been in bed together, attempting to subordinate them by discursively framing them as homosexual:

John:	the *Night Flier* is a Stephen King film, they've taken it from a book
Mark:	but it might be a different name though.
Steve:	but what has that got to do with this?
John:	I think it's *Night Shift*. No, sorry, it's just something that came up earlier. ((laughs))
Steve:	have you two been in bed together?
John:	I do apologise! Eh?
Steve:	have you two been in bed together?
John:	((laughs)) what?

"[F]rom the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity" (Connell 1995: 78) and so positioning homosexuality as 'other' is also a fundamental means of articulating hegemonic masculinity. The positioning of other group members as (implicitly) homosexual is a discursive strategy used by Steve in an attempt to assert his own masculinity. "Existing only *relationally*, each of the two genders is the product of the labour of diacritical construction", (Bourdieu 2001: 23) of social and cultural differentiation, and as such "[w]hatever traits or actions are considered to be feminine are simultaneously and automatically considered to be nonmasculine" (Wilkinson 2004: 123). Drawing on this opposition we see that "to "do" gender is not always to live up to normative conceptions of masculinity and femininity; it is to engage in behaviour *at the risk of gender assessment.*" (West and Zimmerman 1987: 136)

Being in the bath (particularly for long time periods) is something that is considered culturally feminised and so John's admission that he was reading while in the bath for an hour causes him to laugh. This is a laugh of recognition, showing that he is aware that this kind of activity is not culturally compatible with performances of masculinity:

John:	yeah, I was reading it in the bath earlier
Tom:	it gets wet though, I don't like that
John:	I was in there for an hour ((laughs))
Amy:	is that what you do? Do you read in the bath? (2)
Steve:	yeah.
Tom:	hmm
John:	uh! What a horrible image! ((laughs))
Tom:	I don't want to imagine that
John:	[yeah
Mark:	[yeah
John:	the woman in the bath, there are some links! ((laughter))
Mark:	((groans))
Tom:	yeah, I'd rather be in room 217, I think, than in the bathroom with Steve…no, I don't want to imagine you lying in a bath!

In an interesting discursive manoeuvre, John shifts attention (and ridicule) to Steve, after Steve also admits to reading in the bath. Obscuring his own admission, John reaffirms a masculine identity by suggesting that the mental image of another man in the bath is "horrible", thereby avoiding assimilation with culturally feminised homosexuality. By linking Steve to the dead woman in the bath from the diegesis (in *The Shining*), John feminises Steve in rather literal terms by calling him a woman. Tom echoes John's discursive resistance to the feminising 'taint' of the homosexual, explicitly stating that he would not want to be in the bathroom with Steve, or imagine him lying in a bath. Here we see how "the masculine gender appears as non-marked…in opposition to the feminine, which is explicitly characterized" (Bourdieu 2001: 9n6).

"Understanding gender in relational terms is…important because…dominant or 'hegemonic' masculinities function by asserting superiority over the 'other', whether that be gay men, younger men, women or subordinated ethnic groups" (Roper and Tosh 1991: 13). In the following cases, the 'other' within the group is feminised. Explicitly characterising the 'other'

as feminine is a commonly used discursive strategy in the group, and in the next case, constructing the author as a feminised 'other' affirms masculine identity within the group with shared laughter:

Mark:	under other books
Amy:	hmm?
Mark:	Chris Ryan's SAS fitness book (2)
John:	((laughs))
Amy:	oh, so he actually was an SAS guy
Mark:	has he got his own video also? Of SAS aerobics? ((laughter))

"[A] clash between the real and the unreal is the basic semantic opposition in humour" (Soilevuo Grønnerød 2004: 35) and here the idea of SAS fitness as 'hard' and 'masculine' is juxtaposed with that of an aerobics video, something recognised as culturally feminine, making the group laugh. The feminised 'other' can also be an object - in the following extract John objectifies the book, and feminises it by suggesting that you can "have a chapter":

Tom:	[...] I noticed actually, just digressing, but the chapters are incredibly short. Aren't they? [...] Which means you <u>can</u> [...]
John:	you've got time to pop home, change your trousers, 'ave a chapter, and go back out to the pub, innit? ((Laughs))

When referring to a book, one would normally talk about "reading" a chapter, but here the verb used to describe the process is 'to have', which is semantically synonymous with 'having sex', particularly in the context of the sentence, where one can pop home, "have" a chapter and go back out to the pub. In this description, reading is agentive and thus masculinised, enabling an articulation in line with the performance of hegemonic masculinity. "One significant way in which hegemonic masculinity is created and maintained is through the denial of femininity." (Coates 2003: 49) Masculinity operates not just by feminising the 'other', but also by 'othering' the feminine as the next example shows:

John:	it was really bad up until page 200 I thought, I mean the guy is walking around the supermarket talking about huggies (1) and pampers. I

	mean that didn't really have me (1) gripped, and then as soon as he got to the desert, then yeah. That was great, really good. It was good. [...]
Amy:	[...] did you think they represented him as a really good househusband and a really good father
Tom:	u:m (3)
Amy:	or not really?
Steve:	well that's the boring part of it (1) that's- we told you!
Tom:	yeah!

Hegemonic masculine gender identity is predicated on the refusal of things that are culturally gendered as feminine, and since cultural practices relating to child rearing, such as discussing nappies, and shopping in the supermarket are feminised, they are therefore dismissed by the group as "boring". After all, "in the pub setting, talk about babies and parenthood could serve to undermine men's masculinity, and conflict with more dominant, public and traditional interests" (McKee and O'Brien 1983: 153) and the collective "we" used here again to represent the male interests of the group. Denial of femininity also involves refuting feminised responses to texts:

Mark:	I liked the bit where- where it did get to the point, where there were scary things happening
John:	they weren't that scary!
Mark:	I know, they weren't, but he just, he does it very well

Admission of 'scary things happening' in the book, even though this was the part of the book that Mark liked, is enough to place Mark within the realms of subordinated masculinity, since masculinist readings of horror should "safely demarcate horror as something to be mastered rather than be affected by." (Hills 2005b: 201) Announcing that scary things happen in the novel places Mark dangerously close to a feminised cultural model of response to horror. John's assertion is in line with a version of hegemonic masculinity whereby he refutes the idea of any moments within the book being *that* scary – since real men don't get scared. Mark reasserts his masculine gender identity by going along with John, retracting his admission that the moments were scary, instead he claims they were done well, which is why he liked them. Claiming aesthetic judgement recuperates his initial comment as rational and cerebral, rather than being experiential, affective or 'effeminate' (see Warhol 2003).

"[W]omen have long been the target of male-male joking" (Greenwood and Isbell 2002: 342), and the predominantly male environment of this reading group is no exception. Much of this joking can be classified as sexist, performing "[h]egemonic masculinities...[which] derive their meaning in part from the (often oppressive) positioning of women." (Gough and Edwards 1998: 422). The following exchange occurred during the discussion about the novel *Prey* in which the nanobots are transferred between people by kissing:

Steve:	that's what you get for kissing a woman!
Mark:	no, Steve
	((laughs))
Tom:	poor [Mark's girlfriend]. (2)
Mark:	hey!
	((laughter))
John:	what are you trying to say Steve?
Amy:	steady on!
Steve:	or [Tom's wife]?
Amy:	right!
John:	he's after your wife!
	((laughter))
Tom:	I'll give you the keys. ((laughs)) keys.

Steve sets up a sequence of jokes by drawing from the text, allowing group members to identify themselves as heterosexual by referring to their respective partners. When the idea is raised that Steve might be 'after' Tom's wife, rather than responding in a defensive manner, Tom offers his wife for the 'taking', performing male chauvinism for the group. What he means by 'the keys' here is unclear, but perhaps refers to the exchanging of house or car keys at a 'wife swap' party, treating his wife as an object up for exchange at his say-so. "Conversations that affirm traditional masculine identity...talk about women as objects" (Curry 1991: 128) and so by treating his wife as an object that he has ownership of, he is affirming his own masculinity.

In the next data extract another sexist joke is made by Tom. Mark makes an interpretative reading of *The Time Machine* suggesting that themes in the novel are an allegorical representation of class divisions in the nineteenth century:

Mark:	because at the end of the 19th Century there was <u>great</u> class divide, the, um, a lot of the workers were going on strike, the middle class was almost abolished, there was a divide between the higher classes and the lower classes (2) basically, uh, trade unions were abolished, by the end of the 19th Century because they were causing too much trouble
Tom:	and then there was the one big mistake, we gave women the vote as well, yeah
	((laughter))
Amy:	thanks very much!
Tom:	no, that was one of the biggest mistakes we ever made
Amy:	are you serious?
John:	it looks like it!
Tom:	he's right
John:	((laughs))
Tom:	I'm only joking.

Referring to real historical events enables Tom to joke about giving women the right to vote. "Here, the act of transgression itself is treasured, where the rules and norms of adult middle-class society are inverted for shock value" (Kehily and Nayak 1997: 75). This joke is successful in uniting the male members of the group – they all laugh together. Tom's repetition of his assertion that it was a big mistake to give women the vote changes the tone of the discussion; no one can tell whether this is a joke any longer. Eventually Tom admitting that he is 'only joking' dispels the tension.

Humour is regularly used by the group members to draw social boundaries, and in the extract below, knowledge about guns is 'humorously' presented as masculine:

Tom:	and then Gill was leaping around with an automatic weapon as well
Mark:	quite worrying!
	((laughter))
Tom:	yeah, it does worry me. Women with (1)
Mark:	guns
	((laughter))
Tom:	yeah
John:	she'd probably fire it at the back of your head

Discussing scenes from *Greed*, the group members seize on the image of a woman with an automatic weapon and use this to establish guns as a masculine domain of knowledge which is further capitalised on in later sessions (see chapter seven for further discussion). Even

though the diegesis presents 'Gill' as a heroic figure, the men in the reading group express concern at the thought of a woman in control of a gun, implying ineptitude to the extent that a woman would most likely shoot the person she was trying to save. Although the exchange here is light-hearted and accompanied by laughter, it nonetheless reveals how "humour is frequently invoked to expose, police and create gender-sexual hierarchies" (Kehily and Nayak 1997: 70).

In the next example, a quote on the back of *The Shining* is taken out of context. Its discursive framing is supposed to refer to the horror aspect of the book, and the implication is that the book is so scary that it should not be read when one is alone. John collaborates with Tom's set up line, to frame the joke for the rest of the group. John explains that *Daily Mirror* readers should not read this alone because they cannot read it without help:

Tom:	you see, this sums up the *Daily Mirror* for me. You had better not read it alone! (2) *Daily Mirror* (2)
	((laughter))
John:	yeah because you need some help
Tom:	you need some help
John:	well the *Daily Mirror* readers do!
	((laughter))

"The ability to recognise or attribute irony is very intimately bound up with shared beliefs, shared culture and shared assumptions…uses of irony…might be thought, therefore, to be largely pleasurable and to affirm notions of group belief and solidarity." (Benwell 2004: 13) Group solidarity is affirmed by laughter from all group participants. This joke both infantilises and 'others' the *Daily Mirror* reader, based on the foundation of previous discussion about the group participants understanding the book. "[O]ne will derive a sense of amusement and mirth from humor stimuli that enhance one's group; that is, when a joke makes one's own group appear superior to another, humor is produced". (Thomas and Esses 2004: 89-90) This constructs a 'stupid' other (the *Daily Mirror* reader) versus a competent masculine self, taken to characterise in-group identity.

In the following discussion about the physical nature of reading the group initially take the topic seriously, explaining how reading when in prone position often results in the reader

falling asleep (particularly in the case of Tom and John, who read late at night after finishing work).

Tom:	I find that the easiest thing for reading, is actually to have it on a table, where I've gotta be sitting upright. I can't be sitting on a sofa…So at night, if I put my feet up on the coffee table and start reading (1) I'll be asleep, in a few minutes
John:	yeah
Tom:	I have to, I have to sit (1) at the kitchen table, erm, and just read. […]
John:	if I can't sleep, I'll read that, I'll read that in bed, and I'm off!
Tom:	oh, lying down, I can't do it lying down!
Mark:	no?
John:	reading. ((Laughter))

Showing seriousness (and by inference commitment) towards the task can be tolerated momentarily within the group situation, but 'laddishness' signalled by jokes, often sexually related, ensure that humour (and distance) towards the subject are reinstated. In this case, the joke is about Tom not being able to 'do it' (to have sex) lying down. Laddish behaviour is encapsulated in the image of

> a young, exclusively male, group, and the hedonistic practices popularly associated with such groups (for example, 'having a laugh', alcohol consumption, disruptive behaviour, objectifying women, and an interest in pastimes and subjects constructed as masculine). (Francis in Jackson 2002: 38)

The masculine strategy of 'having a laugh' to present oneself as distanced from the topic of discussion can be seen in a moment in which the group return to talk about horror motifs in *The Shining*:

Tom:	that was a bit scary
John:	yeah
Tom:	with the woman in the bath, yeah!
Mark:	you should have seen that bit in the film
John:	yeah, no, it is pretty scary in the decent version, not in the Jack Nicholson
Mark:	[no
John:	[dodgy
Tom:	well I mean the description
John:	it's just
Tom:	I've slept with women like that!

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((Laughter))
Tom: that really worried me! ((Laughs))

Although both John and Mark are in accordance with Tom's suggestion that this is a 'scary'

moment, Tom proceeds to invert the seriousness of the exchange. Keeping his tone serious,

he refers to the description of an aged corpse that appears in a bathtub in the hotel that the

protagonists are staying in. This seriousness allows him to set up his joke, attributing the

'scariness' to the fact that he has slept with women like the one described. Because being

scared by horror is culturally feminised (see Hills 2005b) here "the construct of 'laddishness'

acts as a self-worth protection strategy – protecting self-worth both from implications of

lack of ability and from the implications of being seen to be feminine." (Jackson 2002: 37)

Tom's comments would appear not to contribute to the positive construction of a masculine

identity (admitting to having slept with women that look like middle aged, bloated corpses).

However, by introducing the idea that he has slept with women (in the plural), he is

somewhat bolstering his masculine identity construction with a discourse of

heterosexuality; "sexual activity has never been far from dominant conceptions of

"manhood"" (Garlick 2003: 163), and the joking tone keeps Tom safely distant from the

feminisation of an effeminate response (see Warhol 2003) to horror. In a similar manner,

the warding off of an emotional response to a text can be seen in the following discussion

where "nondisclosure of emotions, or their very limited disclosure, is a key part of signifying

a (hegemonic) masculine self" (Schwalbe and Wolkomir 2001: 95):

Amy: how did you feel about how science and technology were
                represented?
Tom: oh shit scared!
                ((loud laughter))
Tom: ((sarcastic)) I am shit scared, man.
Mark: mm, ooh yeah!
Tom: ((sarcastic)) I'm crapping myself

While asking the question, I was very aware that asking the male participants about how

they *felt* about issues within the books might have resulted in sarcasm, directed towards

me. In this case Tom initially takes the question seriously, and responds with "shit scared".

Incongruity between the image of masculinity and a man scared by science and technology

is identified by the group, as evidenced by the loud laughter. Tom corrects his own slip up

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by repetition of what he has already said, but this time in a sarcastic manner, thereby distancing himself from his previous earnest response.

Laughter as an indicator of awareness of gender inappropriate behaviour can be seen when Tom inadvertently expresses proximity to and involvement with the story in *Prey*:

> Tom: well ((sighs audibly)) I've gotta say when they were down in the cave, I was like really rooting for them when they were throwing the explosives in, and you know, thinking, mm, come on guys, get out! It was, yeah ((laughs)) come on guys, get out! But yeah, no...

Here, Tom's laugh and repetition of what he has just said displays his embarrassment at his immersion in the narrative, and his recognition that feeling for the characters in a novel is culturally coded as feminine: "Laughter marks utterances as self-ironic...and gives the impression of the speakers' ability to see themselves at a distance." (Soilevuo Grønnerød 2004: 36). In his laughter, Tom demonstrates his recognition of the difference between 'critical reading' and 'proximate reading':

> Bourdieu (1980)...calls critical reading a 'bourgeois aesthetic', which assumes a gap between text and reader and favours form over content; while he calls proximate reading a 'popular aesthetic' which assumes the absorption of the reader in the text and content over form. (Reed 2002: 198-199)

Critical reading is culturally masculinised, indicating distance from and mastery over a text, whereas proximate reading is culturally feminised. The symbolic power of gender means that in relation to masculinised choices personal disclosure and/or involvement with the novel and characters are distanced through the use of comedy/laughter (a foreshadowing of the importance of genre to the readers' own choices, see chapter seven for further discussion). Distinction from others "is not usually a conscious strategy" (Kuipers 2006: 242), and so the strategic construction of hegemonic masculinities which work to maintain the normative position of masculinity as superior to femininity (Bourdieu 2001), reproducing the structure of the patriarchal gender order, work at a largely unconscious level where "gender identity is in important respects enacted at a pre-reflexive level" (Adkins 2003: 28).

In contrast to this the productive 'art' of making do in the form of tactical reading is about creative and guileful use of a text (see Hills 2005a: 66). Having demonstrated how the symbolic power of gender acts as a powerful force ensuring compliance with gender appropriate behaviours and alignment with hegemonic masculinities, I now focus on moments where there are potential challenges to or disruptions of hegemonic masculinities. These "challenges can be seen as the microphysics of power, where new possibilities for behaviour are being, if only tentatively, constructed and tested out" (Skeggs 1991: 136). Looking at narratives constructed by these readers which use the text as a point of departure for their own meaning-making I use de Certeau's notion of the reader as 'poacher' (1988: 165-176) in my analysis.

Textual poaching and narratives of affective investment

> [N]arrative has a crucial role to play in our construction of our identities, in our construction of the 'self'. Just as we use narrative modes of thinking to make sense of what we call our 'life' so we present ourselves to others by means of narratives, shaping and selecting events to create particular versions of the self.
> (Coates 2003: 6-7)

Narratives, in Coates' terms, are conversational moments where an individual tells a story about their past, usually involving personal disclosure (2003: 5). Narratives have not been found to be particularly common within these five book group sessions, however, the moments where personal narratives do enter the group discussion in my study are notable for their contradiction of previous 'findings' in the analysis of men's talk, suggesting that "with each other, men avoid self-disclosure" (Coates 1997: 119) and "men consistently preferred 'not talking' and/or 'light conversation'" (Leto DeFrancisco 1991: 419 see also Reid and Fine 1992).

Consumption, de Certeau argues, has been "commonly assumed to be passive and guided by established rules" (1988: xi). Contra this, textual poaching or tactical reading (cf Cranny-Francis *et al* 2003) is an active appropriation of elements of a text, a creative act of temporary textual 'occupation'. The moments of textual poaching presented here are ones in which

The reader takes neither the position of the author nor the author's position. He invents in texts something different from what they "intended"…He combines their fragments and creates something un-known in the space organized by their capacity for allowing an indefinite plurality of meanings. (de Certeau 1988: 169)

In this creative space it can be seen that "[t]hose who can read texts do not all read them in the same fashion." (Chartier 1992: 51) In the following example, Tom explains why he liked a particular part of *The Shining*:

Tom: I liked the lift bit […] I thought that was great because, that was, I dunno why, but that reminded me of when I was, um, just finished college and I- my first job was in a hotel […] and um, when I had to do night porter duties, it was a 6 floor hotel, a big, big thing, and I had to go up and down at night, in the lift (1) I hated that…I don't like them, cause I'm claustrophobic, and that just reminded me, of that, going up and down in the lift. But in a hotel at 4 o clock in the morning, it's like, dead, you know…and it's just like 4, 5, and you walk down and think, who is going to be round this corridor? You know, cause you do get some weird people staying in hotels ((u:uh!))…But it just, I don't know, it just brought that image back into my mind […] of when I was doing my night portering duties, in my (1) early twenties (3)

Reading the text reminded Tom of a moment in his past. He discloses this personal anecdote with reference to his claustrophobia, and also to his trepidation at patrolling the hotel corridors late at night. The sound he makes here is something like the noise that would accompany a shudder. This is an excerpt that reveals a "dialogue between the present and the past, between what is personal and what is public, between memory and culture." (Summerfield 1998: 2) Notable for the lack of humour that accompanies his narrative, this personal admission of a kind of fear (something considered to be culturally un-masculine) is, however, partly 'contained' as 'other' in the description, by virtue of its connection to his significantly younger self, in the past.

Beverley Skeggs' appropriation of de Certeau's work is useful here, drawing on de Certeau's distinction between strategies and tactics and mapping these concepts onto masculinity and femininity, where "Strategies…have institutional positioning and are able to conceal the connections with power: hence the strategic use of masculinity [whereas] tactical options

have more to do with constraints than possibilities." (1991: 137n3) Without the "legitimacy of masculine-regulative power" (Skeggs 1991: 127) this reading can be described as tactical, where "a tactic is determined by the *absence of power*" (de Certeau 1988: 38). This tactical reading is recuperated into a performance in line with masculinity by distancing the reader from his feminised affective response and phobia by historicising it: "by conferring this status on the child-self of the past, a discursive distanciation is…effected." (Hills 2005b: 77)

Tactical reading which uses the text as a point of departure for the reader's own meaning-making was evident during the discussion about *The Time Machine*, where Tom slides from talk about the text into the retelling of a personal and 'emotional' childhood experience:

Tom:	I can remember watching, I can remember watching Armstrong walk on the moon with my grandmother when I was about 8 years old, in black and white TV, and he walked down the steps, <u>you</u> can't remember it.
	[...]
Steve:	one big step for man
Tom:	<u>I</u> can remember watching it, incredibly emotional, I mean everybody was like, I mean, we only had black and white, no colour TVs in those days (2) and he walked down the steps, and he said this is one small step for man
John:	amazing, even though I wasn't there to see that
Tom:	I was like 8 years old, and my grandmother was like, you know, I can remember sitting with her in the chair (1) and I remember that (2) I can remember watching that, and I can remember watching Winston Churchill's funeral, and the gun carriage going down, um Pall Mall, I mean, and, um, they were the two emotional things that I can really remember, oh and- mm, yeah, yeah I know, but we are just talking about history and-
John:	do you want us to stop, because we are babbling on?
Tom:	we are babbling, yeah.
John:	do you want us to stop?

This is a personal and emotive narrative, and since "emotional qualities have generally been seen as…associated with being female" (Smith 1996: 30), this affective digression does not conform to hegemonic masculine discursive strategies. Tom repeats the term "emotional", emphasising how these events have affected him, but similar to the extract in which Tom discusses his night portering duties, the emotion is linked to his past, in this case childhood. Rather than agentive rendering of experiencing this emotion, this emotional experience is

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merely a facet of the events described (Galasinski 2004: 53), where experiential value of the events themselves hold primacy. These events are things that *he* can remember, because of his age, the 'you' he refers to comprises of myself, Mark and John, as the younger people in attendance. Although claiming authenticity by virtue of his link to real historical events, his articulation of gendered identity is somewhat undermined by the juxtaposition of this with emotional response, and so Tom is admonished for his affective digression, by John asking me if he wants them to stop 'babbling', a term used to describe foolish speech and/or chatter – something more commonly associated with childish talk.

In the exchange below, a conversation about characters in *The Shining* sees Tom 'appropriating' the text, adapting it and 'assimilating' in the de Certeauian sense, where consumption is about making something similar to oneself (1988: 196):

Tom:	I think we've summed it up. I assume, I don't know, some of those characters are just too- too sinister. Maybe I've just seen too much of (4) myself? In it.
Amy:	[too much of yourself?
Steve:	[are you in there?
Amy:	what in there?
	((laughter))
Amy:	I mean, you said about the lift, but
Tom:	no, no, I mean the characters I'm talking about, not the
Amy:	oh ok
Tom:	mm, yeah.
Steve:	sorry?
Tom:	no, i- it's just, yeah (2) disturbing
Amy:	yeah?
Tom:	it's like watching documentaries on the (1) TV, that- you know, about people who are (1) schizophrenic, or […] and you think, no, actually it's <u>disturbing</u>, <u>disturbing</u> and I think, yeah, there's part of you that says I want to go on and watch this, and there's bits of you that (4) frighten you, because there's too much […] you can see too much of yourself in there

Talk about emotion is also done here through distancing strategies. Tom begins by stating that he has seen too much of himself in the characters, and this is what makes the reading of the book "disturbing". He then shifts from the use of the first person "I" to the impersonal "you", and so the emoter who experiences 'fright' becomes ambiguous, rather

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than saying "there's bits of *me* that frighten *me*", with the use of "you", the matter becomes more of a general concern and avoids personalisation. Nevertheless, each of the extracts presented here cite emotions as relevant to the reading experience, countering the previously established hegemony of competition, achievement and emotional restraint in the group.

