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Inter-Colonialism: Onscreen Representations of Italian-Americans

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INTER-COLONIALISM: ONSCREEN REPRESENTATIONS OF ITALIAN-AMERICANS

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This dissertation reveals a cultural issue within contemporary American society that has been progressing since the late 1880s with the emergence of Italian immigrants. Upon entering into America, Italians had little power in their new culture. They were admitted, grudgingly, and even before they were permitted to step out the doors of the transit center, they were categorized as something "other than white." American writers and filmmakers, some of Italian ethnicity, have recreated the concept of an authentic Italian-American identity. As a result, they have also rewritten Italian-American history to conform to the motion picture and television world of Italian-Americans where Italian-American males have been negatively and damagingly stereotyped as organized criminals, palookas, buffoons, orphans, and hoods.

I concentrate on the many stereotypes that abound throughout the history of the Italian-American male on screen such as the criminal, the über masculine, and the redemptive. I further explain the tenets of post-colonial elements that result in furthering my ideas of Inter-Colonialism where Italian-American males in film and television are treated. Inter-Colonialism aims to serve as a theoretical construct that offers a way to focus discussions concerning the oppressive treatment Italians endured in America since immigrating to this country. Within this construct, conversations are able to flourish in an organized manner concerning images and representations of Italians in America

specifically through film and television. Ultimately, my work suggests that viewers need to be able to read these uninformed ethnic depictions of Italian-Americans or third and fourth generation Italian-Americans stand to lose their own identities to the popular, commodified image of the Italian American.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: The Foundation of Inter-Colonialism[1] and its Integration into Italian-American Studies

The purpose of this dissertation is to draw attention to representations of Italian-American males in film and television and their implications on how Italian-American identities have been formed on and off screen. Naturally, problems with the idea of becoming less Italian and more American in order to assimilate into that which is accepted within the boundaries of America are the focus of this work. Along with compulsory assimilation, Italians in the twentieth century were made to feel as though they needed to abandon portions of their identities entirely in order to become acknowledged in the hegemonic society of America. The loss of a genuine identity and real traditions within this cultural group requires examination into the distinctiveness of much that has been lost from the Italian home base and the importance for society to recognize and recover it.

It is not without a realization of inevitability in regards to desired assimilation of Italians into Italian-Americans that this study emerges. Some distinctive traditions of Italians, like those of large, multi-generation families living under one roof and sharing Sunday dinners, have been purposefully abandoned by many Italians making their way in America in order to cast off all that is a reminder of who they were in their old country. This newly hybridized group, the Italian-Americans, wanted to purge themselves of all that was undesirable from their heritages, so that they could assimilate into the major culture in America. By becoming "more Americanized," this group had opportunities that afforded them better jobs, education, and places to live within American borders. However, as many third and fourth generation Italian-Americans begin to question their

heritage and ethnic backgrounds, more of the banished practices from the old country have come to reveal themselves and are embraced by these descendants.[2] Perhaps the reclamation of these traditions fills a void. Possibly, with merging cultures and globalization through technological opportunities, contemporary generations yearn for a time when daily life was centered simply on family and hard work. Regardless, it is a desire of current generations to find out where they came from, to institute traditions within their own families that carry meaning and distinctiveness while honoring the historical stories that attach themselves to the customs.

For film viewers, it is essential to be able to access the native lore and historical heritage behind the assimilated portrayals of Italian-American culture mainly because without this understanding, viewers are left with only the representation, the un-real, of the figure rather than the whole embodiment of the Italian-American and the culture that connects to this figure. In an article titled "Latin America, Parking Lots, and Postcolonialism: Teaching World Literature," Terry Caesar questions the situation where the reader of contemporary texts (here, we view film as such) "knows nothing of the history—and therefore the national identity" (109). He cites Stuart Hall's position that cultural identities are considered "as always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth … [n]ot an essence but a *positioning* [Hall's emphasis]" (qtd. in Caesar 109). Thus, if we can't access the primary discourses that construct a cultural identity, we can only imagine its construction (often through stereotypes), and, therefore, something of importance is lost. It is within this sense of loss that I steep my discussion in what we now call Italian-American Literary Studies.