Does this suggest that these responses, which are in part culturally feminised, are evidence of resistance to hegemonic masculinities? Laberge and Albert propose not, stating that "emotionally expressive manifestations are not a sign of counterhegemonic gender politics" (1999: 235), and instead they should be regarded as a shift in personal styles of masculinity of privileged men. In light of my empirical data I do not find this argument to be fully persuasive - rather than signalling resistance to hegemonic gender practices or a shift in personal styles of masculinity of privileged men, what I suggest that we begin to see here are moments where male readers become less cognisant of gender significance.

These forms of tactical reading can be viewed as a form of reader agency, but only in the sense that individuals are not merely passive bearers of social roles rather than individuals actively challenging their conditions of existence. As noted in chapter two, certain applications of de Certeauian theory can be problematic since these impute resistance rather than actually demonstrate it, and "[t]he fact that individuals do not straightforwardly reproduce the social system is not a guarantee of the inherently resistant nature of their actions." (McNay 1999: 105)

It is more appropriate to think of these moments as ones in which the participants became (temporarily) less aware of themselves as gendered beings: "even though...the social subject is 'constituted in gender', in everyday life gender is not always relevant to what one experiences, how one feels, chooses to act or not to act." (Ang and Hermes 1996: 338) In much work on gender identity construction, "It is taken as given that sex is the stable bedrock for the social construction of gender and that there is a necessary correspondence between biological sex and social gender." (Petersen 2003: 60) The examples given above suggest that this is not necessarily the case, and that "the essentialist notions of a 'men's

style'…need to be reformulated for the possibility that men may use so-called women's language on particular occasions" (McIlvenny 2002: 5). What must be noted here is that these readings are presented as subjective, and as such lack an illocutionary force. The moments outlined above are not described in agentive terms which we would expect to see if the readers were engaging resistively[11]. As I have argued above, Tom presents personal histories which can be safely contained in the past, effecting a discursive distanciation from the emotion he expresses. Seeking to avoid analysis which is "elided with the emancipatory... [where] [r]esistance becomes an inevitable consequence of instability rather than a potentiality" (McNay 1999: 105), I suggest that these tactics have a lack of resistant force because their impact is limited; for acts of subversion to have force they must have an impact on social structures (cf McNay 2008: 192-4).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have considered how "gender is both represented and constructed in language use." (Taylor and Sunderland 2003: 170) Previous work on gender identity has had a "tendency to focus on differences between women and men and to overlook extensive similarities between the sexes and even the extensive variation within each sex" (Petersen 2003: 58) Using the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' together with Bourdieu's theoretical framework enables me to look at variations within performances of masculinity: "Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and fields work with hegemonic masculinity to produce a theoretical model that ably describes how men negotiate masculinities over the life course within a range of broad social fields" (Coles 2009: 33) Hegemonic masculinity as a concept is useful for understanding articulations of gendered identity up to a certain point, but the concept cannot account for moments of gender fluidity within micro-social contexts, as my empirical work demonstrates. Performance of gendered identity is not always reducible to domination and resistance which Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity draws upon. Instead, conceiving of gender as a form of symbolic power, one that cuts across fields and is deeply embedded in the habitus of an individual enables us to see how gender may act as a

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[11]These subjectified responses are in stark contrast with the group's forceful 'objectified' readings of feminised texts, as will be illustrated in chapter eight.

variable factor across social fields. The variance of gender articulation evidenced in discourse demonstrates that the symbolic power of gender shapes the habitus and inclines the individual to act in certain ways, but the generative nature of the habitus allows for the production and reproduction of multiple masculinities.

Humour protects performances of masculinity by warding off seriousness and proximity to a text and I have outlined how laughter and joking can be used to "serve as a control on in-group behaviour" (Norrick 1993: 82), and how these also may "signal solidarity…if we can…freely poke fun at each other, we must enjoy good rapport." (Norrick 1993: 75) Masculinity is often a 'negative' construct, defined through what it is *not* and so I have examined how masculinity is constructed in relation to its 'opposites': "men in conversation avoid ways of talking that might be associated with femininity and also actively construct women and gay men as the despised other."(Coates 2003: 69) As previously established in chapter four, we have seen that "[t]he denial of the feminine is central to masculine gender identity" (Coates 2003: 69) with consumption conforming to cultural gender 'norms'.

In this chapter, use of Bourdieu's theoretical framework enables analysis moments of culture-in-process where individuals compete/struggle over capital accumulation and also allows us to conceptualise gender as a form of symbolic power which interacts with forms of capital affecting their value and exchange rate. Using Bourdieuian theory highlights how practices of consumption tend to reinforce patriarchal structure. However "[a]gainst analyses of domination which focus on institutional forms of control and socially structured inequalities…de Certeau focus[es] on the exercise of power at its most specific points, on the microstrategies of everyday life" (McNay 1994: 156) and applying de Certeauian concepts shows how tactical reading can have emotional relevance for readers. Rather than viewing emotionality as a sign of counterhegemonic gender practice, I suggest that at moments where participants are less cognizant of themselves as gendered subjects there is greater fluidity in performances of gender, and that men may temporarily appropriate feminised discursive positions – a notion that is further developed in chapter seven.

If "tactical reading is an articulation of the subject's perception of their own positioning" (Cranny-Francis *et al*, 2003: 135) then we cannot forget that a subject's position is dependent on context: "identity construction is constrained by taking account of the circumstances...at hand" (Galasinski 2004: 149). Also, while subjectivity is continually negotiated in the local context, cultural 'templates' for successful performance of gendered identities are also operational. The articulations presented here have been contextually bound to discussions about culturally masculinised genres, and the next chapter proceeds to focus on the readers' own choices looking at how the symbolic work of consumption may affect articulations of gendered identity.

Chapter Seven – Readers' Choices

The following chapter takes the choices made by the book group members as its focus. My argument engages with the "symbolic work" (Willis 2000) undertaken in the act of consumption, firstly examining how the genre choices of the group members may representatively affirm a dominant masculine identity with laughter, joking and comedy remaining important for the articulation of a masculine identity. A closer look at moments where readers position themselves in relation to reading as an activity and the book as an object identify how a reader's class background and levels of cultural capital can be important within an 'interpretive community' (Fish 1980) such as a reading group. My argument then turns to the symbolic work of reading itself, looking at how de Certeau's theory of textual poaching or tactical reading may need to be rethought and adapted in light of empirical data. The chapter concludes with a discussion of symbolic identity articulation in the form of Bourdieuian capital exchanges and bids for authority.

In the last chapter we saw how the reading of masculinised genres resulted in strong articulations of gendered identity, and distancing oneself from the text and valuing links to realism were established as suitably masculine means of consumption, along with an oppositional construction of femininity as a defined 'other'. In this chapter I undertake to discover how gender may be mapped more fully on to Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus of 'capital', looking at moments when different forms of capital 'collide' or intersect in interaction and how this may result in moments where the readers resist these previously established gendered codes of consumption to incorporate forms of femininity into their discursive identity construction. Through use of the Bourdieuian concept of habitus it can be seen how "the idea of practice is...generative of a notion of agency in that it necessarily has a future-oriented or anticipatory dimension. In so far as the living-through of embodied tendencies involves encounters with unanticipated or unknown social factors, it is also the source of potential creativity and innovation in daily life." (McNay 2008: 35) In this way practices constitute an objective (though often unrealized) potentiality for social change. While the use of feminised culturally powerful discourses in practice may form the potential

for social change, viewing practice in this positive way is not unproblematic and arguably may only allow for a kind of transient "gender tourism" (Thompson and Holt 2004: 334), providing space for a re-articulation of the self as (temporarily) non-gendered.

Symbolic work and the use of symbolic goods produce and reproduce individual cultural identities (Willis 1990: 11). Pettigrew argues that "through their consumption of goods and services, consumers can consciously or unconsciously convey their social standing to others" (2002: 106). Cultural choice is not simply a matter of personal preference: "cultural choice positions us: it tells us and others who we are, and it defines for us and for others who we are not." (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999: 8) For Bourdieu "the manner of using symbolic goods...constitutes one of the key markers of 'class' and also the ideal weapon in strategies of distinction" (Bourdieu 1986: 66). While it may be true that consumption is often about marking 'individuality' and thus distinction, "consumer goods provide...[a] dual role in relation to identity formation." (Galilee 2002: 44) That is, they are used to highlight both 'individuality', and peer group alignment (*ibid*). Bourdieu's "approach tends to lead to a stress on [the] uncovering of 'variation' in consumption practices rather than the parallel need to explore how commonality and solidarities are forged between people." (Longhurst and Savage 1996: 275) It is the 'commonalities' of consumption practices that form the basis for the first part of this chapter, as I look at how genre consumption may contribute to the performance of gendered identity. I will then examine how the symbolic object of the novel may be used as a 'strategy of distinction', in particular discussing the distinctions made within the genre of comedy.

Symbolic work: gender and genre

According to Paul Willis "symbolic work includes the selection of objects and items from countless possibilities, and their placement in personal *mise en scene*, in precise micro-circumstances, material and symbolic, of use and consumption." (2000: 72) This highlights the importance of context when considering the 'symbolic work' of selecting cultural objects for consumption – the micro-circumstances in this case can only be seen within the wider context of the book group sessions. When considering the structuring of the book group, I

was very much aware that while there is "a wealth of valuable material on feminine genres and on the contexts of women's media consumption, there is very little work in reception studies which has given sustained critical attention to masculine reading pleasures and competences." (Moores 1993: 49) Seeking to address this issue, the second grouping of four sessions was given over to the participants' own choices of reading material, in direct contrast to the preceding and subsequent sessions in which I chose culturally gendered texts for the group to read. Steve chose *Monstrous Regiment* (2003) by Terry Pratchett, John selected *Popcorn* (1996) by Ben Elton, Roald Dahl's *Tales of the Unexpected* (1979) was chosen by Mark, and Tom opted for *The Wilt Alternative* (1979) by Tom Sharpe.

While the individual choices seem to be rather different when taken at face value, I was surprised to discover that when considering the books as grouped together, comedy or humour featured very strongly in each of the selections. Prior studies that consider reading choices in terms of gender and genre reveal a male preference for comedy – it appears to appeal to both sexes, but generally with a higher male interest. Bennett, Emmison and Frow report that humour/comedy as a genre is enjoyed by both men and women, but with men having a slightly higher preference or tendency to read this genre (1999: 151) and Hall and Coles note that "[m]ore boys than girls read comic and joke books, annuals and humorous fiction." (1997: 65) Willis notes that "[c]ultural commodities have a striking suitability, or elective affinity, as raw materials for socio-symbolic practices" (Willis 2000: 65). Cultural commodities and resources therefore play an important part in the construction of the (gendered) self: "If we understand the symbolic in terms of the cultural resources and materials with which selves are constructed, we can explore its influence on subjectivity, action, interaction and social structure." (Brickell 2005: 40)

The gender compatibility of comedy as a choice means that a selection from within this genre does not disrupt articulations of masculinity and within these group sessions, explicit performances of masculinity were in line with those produced in other meetings –joking featured heavily, as did laughter, instances of which will be analysed later in this section. Comedy and humour seem to be important as discourses which allow for the performance of hegemonic masculinity. This notion fits with much of the recent work on masculinity,

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where there has been a connection made between the performance of gender identity and humour. According to Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, "boys perform gender by being funny" (2002: 102), and Nayak and Kehily find that "adolescent boys use humour to exhibit a particular form of masculine identity and establish a peer group social hierarchy" (2001: 110). Giselinde Kuipers suggests that "[t]he telling of jokes is not only something better *suited* to the communication style of men: it is also a display of masculinity – a *form of distinction, a gendered performance, and a display of "masculine" symbolic capital." (2006: 236)

In men's talk, the use of humour and comedy is commonplace, but the symbolic work of cultural consumption reveals a greater importance to comedy. Although the group members have chosen different types of comedy, each of their choices contains a strong element of this genre. It appears that comedy acts as a central cultural resource to affirm dominant masculine identity. There appears to be a symbolic mirroring of masculine joking in the generic selections that have been made, where their genre selection stands in (partly) for their masculine gender identity. "Humour is usually thought of as a desirable, even admirable trait, and is conventionally taken as a source of power and prestige" (Palmer 1994: 72) as such, it provides a generic choice compatible with the image of hegemonic masculinity.

Comedy was identified by most of the group members as a reason for making their choices:

> Tom: I (2) am (2) undecided about first choice, I think we ought to read some comedy, erm
> John: no, cause I'm choosing, and I think mine is
> Steve: Terry Pratchett is comedy

Tom indicates that he feels the group 'ought' to read some comedy, and immediately John and Steve categorize their choices as comedy indicating that the genre selection of comedy is an important one. For these men the selection of comedy is also significant in terms of group alignment, as Tom states he wants to choose something the other group members will enjoy:

Tom:	...I was thinking either something by Tom Sharpe (2) uh, and I was thinking about *The Wilt Alternative*, which I thought was quite amusing, I really did find it an amusing film, yeah! I've read it and I've
John:	yours is comedy anyway!
Tom:	and um (2) well it's not comedy really, but he
John:	in *Hitch Hiker's*
Tom:	it's humour, but it's not really laughing out loud humour is it...I don't know, I dunno what, I'm trying to think of something obviously these guys are going to like reading

It can be seen here how "humour plays a significant part in consolidating male peer group cultures" (Kehily and Nayak 1997: 69) as humour is described as something Tom thinks the other group members will all 'like reading'. This extract also demonstrates how genre isn't always readily agreed upon by the group, and that distinctions are made within genres, as well as between them: "differences in appreciation of humor are for a large part socially and culturally determined. What people think is funny varies from culture to culture and from group to group: even within one culture there are differences in taste." (Kuipers 2006: 9). John points out that Tom's choice is comedy, but Tom claims "it's not comedy really", the division here being drawn between humour/amusement and "laughing out loud humour". When he explains his reasons for having chosen *The Wilt Alternative*, he does so in terms of humour:

Tom:	*The Wilt Alternative* is funny, it's hilarious.
Tom:	so, and I just thought, well its light-hearted, it's a good, you know, good read, quite <u>funny</u>, I thought, um, and I just thought everyone would enjoy it!

Humour is linked to enjoyment by Tom, and he draws on the notion of distinctions within humour, using several different terms; 'amusing', 'laughing out loud humour', 'hilarious', 'light-hearted' and 'funny'. Humour or comedy which provokes a physical response in terms of laughing out loud is the most highly valued by the group. This is made evident in the 'echoing' of Tom's phrase, which reappears in other discussions:

John:	I thought it was going to be <u>funnier</u>. I thought it was going to be funnier than what it was. What Tom made it out to be...
Mark:	I thought it was

John:	but it was alright. It was good. One of the better ones we have had.
Steve:	I thought it was good
Tom:	mm
Mark:	it did make me laugh out loud. I was <u>crying</u> at one point.

The way in which "genres form a "horizon of expectations" providing a framework for media reception" (Mittell 2004: 120) becomes important here. Tom's discursive framing of his own choice of book outlined previously clearly identifies that his generic selection is comedy, and this leads John to expect something that will make him laugh, but is ultimately unsuccessful. Mark, however, finds Tom's choice corresponds to the most valued distinction within comedy; it not only makes him laugh out loud, he finds himself laughing so hard that this makes him cry. The reasons for specifically valuing this kind of humour are put forward by Mark:

Mark:	...I think his humour in it is brilliant. I mean, in a book like that he is- he is quite descriptive, but the words that he uses, puts his humour into words, that <u>is</u> <u>fantastic</u>.
Tom:	mm
Mark:	I mean, it just sort of reels off, but it just gets funnier and funnier and funnier as you read it. And it is very creative writing, that. Because humour is like horror in a book, it is very hard to achieve, but he has got it down to a 't'.

Because humour is thought of as being 'hard to achieve', it is highly valued by the group, and because of its ability to provoke a physical response, Tom's choice becomes one of the group's favourites:

Steve:	it is the funniest one, in the way of just out right
Tom:	laughing, yeah, funny. Yeah
Steve:	that <u>is</u> funny.
	[...]
Tom:	but for the comedy value that has got to be
Mark:	the best
Tom:	yeah. (2)
John:	we haven't done any real comedy anyway, have we?
Mark:	well, Terry Pratchett, there was comedy in that
Tom:	and I mean
Steve:	*Popcorn*
Tom:	yeah! *Popcorn* was meant to be funny, but

John:	it was <u>slightly</u> amusing, but
Tom:	yeah
Amy:	but not "ha ha"
Tom:	it's not rolling in the aisles sort of laughter, no.

In the extracts above, it is genre which provides the primary logic for the critical appraisal of popular fiction (Gelder 2004: 40). When asked to rank the books in order, the evaluation of the fiction was made in terms of genre, in this case, comedy. As noted above, divisions within the genre are identified, and according to Jason Mittell the distinctions audiences use in terms of genre play an important role in forming or maintaining cultural hierarchies and categories of social identity (2004: *xvi*). If we consider choice of book as the symbolic use of an object to articulate identity, it can be seen how genre may contribute to the maintenance of hierarchies within the group. The excerpt above shows how Tom's choice is valued as successful – it is the best in terms of comedy value and so hierarchically he is placed above John in the group, whose choice 'failed' generically. It was 'meant to be funny', but only turned out to be '*slightly* amusing'. This hierarchy established on the basis of genre distinction continued to permeate further meetings and discussions, showing how "linking genre distinctions to other systems of difference can point to the workings of cultural power" (Mittell 2004: 26):

Tom:	Terry Pratchett, yeah! It was good!
Mark:	I enjoyed Terry Pratchett
John:	am I the only one here who didn't like it?
Mark:	probably...but then again, you chose *Popcorn*.
John:	yeah, I know, no-one liked *Popcorn*.

John is subordinated once more, for his 'failed' generic choice, and his choice is suggested as the reason that he didn't like the Terry Pratchett book in contrast to the rest of the group members. We are reminded once more that "consumption has a dialectical form. People do consumption, and are 'done to', constructed, consumed by that consumption. Consumption is structure, process and agency." (Hearn and Roseneil 1999: 1) John is constructed as 'other' within the group, through his choice of book which should have been comic, but failed to make the other laugh. Humour acts as an indicator of interactional attunement (see Kuipers 2006) and so when it is unsuccessful it clearly marks group boundaries signalling social discord and 'difference'.

It is clear that the participants "possess generic knowledge and make use of this in their selections and choices of…reading" (Gray 1992: 17) and that they also have expectations about what a genre should be like: genres can be

> viewed as literary institutions whose primary function is to organise the framework of expectations within which, in specific social and cultural contexts, reading is located. They form part of what Jurij Lotman calls the 'extra-text': that is, the culturally specific knowledges, associations and assumptions which inform and animate particular reading practices. (Bennett 1990: 102)

However, it is not always the case that genre classifications are agreed upon within the group:

Amy:	what genre would you classify this as?
John:	fantasy (2)
	[…]
Steve:	you couldn't put it in political, could you?
John:	well, you <u>could</u>, hmm (2)
Amy:	where would you put it Tom?
John:	fiction ((laughs)) I'd put it in fiction.
Tom:	I don't know, I really couldn't-
Mark:	correct.
Steve:	fiction? Of course it goes in fiction!
	[…]
Tom:	I don't know, it's not, i-its fantasy fiction, yeah
Amy:	mm
Tom:	I-I don't know, I dunno, I don't know much about (1) that sort of thing

Mittell notes that genres are not purely sites of cultural consensus – they can also function as sites of struggle over contesting assumptions (2004: *xvi*), and this can be clearly seen in the extract above. When asked to describe the genre of *Popcorn*, comedy simply does not feature in the discussions:

Amy:	…What genre would you say that is?
Mark:	it would be in the bargain bin, that's the genre it should be
Amy:	what about you Steve, bargain bin?
Mark:	fire pile (2)
John:	I wouldn't even call it- no. Crime- crime, I dunno! Crime thriller, it's not even that, is it?

In these two extracts, both John and Tom express uncertainty over how to classify the books ("I don't know"), but it is Tom who ultimately distances himself from genre by claiming not to know "about that sort of thing". As noted previously, popular fiction is consumed in terms of genre, and this is often seen to be the antithesis of literature consumption which "transcends" genre (see Gelder 2004). By denying knowledge of popular fictional genres, Tom is attempting to distance himself from the image of the formulaic genre consumer. In the extract above, it should also be noted that genre is used again in terms of distinctions to exercise cultural power, and to disparage John for his choice, with Mark describing it as 'bargain bin' and 'fire pile' material. As Bourdieu says of the highly gendered 'rules' of the public house:

> One goes there to laugh and to make others laugh, and everyone must do his best to contribute to the exchange of comments and jokes, or, at the very least, make his contribution to the fun by underlining the success of others in adding his laughter, and his shouts of approval...The possession of a talent for being 'the life and soul of the party', capable of incarnating, at the cost of constant labour and accumulation, the ideal of the 'funny guy' which crowns an approved form of sociability, is a very precious form of capital (Bourdieu 1992: 99).

Proving oneself to be a 'funny guy' is extremely important within the group and having discussed how genre selections may be used to make distinctions between the group members, I now return to the idea of comedy as important in group cohesion and in terms of the performance of gendered identity, looking at how "men demonstrate their masculinity with humor" (Kuipers 2006: 236). The nature of humour is complex, since "it resides not only in the logic and content of what is said, but in the performance of the teller, in the relationship between the teller and the audience, and the immediate context of the instance." (Walker and Goodson in Kehily and Nayak 1997: 74). In an illustration of laddish masculine performance presented here John threatens to "fucking kill" Steve, which, out of context of their amiable yet antagonistic friendship, would not appear to be funny:

John: oh my good God Steve, I am going to fucking kill you.
Steve: ((laughs))
Tom: I'm going to take you to the cleaners (2)
            [...]

| John: | I am going to give you such a kicking |

Hostile joking, as in the extract above, serves the purpose of aggressiveness, satire, or defence (see Greenwood and Isbell 2002: 343). With aggressiveness defined as an integral part of hegemonic masculinity, the hostile (and violent) joke above defines both John and Tom as hegemonically masculine alongside the use of "swearing and taboo language [which] have historically been used by men in the company of other men as a sign of their toughness and of their manhood" (Coates 2003: 46).

In the following extract the joke is 'on' John due to insufficient initial clarification in his statement about sleeping with someone:

John:	I shared a dorm with a guy who was a complete gun-aholic. And all he read was gun magazines.
Amy:	was that not a bit worrying?
John:	yeah! Considering he slept under me. ((Laughter))
John:	the bottom bunk. I was on the top.

Stating that a guy slept under him places John in a subordinate position – one that is linked to the notion of homosexuality, one of the sharply defined opposites of hegemonic masculinity. This statement causes the group to laugh at him, but John also laughs along with everyone – those who join in the laughing *at* have the opportunity to display like-mindedness towards the referent (Glenn 2003: 98). John's laughter at this point displays a moment of group solidarity where the thought of homosexuality is laughable. He also ensures that he distances himself from the accusation of being homosexual by explaining that they slept in different beds.

During a discussion about the cover of *Tales of the Unexpected*, I asked the group if they liked the book cover, which comprises of a photo of the author – Roald Dahl. The specific wording of my question resulted in the following sequence of jokes:

| Amy: | do you think it's an attractive cover? (2) |
| John: | no, no. It reminds me of old men. ((Laughs)) |

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Amy: I don't mean is it <u>attractive</u> to you
            ((Laughter))
Tom: you can almost smell the piss
            ((Loud laughter))
Mark: uh! Hospital smell. (2) Sorry.
John: mm. incontinence.
            ((Laughter))

John is keen to distance himself from any accusations of being attracted to old men, and thus homosexuality. The first set of group laughter originates from this misinterpretation of my question, but the subsequent jokes revolve around the feminisation of the older man through his lack of ability to control his bodily functions. 'Othering' the 'old man' through the jokes, and laughing at an external referent "can strengthen boundaries, solidifying members in their group identity against outsiders." (Glenn 2003: 30) The banter between the group members here not only solidifies group identity, but also presents a masculinised style of interaction: "Banter or repartee is not an exclusively masculine style...but it is used so much and so often as a form of male exchange...that it must be considered an example of masculine style." (Easthope 1992: 87)

Sex is the favourite subject for men's jokes (Kuipers 2006: 129) and these 'dirty' jokes may also "serve as understanding tests; recipients can display their savvy by laughing at the punch line" (Glenn 2003: 98):

Amy: what did you think of the *Parson's Pleasure* one? (2)
Mark: which one was that?
Amy: the one where he freaks out with the women, and imagines going down their throats (2)
            [...]
Tom: going <u>down</u> the women's throats, what's that all about? Hmm
            ((Laughter))
Mark: there's a film on it, what's it called? *Deep Throat.*
            ((Laughter))
Amy: yeah, but this is a <u>man</u> going down a woman's throat
John: really? ((Laughs))
Tom: it happens. You know
Mark: push too hard, oh! Sorry!
Amy: oh I see what you mean now
            ((Loud laughter))
Mark: come on Amy! You ought to be there! Dirty minded!

Initially the joke is about oral sex and fellatio, allowing the men in the group to laugh at the comments of Tom and Mark, demonstrating their understanding and performing a moment of masculine solidarity. "[T]he purpose of an obscene joke is to sexually expose a target individual for the pleasure and satisfaction of a third party...an interchange of this sort involves three people: the male teller, the male recipient, and the female target." (Greenwood and Isbell 2002: 342) Thinking too literally about the story (in which a Parson has hallucinations about being swallowed whole by women and ending up in their stomachs) I miss the initial joke, and as a result, the joke is turned on me. I am subordinated as naïve, with Tom explaining that it does happen, and when I finally understand the sexual nature of the joke, I am admonished by Mark for not being "dirty minded".

When gender is made explicitly relevant in interaction, it is often done in such a way to mark me as both 'female' and 'other'. This is congruent with articulations of masculinity since "dominant or 'hegemonic' masculinities function by asserting superiority over the 'other', whether that be gay men, younger men, women or subordinated ethnic groups." (Roper and Tosh 1991: 13)

Amy:	did you read the stories chronologically?
Mark:	no
John:	nope
Tom:	no
John:	I don't think any of us did, did we?
Amy:	I did!
John:	apart from you. The female. ((Laughs))
Mark:	routine
John:	((laughs)) yeah right!
Amy:	thanks!

When asking if any group members read the selection of short stories that comprises *Tales of the Unexpected* in chronological order, most answer 'no', and so John takes the opportunity to bind the group together: "I don't think any of *us* did". When I point out that I did read them in order, I am reminded that I do not form part of the 'us' grouping: "apart from you". Not only am I 'othered' through the use of the term 'you' I am also identified as female, positioning me outside the group, acting as a negative referent for what the "us"

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earlier described is not. For my admission that I read the stories in order, I am criticised as following a routine.

In this section I have attempted to demonstrate how comedy and humour play "an important role in the creation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships." (Glenn 2003: 1) Comedy may be used to create hierarchies within the group, and is important as a discursive strategy within the group. Comedy as a genre selection is also important as a symbolic articulation of masculine gender identity. It can be seen from the extracts presented above how it is possible for the group members to reconstruct "masculinity *through* the practices of consumption." (Edwards 2000: 136). Each of the group members selected a form of comedy fiction, emphasising how it can be used as a symbolic resource to affirm masculine identity. Positioning oneself as a reader and describing how one treats a book also act as an important symbolic means of distinction where variations in taste and style are the embodiment of social distinctions, the symbolic recreation of actual differences.

Cultural capital and positioning oneself as a reader

As mentioned in the previous section, one of the most common features within the book group meetings was laughter. "Laughter plays an important role in the creation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships" (Glenn 2003: 1) because it is through laughter that we "display, read and negotiate identity" (*ibid*: 2). In the extract below, John jokes about his lack of identification as a reader:

> John: yeah, I know what you are talking about. It is quite surprising what I
>   have read! ((Laughs)) it brings it back! I only thought I read one book.
>   ((Laughter))
> Tom: read one book ((laughs))

When discussing the different stories in *Tales of the Unexpected* John mentions that he has read some of them before. He uses this opportunity to invite the group to laugh with him, claiming that he thought he'd only read one book. To the rest of the group members this idea appears to be absurd and makes everyone laugh. Tom even repeats the 'punch line' "read one book". Everyone laughing together at the same thing "can constitute a show of

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participant alignment in orientation towards the laughable referent." (Glenn 2003: 61) And so this joke serves to reinforce group identity. In the next extract, John also presents himself as a non-reader when he is challenged for criticising the construction of the fantasy text *Monstrous Regiment*:

John: why feel the need to put all the rubbish in with it? When they could just do the story, the whole storyline as it is, without putting all this crap around it
Mark: ((sarcastic)) well, cause that builds the characters
Amy: what crap do you mean?
John: maybe this is the problem I have with books (2) you see, maybe this is why I don't read

In this extract John does not have legitimate terminology to describe the formal properties of the book that are lacking for him. This mode of discussion could be argued to "replicate Bourdieu's description of intellectual appropriations of popular culture, which rely on the establishment of a gap between the pleasures of the text (immediately available to all) and the theorisation about its formal properties" (Thomas 2002: 20). John's attempt at a 'critical' reading of the construction of the text fails here, and he is mocked by Mark: "In poking fun at...insiders, mocking and sarcasm serve as a control on in-group behaviour." (Norrick 1993: 82) So here, Mark's sarcastic comment about what surrounds the storyline serving to "build the characters" causes John to personalise his response, claiming that this is the problem *he* has with books, and is why *he* doesn't read. By refusing the identity of the reader, John also refuses assimilation to passivity (and thus femininity) that is associated with reading, and also the subordinated position he occupies here through Mark's mocking. However, if it can be argued that to "be a reader is to be a certain kind of person. There is the obvious connotation of being literate, and also of having cultural capital, a claim to knowledge and a certain standing" (Hermes and Stello 2000: 223) then claiming *not* to be a reader must also carry cultural meaning. By distancing himself from the potential claim to cultural capital that being a reader connotes within a reading group situation, John is simultaneously delegitimating any potential bids for authority based on the identity of the knowledgeable reader.

If it is possible to "link reading practices to notions of cultural capital and social status and find that social differences in book reading are due to cultural competencies and social status characteristics of readers" (Tepper 2000: 256) it may follow that differences in the treatment and perception of books may also be due to cultural competencies and social status; "dispositions to certain types of practice reflect and reinstate both class distinctions and gender difference. These are at once mental structures and physical gestures" (Fowler 2003: 472). Mental structures manifested as physical gestures are the subject of the following extract, in which John discusses how he keeps track of where he has got to in a book:

John:	well I started to dog ear it, which you have to do right? And then I ended up just putting it down like that (2) which I <u>hate</u> doing, right? But that's-
Amy:	so face down
John:	yeah, I don't like doing that [...]
Amy:	was it something to do with your parents? Because I was told never to put a book like that [because it breaks the spine
John:	[yeah I know
Amy:	no? I know you break the spines on books anyway
John:	I do that anyway, I do that straight away normally, but not with hardbacks, only with pa-
Amy:	you can't do it with hardback, you can't break the spine on a hardback, well- not without trying really hard
John:	((laughs)) yeah you can, especially French books

In his physical treatment of the book, John makes a statement about his own cultural and educational background. He 'dog ears' the pages of books and also breaks the spine of the book, leaving a physical trace of his reading. I refer to my own (middle class) upbringing, suggesting that maybe he doesn't like to put books face down as he might have been told not to do so as a child. He rejects this, saying that he breaks the spine on paperbacks straight away. Breaking the spine of a book would seem to suggest some kind of physical mastery over the textual object. John's rejection of education (here "French books") is also manifested in physical terms – he claims to have made his physical mark on this too. This becomes significant in terms of class and habitus when we consider physicality as a significant part of working class identity. For Connolly, working class habitus is "composed of a set of habits and dispositions that are much more physically—and materially-oriented"

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(2004: 184) and likewise, working class masculinity "is very much expressed externally through physicality and strength" (*ibid*: 192). John's treatment of the book is exactly "what is unthinkable to "literature": the book as object" (Debray 1996: 141).

For John, the book is an everyday object, something to be used, not preserved. But this is not the case for all readers within the group. "Sometimes the text is in no way considered and treated as an impenetrable body, whereas at other times its uniform body and intangibility are observed and preserved with respect and even veneration." (Simone 1996: 240) In the next two extracts, discussions show that for Mark and Tom the book is something that should be kept 'pristine':

Amy:	you took your cover off as well?
Steve:	yeah
Amy:	why- why did you take the cover off?
Tom:	because I didn't want it to get torn, and it would have got torn
John:	rubbish!
Amy:	ok
John:	well no, sorry, ok, that might be your (1) opinion, but the reason I did it, is because you can't bend the book back, like you normally do, yeah?

Tom states that he took off the paper cover of his hardback book, because he didn't want it to get torn, indicating that he wanted to keep it in good condition. This is rejected by John, whose reason for removing the cover is in line with his working class masculinity – he removes the cover to attain physical mastery of the book as object.

Amy:	...why have you taken your cover off?
Mark:	...I actually take these off <u>because</u> they get- they get tatty. You know, you're reading it, you put it down, they get torn and creased
Amy:	yeah
Mark:	and you want the book to look nice when it's on the shelf

Similar to Tom's response, Mark removes the paper cover to prevent it from getting damaged. "[T]he book is here a good deal more than common utensil or everyday object" (Debray 1996: 140), it is something to be preserved and presented – to "look nice" on the shelf, and to bolster a middle class identity based on an investment in educational capital.

Investments in different forms of capital are evident in these discussions, often involving struggles for recognition "and what is at stake in them is an accumulation of a particular form of capital" (Bourdieu cited in Webb *et al* 2002: 71).

Viewing fiction as a symbolic resource leads us to a consideration of how the same object may be viewed differently: "In use all things are different, the same things made diverse and multi-faceted through the human work of appropriation." (Willis 2000: 74) Since "de Certeau's notion of "poaching" is a theory of appropriation" (Jenkins 1992: 33) in the next section, I consider how the consumption of the fiction text may differ for a reader using the notion of textual appropriation, or "textual poaching".

Tactical reading and textual poaching

> Michel de Certeau has written eloquently of "everyday creativity," the ways in which the very act of reading a text transforms and enhances the meaning of that text. This active intellectual and emotional engagement renders suspect any model of reading in which the reader is relegated to a merely passive, receptive role. (Davidson 1989: 16)

For de Certeau popular "readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves" (1988: 175). For Jenkins "fans become a model of the type of textual "poaching" de Certeau associates with popular reading...[f]ans construct their cultural and social identity through borrowing and inflecting mass culture images" (1992: 23) Cranny-Francis *et al* describe tactical reading as when "the reader generates a set of meanings which supports his or her own values and attitudes, no matter what the work itself would seem to indicate." (2003: 130) Erin A. Smith describes readers as "poachers"; "readers whose own concerns or preoccupations determined which aspects of the text were most salient. Such idiosyncratic reading practices...are common in contemporary audience studies." (2000: 7)

During the reading of a text "a gap separates what is proposed by the text and what is made of it by the reader." (Chartier 1995: 92) For some readers "the text is less a focus than a

point of trajectory; meanings generated by a reading are extrapolated beyond the text into a reading/meaning making practice which states and reinforces the attitudes and values of that reader." (Cranny-Francis *et al* 2003: 129) This type of tactical reading is evident in the following extract:

Steve:	have you thought about them schools they were on about in there? (2)...was that the Irish schools? (3)
John:	((laughs))
Tom:	you're spinning me out Steve we are actually trying to have a sensible conversation here
Steve:	I thought that was (2) [...]
Tom:	((sarcastic)) oh, well do they do that in Ireland Steve? Fantastic.
Steve:	((angry)) I don't mind, I can stand up and walk away, but if you don't listen, you won't learn.
Tom:	no-
Steve:	that is what they used to do (2)

The discussion above is based on Steve's reading of *Monstrous Regiment* in which two of the characters describe their schooling. There is nothing in the text to indicate that the schools are Irish, as the narrative is set in the fictional land of 'Borogravia'. Nevertheless, this part of the story has particular resonance for Steve due to his Irish family history. According to Pettigrew, "An appreciation of the symbolic importance of consumption leads to the recognition of the emotional relevance of consumption." (2002: 106) Tom's sarcasm at Steve's tactical reading of the text demonstrates the emotional relevance of this kind of consumption – Steve becomes angry and threatens to leave. Here it can be seen that "[p]opular practices...are often also...practices of *affective investment*" (Morris 2004: 691) where the practice of tactical reading can be linked with emotional involvement. In contrast to Tom's textual poaching seen in the previous chapter, where his affective digressions were largely tolerated by the group, Steve is not permitted the same latitude. This difference can be elucidated if we consider both the class and the 'symbolic authority' of the speakers. Whereas Steve's occupational habitus as a builder marks him as working class, Tom as "pub landlord...enjoys a certain symbolic authority" (Bourdieu 1992: 267n19) with a middle class habitus and higher levels of cultural capital, the social value of Tom's linguistic capital carrying more weight within this group situation.

"De Certeau perceives popular reading as a series of 'advances and retreats, tactics and games played with the text,' as a type of cultural bricolage through which readers reassemble the broken shards according to their own blueprints" (Jenkins 1992: 26). I would argue, however, that this view of textual poaching (or tactical reading) is too limited in scope. While in the example above Steve does use the text to make sense of his own cultural history, there are several moments when textual poaching is not used to reinforce the reader's attitudes as can be seen in the data that follows.

According to Henry Jenkins, "[d]e Certeau's notion of textual poaching focuses attention on the social agency of readers. The reader is not drawn into the preconstituted world of fiction but rather into a world she has created from textual materials." (1992: 63) Despite this idea of focusing on the 'social agency' of readers "de Certeau's "poaching" metaphor still fixes power in the making of the text rather than in its readings." (Hills 2005a: 123) Until now, the uses of de Certeau's theories of strategies and tactics have been thought of as a "polar model of domination" (Frow 1995: 55), tactics are 'of the weak' and strategies are the postulation of power: "de Certeau's concept of the 'tactics' of the weak…poaching symbolic and material advantage in the interstices of dominant structures and institutions controlled by the strategies of the powerful." (Morley 1992: 29)

It is in Chartier's discussion of tactical reading that we see the possibility for variation:

> This image of the reader poaching on a text that is not his own raises a fundamental question of all cultural history or sociology: that of the variation, according to time and place, of social groups and "interpretive communities," of the conditions of possibility, and the *methods* and *effects* of this poaching (Chartier 1995: 91 emphasis added).

Chartier outlines there may be different methods and effects of 'poaching' or tactical reading – implying that there are a range of ways in which tactical reading can operate. Tactical reading does not necessarily occupy only one relationship to power. As acknowledged above, de Certeau's ideas have been applied in a virtually singular narrative of the weak versus the strong: "de Certeau distinguishes sharply between the 'tactics' of

poor or subordinate groups and the 'strategies' of powerful institutions...the 'creative' aspect of consumption is always operating by stealth, on momentarily 'stolen ground'." (Morley 1992: 217) I would argue, however that tactics do not necessarily always operate by stealth, and neither do these actions of 'prosumption' (Morley 1992: 216) necessarily operate in opposition to the strategies of the powerful. Textual poaching or tactical reading can be situated and observed as performing a range of differential relationships to power. As Hills notes "tactics are at work within strategies, and...there can be no clear separation of these terms into binary opposition." (2005a: 84) Following Buchanan's notion that "strategy and tactics do not divide the social between the powerful and the powerless, but rather discriminate between types, or modalities...of power" (1997: 188) it can be seen how "tactics can also operate fully and directly within the proper place of the strategic." (Hills 2005a: 72)

Reading the text in a tactical manner can also result in the text becoming a cultural 'weapon' (de Certeau 1988: 171) Tactical reading can become powerful through its alignment with the strategic, in this case hegemonic masculinity:

Steve: well he- he didn't like it because his name is Jade
John: ((through clenched teeth)) oh god! You have been going on and on for a month! ((Laughs))

"Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees...the dominant position of men and the subordination of women." (Connell 1995: 77) In the brief exchange above, the 'Jade' referred to is a female troll from *Monstrous Regiment*. Steve uses the textual poaching of a female character to feminise and consequently subordinate a member of the group who has rejected his reading choice. He employs a similar tactical reading in the next extract:

Amy: did you like it?
Steve: I did, yes, I'm just going to look round here, and see who will admit that they are girls
John: did you like it as much as you liked that one?
Steve: that's Jade

John:	Steve!
Mark:	yeah, I'm a girl, Steve

Steve's moments of textual poaching here are in line with the performance of hegemonic masculinity – he mocks the other group members, feminising them, making them other and distinct from his 'masculine' self. He is poaching from the text, but his manoeuvre is not one of opposition to powerful discourses of the 'strategic' construct of hegemonic masculinity. This tactical reading demonstrates how tactics may gain 'power' through alignment with strategic discourses. Tactical readings may be resistant to the power of the text, but they also may draw on strategic discourses to reinforce themselves: "Strategies...have institutional positioning and are able to conceal the connections with power: hence, the strategic use of masculinity." (Skeggs 1997: 137n11)

In the next example, Mark attempts a tactical reading, but implicitly draws upon the strategic discourse of the critical reader. "[A]lthough popular fiction is indeed usually read quickly rather than 'closely', its minutiae are nevertheless registered and responded to in all sorts of ways" (Gelder 2004: 38). Reading in detail is usually associated with critical reading (Gelder 2004: 37), and this is the type of reading that Mark is used to doing. This is evident in his moment of tactical reading, where it is detail that is important to him:

Mark:	here! Age 17 she said to the sergeant
John:	((laughs)) I told you he would sit there and find it!
Mark:	she's not 17, she's about 12
Steve:	no she in't (sic) she's 16!
John:	she's 15/16.
Mark:	no!
John:	oh right, here we go.
	[...]
Mark:	Oliver, Oliver Perks sir, says Polly. Age? 17 come Sunday sir, yeah right! Said the sergeant
John:	oh yeah, he says yeah right
Mark:	yeah, you're 17 and I'm-
John:	for a boy! For a boy!
Tom:	for a boy.
John:	for a boy, but he's a girl, so he looks very young!
Tom:	yeah, for a girl who has got no- yeah.
Mark:	no, she's younger, she's a lot younger.

Mark attempts a tactical reading in order to support his own argument that the main character Polly is younger than the rest of the group think she is. He literally 'poaches' from the text – reading out various sections of the book in order to back up his argument. Jenkins points to "what is often missed, de Certeau's concept of "poaching" promises no easy victory for either party." (1992: 33) Despite using the powerful 'proper' of the text in his argument the details are insufficient, and so his attempt to position himself as a superior reader in the group hierarchy fails.

In the extract presented below, there are two moments of textual poaching which follow each other in quick succession, demonstrating tactical reading's differential relationship with power. Tom tactically reads the image on the front cover of *Monstrous Regiment* (which is a parody of the famous *Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima* photograph) in order to launch a discussion about how photographic 'evidence' is often doctored, and used as propaganda. Steve tries to contribute by saying how American films also produce propaganda, by changing the nationalities of heroes:

Tom:	((angry)) yeah. Well, yeah, but that's Hollywood. That's a different thing. <u>We're</u> talking about propaganda machines Steve, we are not talking about Hollywood. Hollywood is a load of <u>fucking</u> <u>bollocks</u>. Ok?
Steve:	but these-
Tom:	ok? We are talking about a propaganda machine can you just get-? Yeah. Right? (2) We are talking about-
Steve:	what was the color of the
John:	rubbish!
Tom:	there is no point, is there. No. what I am saying is, Steve, uh, oh no. Forget it. I'm just going to get too heated
	[...]
Tom:	but anyway
Steve:	that's still Jade up there
John:	((laughs))

Tom demonstrates his emotional investment in his tactical reading by becoming angry when Steve attempts to shift the topic. Tom's tactical reading here was an attempt to assert his superiority within the group by demonstrating his personal knowledge on the topic. Shortly after Tom's angry outburst Steve uses his former tactical reading of feminising another group member. This time, however, the tactical reading is used to dispel tension within the

group, and it can be seen that repetition of a tactical reading does not carry the same 'power' as it does when first used.

In this section I have pointed out that de Certeau "argues that what cultural consumers 'make' or 'do' with the cultural products they purchase or consume constitutes a form of production" (Saltmarsh 2004: 448). Consumption-as-production in the book group discussions becomes visible when moments of textual poaching are vocalised, and as such can bear traces of the ""silent production" which is the activity of reading." (Chartier 1992: 59) Many theorists using the notion of strategies and tactics have arguably produced a misreading of de Certeau, because they transcribe "strategy and tactics as dominant and dominated" (Buchanan 1997: 183). I have argued that the distinction between the two terms does not hold as a binary opposition, and instead that they can 'rub' alongside one another (see Highmore 2002), and that tactical reading can occupy multiple positions in relation to power.

In the final section of this chapter, I return to the notion of symbolic identity work, this time looking at how forms of capital may be gendered, and also asking "what happens when there is a clash of dispositions, cultures or different levels of cultural capital in one interaction?" (Thomas 2002: 20)

Gendering capital: the symbolic power of gender

Bourdieu's work has been strongly criticised for its lack of focus on gender: "[w]hile class penetrates right through his diagrammatic representations of the social field...gender is largely invisible" (Lovell 2000: 20) and also for its lack of analysis of the functioning of social hierarchies of distinction in actual social interactions (Thomas 2002: 20). Bourdieu acknowledges this in his own work, declaring that a survey by questionnaire "leaves out almost everything to do with the modalities of practices...the way things are done and the way things are talked about, blasé or off-hand, serious or fervent, often makes all the difference" (Bourdieu 1986: 506). In this section I discuss how forms of capital may be thought of as gendered, and what this means in terms of "micro-level interactions in which

individuals activate their cultural capital...to attain desired social results" (Lamont and Lareau 1988: 163).

According to Toril Moi, there is no such thing as pure 'gender capital' (see Skeggs 1997). For Lisa Adkins gender is not a 'field': "gender is far better conceptualized as *part of* a field...since gender is extraordinarily relational, with a chameleon-like flexibility, shifting in importance, value and effects from context to context or from field to field." (2004: 6) Rather than viewing gender as a field or as a form of capital, much recent work suggests that forms of cultural and symbolic capital can be thought of as *gendered*. Beverly Skeggs' work notes that femininity is a devalued form of cultural capital, whereas "[m]asculinity and Whiteness...are valued (and normalized) forms of cultural capital." (1997: 9) Moi is in agreement with this assessment, claiming that "under current social conditions and in most contexts maleness functions as positiveness and femaleness as negative symbolic capital." (Moi 2000: 330) As I have argued, gender can be usefully conceptualised as a form of symbolic power, one which acts across all fields and is situationally contingent – it is realised in different ways, dependent on context. In the following extracts, I examine moments where these ideas appear to resonate with my data.

In this exchange, Steve's choice of novel with its military themes allows the participants to display knowledge about a culturally masculinised object, the gun:

John:	when you fire an automatic machine gun, you pull the trigger once and it will fire a round, but you have to keep squeezing it continuously every break of, uh, 4 seconds, you have to keep putting the finger down
Mark:	no, that's an automatic on burst fire
John:	you still have to pump your finger! Slowly.
Tom:	no.
John:	yes you do! Yes you do!
Tom:	not on an Uzi
John:	on an Uzi you pump them!
Mark:	you just hold your finger down
John:	Bollocks! That is what you have seen on the TV.

"Bourdieu [1978] conceptualizes the body as a form of commodification or physical capital in modern societies" (Baker 2003: 252). In this way it can be seen how a physical or practical knowledge can be mobilised as a form of gendered capital. When Mark challenges John's 'expertise' on the subject, it is dismissed as second hand 'acquired' or 'educational' capital, from the unreliable and largely 'fictional' source of the television, as such it becomes a feminised form of cultural capital and is devalued. Hugh Campbell's study of the discursive performance of masculinity in public houses notes that the "performative enactment of pub(lic) masculinity involved continual conversational cockfighting, during which other drinkers scrutinized men's performance. At these times, hierarchies of knowledge...and legitimacy were established." (2000: 569) In this moment of culture-in-process, 'physical' masculinised cultural capital is placed 'above' acquired feminised cultural capital: "In the case of working-class men, a culture of necessity is generated which celebrates the physical body and the attributes of bodily strength: the form of 'cultural capital' most readily available for accumulation in these circumstances." (Lovell 2000: 35)

"Since "doing gender" is an ongoing concern...masculinity challenges may motivate social action towards masculine resources that correct the subordinating social situation" (Messerschmidt 2000: 298). This can be seen in the following extract, where the discussion has continued from the moment outlined above. Mark refuses to be excluded from the discussion, despite his "acquired" capital having been rejected earlier:

Mark:	why do you think when people get shot, when you see people getting shot?
John:	where do you see people getting shot? Where do you see people getting shot?
Mark:	we- wh-
John:	in the 'Mead? ((Laughs))
Mark:	yes it is in the films John but simply
John:	its bollocks! [...]
Mark:	you don't have to pump the trigger. It is not a fucking super soaker. Ok? It's a machine gun.

John again attempts to challenge Mark's interjection as inferior in terms of how his knowledge has been acquired, sarcastically suggesting that perhaps Mark has seen people

getting shot in the 'Mead, a local village area only a few miles from the pub. Mark admits that he has only seen people shot in films, and this knowledge is dismissed by John as "bollocks". "To question or to criticize male behaviour is to assert male social inferiority" (Messerschmidt 2000: 298), and Mark refuses to be positioned as socially inferior. He throws John's challenge back at him, infantilising his suggestion that the gun's trigger has to be pumped, by likening it to a child's toy – a "super soaker" water gun. The gendered division of forms of cultural capital is further described in the following extract:

Amy:	how do you know so much about guns? (2)
Mark:	cause we're <u>blokes</u>!
Tom:	yeah, it's a thing
Mark:	women know about horses, men know about guns
Amy:	I don't know anything about horses!
Mark:	well (2)
John:	you should learn! ((Laughter))
Mark:	ok, you know your way around Boots in Cheltenham, we know how to work a sub-machine gun this is how things <u>work</u>. It's the way things are, you know?