Italian American Literary Studies had gained a seat at the American academic

table in part because Italian-American immigrants have been marginalized, and scholars are attempting to show how we can regain an understanding of their culture and traditions. This perspective has taken its place next to current theoretical studies such as Post-colonial Theory and Gender Studies. Italian American Literary Studies has emerged out of the necessity "to chart forces of cultural hegemony" (Viscusi, "The History of Italian American") and track the displacement of a diasporic culture. The concerns of this culturally deteriorating ethnic group to maintain its sense of identity have driven the theory forward to encompass a growing call for a more organized "matrix of codes" (Sipiora, "Walking the Mean Streets") that will support the study of the culture, language, and identity of an otherwise displaced, marginalized, hybrid group. In "Is the United States Postcolonial?," Jenny Sharpe poses a foundation for Sipiora's matrix of codes coinciding with diasporic cultures and their treatment on American soil. To understand how ethnic immigrants become marginalized in America, Sharpe comments, "the weakness of the [traditional] internal colonial model is that it draws too sharp a distinction between voluntary and involuntary movements of populations" (3). As a result, post-colonial tenets morph into what she calls transnationalism. This development, Sharpe argues, permits us to read marginalized cultures who voluntarily immigrate to America in a similar way that we read cultures that have been colonized on their own soil. With Sharpe's acknowledgment of marginalized cultures on American soil, my study into the oppressed Italian-American in America intensifies as we begin to see a further need to explore the extensions of these colonized peoples.

Robert Viscusi's article, "The History of Italian-American Literary Studies,"[3] states that when Italians came to America, colonization happened "*to them*" instead of

"*for them.*" He explains that Italians may have come to America and assimilated "to some extent," but they were colonized by American demands and expectations. For example, it was expected that immigrants speak the dominant language, English. In order to get jobs and keep them, speaking English was essential. For those who were unable to pick up the language through education or the like, opportunities were lost. Viscusi's work, although targeted at the writing of the Italian-American, unearths the beginnings of the Italian-American subject's oppression in America which I concentrate on. His call for Italian-American scholars to focus on the Italian-American family within the literature of Italian-Americans begins the study of transnational assimilation that approaches like Diasporic Theory, Post-Colonial Theory, and Ethnic Studies situate themselves within. Building on Viscusi's work, Fred Gardaphé urges us to pay closer attention to actual Italian-American family culture rather than to simply cite the literature ("George Panetta's *'ciuccio bianco'* and Early (Italian American) Humor"). Thus, Gardaphé's work transcends the linguistic utterance to include the image while pulling forward all of the foundational work Viscusi established. With Viscusi's discussion of assimilation in relation to Italian-Americans and Gardaphé's advocacy for stronger familial exploration within the Italian-American communities, my work furthers both scholars' agendas in order to examine the powers brandishing the images of the ethnic group.

This dissertation reveals a cultural issue within contemporary American society that has been progressing since the late 1880s with the emergence of Italian immigrants. Upon entering into America, Italians had little power in their new culture. They were admitted, grudgingly, and even before they were permitted to step out the doors of the

transit center, they were categorized as something "other than white." American writers and filmmakers, some of Italian ethnicity, have recreated the concept of an authentic Italian-American identity. As a result, they have also rewritten Italian-American history to conform to the motion picture and television world of Italian-Americans where Italian-American males have been negatively and damagingly stereotyped as organized criminals, palookas, buffoons, orphans, and hoods. Recently, many scholars have taken notice of the (re)creation of Italian-American images and have begun analyzing America's fascination with Italian Americans. Current scholars like Jennifer Guglielmo, Louise DeSalvo, and Maria Laurino have drawn attention to these stereotypes but have not yet offered alternative ways of viewing them. I assert that Italian-American stereotypes are far more complex than the term implies. These depictions are almost always blended with much that is "good" in Italian-Americans both on and off the screen and therefore powerfully gain viewer sympathy. By viewing numerous Italian-American characters like Arthur Fonzarelli, Michael Corleone, Rocky Balboa, Tommy DeVito, and Tony Soprano as well as actors such as Rudolph Valentino and fighters like Rocky Marciano and Jake LaMotta alongside their WASP-like counterparts, we can begin to see the unassuming yet appalling treatment Italian-American men have endured since their diasporic condition transplanted them on to American soil and how they have fought back to maintain their dignity.

Another compelling reason to examine Italian-American cultural representations is that as other ethnicities are seeking to define just what it is to be a hyphenated American, so too Italian-Americans are beginning to understand the necessity of such a definition. This identity marks the move away from a purely Italian ethnicity to a hybrid.

In response, it is critical to posit an awareness of the rich culture and tradition embedded in Italian-American heritage. Otherwise, inaccurate depictions of this ethnic group will continue to lead to the extinction of an authentic heritage.