Our sense of gender is socially constructed and produces a gender differentiated habitus (Bourdieu 2001: 55), and it is this social construction of gender difference which Mark identifies in his comments. As has already been noted, gun knowledge carries cultural capital which is culturally gendered as masculine, and it is rendered commonsensical that men know about guns because they are men: "the individual internalises gender appropriate behaviour and external values" (Ashall 2004: 26). Gun knowledge is viewed as gender appropriate cultural capital for men, and the group members suggest that knowledge about horses is the equivalent for women. In attempting to resist this positioning, as I genuinely have no knowledge about the subject, I am subordinated by the group and my feminine cultural capital is devalued further. In order to perform gender appropriate behaviour I should conform and learn. In Mark's final comment about women knowing their way around shops, and men knowing about guns he is reproducing an argument about the 'nature' of gender distinction and is highlighting how gendered cultural capital contributes to "the production of difference – the positions of distinction of the differential holders of capital and relations between them." (Burkitt 2004: 213) Stating that "it's just the way things are" legitimates gender differentiated knowledge and is indexical of

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the symbolic power of gender, which is necessarily misrecognised; disguised as the natural order of things. Here we see that structures of domination are not ahistorical, rather they are the product of constant reproduction to which agents and institutions contribute (Bourdieu 2001: 34).

The ways "people make use of their capital and resources are...gendered" (Tolonen 2005: 344), but this notion of femininity or 'femaleness' as a devalued or negative form of cultural and/or symbolic capital appeared to be challenged by some of my data, which also seemed to confront commonsense cultural notions of the male reader. Millard describes boys' reading as "efferent, transactional and public" (1997: 95), their reading is instrumental and purposeful, hence the valuation of fact-based materials by men (see Hall and Coles 1999 and Bennett *et al* 1999). The following extract appeared to completely contradict this cultural stereotype:

> Amy: Mark, why didn't you finish it?
>
> Mark: because, cause it was <u>crap</u>! I <u>completely</u> hated it, I just couldn't bring myself to read it anymore. It wasn't hard to read, but. It was just <u>rubbish</u>! Completely rubbish! It was something that you could probably have the story in a cartoon on the back page of *The Sun*. It was <u>absolutely</u> (2) <u>shit</u>! ((Bark of laughter)) It was crap. There was no imaginative content in it at all (2) It was too realistic for me, it was a <u>point</u> (2) that Ben Elton was trying to make, that he could have summed up in about, a couple of paragraphs, but he drew it out through a whole novel, and it was- it was just (1) pathetic. Really.
>
> Amy: too realistic?
>
> Mark: it was nothing to capture, I mean, you could pick that up, right, you've had a hard day's work, you come home, you pick up this book, and you start reading, and you do not <u>detach</u>. There is no detachment involved in while reading this book, it is literally like picking up an order, for the bar, and reading it, and putting it down. (2) You know? Its- that's it. There is nothing there, there is no (1) personal involvement within this book.

Mark was discussing *Popcorn* in this instance, which he failed to finish reading. His reasons for not completing the book were that it was too realistic, and he was not able to 'detach' in order to engage and develop 'personal involvement' with the book. He describes this kind of reading as 'work' by likening it to his work as a bartender in reading orders for drinks – an efferent form of reading, one which is distinctly instrumental: "the reader's attention is

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focused on what he will take away from the transaction" (Rosenblatt in Hills 2005a: 58). He rejects the masculinised discourse of approval for 'realism' in fiction (established by the group when reading the masculinised genres) and proceeds to value a feminised form of reading – that which is 'proximate':

Amy:	so, so what made you give up? Cause you had like 6 weeks since the last meeting
Mark:	well, compared to the last book, say, erm Terry Pratchett, I mean, I picked that up, and I found myself reading that, cause I got back from work at about 11.30 I picked that book up, and I found myself reading until 3 in the morning
Amy:	mm
Mark:	cause I got so (1) <u>into</u> it, and involved in the storyline (2) it just kept me reading and reading and reading. <u>This,</u> I found myself looking at the clock every time I finished the page, it just had nothing there to <u>grab</u> me, nothing there to <u>involve</u> me, nothing <u>interesting</u> to say, it was exactly like reading an article in a newspaper
John:	how can you be <u>gripped</u> by Terry Pratchett?
Mark:	well how can you be gripped by this?
John:	well, it's got a sense of realism, Terry Pratchett hasn't got any of that

Immersion in a book in order to 'detach' from daily life is linked to a discursive repertoire of escapism commonly invoked by female readers in lower class fractions (see Fowler 1991: 139). It should be noted here, however, that the term 'escapism' is not ever used by the reading group members to describe their own reading. Mark describes his involvement in the book in non-agentive terms: he "found" himself reading more and more, thereby disrupting an alignment with culturally endorsed masculinised autonomy. This is countered by John's response. In an attempt to defend his choice of novel and as the only reader in the group to express a dislike for the Terry Pratchett novel he draws upon a previously established discursive indicator of value for the group, using the term 'gripped'. In previous sessions the term was founded upon links to realistic action and historical value, but here we see interpretational slippage occurring. John still associates the term with a discourse of value by linking it with realism, however, Mark has modified his interpretation of a gripping text to be one that invites a loss of self through involvement with the text rather than the transactional (and culturally masculinised) type of reading associated with gleaning

information from a newspaper article. The presentation of a culturally masculine self is disrupted in these moments where the readers describe being 'addicted' to the book:

> Tom: yeah, I got- I didn't get addicted, until halfway through the novel, and then, I was suddenly, I was on about, yeah, 100, 150, and then I started to think, no, I wanna read this now, I really do wanna finish this.

> Mark: ...I had to carry on reading. Usually I got to the point where I kept on reading and it would get later and later and later at night, and I've got to stop somewhere, I would usually find a place, and keep on reading until it stopped at the end of the- of a page like that

In Ann Gray's work, education was described as a strong determining factor in textual identification – those with a higher education level exhibited a greater amount of distance from the text, or at least a desire for this to be the case. Distance from the text is considered by Gray to be the control of the reader over the text (1992: 162) and is indicative of a mode of reading linked to the academy in which one reads the text in an analytical way rather than immersing oneself in the text. With distanced readings being culturally masculinised (in opposition to culturally feminised proximity to the text) it is somewhat surprising that these readers, as the book group readers with the highest levels of educational capital, both express feeling an identification with the text and compulsion to read. Tom gets "addicted" to the book, and Mark felt he "had to carry on reading", even to the exclusion of sleep.

A continuation of the rejection of realism as a collective term of value for the group is also evidenced in the following extract. When asked for a word to describe his reading experience of *Popcorn*, Steve also draws on feminised discourses, claiming that the realism in the book was too disturbing for him to finish the book:

> Amy: what about you, Steve? What is your word
> Steve: actually, my word is probably the same as Tom's
> Amy: disturbing?
> Steve: yeah, because it could happen
> Amy: mm
> Steve: and that might have been half the reason I couldn't really read it, yeah! It could happen any time

John's attempt to value his choice by linking it to a masculinised form of discourse which draws on realism is totally unsuccessful – all of the other group members claim that *Popcorn*'s realistic nature prevented them from enjoying the book. How, then, to explain the ascendancy of feminised discourses over those that have been previously established as allowing for the successful discursive accomplishment of masculinities?

One answer may lie in considering how the symbolic power of gender may be realized in different ways across micro-social contexts. While Bourdieu "explicitly states that "male domination constitutes the paradigm...of all domination"...it nevertheless does not follow that male power is always the most central power relation at stake in every social situation." (Moi 2000: 329) Lamont and Lareau point to an early article written by Bourdieu in which it is suggested "that various types of cultural capital could have different values, and some are even "illegitimate," or of low value." (1988: 157n5) Since fiction reading is culturally feminised, a masculinised cultural capital display in this context can become one of 'low value'. It should not be forgotten that gender "carries different amounts of symbolic capital in different contexts" (Skeggs 1997: 8). The discourses outlined above are presented within a specific context; that of the book group. Book groups have been routinely culturally feminised (see Poole 2003 and Hartley 2001), and thus provide a 'space' in which feminine discourses may function as "a symbolically legitimate form of cultural capital." (Skeggs 2004: 24) Skeggs argues that femininity rarely operates as symbolic capital, except when used by men and that "men are able to turn the use of feminine dispositions to their advantage" (*ibid*), such as in the case outlined above.

While upon initial inspection it appears that these male readers may be resisting hegemonic forces and that in the space of the book group the creative dimensions of social action result in a rejection of masculinised modes of reading in favour of feminised ones, examining the context in more detail leads to a consideration of this apparent 'agency' within the confines of structural forces. The structure of the book group sessions becomes important here. With the initial set of book groups being defined as limited to masculinised genres and the subsequent set of books being culturally feminised a space opens up in which the readers make their own choices. When making choices about the selection of cultural goods it

appears that consumers may be less cognizant of structure – they have more freedom and are less constrained by ideology in terms of identity performance. There is greater variance in performance of gendered identity when readers select the texts themselves, suggesting that "non-gendered identifications may sometimes take on a higher priority than gendered ones, allowing for a much more complex and dynamic theorization of the way media consumption is related to gender." (Ang and Hermes 1996: 339)

Although it can be seen that "[p]eople *do* perform gender differently in different contexts, and do sometimes behave in ways which we would normally associate with the 'other' gender" (Cameron 1999: 445), we must ask whether this spontaneity can form the basis for any kind of meaningful resistance to hegemonic cultural norms. Although we can talk about masculinities in a local context, these variations in gender articulation cannot be extrapolated to the wider level of 'masculinity' – the insight is context bound: "[b]y relating agency back to the particular configuration of power relations in a given situation, it is understood as a specific and unevenly realized phenomenon whose meaning can only be derived from the position it occupies in the social order." (McNay 2008: 23)

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that there is a symbolic mirroring of masculine joking in the generic selections made by the group. Their articulation of self is symbolically transferred into their choices of comedy fiction. The choice of comedy as genre allows for a performance of masculinity that is in line with hegemonic masculinity. I then examined how de Certeau's work "can be read as straightforwardly celebrating and privileging the 'oppositional' character of the everyday and championing its general condition of resistance." (Highmore 2002: 156) Morris complains of de Certeau's "rigid differentiation between strategies and tactics" (2004: 679) arguing that social practices "rarely conform to this either/or model" (*ibid.*). I address this by explaining that strategies and tactics do not operate as a binary opposition, and that different uses of tactical reading can occur. Contra previous work that uses de Certeau's ideas about textual poaching, I argue that these tactical readings can occupy differential positions in relation to power.

Finally, this chapter has considered how "some forms of reading carry greater cultural and social capital" (Hall and Coles 1997: 67) In schooling and academia, distanced (masculinised) reading carries a high level of cultural capital, but in the world of fiction consumption, it is 'proximate' (feminised) reading which carries the greater level of cultural and social capital. Men are able to capitalise on feminine symbolic capital in this context, these are the moments in which the symbolic power of masculinity may be diminished. "Meaningful subversion of dominant forms of masculinity will remain difficult, given their privileging within current social arrangements. However, fissures within hegemonic patterns do permit acts and cultural forms that leave the way open for a reconfiguring of selves and their contexts, initially at the microlevel of society." (Brickell 2005: 40) Spontaneity in the form of gender flexibility exists in the space of relative freedom generated by the use of symbolic goods where social actors are less cognizant of structure being at work. When structure is not explicitly imposed upon the readers there is a greater variance in the performance and articulation of gendered discourses – there appears to be more agentive space when cultural consumers make their own choices. However these moments of variance only exist in spaces where gendered discourses are less clearly marked. Habitus is a useful concept here, as it provides an explanation for how variability in performances of gendered identity can take place without disruption to a sense of self:

> The force of the idea of habitus is that it goes beyond simplistic dualisms of domination and resistance, invoking a phenomenological notion of freedom in constraint or 'regulated liberties'. On this view, change is understood as generated by the interplay of necessity and contingency. Habitus is a principle of 'operative spontaneity', that is to say it is in a state of permanent revision, but this revision is rarely radical because the new and unexpected is always incorporated on the basis of previously established, embodied dispositions. (McNay 2008: 18)

Habitus, due to its generative nature, enables flexibility on the part of the subject. When circumstances change, the "phenomenal significance" (McNay 2008: 159) of an individual's gender identity may fluctuate. A contextual shift may result in gender becoming less significant to a person's interactional behaviour, and because "[a]rticulations...are inexorably contextual... [n]o articulation is ever definitive or absolute. Under certain conditions, existing articulations can be disarticulated, leading to altered patterns of media

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consumption, in which women and men take up very different positions." (Ang and Hermes 1996: 338)

However, as McNay points out, 'this revision is rarely radical' since the new is mediated through the embodied dispositions that constitute the habitus, largely ensuring compatibility with gendered norms, as the next chapter demonstrates. Focusing on culturally feminised fiction, I examine at moments "when there is discord between the previously routine adjustment of subjective and objective structures: a dissonance between the feel for the game and the game itself" (Adkins 2003: 26). It can be seen that the gender fluidity evidenced in a situation where agents are given the freedom to choose cultural objects is subsumed by previously established masculinised articulations when men are asked to read feminised texts.

Chapter Eight - Feminised Genres

This chapter analyses the group's discursive responses to four culturally feminised genres of fiction. The four books chosen were: *A Passionate Revenge* (2004) by Sara Wood (a Mills and Boon novel) as an example of contemporary popular romance fiction, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by Jane Austen as a representation of some 'classic' female authored fiction, *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) was the third book, selected for its status as the originary "chick lit" novel and the epitome of this genre, and finally a feminist novel – *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by Margaret Atwood. It has been argued that "the active, judging consciousness within most texts...is male; the female is almost always the passive object of the narrative gaze" (Morris 1993: 29). In contrast to this, all of the books chosen for the 'feminised genres' section of the reading group are not only authored by females, but also have a female narrator. As a result female subjectivity is at the centre of each narrative and I will explore how male readers engage with this, demonstrating how masculinity reappears as an embodied disposition (externalised through the linguistic habitus) that is strongly performed in relation to the consumption of cultural goods that are perceived to be highly gendered.

Beginning with an examination of readers' expectations of narrative structure in the field of popular fiction and discussing gendered modes of reading and responses to non formulaic narrative I draw on the work of both Bourdieu and de Certeau, since the latter's "central premise, one he broadly shares with Pierre Bourdieu, is that the investigation of any sociocultural field requires an understanding of the complex of *practices* that constitute that field." (Gardiner 2000: 168-169) As outlined in previous chapters, textual poaching occurred in these discussions with book group members using the text as a departure point for their own personal readings, to subordinate other readers in the group, and the readers also poach from a mediatized text to articulate their masculinity. An interesting variant of textual poaching which doesn't conform to this notion of the isolated reader making meanings to "serve only their own interests" (Jenkins 1992: 45) was evident during the reading of the Mills and Boon popular romance novel in which the group members colluded to execute a generic shift from romance to pornography and thus 'poached' from the text to serve a group interest. Like Frow and Morris, I am interested in the "*implications* of particular forms

of symbolic action, and the *consequences* of particular moments of cultural practice." (1993: *xiv* emphasis in original) What are the further implications of this kind of poaching as a cultural practice? What effect does the female narrative voice have on the reading experience of these male readers? A closer examination of response to these questions leads to a discussion of gender and cultural politics.

The final section in this chapter analyses the linking of cultural capital to the literary canon, with emphasis on the importance of the educational system: "whilst reading appears to be an individual or private practice…it has a public and *social* infrastructure" (Wright 2006: 124 emphasis in original) whereby institutional framing legitimates certain literary values and types of reading, instilling these with forms of (feminised) cultural power. As a culturally sanctioned and thus legitimate form of symbolic power, the value of the canonised text cannot be rejected by the group by means of an 'objectified' reading. The reaction to the 'threat' of feminised cultural power sees the readers enacting symbolic violence in order to affirm their masculinity. The embodied dispositions that constitute the habitus ensure compatibility with patriarchal cultural norms: "manliness must be validated by other men, in its reality as actual or potential violence" (Bourdieu 2001: 52).

Firstly, then, I look at how the readers respond to non-formulaic narrative structure in the feminist novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Expectation and narrative structure in popular fiction

Jay Dixon identifies "a fundamental element of all genre fiction – the familiarity of the plot" (1999: 2). According to McCracken's argument, popular fiction 'traps' the reader in its predictability but has more scope for an escape into fantasy than other fiction (1998: 1). It seems that this notion of 'predictability' informs the reading logic of the group, exemplified by their discussions about what compelled them to keep reading in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Two members of the group discussed their narrative expectations, expressing a desire to keep reading in order to find out further details. Having previously read genre fiction that

largely conformed to standard plot formulations, *The Handmaid's Tale* was strikingly different. Steve referred to mystery as the compelling element of the text:

> Steve: well I did read it in chunks but the only thing I couldn't work out was where did it finish and where did it start from- came from. That was what I couldn't work out. There was no explanation about <u>why</u> you've got the housemaid (4) and there must have been a war or something went on, because there is a little bit where it says the president (1) of the United States or whatever (1) got killed
> [...]
> Steve: it could be a war thing, or you could turn round and say (3) but it doesn't actually state (2) <u>why</u> it happened (3) which was the only thing that got me. It's probably one of the things that got me hooked onto reading more and more to try and find out exactly why it happened

He reiterated this same argument later in the meeting:

> Steve: that was the one thing which kept me reading it, trying to find out what actually started the war (2) I thought, it's going to tell me soon! But it still didn't do it. All of a sudden there was some sort of religious thing going on and that was it! It still doesn't say what actually caused it. What started the war.

The importance of the generic adjustment in this reading lies in its avoidance of discussing the feminist elements of the book, preferring instead to refer to a textual component that is more compatible with a performance of masculinity – mystery is an acceptable reason for continuing to read the novel. Mystery reading can be considered as reading with transactional value, where the reader will discover something. Steve's mode of reading here is instrumental, where the reader reads for specific information. These modes of reading are considered to be culturally 'masculine' where reading is pleasurable "when it can be related to what the reader *wants* to know" (Smith 1988: 167). This type of reading is also referred to by Mark:

> Mark: [...] like Steve said, I wanted to know why it happened, what was the reasoning for it, what were the overall political views, uh the regime, what were they- you don't know anything about it, you just knew how it affected this one person. I mean, that was what I really wanted to find- it doesn't say

What he *really* wanted to find was not made available to him through the narrative. These responses from Steve and Mark are also replicated by male critics: Thompson's look at cross continental literary criticism for the novel led him to conclude that "men, in general, responded to *The Handmaid's Tale* with less enthusiasm than did women." (1997: 1 9) Particular problems included "the sketchiness of socioeconomic and governmental details...[which] bothered or bored a sizeable minority of male critics." (Thompson 1997: 20) Denied this information by the non-formulaic narrative structure of the novel, and thus denied a traditionally masculine reading mode, the readers described the overriding narrative structure in largely derogatory terms. When asked to describe how the book was 'as a read', the following exchange occurred:

Mark:	frustratingly pleasing
Amy:	right
Steve:	yes, I'd tow along that line as well, yes (2)
Tom:	no, I mean yeah, it was frustrating because I don't know what happens at the very end- how she gets out, if she gets out (2) what- you know (3) yeah it was a bit weird, yeah. I mean, it was a very <u>weird</u> book, it's because of the weirdness that you just, you know, decide to keep going! Well, I thought
Mark:	yeah, the thing that annoyed me was that she tended to digress quite a lot (3) digress quite a lot and sort of keep you reading, it was sort of <u>long</u> bits of description about something, and it did drag on a bit until- probably until it got to about 50 pages
Tom:	or a hundred I think
Mark:	there is a lot, I don't know, it depends on what kind of reader you are, really (1) it didn't seem to have any sort of (1) forward motion to it. It was just sort of stagnant text, nothing gripping you, nothing making you want to read more (1) it was just waffle [...]
Amy:	why did you keep reading then if it was stagnant waffle?
Mark:	because either side of that there is interesting stuff, stuff that is progressing, and you get it and then it's something that cuts off as she divulges something she did with Luke, or some family thing, or how she thinks about families, love and all that sort of stuff. And then it jumps back into the story, so you know it's coming back, but you've got to go through this, like, <u>brick</u> ((laughs)) of crap before you get to it. That's what kept me going.

Tom's use of the word 'weird' offers some recognition of the book's unusual narrative construction, and discusses the lack of narrative closure as 'frustrating', which again refers back to his preferred position of instrumental reading – a masculinised mode of reading for information: "[s]ome traditionalist critics have complained that the plot line jumps about, or plods and stops and plods again" (Thompson 1997: 54). The narrative construction also resists traditional reader identification with the narrator. It is interesting that once again, most of these critics are male, and Thompson puts forward an argument as to why this may be the case:

> If we concentrate on Atwood as a crafter of it all, what strikes some as a lack of internal organization may be argued to be her deliberate device to replicate the choppiness of interrupted personal journals and oral accounts, to present a narrative that feels immediate and intuitive (usually characterized as female) rather than deliberate and linear (often thought of as male). (1997: 55)

The complaint of the 'traditionalist critics' echoes Mark's frustration with the text: for him, the "story" is something that has "forward motion to it", with things 'progressing'. His description of what a story should be fits with the fundamental notion that "[h]uman beings have a deep-seated need to establish narrative patterns" (Lothe 2000: 3). This need for narrative patterns is inferred by Mark, revealing his concept of what a story should be: linear, with a beginning, middle and end. For him, the feminised intuitive narrative 'digressions' which relate to "families" and "love" are a "brick of crap" that have to be pushed through in order to get back to the 'proper' story, the one that is linear and masculinised. The critics' views are strikingly similar to the men's 'untutored' readings of the text and are suggestive of the subtle ways in which culture shapes 'the social', and also of the pervasive symbolic power of gender which may incline readers to respond to a text in certain (gendered) ways.

I introduced the book to the group as feminist fiction, which led to expectations of a narrative strongly evocative of hatred towards men:

Amy: so was it what you expected? (2) When I said you'd be reading
          feminist fiction

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Mark:	mm, yeah, kind of, I mean it's not as- as (1) <u>outspoken</u> as a lot of feminist stuff that I've looked at before. It has got a lot of feminist undertones to it, you can see that
Tom:	yeah
Mark:	there is a <u>lot</u> of stuff in there, but it is not in your face, it's more sort of universal, you know, for men and women to read, of all ages, but she still keeps up the largely feminist undertones to it. There's a lot of sexist references but, she also looks at the male perspective quite a lot, so (1) it's not as (1) violent towards the men, as she could have made it

This expectation of feminist fiction is somewhat defeated, with Mark acknowledging that Atwood is not 'sexist' – she also presents a male perspective which is not congruent with Mark's perception of 'outspoken' feminism as violent towards men. The phrasing of his sentence suggests that the sexism is directed towards men, revealing his perception of feminism as somehow unfair to men, suggesting that men may be 'objectified' in feminism through a denial of the male perspective.

The Handmaid's Tale was chosen as an example of feminist fiction; more specifically, the novel is a feminist dystopia, although the narrative construction means that the novel could belong to any number of genres, an idea to which I return in the subsequent section. "[I]t is Atwood's choice of a female narrator which turns the traditional dystopia upside down, engaging in the debate about gender and genre" (Howells 2000: 141). Howells classifies *The Handmaid's Tale* as dystopian in genre, and it is both her and Atwood's contention that "dystopia is a predominantly masculine genre." (*ibid.*) By this, Howells is actually referring to the authorship of dystopian fictions, as opposed to the readership, naming Orwell's *1984* as an example. Atwood's novel exists as one of the very few 'popular' feminist dystopian novels. The novel is largely "*herstory*, a deconstructive view of patriarchal authority" (Howells 2000: 142 emphasis in original). As has already been identified, the book group readers demonstrated resistance towards the feminised narrative structure, but the following exchange demonstrates how the readers also resisted identification with the female narrator and feminised reading perspective:

Mark:	well that's the whole thing, it builds up this personal relationship with her throughout the book, this character Offred, or whatever her name is, but the end, I found that very impersonal. There were- it was- I

	think she tried to play the trick where you become the character and you visualise you can walk in and "oh crap! Where am I?" It didn't capture me. It really didn't. There was no personal relation to it, no name, nothing. You are building up this character's life, her past, her history, and the present- the present events that are happening, but in the end it was nothing in there- I mean, if you didn't read the historical notes, you would put the book down in disappointment, that was it.
Tom:	mm, I think the historical notes was actually a very clever twist in the end
Mark:	yeah
Tom:	I actually thought that was sheer brilliance, I've got to say
John:	would you say it made the book?
Mark:	yes, I think so. After reading the story, I mean, without the historical notes it wouldn't be as good.