By building a foundation from which to read the Italian as a subjugated figure and therefore the Italian-American as an *other*, it is clear that the Italian-American male figure has been appropriated by Hollywood filmmakers in order to gain financially from the death of a cultural heritage. Although not entirely negative, Hollywood stereotypes have highlighted negative qualities over the celebration of working-class values, dedication to craftsmanship, valuing of Italian cuisine, and the honoring of spirituality and sainthood amongst others. These values Italian-Americans have always held in the highest esteem.

In summary of Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, hybridity is a product of colonialism and means simply "ambivalence"; however, from this ambivalence arises a discourse of stereotyping and a desire of the dominant culture to resist inclusion, or hybridity, by mocking or stereotyping the other as culturally insignificant or "damaged" (*Location,* 162). Hybridity, then, can be defined as the yoking together of two items (in this case ethnicities). The idea of hybridity comes from the critiques of cultural imperialism, when a territory takes over a less affluent territory. It is important to mention Antonio Gramsci here because his ideas on subjugation and subalternity take on a more visible place in the work of Gayatri Spivak, whom I will discuss later in the framework of my theoretical discussion. Although Gramsci is associated with the political standing of the proletariat and peasant cultures, his ideas on hegemony opened doors from which the current cultural studies fields have borrowed when discussing ideas

behind class, race, and culture. Specifically, Gramsci's views on Italian politics can be utilized to trace the dissention within Italy and perhaps even provide a construction to work within while discussing the reasons that there was a *mezzogiorno* (areas south and east of Rome) diaspora. Building a history of the Italian immigrant entering America is necessary for the study of the Italian-American within this discussion of hybridity. Moreover, when discussing the hybrid in simple terms, we turn to critics like Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said,[4] and Homi Bhabha because they are the leaders in untangling what it means to be an "Other."[5]

It is important to associate the study of the Italian here with the study of the Oriental in Edward Said's work as well as the concept of the stereotype from Homi Bhabha's work because these studies situate the Italian as a casualty of political oppression and stereotyping, much like Said's and Bhabha's discussions of the Oriental. Homi Bhabha says in "The Other Question" that stereotypes are a construction of signs (83). We can see the shaping of the Orient and subsequently other groups by viewing a simple semiotic construction of signs. The sign is the stereotype, the signifier is the Oriental and the signified is the representation; Said suggests that the male Oriental is deemed weak and feminine but dangerous and the female is eagerly dominated and strangely exotic (72 - 75). Bhabha calls this concept of opposing ideas *ambivalence*. Bhabha suggests that if the sign is not repeated then the connection between the signifier and the signified is weak, causing the stereotype to dissipate (*Liminality,*7). If we utilize this semiotic construction on the Italians of the *mezzogiorno*, it would follow this model: the sign is the stereotype, the signifier is southern Italy, and the signified is the representation, specifically a "feminize[d] south and sexualize[d] southern women"

(McClintock 5), as well as "the element of criminality at an abundance" (Buonanno 54). The problem here is that the stereotype did, indeed, repeat, causing Italians to be stereotyped before they even entered America to become a hybrid.

Jennifer Guglielmo, in an essay that appeared in *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made In America,* points out that when Italians immigrated to America, 1870 – 1930s, there was a color line. James Baldwin states that "the cost of admission [to the dominant culture] was learning to demonize and reject" or a person would always be on the outside (3). Unlike Baldwin, these immigrants were unaware of the color line but would soon understand the cost of their fleeing from their country to a better place; the land of the free, full of opportunity, was nothing but a façade. Guglielmo goes on to place Italians in America in a hybrid category since Italians were not defined as white and because of the blatant oppression they encountered from the U. S. government upon entering their new land. For example, Guglielmo references Louis DeSalvo's discussion on the Italian naturalization process in America. DeSalvo shows that a large number of Italians immigrating from the *mezzogiorno* were categorized as color "white" and complexion "dark" (25), showing the "provisional status of Italian 'whiteness'" (27). Because southern Italy (and specifically Sicily), standing as a representation of that which is Italian in American pop culture, has been conquered by so many cultures including Greek and Arab, causing the gene pool to darken, the U.S. government "us[ed] their power to *create* rather than *record* difference in physical appearance" (27). The Italians were simply "racially suspect" because they were considered darker than the average American. Historian Matthew Jacobson states, "not only did Italians not look white, they didn't act white either." They were darker in complexion, and they took jobs that were

associated with blacks like laboring on farms, digging trenches, and laying tracks for the railroad (qtd. in Ferraro 163).

With this stereotyping in their new country came a need for the Italian to purge him/herself of any association with the old country. Italians threw away naturalization papers and records linking them back to Italy. They assimilated as much as possible to the standards of America, yet they were always reminded of the memory of their histories, which was often troublesome. Anne McClintock states that Italy's politicians, novelists, and other "populizers of race discourse" (qtd. in Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution…* 84) were able to build a national identity upon misrepresenting the ideal of their country by way of presenting the south and southern woman, specifically, as sexual bait. Those from southern Italy were seen in popular culture as weaker than the northerners because they were superstitious and because the men were said to have had unhealthy attachments to their mothers. The women were stereotyped as aggressive, sexual, loud, exotic, and dark. We see this same misrepresentation in Edward Said's *Orientalism* when he discusses the idea of the Orient and the Oriental as land and image appropriated by the West. He says that the West has determined what it means to be a member of the East. Westerners have been educated and empowered by training and definitions and exoticized images to think they know what it means to be a member of the Orient. The problem, Said says, is that the West has glorified and exoticized through literature, film, and other media the Eastern way of life, religion, art, culture, and food as a means of making the Orient more accessible to the American people (132 – 135). Spivak's answer to this problem is that the hegemonic culture should "de-hegemonize." Spivak feels that if those who hold powerful status in the West could place themselves in

the positions of the subject (the Easterners), that would help the West to understand better what it means to be a member of the Eastern culture (67 – 81).

However, today, Italian-American hybrids already have no authentic connection to their homeland or to the ancestors who immigrated to America. The history of the immigrants was recreated instead of recorded during the naturalization process; the Italians in the discourse exoticized the land and the females; and American popular culture appropriated access to the Italian land, the Italian people, and the Italian language to utilize in the commodification of the culture (this is the essence of Baudrillard's and Debord's notions of consumerism that I will discuss in Chapter 2). In this theoretical discourse, a concentration on the image of a linguistic marker, "Italianity," engineered by Roland Barthes, leads us to understanding the idea that Hollywood appropriated and then commodified what we once knew as *authentic* Italian. I assert in Chapter 2 that this marker has typecast Italian-American males in a patronizing, stereotyped manner which ultimately results in the loss of an *authentic* Italian history. The idea of this loss is what prompts exploration of Frantz Fanon's role in post-colonialism.

Fanon identified the universal psychological phenomenon of the loss of history leading to the desire of the colonized to reclaim their past. With this paradigm, Fanon opened up the field to include a way for colonized natives to have a genuine voice through what he terms the "three stages of ethnopoetics" (179). Fanon was a psychiatrist from Martinique where he treated mental patients. With this experience, he felt he was better prepared to communicate with the colonized in a psychological way in order to help explain the "myth" of colonization, the indoctrination of the colonized into the beliefs of the colonizers. In summary he posits three stages to help in this

communication: assimilation of the culture imposed on the colonized; realization of the acculturation of their histories and presence of the colonizers; and fighting (shaking up the people) by writing about the process by which the colonized culture, history, and identities have been stolen. Fanon says the colonized must reclaim their pasts not by looking backward but by starting from right now. Much like Fanon, Aime Césaire in *Discourse on Colonialism* suggests that natives must reclaim their pasts but not by violence as Fanon suggests. Césaire leaves the reader to choose for him/herself how to reclaim the past. What Césaire brings to the discussion is "thingification," (9) where the colonizer must project onto the colonized all that is deplorable so as to be able to call the subject a savage in order to continue the colonization of the subject.

Albert Memmi joins in with a comment on the boomerang effect. He says that thingification is like the boomerang effect in that the colonizer must subjugate the colonized figure in any way necessary. However, Memmi goes on to say the colonizer also becomes a thing, devoid of feeling, turning to "opaque stone" in order to take on some of the responsibility in the treatment of the colonized figure (qtd. in Yancy 243). By turning themselves into things devoid of feeling, by de-humanizing themselves as they did to the colonized, colonizers are no longer responsible for their actions, which can be justified, and the policing of the group can continue. We can adapt this idea to the cinematic representation of the Italian-American when we trace the stereotyped Italian-American figure from the "mustache Petes" (typically modeled after early Sicilian immigrants, a lot of times those who were associated with the mafia) to the gangster to the boxer back to the gangster and on to the cop, priest, and cook, and then back to the gangster. This effect can be invoked when we realize that the power that has created