The desire to read 'as a man' can be seen clearly from the readers' descriptions of the "Historical Notes" – *herstory* does not work for Mark, he could not be 'tricked' into becoming the character and aligning himself with the female narrator, for him it is history which is acceptable and works in line with his performance of masculine gender identity. The historical notes serve to historicise Offred's narrative and compare it with 'facts', and the explanation takes the form of his-story – a male academic's version of events: "the voice of the male historian threatens to drown out Offred's voice, for Piexoto is not at all concerned with her as an individual but is preoccupied with establishing the authenticity of her tale and its value as objective historical evidence." (Howells 2005: 107) Such is the concern of the readers in the group – historical evidence takes precedence over the story written from a female point of view. For both Mark and Tom, this male commentary 'makes' the book, the notes are a 'clever twist' and without them, the book would be a disappointment.

The importance of the group's reading of the 'historical notes' extends beyond *The Handmaid's Tale* – it is symptomatic of the group's reading of the other feminised novels. The contrast of real life (in this case, historical 'fact') with fantasy is a classic masculine valorisation of the 'real' over 'fantasy' and this occurred during the discussion of each of the books. In further analysis later in the chapter it can be seen how the group dismiss the Mills and Boon novel on the basis of its unrealistic depiction of sexual acts, and *Pride and*

Prejudice is made tolerable by linking it to realism through the discourse of historical value. *Bridget Jones's Diary* is also valued through its links to 'real life', and enables Tom to perform textual poaching in line with his personal history.

As has been identified in previous chapters, readers within the book group often perform moments of textual poaching where they "fill voids in the text and understand it using all the other texts that inform their lives and identities—the stories, knowledge, belief systems, and experiences they already have." (Jarvis 2003: 264) One such example of this is Tom's reading of *Bridget Jones's Diary*:

Tom:	it's actually more of a story of life in London
Mark:	mm
Tom:	I mean I spent 10 years working in central London in bloody offices and things like that, and it was very real- that was a very real thing
Amy:	mm hmm
Tom:	it was, there were- all this sexual innuendo that used to go on in these big offices that I worked in

Here Tom reads the novel through his own previous experience of life in London. He turns discussion away from the more feminine elements of the text such as Bridget's obsession with her weight and calorie consumption and frames the text within a discourse of realism – "it was very real" – a discourse more congruent with the performance of masculinity.

The performance of masculinity is also central during an exchange in which the readers use the Mills and Boon novel as a point of departure to subordinate Steve and also poach from the media to enact a laddish presentation of sexual intercourse. Having discussed sex scenes in 'romance' novels, the other group members take the opportunity to ridicule Steve who has not joined in with this part of their conversation:

Tom:	what is the point of putting sex scenes into a film? I don't see the point. We all <u>know</u> what happens
John:	Tom
Tom:	well <u>most</u> of us do ((loud laughter))
John:	come on, come back Steve

Tom:	come back with us, yeah. I know, we all know, what is the point in having a lot of graphic sex
John:	you're saving yourself aren't you Steve, for the right man
Steve:	yeah
John:	((laughs loudly))
Mark:	I love the way you said that and he said "yes".
Tom:	no, we all know the basic principles, um (2)
Steve:	what are the basic principles anyway?
Tom:	well, no ((whispers)) I'll explain it to Steve
Mark:	get in quick, do the business and get out
Tom:	I don't see- wipe your knob on the curtains and go
John:	on the sheets and then leaves
Steve:	is it a panda or a koala
Tom:	panda, it eats, shoots and leaves ((laughs)) ((laughter))

Tom cannot see the point of depicting sex in films since 'we all know what happens', he then retracts his statement to 'most of us do' to imply that Steve has not had sex. John furthers the joke by claiming that Steve is saving himself for the right 'man', thereby inferring that he is homosexual. Steve plays along with the joke, asking what the basic principles of sex are. The joke then develops to represent a masculinised version of sex, where Mark interjects with the suggestion that men get in quick to 'do the business and get out'. Joining in the "male sex talk camaraderie" (Messerschmidt 2000: 291), the rest of the group collaborate to perform a humorous poaching of a highly mediated text that was heavily promoted at the time this meeting took place: sex from a male perspective involves 'shooting' followed by a swift exit, completely disparate from the lengthy descriptions of sex from the female perspective in the Mills and Boon novel. This contrast between male and female perspectives is developed further later in the chapter.

An atypical example of textual poaching which involves a marked shift in genre away from the usual classification of a text occurred when the group read the Mills and Boon novel: "De Certeau's...perspective emphasized the individual agency of readers and their playfulness and is particularly pertinent in relation to the deliberate reconstructions of popular genre fiction" (Jarvis 2003: 264). It is to this that I will now turn.

<u>(Re-)reading the 'romance': men, patriarchy and textual poaching</u>

The book group members all expressed resistance to and a strong dislike for the romance

genre, which is unsurprising given that

> Although women were not the only readers of novels, they were regarded as a
> prime target for popular and romantic fiction. The feminization of the novel reader
> seemed to confirm dominant preconceptions about the female's role and about her
> intelligence...the novel was the antithesis of practical and instructive literature.
> (Lyons 1999: 319)

When explaining the sequence of events for the running of the book group, I mentioned

that the first four books would be from culturally masculinised genres; the subsequent four

would be books of the participants' own choosing:

Mark:	and then this is when the more women oriented genres come in, a lot of romance and stuff
	[...]
Steve:	(1) <u>love</u> stories and stuff?
Mark:	is that where the period drama and the Jane Austen and Bronte's and stuff is going to come in?
Steve:	shit no! Why have you got to put a love story in there?

'Women oriented genres' are identified by Mark as 'a lot of romance' and he also names

Jane Austen in this category. Steve associates feminised material with the 'love story' and

expresses his disgust by using an expletive "preserving an image of reluctant involvement or

disengagement" (Jackson 2002: 30) typical of articulations of masculinity. Resistance to the

feminised text continues in the extract below:

Mark:	as long as there is nothing by, what's it called? ...Oh, Tom, you know, what are they called? (2) Typical female book, um, it's all about romance
Tom:	Mills and Boon.
Mark:	Mills and Boon! As long as there is no Mills and Boon in there
John:	((steadily getting louder to a shout)) oh! Oh! <u>Oh</u>!
	((loud laughter))
Mark:	I am not reading any Mills and Boon, I refuse!
Amy:	why not?

<pre>
Mark: crap!
</pre>

The 'typical female book', as described by Mark, is the romance. He distances himself from the genre by claiming not to know what these 'female' books are called. Since "women are the main consumers of romance novels – comprising 93 percent of the audience" (Tepper 2000: 273) they are undoubtedly culturally feminised. Mark's refusal to read romance is in line with a hegemonically masculine rejection of the feminine, particularly a cultural object that is so strongly feminised:

<pre>
Tom: I mean if we've got to read a Mills and Boon, I'll read a Mills and Boon,
         yeah, yeah
Mark: filthy stuff!
John: ((laughs))
Tom: but the thing is, I'm going to have to put it in another wrapper. So
         people don't see I'm reading Mills and Boon.
Mark: yeah!
Tom: yeah, I'm going to have to
Mark: cover it up
John: with a copy of Playboy.
         ((very loud laughter))
</pre>

Shifting from complete refusal to acceptance, the exchange above offers amusement for the group members. None of them *want* to read Mills and Boon books, but as they have agreed to participate, if they've "got to", they will. Tom says he cannot read a romance without hiding the cover and John suggests *Playboy*. The contrast between Mills and Boon as feminised, and *Playboy* as conventionally masculine is the basis for the shared laughter. Mark's comment that Mills and Boon is 'filthy stuff' provides an indication of the textual poaching that would occur later. Although Mills and Boon are initially identified by Mark as being 'all about romance', this position is subsequently disarticulated once the group have read *A Passionate Revenge*, and the group collaborate to execute a regenrification of the text:

> As many genre scholars have noted, there are no uniform criteria for genre delimitation—some are defined by setting (westerns), some by actions (crime shows), some by audience effect (comedy), and some by narrative form (mysteries). This diversity of attributes suggests that there is nothing internal mandating how texts should be generically categorized. (Mittell 2001a: 6)

In the instances presented below we see how "Genre describes not so much a group of texts or textual features as it does a dynamic relationship between texts and interpretive communities." (Allen 1991: 45) These readers deliberately reconstruct the genre of the Mills and Boon fiction, but do so as a group, moving away from the idea of individual agency and towards an "interpretive community" suggesting a variation in the conception of the 'poaching reader' is needed to include social groups, but also in a different way than has been done before. The notion of the reading group as interpretive community has already been considered:

> One of the positive elements of belonging to a book group...is a sense of solidarity derived not just from a common activity...but from membership of an 'interpretive community' expressed through common or close views on that book... This is the point where reading, as it has developed as an individual interpretive act, and reading as a distinct social activity, intersect and merge. (Finkelstein and McCleery 2005: 117)

Radway uses the idea of an interpretive community in her work on romance aficionados, but these female readers *voluntarily* belong to the 'Smithton' interpretive community. Through Dot, the gatekeeper, the women "join[ed] forces symbolically and in a mediated way in the privacy of their individual homes" (1984: 212). Jenkins (1992) extends de Certeau's theory of reading as poaching describing how for *fans*, reading is a social process shaped by discussions with other readers, which may affect their future readings. Reading groups, social circles and fans are arguably all part of elective or voluntary 'naturally occurring' interpretive communities. Since the book group was established for research purposes, and the participants were recruited to form it, the group cannot be described as 'naturally occurring' or truly elective and so the conceptual absence addressed here illustrates that people who are 'made' to read specific texts can be thought of as interpretive communities, and can partake in a group version of textual poaching.

"Popular romance operates within the broad frame of literary romance, but it is a diminished and claustrophobic form of romance, for it is enacted...on the field of sexuality" (Cohn 1988: 22). The sexual content of the contemporary popular romance forms the basis for the textual poaching undertaken by the group. De Certeau's notion of creative appropriation or 'non-predetermined usage' is a kind of translation – it transforms the

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original symbolic material contained in the commodity into something different (Gardiner 2000: 170). While contemporary popular romance novels are typically uncontested in their generic description as romance, "[t]here are many kinds of reader, using romance fiction in different ways, in various contexts, and with specific purposes." (Taylor 1989: 73) In the following exchange all of the readers in the group refuse to discuss the Mills and Boon as belonging to the romance genre:

Amy:	... was it what you expected from a romance novel?
Mark:	no, that's not a romance novel (2) its sleaze
Tom:	its smut
Amy:	right, ok
Tom:	pornography. It's soft porn.
Mark:	yeah right
Tom:	it is soft porn (1) I thought, you know, um (1) I have been down on many women
Mark:	((laughs))
Tom:	but when he went down on her in the kitchen ((laughs))
John:	I didn't expect so much attention to details myself ((laughs))
Tom:	exactly
Mark:	if you were going to look at a romantic text you wouldn't look at that, you would go for a classic like Shakespeare
Tom:	yeah
Mark:	his stuff is romantic
Amy:	right
Mark:	the way he writes is poetry, stuff like this is not romantic.

Popular romance is "the genre which has been taken least seriously in literary studies" (McCracken 1998: 75) and two main factors contribute towards its marginal status: "an association...of popular romantic fiction with mass-market formula publishing...and...the identification of that market with women readers" (ibid.). The generic shift here is one that also works in line with a performance of masculinity by eliminating the possibility of any further discussion of romance which "is aimed specifically at women." (McCracken 1998: 76) Definitions of the romance genre are complicated by its long history but "the connection between women and romance seems so appropriate that it has been considered almost natural" (Langbauer 1990: 1-2). When I referred to the novel once more as 'romance' I was reminded of my 'incorrect' classification:

Amy:	so no more romance novels for you (2)

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Tom:	no!
Mark:	well that's not a romance novel
Amy:	ok, sorry
Mark:	no more Mills and Boon! That's not romance.

By avoiding discussion of romance the group are engaging in resistant practices which "in de Certeau's account, are involved less in the defence of a subordinate culture against the incursions of a dominant one than in effecting a creative, adaptive play in the space of the other." (Bennett 1998: 176) The space of the 'other' in this instance is that of the romance reader, an identity often constructed as a literal 'other': "[a]s many critics have observed, it is *other* people who read romances – your grandmother, mother, friend, you as a teenager." (Taylor 1989: 59) Conceiving of "genre as a classificatory discursive strategy allows us to reconnect perceived patterns of textual structure and reader expectation with the groups in society for whom those patterns are meaningful" (Allen 1991: 45), and helps us to understand how genres as classificatory schemes "fit into larger systems of cultural power" (Mittell 2001a: 16). When investigating how "a genre's definition [is] strategically articulated by socially situated groups" (*ibid*: 9) we should remember that "identities [are] constructed through our active engagement in consumption" (Silverstone 1994: 175). Here, the readers adapt the genre label of what they have 'consumed' in order to avoid being conflated with the identity of the romance reader.

The cultural notion of the romance reader is of women who identify uncritically with characters and tend to be swept away by the fantasy of popular romance (McCracken 1998: 8). This usually results in the condemnation of the romance reader:

> Male critics with little or no identification with women readers slide inexorably from denigrations of the text to contempt for the reader. Mistaking the thing on the page for experience itself, they see popular romance as a packaged commodity relaying false consciousness to an essentially passive and foolish reader. (Radford 1986: 14)

The reader of the romance novel is irrefutably feminised and these "[r]omance readers are often given...undignified identities, cast...as 'addicts' who believe what they read" (Gelder 2004: 44). The following extract highlights the group's perceptions of these readers:

Tom:	this is written for c2 housewives who read *Hello!* Magazine
Mark:	yeah
Amy:	c2?
Tom:	c2 yeah
Amy:	what's that?
Tom:	a socioeconomic group (1) I mean, I don't know how you do it now, I know you're not allowed to do that now [...] class people. Yeah, well there's a's, b's, c's, c1's, c2's and d's aren't there [...] yeah, it's the way life is
Amy:	would everyone else agree with that? Who would you say the book is aimed at?
Mark:	yeah
Tom:	yeah, yeah, it's aimed at the bored [housewife
John:	[housewife
Tom:	yeah
John:	who isn't all that intelligent either ((laughs))
Tom:	who'll probably rush up to the bathroom and masturbate
John:	((laughs))
Mark:	or some love crazed feminist, who won't admit to her own sexual desires

Tom refers to the socioeconomic group of the 'c2' 'bored' housewife in his description of the romance reader, furthered by John as not "all that intelligent", a woman who will use the material for masturbation: these books "are not just escape; they also offer release...specifically sexual release." (Snitow 1983: 254) This construction of the reader is concomitant with the men's generic shift from romance to soft porn. Ann Barr Snitow mentions in her work that critics have hypothesized that contemporary formula romances "are essentially pornography for people ashamed to read pornography." (1983: 254) Mark makes an interesting additional comment about who the reader might be – a 'love crazed feminist' – putting forward the idea that it may be compensatory material in a different way, not just for a woman who is not satisfied by her husband but for a woman who resists heterosexual romance, a woman who "won't admit to her own sexual desires". This is a surprising response as most critics of the romance novel suggest that

> Romance is produced for an audience that is, generally speaking, profoundly conservative. It is not intended to serve either the "sexually liberated" woman or the radical feminist who attacks the conventional gender relations that lie at the very root of basic cultural assumptions and constructs. (Cohn 1988: 34-35)

Mark's inference here, however, is that feminists are lesbians – a profoundly reactionary ideology. This sentiment is articulated more fully when discussing the reading of the feminist text, *The Handmaid's Tale*:

Amy:	do you think there would be more female readers of this than males?
John:	I don't think so, no, I don't think there would be
Tom:	well you think about when I was reading it. It was Friday night
Mark:	no, Sat- no, it was Friday night
Tom:	it was Friday night I was reading it and two women were sitting down there, and I put it down "Oh! Margaret Atwood! She's a very good writer" or- yeah
Mark:	but they were lesbians
Tom:	well they <u>were</u> lesbians, but
John:	<u>blatantly</u> ((laughs))
Amy:	were they really?
Tom:	they were having dinner together so they must have been

In a previous extract Mark revealed his anxiety about feminism existing as an attack on men, and somehow being sexist towards them. Feminism appears to be a particular challenge to the performance of hegemonic masculinity and so must be warded off at all costs. This is once again coded into his comments; women who mentioned liking feminist fiction are dismissed as lesbians, thus avoiding the threat of feminist contamination: these women liked the book, *but* they were lesbians. As sexual deviants in the patriarchal system where the heterosexual relationship has primacy, the "lesbians" and thus feminism are safely contained as 'other'. Attempts to contain the threat of feminism also extended to insulting the author of the feminist text when looking at her photo in the back of the book:

Tom:	ooh look
John:	oh she's ((high pitched voice)) gorgeous!
Tom:	((high pitched voice)) gorgeous! Bet she's got a <u>cock</u>.
John:	yep

Patriarchal resistance to the threatening woman comes in the form of maligning femininity; either by attempting to deny her femininity altogether by proposing that she has male genitalia (and thus incorporating her into the domain of masculinity) or by suggesting that she is a lesbian (and therefore 'other' and outside patriarchal norms), or in the case of the

romance reader, a lesbian who is suppressing her sexual desires and uses the book for sexual release.

Scenes of a sexual nature appeared several times throughout the Mills and Boon novel: "Scenes of sexual temptation and arousal may occur and recur in romance, apparently establishing the content of these fictions as scenes of sexual arousal and consummation do in pornography." (Cohn 1988: 170) But it does not go unnoticed that "mass-market fictions like pornography and romance...[are] produced for altogether different audiences." (*ibid.*) When enacting the 'textual poaching' of the generic shift from romance to pornography the readers' dismissal of the novel is manifested through a splitting of pornography into two categories, pornography for women ('soft') and pornography for men ('hard'). Not only is the book not *genuine* romance fiction and in fact pornography, worse, it is *soft*: pornography for *women*.

Mark:	if that was written by a male, or for a male audience, there would be much less of a build up, cause women <u>love</u> the build up, apparently, like some of them won't get into bed unless you take them out for a meal first, and then have a few drinks, wined and dined before, to get them into the mood! That's why it's more typically a female book. Like a man, will quite happily just <u>jump</u> into bed. (2) And so if it was a male who wrote this book or it was for a male audience it would be more sexual (1) explicit
John:	it's just porn! It would just be porn!
Tom:	his mouth enclosed her hot wetness ((ugh!)) Rubbish!
Mark:	((laughs))

Mark's use of the word 'apparently' here is particularly important. This single word shifts his discourse away from an explanation of the female psyche to a disavowal of knowledge about women and their sexual subjectivity, returning to the idea of female as 'other' and object. Suggesting that men will just jump into bed without having to get 'into the mood' he is enforcing and performing 'strategic' culturally powerful norms of masculinity at the same time as tactically poaching from the romance novel. The cultural discourse drawn upon here reveals how "in a sexist society, we have two pornographies, one for men, one for women...pornography for men...[treats] women as objects. How different is the pornography for women, in which sex is bathed in romance" (Snitow 1983: 257). According

to Mark, pornography for men would be more explicit and would dispense with the 'build up' that women 'apparently' love. For men, the book would have to be more 'realistic':

Mark:	a man wouldn't spend his time reading that
Tom:	wouldn't waste his time, yeah
Mark:	he would just say, right, I'm horny
	((Laughter))
Mark:	and go out there
	[...]
Tom:	shag them and then wipe your knob on the couch
	((Laughter))
John:	and then leave! ((Laughs))
Mark:	we need a sense of realism

Once again, it can be seen how the masculinised discourse of realism is drawn on, in contrast to the 'unrealistic' depiction of sex written by a woman, from a female perspective. The splitting of types of pornography into 'genders' is an attempt to separate and close off the 'contamination' of romantic (feminised) sex from discursively 'real' (masculinised) sex and is an instance of reactionary gender politics. "[R]omance, like other forms of mass fiction, creates structures in which the reader's identification with the heroine allows her to experience emotions otherwise negatively sanctioned, to play out tabooed roles in defiance of the social order." (Cohn 1988: 6) For male readers the concept of sexualised female subjectivity is what seems to be in defiance of the social order of patriarchy: "romantic fiction...continues to challenge patriarchal assumptions, by stating female sexual desire as a reality, reconstituting women as sexual beings." (Cranny-Francis 1990: 187) In line with other male critics, these readers attempt to close off the threat of sexual female subjectivity:

> Male critical readings frequently seem to attempt to control or close off any threatening excess of meaning within literary texts, and to reimpose restricted masculine interpretations on potentially disruptive intimations of alternative possibilities. Their singleness of vision necessarily excludes women's sexuality as a knowable presence (Morris 1993: 42).

The group's discussion of the sexual content of the novel moved on to what they considered to be the worst part of the book, a sexual scene described from a female perspective. Tom reads aloud a section of the novel which refers to performing oral sex on a woman which

allows the other group members to join in with his 'critique' of the lack of realism in the book. Again, the discourse of the male perspective is discursively equated with 'the real', and the female perspective is disavowed on the basis of it being 'unrealistic':

Tom: oh right, here we go, this is it, this is the worst bit. I will read it to you.
John: ((laughs))
Tom: this is when they are in the kitchen. His dark head lifted from her breasts
            ((laughter))
            it was as dark as the darkest night, "Anna" he whispered, as if caught up like her in unstoppable passion, and then he slid down her body (2) right?
            ((laughter))
            and she could feel the moistness of his mouth on the silk of her thighs before he enclosed her hot wetness, and she completely lost all sense of time and place
John: ((laughs loudly)) look at Amy!
Tom: that is how they describe (2) going down on a woman
John: ((laughs)) yeah
Tom: how to write a fucking essay
Mark: yeah ((laughs)) you're doing it all wrong!
Tom: there was no tongue flicking over things, and things like that- I mean, complete rubbish! You know, there is a lot of hard work involved. It's not that easy.
John: ((laughing)) it's not, no.
Mark: there is time, pressure
            ((Laughter))
            dedication
Tom: this is all done in, what? One, two, three, four lines, you know? She doesn't realise how much work goes into that!
            [...]
John: no gratitude! ((laughs))
Tom: yeah, rubbish!

Tom, Mark and John work together to represent pleasuring a woman sexually as a job taking time, pressure and dedication. The author is directly criticised for her lack of recognition of the male labour that results in sexual pleasure for women. Shared laughter again becomes important as an indicator of group dynamics; the group join together in the joke, and bond through the mocking and 'othering' of the female narrator, and myself as the female in the group ('look at Amy!').

There is some debate over narrative perspective and gender politics in relation to the romance novel. Some argue that "the narrative perspective in these novels still privileges the male gaze: the hero's perspective is always the one from which the heroine's looks are described." (Jones 1986: 214) I would suggest that this is a somewhat reductive analysis of romance fiction, ignoring the fact that most of the narrative is described from the heroine's perspective, and that the hero is subjected to the female gaze: "In romantic fiction...his [the hero's] physical appearance is often fetishised, objectified as female appearance conventionally is in the (male centered, male focused) texts of our society." (Cranny-Francis 1990: 187) This argument is furthered by Snitow:

> all action in the novels is described from the female point of view, the reader identifies with the heroine's efforts to decode the erratic gestures of...men, all mysterious strangers or powerful bosses. In a sense the usual relationship is reversed: woman is subject, man, object. There are more descriptions of his body than of hers...[h]e is the unknowable other (1983: 247-8).

While feminist critics also argue that contemporary formula romance fiction is pornographic (see Douglas 1980 and Snitow 1983), their argument differs radically from the male book group readers' responses. The root of the complaint from the book group members is not that the book "exploits female sexuality in the interests of status quo" (Cohn 1988: 16) or that it reinforces "a retrograde vision of gender relations in which women submit to superior male force" (*ibid.*). These male readers protest about the book's unrealistic nature, particularly in relation to the performance of sex acts from a male perspective. More than simply a debate about 'realism' versus 'fiction', the fact that this critique is based on *male* experience is particularly important: "the language we use conveys more than the obvious content of its message—it also expresses cultural values." (Reinholtz *et al.* 1995: 141) This discussion reveals "male anxiety about the power of women's sexuality and the need for men to retain control of this dangerous, unknowable force." (Morris 1993: 42)

Dixon puts forward the idea of Mills and Boon novels coming from an oral storytelling tradition – they use language to involve emotions rather than intellect (1999: 4). This type of language use is also evident in Atwood's fiction, although the style is somewhat different, and less heavily dependent on dialogue. In both cases, these readers have difficulty in

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engaging with the narrative and the narrator. Dixon's understanding of the lack of male readership for Mills and Boon novels is dependent on a cultural stereotype: the uncomprehending, insensitive male. In her argument, men "find it difficult to understand women's lives, tending to act as if there is only one culture – theirs. Therefore most men cannot enter the world of romance." (1999: 11) It is certainly true that "Mills and Boon romances primarily depict the world from a woman's viewpoint" (*ibid.*) but this should not automatically be an impediment for a male reader's involvement in the narrative. To suggest that women are incomprehensible to men is to return to a retrograde vision of gender relations that constructs gender as oppositional, but this is exactly what the male readers do in their discussion of not only the romance, but also the other feminised texts as well. Refusal of feminine subjectivity within these group meetings is not simply limited to female sexuality. An overall refusal of identification with and a tendency to objectify the female narrator is expressive of a deeper gendered and reactionary cultural politics – an idea which I shall explore further in the next section.