these images in a number of cases is that of the colonized group itself. In my dissertation, I call attention specifically to Garry Marshall, Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, and Sylvester Stallone. Although these filmmakers are situated later in the history of Italians in America, their work provides a foundation for a rich study into the Italian-American inter-colonial figure in Italian American Studies.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the idea of Arthur Fonzarelli, Fonzie, as oppressed by the dominant white society of the Cunningham family. We watch as Fonzie continually searches for a way into the dominant culture so he, too, can become a happy, contributing member of society. Fonzie realizes that his own identity is in question when he finds himself assimilating into that which surrounds him in the microcosm of WASP-saturated Milwaukee centered at the teen hang-out, Arnold's. Marshall writes the character out of the traditional, ongoing stereotype of a low-life hood. Ultimately, Marshall is able to show progress for the Italian-American character by unveiling his depth as Fonzie attempts to gain entrance into the hegemonic society within which he is expected to live. However, the complexity of Fonzie's character is revealed little by little (at least in the first few seasons of the show) illustrating his internal struggle at losing a large portion of his cultural identity to become part of the Cunningham family.

The theory surrounding the inter-colonial figure is also evident within the construction of terminology: for example, the "palooka," which has attached itself to the image of the Italian-American male. In Chapter 4, I explore the etymology of the term "palooka" and show its relationship to the demonization of the Italian-American prize-fighter. To help situate the tenets of inter-coloniality for the Italian-American scholar, my concept for discussing the ongoing struggles of assimilated immigrant group

members utilizes the characters of Rocky Balboa and Jake LaMotta. Both characters hail from the streets of working-class cities where, as children, they were provided little guidance, education, or role-modeling outside the typical Italian-American boy's upbringing for that time. Both of these characters are forced to grow up struggling against societal hegemony because of their Italian ethnicity. Even though the directors of the films *Rocky* (1976) and *Raging Bull* (1980) are Italian themselves, they draw attention to the archetypal pigeonhole onscreen; however, much as with Marshall's depiction of the Fonz, both film directors also subvert their typecasting, allowing for a deeper understanding of the complexity of both characters. The characters' struggles with their own identities are owed to their unfortunate economic situations as well as the society into which their fathers were accepted.

Of course, I address the new roles that have opened up over the years for Italian-American males as well. As a response to the call for what Bondanella refers to as an "ethnic antidote" (225), roles that strayed away from the wiseguy depiction were created for Italian Americans. Alternate roles like that of Frank Serpico in *Serpico* (1973) showed one of the only Italian-American cops who did not skate the line between the law and criminality.

It is clear that few roles escape the traditional masculine, aggressive, violent, womanizing stereotype of the Italian-American male in film. Thus, chapter 5 examines the complication of the Italian-American male figure's sexuality through figures from Rudolph Valentino's persona to characterizations in *The Godfather*, *Goodfellas*, and *The Sopranos*. In this chapter, I scrutinize the characters of Julio Desnoyers, an Argentinean heir to a Ranching family (played by Rudolph Valentino), Juan Gallardo, a Spanish

bullfighter, (also played by Valentino), Rico Bandello, a small-time criminal (played by Edward G. Robinson), Vito and Michael Corleone, crime empire dons (played by Marlon Brando and Al Pacino) and Bonasera, an undertaker (played by Salvatore Corsitto), and Tommy DeVito (played by Joe Pesci) and Paulie Gualtieri (played by Tony Sirico), enforcers for the mob. Ultimately, this chapter culminates in ideas that show progress for the image of the Italian-American male in Hollywood by constructing a context in which to examine these hyper-masculine males and their sexuality through unveiling the fluidity of their masculinities.

In my conclusion, I concentrate on the many stereotypes that abound throughout the history of the Italian-American male on screen such as the criminal, the über masculine, and the redemptive. I further explain the tenets of post-colonial elements that result in furthering my ideas of inter-coloniality where Italian-American males in film and television are treated. Inter-coloniality aims to serve as a theoretical construct that offers a way to focus discussions concerning the oppressive treatment Italians endured in America since immigrating to this country. Within this construct, conversations are able to flourish in an organized manner concerning images and representations of Italians in America specifically through film and television. Ultimately, my work suggests that viewers need to be able to read these uninformed ethnic depictions of Italian-Americans or third and fourth generation Italian-Americans stand to lose their own identities to the popular, commodified image of the Italian American.