Gender, genre and cultural politics

Gender "can never be understood as an abstract position but as an always lived social relation which will always involve conflict, negotiation and tension." (Adkins 2004: 11) The use of a female narrator in each of the feminised fiction books proved to be a challenge to the performance of a hegemonically masculine self, to the extent that each narrator was constructed as both 'other' and 'object': "readers are sensitive to narrative perspective and distance, and that perspective has a palpable effect on their appreciation of a story." (Sotirova 2006: 110) The readings made by the book group members demonstrated that

> Readers are usually aware of the author's gender, particularly when reading creative works such as a novel. "Who is speaking" may affect the reader's expectations for a text, the way in which the reader hears the text, and even whether the text is read or not. (Hayward 2003: 88)

In a similar way, genre may also affect the reader's expectations, and each of the novels within this 'feminised' grouping are at least partially related to the romance novel:

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> The antecedents of modern romantic fiction in Britain can be traced back to the eighteenth century via...Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*...It is written primarily by women and deals mainly with feminine occupations, preoccupations, emotions and aspirations discussed with a narrative structure which focuses on a heroine's quest for love. (Paizis 1998: 29)

Jane Austen's work provides the historical precedent for the romance novel, and *Bridget Jones's Diary* contains strong links to *Pride and Prejudice*. Bridget Jones is "the product of a very marketable, if unacknowledged, genre of popular fiction for women readers, the single woman novel" (Philips 2000: 238) a type of novel which is closely aligned with popular romantic fiction: "[a]lthough their narrative structures reproduce many of the same features, the single woman narrative does not belong entirely to the genre of Mills and Boon romance." (*ibid.*) The 'single woman novel' identified here is now more commonly known as 'chick lit' which is likened to contemporary romance (see Ferris and Young 2006).

In the case of *The Handmaid's Tale* confusion about the generic classification of the text was evident - Atwood's novel is open to multiple interpretations in relation to genre: "[d]epending on the reader's perspective and the criteria chosen, *The Handmaid's Tale* might be interpreted as belonging to a whole range of genres." (Howells 2000: 142) Looking at the overall text, it can be argued that it is largely dystopian in nature:

> the Historical Notes belong to the dystopian genre...but the reader's discovery that we have been reading an edited reconstruction of cassette recordings seriously complicates any simple dystopian reading by adding yet another generic layer, with its satire on academic conferences and on objective views of history (Howells 2000: 142).

However, the generic complications do not end there: "Given Gilead's fundamentalist doctrine of biological essentialism, Atwood's feminist concerns are plain, but so too are her concerns for basic human rights. Gilead is a failed utopia for everyone" (Howells 2000: 142). If focus shifts to "Offred as narrator...another range of generic readings shimmers into view. The novel may be read as belonging to the genre of women's fictive autobiography, prison narrative or survival narrative" (*ibid.*). Unsurprisingly, the group do not read the novel through Offred (thus avoiding alignment with female subjectivity), and do not sympathise

with her oppression. Tom identifies the novel as "Orwellian" picking up on its dystopian aspects, and interprets the society depicted therein as matriarchal.

In de Certeauian terms "acts of reader appropriation are always in potential conflict with…institutional voices (professional critics, academics, etc.) who work, through an insistence on the authority of authorial/textual meaning, to limit and confine the productive proliferation and circulation of 'unauthorised' meanings." (Storey 1996: 126) Such a moment of conflict arose during the discussion below. Tom read the society depicted in the book as matriarchal, entirely opposing academic readings of the text. Generally this book is considered to represent a world in which "women have been stripped of their rights and privileges in a world dominated almost exclusively by men" (Hampl 2004: 177):

Tom:	…Um, it- in *Nineteen Eighty Four* George Orwell was writing about the totalitarian state, which is what this is, but, what she's done is put a twist on it where it becomes a very matriarchal, um, totalitarian state (2) because it <u>is</u> isn't it. [...]
Amy:	it's still quite patriarchal though
Tom:	it's the women
Amy:	that's the essence of it, I would say [...]
Tom:	it <u>is</u> actually a matriarchal society she's describing here, where women are- it is, it's the- it's the <u>beehive</u> (1) if you like. Where you've got the, um, yeah, it's reversed, you've got the male drones, i.e. the angels, right who are looking after the place, they are the fighters, right? But, you've got, then, um (2)
Steve:	the eyes
Tom:	well, yes, but those are just the security services. What you've got here is a society where, uh (1) the, um, the <u>wives</u> are in control (2) aren't they. Because it's like, um, what was her name, um
Amy:	Serena
Tom:	Serena, right. Serena ruled the roost, didn't she (2) she was the one who decided when the ceremony was, and things like that (1) her husband was just there to make babies. The Commander was just there to make babies. (2)

Tom reads the Gileadean society as matriarchal, one in which females have power. His refusal to see the novel in anything other than these black and white terms left me enraged; why couldn't he understand that the women had only limited power and were largely

imprisoned in this society? It was men who were at the very top of the power chain, men who had access to cigarettes and alcohol while women were denied, women who were the infertile ones (*never* males). In my mind the society of Gilead was "run on patriarchal lines", but it was a society in which everyone suffered:

> A more comprehensive reading of the novel would suggest that it is closer to the new feminist scholarship, which has moved beyond exclusively female concerns to a recognition of the complexities of social gender construction. Offred's tale challenges essentialist definitions, whether patriarchal or feminist, showing not only how state sexual regulation criminalises male violence against women and suppresses women's sexuality but how it also mitigates against basic human desires for intimacy and love. (Howells 2005: 95)

Such an instance of personal anger had never occurred for me before within any of the book group meetings, and I was unprepared for it: "emotions such as rage, pain, frustration, fear, anger and resentment are, so often, not...recognized by social theorists and researchers" (Adkins 2004: 13). This was a moment in which my feminine (and feminist) subjectivity impacted on the progress of the group meeting and as such an analytical consideration of my subjectivity is appropriate at this juncture.

It is difficult to pinpoint why Tom's comments left me so deeply angered. Potentially, my anger reflects my own investment in the text: it was a book that I particularly enjoyed reading, impressed with its nuanced construction of gendered relations and gendered power. It is possible that I was affronted by such a (seemingly) reactionary and ultimately (in my eyes and in relation to textual 'authorities') 'incorrect' reading. Although I attempted to conceal my rage in order to allow the group members to express themselves with the least possible censorship from me, I could not resist suggesting that the foundation of the society was patriarchal. This suggestion only seemed to further impact Tom's reading of a matriarchy, and he repeated his argument several times, refusing to be swayed. Considering my emotional response in terms of habitus may prove fruitful here. Bourdieu's work on *Masculine Domination* suggests that bodily emotions and their visible manifestations are triggered by symbolic power, with anger or 'impotent rage' betraying a submission "against the grain...to the dominant judgement." (Bourdieu 2001: 38-9) In Bourdieuian terms habitus and its relational dynamics with general social structures and fields are the basis for

emotions: "[f]rom the perspective of habitus, emotions are neither purely 'natural' nor discursive effects; they are generated in and mediate the interactions between embodied subjects and social structures." (McNay 2008: 186)

Although the research encounter is a peculiar one in which the researcher is usually afforded more power and control over the situation than the research participants (Schwalbe and Wolkomir 2001: 91), here I felt profoundly constrained and powerless. Although I had strong opinions on the subject matter, my role as facilitator meant that I was there to observe and focus the conversation rather than participate in the discussion. In this instance my embodied feminist subjectivity interacted with a strongly patriarchal social structure (albeit in discursive and literary form) and the result was an enraged emotional disposition, a moment during which I was profoundly aware of my gendered habitus.

Tom's (masculine) subject position in relation to this novel only allows for a binary model of power relations where one gender is powerful and the other is powerless, refusing to acknowledge the 'shades of grey' in a fictional world which has seen an ironic realisation of some of the aims of feminism, but also a world in which "[i]ndividual freedom of choice has been outlawed" (Howells 2005: 94) for everyone. While women are "valued only as child-breeders in a society threatened with extinction...[t]his essentialist definition of women as 'two legged wombs' work[ing] entirely in the interests of a patriarchal elite" (Howells 2005: 95) it should also be noted that men are very much constrained and persecuted within this society and in particular, male sexual activity is restricted. Tom associates the holding of power in the novel with the control of sexual intercourse:

Tom:	he does, he gets the privileges, yes, but he is <u>not</u> in control of the situation. If he was in control of the household then he would have been able to go and sleep with her [Offred] any time he liked [...]
Tom:	but he couldn't do that, he couldn't. He had- Serena was the one in charge, so this is why I'm saying it was a very matriarchal society [...]
Tom:	I still say that it <u>was</u> a very matriarchal society, because they had tiers, of females, and they had the aunts who were obviously older, you know, there to keep the discipline, and look after the younger ones who could then breed (2) but it was <u>controlled</u> (2) who they bred

with, a-and, a-and <u>when</u> they did it (2) If you see what I mean, it's wasn't just, you know, whenever he felt like it he could just get up and go and- you know (2) mm

This control of male sexual activity forms the basis for Tom's argument about the society being matriarchal as his reading of the novel conflates the notion of power with the ability to control the sexual act. The wife of the Commander holds down the Handmaid during the intercourse ceremony, and the Commander is reduced to reproductive function, he is 'just there to make babies'. In Tom's reading the Commander is not in control, because he cannot sleep with Offred any time he likes, and therefore he is powerless. When conversation turned to Offred's illicit liaisons with Nick, Tom restated his argument:

Tom: that was the other thing wasn't it (2) you know, and it emphasises my point that it was a very matriarchal society is that she [Serena] arranged for her, obviously because her husband obviously wasn't making it, uh, she arranged for her [Offred] to go and sleep with Nick
Mark: because they wanted a family promotion
Tom: yeah. But she was in control, at all times (2)

Here the word 'matriarchy' is used in relation to a specific loss of masculine power in the novel. Because Serena Joy organises for Offred to sleep with the gardener she is understood to be the one in control of sexual activity, and thus the holder of power. This reading of the situation has resonance with the popular romance fiction: conflation of sex and power is also an issue in relation to the Mills and Boon romance where sexual female subjectivity is regarded as threatening and must be recuperated and objectified within a masculine domain. In this case, where sex cannot be recovered as masculine, Tom reverts to reactionary ideology where the deconstruction of or challenge to masculine power results in a zero-sum binary where women have power, and men do not.

This relates back to the male group members' return to retrograde gender relations in their arguments, constructing gender as oppositional. This has been a tendency familiar to literary criticism where gendered cultural politics mean that:

most male critics are still engaged in what is considered neutral subject matter; when they venture into matters of gender they automatically mean female. The

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'male stuff' still has a right to be considered neutral or at least bisexual, whereas the feminine goes on simply being the 'feminine'. (Curti 1988: 155)

In Tom's case, the argument is taken to extremes – because men cannot have sex whenever they like, and because certain women (notably *not* the narrator) have limited forms of power within the narrative world, this 'oppressive' and 'evil' power cannot be neutral, and must be named as feminine and therefore 'other'.

The readers reject feminine texts since they draw attention to "ambiguities and points of instability...[feminised] texts implicitly call for introspective rumination on the nature of being a man." (Thompson and Holt 2004: 325) The novel *The Handmaid's Tale* calls directly for such 'rumination on the nature of being a man', since being a man in contemporary society is very different from that in the novel. Following McCracken I ask what kinds of value these readers have a vested interest in creating or sustaining – what social conflicts are being played out through the assertion of one set of values over another? (1998: 5)

Amy:	but the men are <u>allowed</u> to smoke and drink, the men aren't considered to be infertile, it is always the women
Mark:	yeah I thought it was-
John:	we can do what we want ((laughs))
Amy:	that's why I wondered if you would like to live like that
Mark:	you wouldn't want that there. You have to- you're married, right, you've got a wife, you want to sleep with your wife. So what if she can't have kids, so what if you can't have kids, if you don't want kids, fair enough, if you do you adopt, whatever. But, I mean I wouldn't fucking want to do it, if I love my wife, have a family- not have a family, but have a house, a wife, housemaids or whatever doing the cleaning, a butler, a chauffeur, it doesn't matter, not having sexual relations with any of them, and then once a month, you have got to go and fuck this girl, she is just laid there, your wife is there holding her hands, she's got her legs in the air and you've got to shag her. There is no emotion, nothing, you have just got to stick it in there, do your business and fuck off. That's it.
John:	brilliant ((laughs))
Mark:	personally, I couldn't do that, I would hate to do it. I'd get shot for it, I don't care. I couldn't do that
John:	you wouldn't be able to get it up

Social conflicts played out in this text are strongly gendered. In the extract above Mark is admonished for straying from the group-constructed notion of male sexual activity in which male power is conferred through control of the sex act. John takes up a hypermasculine discursive stance, claiming that it would be 'brilliant' to simply have sex and leave. By displaying a certain level of humanity, and linking sex with emotion and love Mark is contravening the rules established by the group regarding the performance of heterosexual masculinity set up in sexist jokes (see for example the eats, shoots and leaves joke on page 183): as a result he is denied any link with masculine sexual power and is labelled as impotent – 'you wouldn't be able to get it up'.

While the 'othering' of feminised texts occurs across these book groups, the group were noticeably less resistant to one feminised genre in particular: chick lit. This has been defined "as a form of women's fiction on the basis of subject matter, character, audience, and narrative style." (Ferriss and Young 2006: 3) The readers recognise this, and *Bridget Jones's Diary* is immediately identified as feminised, but in this instance the feminised text is not immediately rejected. "The high seriousness and simmering anger of earlier feminist fiction has given way to comedy" (Benstock 2006: 255) and such is its appeal for these male readers, as well as the females it is apparently written for:

Amy:	what was the best thing about the book?
	[...]
John:	its light heartedness, the fact that it was so easy to read
Tom:	it was generally- yeah
John:	it was a light hearted book I think
Tom:	yeah, I would agree with John on that, it was an easy book to pick up
John:	nothing heavy, it wasn't feminist really was it. You can't say that, I mean there were parts, but only a few
Tom:	it's not feminist no, in actual fact you could actually argue it the other way around, um, in many ways, mm. it's actually knocking (1)
Mark:	feminist views

Once more, the notion of feminism is discussed in negative terms and is ideologically equated with the word 'heavy'. Feminism is constructed as the opposite of what these readers value: 'light heartedness' and comedy. This exchange also reveals a lack of awareness of post-feminism: Tom describes the book as 'not feminist' and argues that it is

'knocking' feminist views. "[T]he lighter touch of chick lit" (Benstock 2006: 255) is something frequently referred to by John in his 'valuation' of the book:

Steve: I actually enjoyed it
Tom: you enjoyed it
Mark: yeah
John: it's not bad! It's not <u>bad</u>.
Tom: there were bits that made me chuckle, yeah (1) when she's doing that job for the TV, when she's on good afternoon or good morning or whatever, and she starts climbing up the fisherman's (sic) pole
John: [fireman's pole
Tom: [because the producers are shouting, go, go, go and she has to slide down the pole ((laughs)) I mean that made me laugh- you know just little silly things like that, but, some of the jokes wore a bit thin.
            [...]
Steve: well I was expecting not to, yes, but, well, it's a comedy book, you know, and I like comedy, so, yeah, it was alright. Simple. Easy to read.
John: yeah, with a bit of humour in there, it was alright.

John's reason for not rejecting the novel is that is contains elements that are related to a genre compatible with performances of masculinity – comedy, previously established in chapter seven as valued within the group:

John: considering it was going to be a girlie book I'm not disappointed
Mark: you've got Bridget Jones, stereotype Elizabeth Bennet. You've got one of the gentlemen as Mr Darcy and the other is (2) Mr Wickham (1) same story dragged out in modern times
John: yeah but it's so much more light hearted
Mark: it's shit
John: there is a lot more humour in there

Mark recognises the text's links to *Pride and Prejudice*, and the love triangle that this narrative contains:

Every chick-lit novel centers on a love plot...[i]f single and unattached, like Helen Fielding's Bridget Jones...she will attempt relationships, only one of which will ultimately prove worthwhile—often with the man who seemed least likely or attractive at first, a twist borrowed from Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. (Wells 2006: 49)

While most of the group concede to actually enjoying the book, Mark's refutation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* is absolute. He identifies it as a copy of a 'classic' novel, and decries the book as "shit", offering no further explanation as to why it is so bad. His blanket dismissal of the text indicates that he feels no need for any detailed argument, the book simply is 'shit'. However, a later exchange reveals possible reasons for his strong resistance to the text:

Mark: from a male reader's point of view, that put me off straight away
John: but a female probably likes it, a female would probably like it
Mark: yeah, doing it from a female perspective I thought oh my god! It put me off straight away, I thought there was gonna be stuff about time of the month in there, and all sorts of crap. I mean, that's what I expected. When I saw that first bit I thought crap. It's like consumption of cigarettes, alcohol, calories ((duh duh duh duh duh duh duh)) I expected the whole hog throughout the year, you know? everything she was doing

In the extract above, the group are discussing the italicised 'notes' that precede virtually all of the 'diary entries' in the novel, where Bridget notes her weight and calorie consumption. "The first-person, confessional mode of chick lit further enhances readers' identification" (Benstock 2006: 256) but seemingly only if the reader identifying with the text is female: Mark is 'put off' the book by the thought that he might be forced to read about a woman's body, one that experiences that 'time of the month'. He specifically identifies that his reading from a (male) gendered perspective immediately renders the text as problematic since it is written from a first-person female point of view, and identification with a feminised viewpoint runs counter to a performance of masculine gender identity.

Reference to narrative expectation returns in the following section, based on the novel's construction as a diary:

Amy: given the fairly frequent references to shagging, why do you think there aren't any sex scenes in here?
Tom: because she never has sex
Mark: but this is supposed to be a diary, if she's that obsessed about
John: very true, very true
Mark: her calorie intake, alcohol units, cigarettes, weight and all that crap, if she has sex, why isn't there a description of that?
John: there is no description, but it does say she's had sex though

Mark:	I would expect this to have penis size, all that sort of thing I would expect that, if she's that detailed about her weight and stuff like that, and she has sex with a guy, why isn't that in there? I don't want it to be in there, but
	[...]
Tom:	yeah she could blatantly write down more into there, but I don't think that would- then you would have turned the book into (1) a work of pornography, which I <u>don't</u> think Helen Fielding would have lowered herself to.

Mark expected the novel to contain information about Bridget's partners' penis sizes and states 'I don't want it to be in there'. His anxiety about the narrative structure being in diary form results from his fear that the male will be objectified in a sexual manner and men will be reduced to their sexual function. He does not want to be aligned with feminine subjectivity and read about sex from a female perspective. In fact, the novel contains no such information, and Tom praises the book for its lack of sexualised feminine subjectivity, as this is what distinguishes it from the 'lower' genre of pornography: "chick lit sex scenes are rarely either extensive or graphic...factors that distinguish the genre from pornography, erotica and romance novels." (Wells 2006: 50)

Despite being the feminised book most enjoyed by the group for its comedic elements, it is the reading of *Bridget Jones's Diary* that consistently results in some of the strongest refusal of alignment with female subjectivity:

Amy:	...so if you know women like her, do you think that the character in this book provides an accurate representation of what goes on in women's heads?
	[...]
Mark:	yeah well
John:	((laughing)) if we knew <u>that</u>! Yeah right! If we knew the answer to that
Mark:	we'd be billionaires
Tom:	do you think I'd be sitting here now?
John:	I'd live in a mansion
Tom:	yeah
	[...]
Steve:	how should we know? You tell us what goes on in women's heads
	[...]
John:	we're never gonna know
Tom:	I'd write a brief guide for men, and then retire

	((Laughter))
Tom:	I'd sell millions, yeah
John:	there are so many arguments I'd imagine
Tom:	well- probably.
Amy:	you're saying you've got no idea what goes on inside women's heads [...]
Mark:	I know women do find all blokes a bit (1) offensive and stuff like that, and Bridget, well, maybe. I don't know about things like that

The readers refuse to answer my question, and when Mark finally makes a tentative gesture towards a reply, suggesting that women find men offensive, he immediately backtracks and claims not to know about things "like that". Here, the group act once again as an 'interpretive community' and join together in their construction of female psychology as completely unknowable and 'other', denying the 'pollutant' of the female subject in a performance in line with the articulation of hegemonic masculinity.

In each of the books chosen for this section of the reading group, the text is culturally feminised. The male readers have been seen to engage in 'tactics' to evade the feminised narrative 'strategy' with masculinised discourses being heavily drawn upon to avoid the discursive taint of femininity. Masculinities are articulated strongly in relation to the perception of these texts as robustly feminine indicating a compliance with patriarchal cultural structures, even if this is couched in terms of agency through radical forms of textual poaching. Here we have seen that poachers' agency can in fact reinforce the ascendancy of masculinity over femininity, rather than acting in opposition or resistance to structures of cultural domination. Bourdieu's theory reminds us "of the deeply structured and historical nature of the process through which the resources (both symbolic and material) which consumers use to 'create meaning' are themselves distributed, in uneven and unequal ways, between different categories of people." (Morley 1992: 217) However, while patriarchy would seem to favour the ascendancy of masculinities over femininities, there are still moments where the symbolic power of gender is realized in a feminised form. According to Christine Jarvis "reading is also a form of consumption, constructed by desire and aspiration. As such it is a space in which to practice "distinction"...as part of the construction of identity and identification." (2003: 262) The next section focuses on practices of distinction which take the form of alignment with educational capital and the

readers' inability to re-genrify or recontextualise a text that embodies feminised cultural capital, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. It also considers reader negotiation of and resistance to forms of feminised symbolic power.

Negotiating (feminised) cultural capital and the literary canon

The concept of cultural capital allows Bourdieu to show how "pervasive class antagonisms are within specific class fractions" (McRobbie 2005: 137). In the following excerpt, Mark performs a class-based reading of *Pride and Prejudice* which also discloses his own class position:

Mark:	I dunno, the best bits. I think the humour- even though it was limited in there (1) it was ok
Amy:	made it bearable
Mark:	like Mrs Bennet and Mr Bennet, I liked his sarcasm and wit, that was quite funny, towards Mrs Bennet's
Amy:	yeah
Mark:	I found that quite funny (2) I dunno (2) I found Lizzie's sort of undermining the upper classes, especially with Lady de Bourgh when she comes and visits and tells her <u>not</u> to accept Mr Darcy's engagement, like- I've got a big problem with the upper classes anyway, and I find it quite funny that this one girl is undermining it, saying fuck off basically, it doesn't matter who is related to who

Again, it is humour that makes the book acceptable, similar to the reading of *Bridget Jones's Diary* in which its "light heartedness" and humour are valorised. He particularly enjoys the undermining of the upper classes, represented in the novel by Lady de Bourgh – this is something reiterated in his discussion of his favourite character:

Mark:	nah, I did quite like them. I liked Lizzie.
Tom:	yeah
Mark:	I think she was quite headstrong, she wasn't fazed by, especially in front of Lady de Bourgh who was meant to be a bit like royalty in those days, but she didn't seem to change. She still came up with sarcastic comments and things like that.

Through expressing his enjoyment in the undermining of the upper classes, Mark reveals his class position as middle class. One of the main elements in "middle class habitus is the more explicit interest in education and a taken-for-granted recognition of the value of schooling." (Connolly 2004: 142) Jane Austen's close links with schooling are discussed in the group, and the link between education and the canonical cultural status of a novel becomes evident:

Tom:	... I've never read *Pride and Prejudice*. Never
Amy:	you've read it before have you?
Mark:	a long time ago
Amy:	where did you read it? At school?
John:	yeah
Tom:	it was on your curriculum, it wasn't on mine
John	I think it was English Literature that we did it for

Tom:	I was talking to [name] the other day in the kitchen, she said she did it for her GCSE
Mark:	hmm
Tom:	I think as one of her GCSEs, I think that landing that book on a 16 year old for GCSE is just
John:	stupid
Tom:	incredibly unfair
John:	it is
Mark:	yeah
Tom:	I thought so, yeah [...]
John:	no, I did it at the end of GCSE, so yeah, I can see where she is coming from, *Pride and Prejudice* yeah
Mark:	it's these stupid private schools

Pride and Prejudice "has been a staple of educational curricula in the UK for many years" (Bennett *et al* 2009: 94) and when linked to education, a book often acquires canonical status – if it is deemed to be worth studying, it attains significance as a repository for cultural capital:

> The state's primary role in Bourdieu's schema of cultural production is in the consecration, via the education system, of legitimate forms of art and culture, tastes for which can be 'cashed in' as cultural capital...[t]he effect on the literary field is primarily felt in the creating of a canon of notable works, which constitute 'the literary'. (Wright 2007: 15)

While critics have argued that canonical prominence is reserved for male writers, Guillory disagrees and refers to "Jane Austen's canonical status" (1993: 17) when rejecting the idea of gender as a reason for exclusion from the literary canon. Purdie also refers to "books generally included in traditional literature's 'canon' (of which Austen and the Brontës are the most obvious examples)" (1992: 155). It is nevertheless true that most books with canonical status are male authored, and Austen is one of the exceptions to the rule. As such, Austen, by virtue of her canonisation has become a quintessential example of what Bourdieu terms a 'capital bearing object': "for Bourdieu, women's status is as *capital bearing objects*, whose value accrues to the primary groups to which they belong...rather than as capital-accumulating subjects in social space." (Skeggs 2004: 29) No longer considered in terms of her feminine subjectivity, she has become a valued object – a brand name which brings with it connotations of cultural capital. Her name and works are so well-established as capital bearing objects that any potential contra-indications to this are immediately opposed:

> Tom: Jane Austen, I mean, you can't knock her, brilliant!

"'Jane Austen' is now effectively, among other things, a brand name for marketing purposes...or a 'cultural commodity'...[y]et at the same time it can be argued that the success of this 'brand' is not due to its high cultural credentials alone, but to its combination of these credentials with a mass-market appeal." (Irvine 2005: 157) Austen's link to cultural capital, even though this is feminised, is ultimately powerful. The status of *Pride and Prejudice* as a literary classic results in its significance in terms of cultural capital: the "literary classic [acts] as a signifier of cultural value" (Simons 1998: 27-8):

> Tom: ...well actually I haven't read this, so that is going to be good for me, yeah

> Tom: yeah, oh yeah. It is going to be hard work, but we will do it (2) it's a book I probably should have read years ago, yeah

Tom recognises the status of the novel and its resulting cultural value by claiming that reading the book will be good for him. "Cultural capital derives from the disinterested, non-utilitarian 'investment' in legitimate works" (Fowler 1991: 116) Tom's framing of the book

here indicates his belief that the book is a 'legitimate work', and the description of it as 'hard work' indicates that he feels it will be a book worth investing his effort in. He tacitly acknowledges the cultural capital return that reading the book will bring: "classics offer the legitimization of tradition and the worth of self-improvement." (Long 2003: 119)

According to Guillory, "evaluative judgements are the necessary...condition for the process of canon formation" (1993: *vii*). Jane Austen's work *Pride and Prejudice* is evaluated by the group in incontestable terms:

John:	you can't say it's <u>not</u> good writing
Tom:	its good writing, yeah, the style is not very good
John:	but very boring, yeah
Amy:	why is it good writing?
John:	because its proper English, isn't it
Amy:	what do you mean proper English?
John:	well just the way that she (1) tells things and the way that she describes things, she does it in proper English, doesn't she

Feminist developments of Bourdieu's work suggest that "[g]ender...can be a range of things; it can be a resource, a form of regulation, an embodied disposition and/or a symbolically legitimate form of cultural capital." (Skeggs 2004: 24) In this case, *Pride and Prejudice* acts as a symbolically legitimate (and therefore powerful) form of *feminised* cultural capital. The social process of the institutionalisation of a text means that it "acquires an aura of inevitability and objective, even transcendent, truth" (*ibid*: 118) where its cultural legitimacy in the evaluative hierarchy is secure – classics carry symbolic capital. For these readers it is irrefutable that Austen is conceived of as anything other than a good writer. The book's status as a form of objectified high cultural capital means that these readers feel that they are not culturally licensed to reject the book: "In distinguishing between reading communities, the history of Austen criticism has created a tension in reading practices between the academy and the amateur or casual reader." (Simons 1998: 33-4) It can be seen how feminised cultural capital here wields the power to silence any construction of the book as 'bad': "you can't say it's *not* good". Although all members of the book group concur on this point, they are unable to identify what is actually good about Austen's writing. They are, however, able to link the status of the book back to the education system thus linking

back to the notion of cultural capital: "The point that Austen is used to exhibit a certain sort of 'cultural capital'…is one made by several critics." (Irvine 2005: 157):

> Mark: it does hold a certain status
> Tom: for academics, yes.

"The possession of cultural capital provides its owner with a key instrument for maintaining social dominance over those who are not in possession of these competences." (McRobbie 2005: 137) This use of cultural capital for social dominance could be a reason why none of the group are willing to denounce *Pride and Prejudice*. As a novel that is so strongly associated with cultural capital as to objectify it, in order to maintain social status the readers are unable to reject the text for any other reason than personal preference. Unusually, the readers subjectify their readings of the text in contrast to the claimed objectivity of male sexuality and power identified earlier. The vessel of cultural capital itself remains untouched by criticism despite the fact that none of the group enjoyed it:

> Amy: did anyone enjoy the reading experience of that? (2)
> Steve: to be honest with you, yes, I didn't enjoy reading it, but it isn't a bad-
> Tom: yes, exactly. It was interesting from the social history point of view I think, you know, it sort of reminds you, what people- what <u>that</u> sort of class of people did (1) in those times

"[T]o the extent that genders structure our perceptions and organize social life, they also serve to distribute power, that is, differential control over, and/or access to, material and symbolic resources." (Laberge and Albert 1999: 265) In order to convert the feminised cultural capital of the novel into a symbolic resource that is more appropriate to the performance of masculinity, Tom's appreciation of the novel stems from its linking to history, 'reality', and thus to masculinity just as in Mark's appreciation for Atwood's "Historical Notes":

> Mark: it is a social story of how things were in those times
> Tom: it is an important social history of the time, yes. I mean, of course it is going to be a classic. (2) I think
> [...]
> Tom: …for its historical value, yeah.

Tom refers to the text as 'a classic', a text "which has 'stood the test of time', which deserves and requires a multiplicity of rereadings, which speaks to a wide range of people at different times, and so on" (Morgan 1992: 50). The value in this 'classic' is the s ocio-historical aspect of the book, making Tom's focus "realism" to the point where he even suggests that it may be a diary:

Tom: well (1) but I actually get the impression- was it- was she- is it a <u>novel</u>, or is it a diary? Where the names have been changed

This return to the masculinised discourse of 'realism' signals its importance as a symbolic resource for the performance of masculinised gender identity as seen in chapters six and seven. Since *Pride and Prejudice* carries institutionalised symbolic capital, the readers are not able to reframe the text by regenrifying it as they did with the Mills and Boon novel, and as the readers admitted to enjoying the feminist novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, claiming it to be on a par with Austen's writing (thereby symbolically legitimating the author and the text), they risk assimilation to the feminised symbolic power of these texts:

Steve: well I quite enjoyed it actually
Mark: and me
Tom: mm, so did I. She is a <u>fucking</u> good author
             [...]

Tom: she's on a par with (1) the Austen girls, definitely (1)
John: you reckon?
Tom: yeah, oh yeah, Jane Austen
John: for her style of writing?
Tom: yeah, yeah, oh the woman's talented
Mark: she's good
Tom: the woman's bloody good

As the denial of the feminine is central to articulations in line with hegemonic masculinities and femininity is a characteristic which the group have consistently defined themselves against, the readers collaborate to symbolically obscure this cultural power using "techniques and strategies of masculinity such as objectification, fixation and conquest" (Skeggs 1991: 133). The subject positions taken up below are ones which do highly situated

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interactional work with regard to the performance of masculinities, and in these moments we see that gender is "a mode of embodied being, an orientation to the world that is lived out...in daily practices" (McNay 2008: 34), where the power of gender as a primary form of symbolic power is enacted by the reading group participants.

Referring to how the marriage process is described in *Pride and Prejudice*, the following exchange took place:

Tom:	...It's like, you know, they are inviting these people to their house to choose one of their daughters to marry, you know. What is that all about? Just going down for a week to stay, and you are going to choose one of the daughters to marry, you know. Well, you want to have a go first, don't you? ((loud laughter))
John:	try before you buy innit! ((loud laughter))
Amy:	I don't think that was allowed in those days
Tom:	well I certainly would, yeah!
Mark:	((high-pitched voice) Thomas that is an outrage!
Tom:	no it's not
John:	do you mind if I try one of the mothers as well
Mark:	((laughs))
John:	see what you're going to be like when you're older ((laughs))
Amy:	((ugh!)) Please!
Tom:	can I have a little go first
John:	((laughs))
Tom:	((laughing)) can I have a go.

The cultural status of *Pride and Prejudice* as a classic has already been established by the group meaning that these readers cannot challenge it on literary grounds, and so in order to present themselves as masculine, they joke about having sex with the women and their mothers before marriage – "you want to have a go first", and "try before you buy". "[A]lthough many social processes play a part in constructing masculinity, sexuality is central to that process." (Taylor and Sunderland 2003: 171) Performance of sexuality also forms the basis for disrupting seriousness around discussions about *The Handmaid's Tale*:

Tom:	it'd be nice if she'd got her tits out
John:	it's not very clear and very boring

Mark:	she doesn't get her tits out, he undoes the bottom and takes off her undergarments
Tom:	the cover though
John:	I mean, come on! ((Laughs)) on the centre page, when you get there, a pop up ((laughs))
Mark:	you want to get a male opinion? Get a load of this.
Tom:	she'd get a lot more male readers
John:	look at her face! ((Laughs)) [referring to Amy]
Mark:	we're male chauvinists
John:	yeah and proud of it ((Laughter))
John:	damn right

As the preceding extracts presented in this chapter have demonstrated, this feminist novel resulted in some of the most engaged discussions about gender and patriarchy in the group sessions. In order to disrupt this, Tom jokes that the cover of the novel would be improved if the woman depicted had "her tits out". The "disruptive and status-seeking character of joke telling connects with something that can be viewed as distinctly masculine: joking is a rather competitive form of communication." (Kuipers 2006: 57) Contributing to this, and competing for masculine status in the group John and Mark join in with the joke, John implying that there should be a naked 'centrefold' and Mark approvingly citing this as 'male opinion'. The success of the joke is measured by my response: "look at her face!" This is a joke which emphasises gender difference, "a social boundary kept intact expressly and consciously in jokes, both by their content and the rule surrounding them...[j]okes emphasize not only one's own and others' manliness; they also emphasize gender roles in mixed company." (Kuipers 2006: 189) By emphasising their gendered position as male and indexing my gender directly ('her') the readers are affirming their own masculinity while simultaneously distancing themselves from the feminine.

Rejection of feminine subjectivity is taken to an extreme level in the final example presented below. When Tom discusses *The Handmaid's Tale* linking it to the real life events of the Rwandan genocides, John colludes with Tom to disrupt the tone of the discussion:

| Tom: | I kept getting flashbacks of um, is not relevant, um I was thinking, I was thinking of um of a lot of African countries when you look at Rwanda and places like that, where there are military dictatorships, um, you've already got this situation where women are just there for |

	breeding purposes which is why you've got these rape camps and things like that where women were all herded in, and the soldiers were sent in there to rape them with the idea of making them pregnant (2) and this was happening in Rwanda (4) in a lot of African states, a lot of African countries [...]
Tom:	no, no, they were deliberately trying to get them pregnant. Yeah, the women were herded up and deliberately raped, they had these rape camps where the soldiers could go and just, you know ((laughter))
Tom:	it's not rape
John:	oh I just fell!
Tom:	I just fell over, yeah ((laughs))
John:	what are the chances of that
Tom:	what are the chances of that, yeah ((laughs))

This extract represents sexual joking taken to excess and "should be analysed not only in general terms of the function of jokes as a means of defending social order, but in specific terms as the mechanism by which the order of gender domination is sustained in everyday life" (Lyman 1998: 172). The joke is both sexual and misogynistic, incorporating notions of gender as a form of primary symbolic violence where male power is linked with sexual intercourse (see Bourdieu 2001: 52). Refusal of the notion of rape shows both disdain for and absolute denial of female subjectivity and the shared laughter is a practice of objectification of women (Thompson 1999: 189). Here, structures of symbolic violence are reproduced through corporeal dispositions and are externalised via the linguistic habitus and the arbitrary nature of gender divisions is naturalised by being lived through as dispositions and behaviour (McNay 2008: 34). Discursive constructions of gendered self in these articulations are "shaped by the powerful hegemonic constraints of an effectively established culture." (Dawson 1994: 24)

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on responses to culturally feminised texts which each present female subjectivity as central to their narratives and sees a return to recognisable articulations of hegemonic masculinities which are strongly performed in relation to texts perceived as 'inappropriately' gendered for the reader. Textual poaching took several forms during these book group meetings, most notably in the form of resistance to the 'romance'

novel. An examination of how these readers executed a discursive reframing of the Mills and Boon text suggested that the group engaged in collaborative poaching, and that the circumstances surrounding the inception of the book group meant that it could be seen as a non-elective interpretive community. Reinforcing my argument that textual poaching needs to be more conceptually distinct in relation to power, I have outlined how readers' agency can in fact reinforce patriarchal cultural norms and thus accentuate structures of cultural domination.

A closer look at genre and gender reveals a deep rooted masculine resistance to alignment with feminine subjectivity, and a conflation of sex and male power which was used by the readers to construct a binary model of gendered power relations in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Using Bourdieuian theory I considered my own emotional response to this particular line of argument, conceiving of emotions as generated "through the interplay of bodily dispositions, the intersubjective relations of the field and social structures." (McNay 2008: 187)

Although "works such as Jane Austen's...have clear affinities with popular romance" (Purdie 1992: 153) texts such as *Pride and Prejudice* have become canonised and consecrated as "classics", considered to be works "of lasting significance or recognized worth" (Long 2003: 232) and so I have considered the social and institutional framing of texts, whereby canonised or 'classic' texts can act as repositories for feminised cultural power in the form of feminised cultural capital; "gender can be a form of cultural capital but only *if* it is symbolically *legitimated*" (Skeggs 2004: 24). The cultural value of such texts cannot be easily disputed, meaning that these readers are forced to subjectify any negative responses to the text.

"[M]en's (and women's) identities are constructed, negotiated, and changing, but they are also constrained by social structures that value some types of identities over others" (Kiesling 1997: 84 n1) and ultimately seriousness towards feminised symbolic power is not tolerated by the group for an extended period of time. The readers in the group react against this by reaffirming their distance from feminine subjectivity, and jokingly performing

hyper-heterosexuality (Kehily and Nayak 1997: 79) to assert their masculinity. These displays of chauvinism in relation to the characters and textual content of the novels illustrate how the weight of gender as a form of symbolic power structures social space and "the opposition between masculinity and femininity is an explicit...organising principle" (McNay 2008: 208n5) for these male readers' presentations of self.

Having analysed my empirical data, the final chapter draws together the arguments presented in my thesis. I consider the necessary limits to my research and also indicate how my work might be developed.

Chapter Nine - Conclusion

The final chapter presented here draws together my arguments from across the thesis. Highlighting the original aspects of my research I provide chapter summaries, reviewing the main arguments put forward in my work. I then discuss some of the inevitable limitations of my work before finally offering thoughts on how elements of my thesis might be developed and extended in future work.

This thesis has looked at the gendering of consumption as a cultural practice, and has done so by analysing men's talk about fiction reading. I argue that it is only by studying consumption in the dispersed processes of social interaction that we can grasp the range of ways in which the symbolic power of gender is (re)produced. This thesis has considered how theories of consumption put forward by de Certeau and Bourdieu can be applied, extended and usefully brought together in an analysis of empirical data looking at the articulation of gendered identity in relation to men's fiction reading. The meaning of micro-social processes such as tactical reading can only be ascertained through analysis of how these relate to macro-social structures. Power exists as a central concept, with my research demonstrating that cultural consumption is embedded in the operation of forms of social power.

Review of main arguments

Chapter two outlined how these theories have been previously applied in academic work, and explained the value of combining theoretical approaches rather than simply applying one approach to audience practices. Chapter three discussed my methodological approach – previous work has tended to focus on textual analysis, or audience engagement with one text (Ang 1985) or a single genre (Radway 1984). My key concern was to learn more about men's engagement with the field of fiction reading to address a lack of cultural studies work in this area and in a wider sense to examine in more detail how genres are culturally gendered and what this means for men as readers.

Chapter four drew on interview data and considered the relevance of the media to reading as a form of cultural consumption, suggesting that mediated cultural products have increased importance as a cultural reference point in contemporary culture. It seeks to add to knowledge about how mediatization of the novel can influence readers' perceptions of hierarchies of taste. I have argued that Bourdieu's theoretical framework can be usefully extended to consider the media as a form of 'meta-capital' (cf Couldry 2003) which carries symbolic power, and should be distinguished from the primary symbolic power of gender which acts below levels of consciousness. Examining the discourses that surround the mediatization of fiction reading, focusing on 'Richard and Judy's Book Club', it can be seen that meta-capital can be consciously resisted and negotiated by individuals. By contrast, the symbolic force of gender is evident in discourses which seek to normalise hegemonic forms of masculinity, in line with patriarchal cultural norms.

Expanding on more traditional applications of de Certeau's notion of the poaching reader, I have suggested that in contemporary culture readers can poach from discourses that circulate around a text rather than being limited to the primary text. It is by looking at poaching from media discourse, and examining micro-processes of interaction, that we can see how the meta-capital of the media may be resisted, and distanced readings of texts can be performed. Tactical readings of this kind are dependent on the macro-level meta-capital of the media; it is the mediatization of fiction which enables the reader to occupy multiple positions in relation to the primary text and the approaches of Bourdieu and de Certeau can be usefully combined to informative effect in an analysis of this.

Richard and Judy's Book Club acted as a symbolic resource against which masculinity can be articulated, with respondents distancing themselves from the feminised image of the 'mainstream' consumer. Commonalities in taste cultures were negotiated from a safely masculinised perspective where the reader positioned himself as a taste leader. Although an increase in the mediatization of fiction means that the media act as a frame of reference for most readers, my work addresses contradictions to this, examining readers who presented

themselves as agentive by virtue of their singularity and their 'serious' tastes. Nevertheless, their use of cultural goods bears traces of their perceptions of hierarchies of cultural taste.

Also using interview data, chapter five argues that more sustained critical attention should be given to genre as a system of categorisation that is situated within gendered systems of power which are hierarchically organised. The interviewees stated that they did not perceive their own reading in gendered terms, but comparing their reading preferences to the genres they later identified as gendered suggested that their choices were culturally normative, valuing texts that are culturally masculinised. Following the work of Jason Mittell (2001, 2004) and Rick Altman (1999), I argued that genres should not be viewed as neutral categories and can work to further the naturalisation of gendered cultural divisions. Linking genre to gender as a system of cultural difference can elucidate the workings of the symbolic power of gender, with male readers concerned to differentiate themselves from what they regard as feminine tastes.

Continuing to use the gendering of genre as an axis for orientation of my analysis, chapters six to eight focused on the data generated by the book group meetings, examining in more detail how men's cultural identity is performed through fiction reading. Looking first at culturally masculinised genres (horror, in the form of Stephen King's *The Shining*, *Greed* by Chris Ryan as a military action/adventure, Michael Crichton's *Prey*, a techno-thriller, and a 'classic' science fiction novel – *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells) I examined how at moments of culture-in-process capital may be contested, with its value dependent on situational legitimation. The symbolic power of gender continued to act as an organising principle for the discursive strategies used by the book group members, as they distanced themselves from femininity by continuing to draw on distinctions between realism and fiction, the former being linked to masculinity. Combining the concept of hegemonic masculinity with Bourdieu's theories enabled a view of competing and flexible masculinities. Humour and joking emerged as an important means of cultural identity performance through which masculinity can be successfully articulated.

The work of de Certeau was drawn on to investigate the relationship between textual poaching and affective expressions, pointing towards fissures in the hegemony of patriarchal norms and offering the possibility for 'interstitial agency' (McNay 1996: 62) as a reconfiguration of gender practices. However, tactics are not inherently resistant, and the contestatory nature of an action can only be determined by analysing the extent to which it reinforces, conflicts with or dislocates the web of power relations within which it is entrenched. Lacking illocutionary force, and not discursively framed in terms of agency, I proposed that these were moments in which men may experience gender-neutral textual identification rather than actively resisting patriarchal cultural norms. This suggestion was developed more fully in chapter seven where I analysed the group members' own choices of reading material.

Each of the novels chosen by the readers of the group featured strong generic elements of comedy (*Monstrous Regiment* by Terry Pratchett, *Popcorn* by Ben Elton, *Tales of the Unexpected* by Roald Dahl and *The Wilt Alternative* by Tom Sharpe), building on the established importance of comedy and humour for the performance of masculinity. Textual poaching as a practice of affective investment reappeared in this chapter, and I also investigated the range of ways in which tactical reading can operate. Rather than conceiving of this model as one of binary domination and resistance, a reductionist reading which has resulted in previous work imputing rather than demonstrating the 'radical' element to the popular practices under scrutiny (McNay 2006: 66), I argued that practices need not be singularly tactical, they can also be simultaneously strategic.

Using Bourdieu I looked at how forms of knowledge act as resources for the articulation of a hegemonically masculine self, and how the gendering of capital works towards maintenance of the normative position of masculinity in patriarchal society. Within discussions about their own choices, the readers made a marked departure from the previously established discursive value accorded to notions of realism in the novels they read, here rejecting one of the books on the basis that it was "too realistic" and didn't allow them to enter the world of the novel and 'detach' from reality. Although this inversion of established masculinised values may appear to be counterhegemonic in nature it is important that this rejection of

the prior dominant discourse occurs only when the readers discuss their own choices; there appears to be more agentive space when cultural consumers make selections, presenting the opportunity for gender-neutral textual identification. Nonconformity cannot be taken as a guarantee of resistance and displacement of the symbolic value of realism is only temporary and does not disrupt conventions of masculinity, as seen in the final chapter.

Chapter eight examined reader negotiation of feminised genres and responses to fictional representations of feminine subjectivity, demonstrating a striking return to performances of masculinity in line with hegemonic cultural norms. The reading of each of these texts (*The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, Sara Wood's *A Passionate Revenge*, *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*) saw a measuring of the novels' relationship to a masculine version of discursive 'reality' which was represented as objective. Representations of female sexual subjectivity were dismissed as unrealistic, and female psychology was presented as an unknowable alterity. The refusal of alignment with feminised subjectivity was absolute, with a regression to a binary model of gendered power relations. Using the concept of habitus, I analysed my own emotional response to a reactionary reading of the gender politics in the feminist novel.

In a departure from individualised forms of textual poaching, the reading group members collaborated to execute a regenrification of the Mills and Boon novel from romance to soft pornography. Reinforcing my argument that tactical reading needs to be more carefully considered in relation to power, I have argued that poachers' agency can reinforce patriarchal cultural structures. The comedic elements of the 'chick lit' genre could be assimilated by the group on the basis of established compatibility between masculinity and comedy but *Pride and Prejudice* appeared as a rare case of symbolically legitimated feminised cultural capital through its canonical status, and institutionalised value. As such the value of the text could not be contested in objective terms, and responses to the text were unusually subjectified. Nevertheless, the symbolic power of gender as an organising principle is evident, and sexual joking is used to sustain masculine domination and discursive articulations of self are shaped by hegemonic cultural forces.

The symbolic power of gender carries across the shifting terrain of the interviews and the interpretive community of the book group and emerges in different ways. Analysis of this is only possible by examining consumption-as-production, by looking at what readers actually *do*, and how they discursively frame their interactions with texts: "Interaction with consumers and the context of their consumption contributes to an understanding of...fiction as a cultural product." (Moody 2007: 43) Studying actual readers leads to a reconciliation of different theories of consumption; consumers are neither strictly active nor passive, they are often both: readers can be agentive and positioned by structural forces. "By studying real readers in real contexts the limits of...theory can be highlighted. Ethnography can demonstrate that fiction reading is a culturally embedded practice; is it not always the activity that theorists claim." (Reed 2002: 198)

What must be acknowledged here is that any application of particular theories has necessary limits, and in pursuing one theoretical approach, others are neglected. I move now to consider some of the elements not developed in my work and to look at how some of my arguments might be extended in future research.

Limits to the research and possible extensions to the arguments

Some of the practical aspects of my research necessitate reflection. My thesis has been structured around my empirical data, and the informal approach to the generation of this data (through 'friendship pyramiding') has resulted in a small sample that is not representative, meaning that my research findings therefore cannot be generalised to a wider population of men. Thus my research "relate[s] to specific vantage-points on the social terrain rather than a statistically significant sample of the whole population" (Couldry 2000b: 201). Limited by time constraints and not able to offer remuneration for my respondents' time, my sample could not feasibly have been much larger. Such an approach is particularly apposite to the study of genre, since "Insights into genre best emerge out of detailed research and specific cultural articulation of definition, interpretation and evaluation rather than from critical analyses of form or text." (Mittell 2001a: 17-18) My analysis makes a contribution to academic debates around gender, genre, and theories of

consumption by examining in detail some of the key ways in which individual men and one particular group engage with the field of fiction reading. This detailed engagement with an area of cultural studies research that has received little critical attention has also meant that by concentrating solely on men's reading this research has lost some comparative possibilities – it cannot speak to the differences between men's and women's responses (cf Long 2003: *xiv*). Here the potential for future development of my research is evident, along comparative lines.

Another area that could be further explored is how far my analysis and theoretical framework would resonate with different ranges of participants. My focus has been on white, British men and their identity articulations, and although varying in age, the majority were in their twenties and thirties. Age and ethnicity may be important stratifying factors in the (re)production of gendered identities and my sample has not allowed for engagement with this. There is also the possibility of developing this work to engage with cross cultural comparison, seeking an understanding of how relationships between consumption, context and gender function in a broader context.

Given the limited scale of my research I was surprised by the volume and richness of data produced. Not wanting to fall into the trap of 'under-analysis through over quotation' (see Potter and Hepburn 2007), ultimately this has meant that issues of word count have prevented me from analysing other interesting recurring themes in my data, such as the importance of the paratext (see Genette 1997 and Matthews and Moody 2007), the use of geographies in the construction of masculinities (see Longhurst 2000 and Berg and Longurst 2003), and the impact of mediatization on cultural value and literary prizes (see English 2005 and Street 2005). The limited data extracts presented here have been chosen "for their explanatory power in relation to the theoretical framework, and for their ability to exemplify the structural relations as they were lived at the level of everydayness" (Skeggs 1992: 192). This does not mean that I have ignored or 'written out' inconsistencies or unusual responses – these have been critically reflected upon at relevant points in the thesis (see for example my analysis of readers in a 'print culture' in chapter four, and my subsequent analysis of interviewer and interviewee discomfort in this chapter).

Bourdieu has consistently emphasized that research must integrate careful reflection upon the position occupied by the analyst into the analysis (Krais 2006: 123) and although this forms part of my discussion in chapter eight, there were other moments during which my (gendered) subjectivity may have impacted on my research. A retrospective examination of my participation leaves me feeling uneasy. Even though I did not join in with the group laughter that accompanied sexist jokes, I did not challenge this behaviour. Against my feminist sensibilities my role as researcher (usually) prevented me from doing so; I was there to observe, not to participate. I have also not had space elsewhere to reflect on some of the more difficult and unusual interviews that form part of my corpus of data, and since these lead me to a consideration of further potential development of my research, I will discuss some of these moments here.

Peter (59, consultant engineer) was happy to help me with my research, but once the interview commenced he seemed to find it difficult to answer my questions. Whenever I asked him about fiction he would turn the conversation towards his golfing 'bible' or his electrical engineering manual. His response to the following question particularly surprised me:

> Amy: do you think that fiction reading is gendered in our society?
> Peter: don't really know how to answer that, I think that the fact is that uh, if you really think deeply about it, but I am not that sort of a deep thinker, because um, although I might think I think, uh, uh, because I don't hold any biases or prejudices against anybody at all, I wouldn't say I could answer that fully because I don't know the answer [...] I don't- I don't know, I wouldn't- I'm not (1) I'm not a vindictive person, I never have a particular bee in my bonnet, ever.

Perceiving my question to somehow be related to prejudice and vindictiveness, and concerned not to represent himself in this manner, he had a series of false starts 'I don't-' 'I'm not' I wouldn't-' before declining to answer. Being asked about the gendering of reading (which I had considered to be a relatively noncontroversial question) by a young woman obviously made him feel uncomfortable. My gendered subjectivity also impacted on my interview with Malcolm (25, clerical assistant). Although Malcolm was known to me through

a mutual friend and volunteered for interview he was very reticent to talk about his reading habits, which he eventually revealed consisted mainly of 'Games Workshop' novels and manuals. His discomfort about cultural perceptions that may stem from being a reader of these particular materials became evident when I asked him to describe himself as a reader:

> Malcolm: I would probably lie, miss out the fiction part and talk about reading the Tony Benn diaries, because going up and chatting to someone about skirmishing and Games Workshop doesn't really promote you in the best light.

Indicating an awareness of the cultural stereotyping that surrounds notions of the 'Games Workshop' participant, he states that he would lie about his reading habits, and not tell others about them. Not wanting to be seen as a fiction reader, he would sooner refer to his more appropriately masculinised political interests. His anxiety about the interview process was articulated at the end of the interview, just before I turned off the recorder:

> Amy: ok, that's it then!
> Malcolm: how did I do?

Talking to some men about their reading habits seemed to result in 'confessions' about reading culturally feminised fiction, which then led to expressions of interviewee discomfort. Below, Max (27, PhD student) mentioned *The Devil Wears Prada* in his list of recently read novels. He instantly identifies this as 'interesting, because it's a girl's book':

> Max: ...I've read *The Devil Wears Prada* as well recently...which will probably be very interesting because it's a girl's book really, isn't it?
> [...] part of what interested me in *The Devil Wears Prada* though was that I knew it was based on a true- it was a semi autobiographical book [...] it's not because it's a girl's book or anything [...] a lot of the books I read, I just read to see how the writer writes, because I- I'm interested in trying to write myself , so a lot of the time it's- for instance, one of the main motivations for reading *The Devil Wears Prada* was because I read an article on an interview with the girl probably in the Guardian or something Lauren Weisenberg (sic) or whatever her name is, and it was talking about the way she was writing and stuff and her sort of voice if you like, to use that vague term, and that was one of the reasons why I read *The Devil Wears Prada* because I wanted to see how she wrote this novel

	[...]
Amy:	so if you were choosing a book for an all male reading group what would you choose and why?
	[...]
Max:	um (5) ah um I don't know, um, (3) I wouldn't pick *The Devil Wears Prada.*

I have reproduced Max's comments at length here since these make it clear that after his admission of reading 'a girl's book' he justifies this repeatedly, by linking it to factual information (the semi autobiographical nature of the book), and then giving it further use value by suggesting that it was read to inform his own writing. As can be seen here, he returned to the topic several times indicating an underlying anxiety about being seen as a reader of feminised material, emphasised finally by making it clear that he would *not* choose *The Devil Wears Prada* for an all male reading group.

In my interview with Mac (25, newspaper journalist), he described himself as having wide reading tastes that ranged from sport biographies to chick lit author Maeve Binchy:

Mac:	I don't think there is anything I would never read, I don't like to nail myself down in that way, yeah, I- I have read everything. I have read Maeve Binchy in my time, that was- that's what my mum reads so I thought I'll pick up one of them, see what she is reading at the moment, so I- there is nothing I would never read, I would always give it a shot, yeah
Amy:	um, what did you make of Maeve Binchy?
Mac:	I thought it was alright! I can't remember what it was called, but um, it was about the relationship between two girls in wartime Britain, but basically how the one girl went to live with the other girl in Ireland whilst the Blitz was on, yeah, I really enjoyed it, but anyway, I've got that kind of strange gay side to my personality anyway.

Although he initially seemed quite happy to 'admit' to reading one of his mum's books, his discussion of this ended with an unusual comment, linking the reading of feminised material to the 'strange gay side' of his personality. This comment suggests that he recognises that the reading of chick lit is not compatible with the reproduction of hegemonically masculine norms, and expresses a latent anxiety about this. Notably, he does not use laughter to ironically distance himself from the statement.

My interview with Jim (76, retired company secretary) was one of my least comfortable experiences on a number of points. He was one of the few men I interviewed in their own home, and the interview did not get off to the best start as his dog, unaccustomed to strangers, began barking loudly and had to be restrained and removed from the room. Jim subsequently announced that he couldn't understand why I would want to interview him, but would nevertheless answer my questions. Already feeling like an intruder after my 'welcome' from the dog, the interview proceeded in a hurried manner, with Jim's short responses followed by instructions to move on to the next question:

Jim: ...I can't see the point in reading novels you know, that's what I'd say...it's only like watching a film on the television, that's all made up. Next question!

Jim repeatedly pushed the interview forwards, refusing to discuss things in detail. At the end of the majority of his answers he would say "ok?" or "go on" indicating that he had no more to say on the subject, as in the following exchange:

Amy: are there any books that are particularly special to you? (6)
Jim: no, oh wait! To me? Yes. To me, the concise Oxford English dictionary, yes, and um, the crossword companion, and um, French and Latin dictionaries, ok?
Amy: mm hmm
Jim: right, go on

The interview also ended in a rather abrupt manner, after he had taken me to his living room to show me what books were in the bookcase, pointing out which belonged to his wife and daughter he suddenly announced he had to leave and I was shown to the door:

Amy: do you ever read any plays at all?
Jim: uh, no. I go to watch them, Dylan Thomas, all of this poetry, *Under Milk Wood*, I have got to go now actually.

On reflection, the discomfort that I experienced during this interview was largely due to the significant age gap, and also to Jim's dismissal of my research project before I had even started to ask him any questions. He made it clear that although he would tolerate being interviewed, he did not consider it worthwhile and repeatedly emphasised this by pushing

the interview forward. This also enabled Jim to exercise control over the interview in what was obviously an unusual encounter for him.

What is clear here is that "interviewing relies on self-reflexivity, but self-reflexivity does not offer the uncoupling of agency from structure...self-reflexivity *itself* depends upon access to resources and concomitant forms of capital that are classed, raced and gendered." (Skeggs *et al*: 2008: 6) In a manner similar to the interviewees described in the work of Skeggs *et al*, those with a higher level of cultural capital (such as Mac and Max) were concerned to justify their cultural engagement, whereas those with a lower level of education (such as Jim) did not mobilise discourses of cultural value and did not justify responses. What each of these interviews have in common is an expression of anxiety on the part of the interviewees and it is important to recognise that my identity as a younger female researcher undoubtedly affected my research and these responses.

My focus on social theory has meant looking at cultural practices rather than taking the individual as my object of research. I have been concerned to keep my study of text, genre and (gendered) subjectivity focused in social and historical specificity; it is texts and contexts that combine to produce the gendered reading subject. The subject constituted in a social context occupies different positions in relation to different discourses which change across time, and "[a]s particular discourses become central issues, they will affect the ways in which the social subject occupies, or resists [a] subject position" (Gray 1987: 51). I return here to differences in the work of Butler and Bourdieu to lead to a suggestion for future research.

Bourdieu's focus is on the social processes of power and it is here that his theories are also in contrast with Butler's. In her "theory of agency through performance, the psychic life of power deeply informs the self that power produces" (Lovell 2003: 13) whereas Bourdieu resists alignment with psychoanalytic theory: "In terms of the metaphor of depth, *habitus* lies below consciousness and intentionality, but well above the level at which the unconscious is interred." (Lovell 2003: 5) Psychoanalytic theory applied in a cultural studies context remains primarily focused on textual analysis, rather than on empirical research

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(Gray 2003: 133) and those working in the psychoanalytic tradition have mostly determined audience response from the structure of the text, presenting a difficulty for audience studies which attempts to account for multiple, differential interpretations by the audience (cf Morley 1991: 19). For the purpose of this thesis, psychoanalytic approaches are extraneous to my analysis: "It is not that such accounts are not valuable, but they are of a different order, and do not throw much light on the complex and historically varied ways that the lived realities of identity, gender or otherwise, connect to abstract social structures of oppression." (McNay 2004: 188)

I have focused here on social theory to reflect on reading as a broad cultural practice, one that affects and involves large numbers of people. Against this, in psychoanalysis the object of study is the individual, and this approach has traditionally been used to analyse the textual mechanisms that interpellate the subject. Ultimately this removes both text and subject from history and society, and does not have much use for a study of 'real' readers located in social and historical specificity (cf Gray 1987). Given that psychoanalytic approaches tend to ignore "important factors of social context" (Gray 1987: 45), I have maintained sociological emphasis in my theoretical approach. I have not considered an exploration of how Bourdieu's sociology might be included within psychoanalytic approaches in this thesis given that this "raises a far larger question about how psychoanalytic theory, on the one hand, and sociological...theory on the other, can be successfully integrated." (Couldry 2000b: 183) However, an analysis of some of the data, particularly the interviews in which anxiety acted as a latent organising principle could potentially be developed in terms of psychoanalytic perspectives in future work.

In this conclusion I have outlined the main arguments of my thesis, addressed the inevitable limitations of my study and suggested avenues for further research. I have argued for a broad socio-centric approach to the practices of fiction reading, one which considers context, gender identity, power, and theories of consumption. In considering how gender may be articulated in practices of media consumption, I contend that "it is important to grasp the increasingly complex ways in which identity and subject formation are

interconnected to latent structural dynamics" (McNay 2008: 9) and that the study of micro-processes can illuminate macro-structural issues.

My study is located within the field of cultural studies, and seeks to contribute to cultural debates surrounding gender, reading as consumption and the articulation of identity, emphasising the importance of empirical data in shaping, extending and refining cultural theory. Without "empirical work, these complexities, and this range of readings, appropriations of media texts and cultural moments, would not have emerged." (Thomas 2002: 178) To focus on the symbolic power of gender and an analysis of its social impacts is to address an important aspect of our everyday lives. To examine how gender is articulated in men's talk about fiction reading is pertinent to wider questions about patriarchal cultural structures of domination. This research will, I hope, encourage other empirical work that explores these implications further.

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Appendix A: Transcription Conventions

Transcription used is an adaptation of Gail Jefferson's system (see Jefferson 2004).

The Shining	italicised words refer to the title of a text
[	indicates the beginning of overlapping speech
<u>Really</u>	underlining indicates emphasis
(2)	timed pause to the nearest second
(bothered)	unclear speech, guess at word
( )	unclear speech, unable to transcribe
((laughs))	double parentheses are used to describe a sound
Like-	cut off of preceding sound
"no way"	change in tone indicating reported speech
,	micro-pause and continuation marker
.	micro-pause with falling intonation
?	rising intonation indicating a question
!	emphasis at the end of a word
[...]	data omitted
n:o	extended sound
[Steve points to book]	nonverbal actions or transcribers comments
[name]	name omitted
[wife]	name omitted but relationship to speaker indicated

Appendix B: Portraits of Interviewees

Information about age and marital status was derived using a basic questionnaire completed before the interview. Details about employment, family, ethnicity and education were gathered at the beginning of the interview and so ethnicities given here are in the respondents' own words. All interviewees were White – this is not stated unless a respondent chose to declare this in their answers. Informants are listed in alphabetical order using pseudonyms.

Adam
PhD student and part time researcher/undergraduate teaching assistant. Aged 31. He is single and has no children, is Caucasian and has an MA in European Literature.

Adrian
Civil Servant. Aged 41. He is single and has no children, is White and has O-Levels completed at the age of 16.

Alex
University lecturer. Aged 38. He is married and has no children, is White and has a PhD in Social Sciences completed at the age of 32.

Ben
Office worker. Aged 37. He is separated and has a son aged three and a half, is White British and has A-Levels completed at the age of 18.

Chris
University EFL teacher. Aged 32. He is single and has no children, is Caucasian British and has a Masters in English Language Teaching.

Dan
Civil servant. Aged 27. He has a long term partner and no children, is White British/German and has a Masters in International Relations completed at the age of 26.

Dave
PhD student, part time undergraduate teaching assistant and part time shop assistant. Aged 24. He is single and has no children, is British "Devonian" and has an MA in Television Studies.

Doug
Currently unemployed on long term sick leave, his prior employment was working with computers. Aged 28. He has a long term partner and no children, is English and has A-Levels completed at the age of 18.

Ed
Deputy editor for a local newspaper. Aged 35. He has a long term partner and no children, is Welsh and has A-Levels completed at the age of 18.

Fred
PhD student. Aged 25. He is single and has no children, is British and has an Undergraduate Degree in Mathematics and Physics.

Harry
University lecturer. Aged 37. He is married and has two sons aged five and three, is British and has a PhD in Innovation and Organisational Theory completed at the age of 33.

Ian

Civil servant. Aged 24. He is single and has no children, is Caucasian and has an Undergraduate Degree in Law completed at the age of 20/21.

Jack

Deputy picture editor for a local newspaper group. Aged 30. He has a long term partner and no children, is White Western European and has an Undergraduate Degree in Media Education with English completed at the age of 20/21.

Jake

Wine merchant. Aged 55. He has a long term partner and a daughter aged one and a half, is a "European mixed blooded person" and has O-Levels and attended Agricultural College leaving education at the age of 23.

Jim

Retired former company secretary for a rubber moulding company. Aged 76. He is married with one daughter who is "married and grown up". He is British and has a Cambridge School Certificate completed at the age of 15/16.

Joe

PhD student and part time council worker. Aged 40. He is divorced and has no children, is "Pangaean" with no ethnicity and has an MA in English Literature.

Josh

Civil servant. Aged 24. He has a long term partner and has no children, is White British/English and has an undergraduate degree in English completed at the age of 21.

Kyle

Forklift truck driver for a newspaper packing company. Aged 30. He is single and has no children, is English/British and has a National Diploma in horticulture completed at the age of 21/22.

Lee

Assistant editor for a local newspaper. Aged 35. He is married and has two children – a daughter aged 15 and a son aged 10. He is White British and has an undergraduate degree in English Literature completed at the age of 21.

Liam

Customer services representative for a glass manufacturer. Aged 29. He is single and has no children, is White and has an undergraduate degree in European Tourism.

Luke

Self-employed caterer. Aged 52. He is married and has two children a daughter aged 25 and a son aged 23. He is English and has an MBA completed when he was in his forties.

Mac

Reporter for a local newspaper. Aged 25. He is single and has no children, is White British and has a Masters in Newspaper Journalism completed at the age of 24.

Malcolm

Clerical assistant. Aged 25. He is single and has no children, is British and has an undergraduate degree in Public Services completed at the age of 21.

Matt

Civil servant. Aged 36. He is married and has a son who is six years old, is White and has an undergraduate degree in Russian and Philosophy completed at the age of 28/29.

Max

PhD student and part time library assistant. Aged 27. He is single and has no children, is White English and has a Masters in History.

Mike

University lecturer. Aged 33. He is separated and has no children, is White British and has a PhD in Applied Economics completed at the age of 28.

Neil

Private music teacher and sculptor/painter. Aged 48. He is divorced and has five children – two sons aged 27 and 23 and three daughters one aged 25 and twins aged 14. He is White British and has an undergraduate degree in Engineering completed at the age of 21.

Nick

Retired former manager and chemist/scientist for a water company. Aged 63. He is married and has two children a son aged 33 and a daughter aged 30. He is "Southern English" and has an undergraduate degree in chemistry completed at the age of 22.

Oliver

University professor. Aged 49. He is married and has a ten year old daughter, is British and has a PhD in Communication Studies completed at the age of 27.

Paul

University lecturer. Aged 37. He is single and has no children, is White British and has an MPhil in Applied Psychology completed at the age of 26.

Peter

Consultant engineer. Aged 59. He is married and has six children ranging in age from 15 to 33, is an "Anglo-Celtic mongrel" and has an MBA completed in his forties.

Ray

PhD student. Aged 32. He is married and has no children, is Caucasian and has a masters in Journalism.

Rob

Self-employed computer consultant. Aged 57. He is married and has two sons, is White/Caucasian and has a HND in Mathematics and Computing completed at the age of 22.

Ryan

Agricultural engineer. Aged 28. He is single and has no children, is British/English and has GCSEs completed at the age of 16.

Sam

Civil servant. Aged 31. He has a long term partner and no children, is White British/Welsh and has an undergraduate degree in History and Welsh History completed at the age of 21.

Scott

Works for the police. Aged 25. He is single and has no children, is White British and has an undergraduate degree in Journalism and Media completed at the age of 21.

Toby

University EFL tutor. Aged 29. He is single and has no children, is British/Welsh/European and has a masters in Linguistics completed at the age of 28.

Will

University researcher. Aged 29. He is married and has no children, is White Welsh and has a PhD in English Literature and Cultural Studies completed at the age of 28/29.

Appendix C: Portraits of Book Group Participants

Details about the participants were collected orally and notes were taken. Having worked regularly as a temporary seasonal worker at the pub for two years prior to running the book group, each of the participants were also known to me personally and some of the information below is based on my first-hand knowledge of them. Mark, John and Tom were colleagues at the pub in which the meetings took place and Steve was a regular patron of the pub – all participants knew each other well. Brief sketches of the book group members are given below, names used are pseudonyms:

Mark
Aged 20, a part time bar attendant, kitchen assistant and waiter at the pub. Mark began studying for an English Language undergraduate degree midway through participating in the book group. He lives in rented accommodation with his girlfriend and has no children, and he describes himself as White British. He has worked at the pub for five years. He likes to read but says that he is not an "overly active" reader.

John
Aged 23, chef at the pub. John has GNVQ Advanced level qualifications in Business Studies and Hospitality and Catering and an A Level in Communication Studies, leaving education at the age of 18. He lives in rented accommodation with his girlfriend and has no children, and he describes himself as White British. He has worked at the pub for three years. He is not a regular reader and says that he did most of his fiction reading at school for his GCSE in English Literature.

Tom
Aged 46, pub landlord. Tom completed two years of Business Studies at Manchester Polytechnic and holds a professional hotel management and catering qualification, leaving education at the age of 20. He is married and owns the house which he shares with his wife and describes himself as White/Caucasian. He has run the pub for ten years. He describes himself as an "intermittent" reader.

Steve
Aged 45, bricklayer. Steve has CSEs, leaving education at the age of 16. He is single and owns a house which he rents out. He lives in his father's house, and declined to state his ethnicity. He has worked as a bricklayer for 26 years and acts as director of his family-owned building company. He enjoys a good book but is not an avid reader, more of a "medium" level reader.

Appendix D: Interview Questionnaire

Name:_____

Nationality:_____

What is your current legal marital or civil partnership status?

____Never married and never formed civil partnership
____Long term partner
____Married
____In a civil partnership
____Separated but still legally married
____Widowed
____Divorced
____Other (please state)_____

Religion:

____None   _____Christian
____Buddhist   _____Hindu
____Jewish   _____Muslim
____Sikh   _____Other (please specify) _____

What is your date of birth? (dd/mm/yyyy)   (_____/_____/_____)

In which country were you born?_____

At what age did you come to the UK?_____

Personal gross income before tax for your present job (or if retired your former job):

____£1-9,999   ____£60,000-69,999
____£10,000-19,999   ____£70,000-79,999
____£20,000-29,999   ____£80,000-89,999
____£30,000-39,999   ____£90,000-99,000
____£40,000-49,999   ____£100,000 and above
____£50,000-59,999

Appendix E: Interview Schedule

Firstly I'd like to find out a bit more about you:

Do you currently have a job?
   [If retired, what was your last job?]
   What kind of work do/did you do?
   When did you start/finish working at this job?

Do you have any children?
   Gender and ages

How would you describe your ethnicity?

What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   What field(s)/subject(s) did you specialise in?
   At what age did you leave education?

On to the questions about reading, I'd like to start by asking you what you read, generally, then I'd like to focus on fiction reading in particular.

Do you read?
[What do you read, if not why not?]
Have your tastes changed over time?
   [How? Why is this?]
How often do you read fiction?
How much time do you spend on it overall?
   [e.g. per week, does this change on holiday or when travelling?]
What time of day do you read?
   [Why?]
Where do you do most of your reading?
   [Why?]
How much of a book do you like to read at once?
Favourite genre(s)?
   [Why?]
Favourite author(s)?
   [Why? What is it about them that you like?]
Few examples of authors whose books you read
   [poss talk about books by male female authors here]
What makes a book good/bad in your opinion?
What (genre) do you never read?
   [Why?]
How do you get hold of the books you read now?
[buy/borrow from lib or friend/gifts]
Are your tastes catered for in high street bookstores?

[Waterstones, WHSmith etc]
Do you ever buy second hand books?
[Why? Why not?]
How do you choose the books you read now? Factors for choosing?
[Recommendations/reviews/book club/TV]
Has a book cover ever intrigued you?
Has a book cover ever put you off reading a book?
What format do the books you buy take?
Where do you keep books while you are in the process of reading them?
What do you do with books once you have finished reading them?
Are there any books you've read more than once?
[What? Why? Why not?]
[Why do you re-read some books and not others?]
[What is it that makes a book re-readable?]
Is there one book you've read more times than any other?
[What? Why has the book had such longevity? What do you get out of it?]
Are there any books that are particularly special to you?
Have you been aware of the recent increase in media coverage of fiction reading?
[Oprah, Richard & Judy, Daily Mail book promos]
Do you feel you have been targeted by any of this media coverage?
Who do you think this media coverage is aimed at?
Do you think that promoting reading is a good thing?
Has it encouraged you to read more?
Have you ever purchased an e-book?
[Would you? Why/Why not?]
Do you ever discuss your reading with anyone else nowadays?
[Who? Why? Why not?]
Have you ever been involved in a book group?
[Details...]
Would you ever consider joining a book group?
[Why/Why not? All male one? Mixed? Female?]

For the next few questions I want you to imagine you belong to a reading group:
If you were choosing a book for an all male reading group, what would you pick and why?
If you had to choose a book for a mixed sex reading group, what would your choice be and why?
Imagine you were the only man in an otherwise all female book group, which book would you choose in this case? Why?

If you had to describe how and what you read to someone who didn't know you, what would you say?
Do you think that fiction reading is gendered in our society?
Are there any types of book that you consider to be particularly/highly gendered?
Is there anything about your reading activities that I haven't asked you that you would like to talk about?

Thank you for your time.