The Birth of Inter-Colonialism

The genesis of Inter-colonialism came out of my need to know more about my

own heritage and the history of my relatives. As my older family members began to pass away, I realized that they were the holders of the stories indigenous to our family history. Of course, the stories and characterization of my family history from Italy and in America differ from the depictions of the Italian-Americans on American television and in American film since my relatives, for the most part, were not recognized as criminals, palookas, buffoons, or hoods. I began to ask more questions from my family regarding our heritage, our entrance into America only to find that a lot of history and the authenticity of my family's identity had been lost as a result of assimilation. Their quirks, their oddities, like superstitions that prevented children from sleeping directly in front of mirrored bureaus so that they wouldn't wake to wrinkled faces and food choices like polenta and dandelion salad picked directly from the grass in their own yards, were mocked out and used against them when they came to America. In addition, speaking broken English and celebrating family by sharing large meals with many relatives each week supplied non-Italian neighbors with more material to ridicule the Italian heritage.

When I entered graduate school for my doctorate, I was given some great advice from two of my professors from that first semester: try to determine an interest that will carry through to the dissertation stage of the degree so that while completing coursework, I can also research in the field I will concentrate on in the end. As it turns out, the image of Italian-Americans is what I concentrated on that semester. In a research methodology course taught by Michael Vella, I was able to gain valuable knowledge of the plight of Italian-Americans in history and how this ethnic group has been depicted through images, film and television. In my second course that semester, Comparative Literature taught by Malcolm Hayward, I came to see the connection between the treatment of Italian-

Americans in America and on-screen with that of post-colonialism. For my term paper, I wrote of the oppressive treatment of the Italian-American character Fonzie in *Happy Days*. Hayward was intrigued with the idea of applying post-colonial theory to this non-post-colonial character and suggested I continue thinking about the implications such a theory could have on Italian-Americans in America. Another professor, Terry Caesar, from my Master's degree granting institution read my paper and immediately directed me to critics such as Jenny Sharpe who he felt could help to shape my ideas on this new way of reading Italian-Americans. I remember Caesar sending me an email that applauded my efforts for declaring the need for a new way of viewing Italian-Americans but urging me to come up with a name for this theoretical lens and tenets that would allow a discussion of post-colonialism to take place outside of the oppressed land and inside of American borders. From here I began to highlight similar treatment, similar responses between post-colonialism and the treatment and responses of Italian-Americans. I researched to find a term that would exude the necessity of the theoretical lens and found a document that charted railroad plans from the late 1880s in America.[6] The document mentioned an Inter-colony of rails that would connect from port city to port city throughout North America. It seemed fitting to name my new way of reading images and the treatment of Italian-Americans in America Inter-Colonial because when Italians came to America, they would have entered through one of these city ports.

Finally, during the writing of this dissertation, I attended the 42nd Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association in Baton Rouge where I was in the audience for Ribert Viscusi's talk titled "The History of Italian-American Literary Studies." Viscusi renamed terms like colonial and post-colonial in order to distinguish

the Italian American writer from other hyphenate writers. From his work, I chose material that would help to focus my ideas on the ethnicity of the Italian-American rather than the Italian-American as writer. With the help of Fred Gardaphé's work on parody in the Italian-American community and Anthony Tamburri's work on Italian-American ethnicity, I was able to round out my ideas related to the oppressed Italian-American in America and present my work in an organized and well-rounded study that takes place at the center of the field of Italian American Studies.

CHAPTER TWO

Being Italian-American: A Twisted Commodity

This chapter looks at how Inter-Colonialism unveils ways in which Italian-American identities have been formed, stereotyped, resisted, and appropriated for commodification within a cultural context that allows a clear view of negative social and cultural effects. Roland Barthes's concept of "Italianity" suggests a disturbing yet necessary understanding of how Hollywood appropriated and commodified what we once knew as *authentic* Italian. This process involved typecasting Italian-American males in a patronizing, stereotyped manner which ultimately resulted in the loss of an *authentic* Italian history. By packaging all things stereotyped Italian into "Italianity" and utilizing this concept in advertising, television and film, writers and directors managed to re-create a history of the Italian-American male based almost completely on what Jean Baudrillard refers to as use-value (*The Consumer Society,* 50, 89, 150), that which has been created and sold (here, the use-value is negative and glorified past depictions of the image of Italian Americans). Fundamentally, following Baudrillard's logic, the viewing audience buys into the sign, which is nothing more than a stereotype of Italian males based on images associated with criminality. Thus, Hollywood hopes the audiences will consume based on their inner need to identify with the sign in order to become associated with a particular group, one that has the value of being sold as an experience not to be missed out on.

In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord complicates Baudrillard's assumptions of the sign by bringing the idea of the spectacle into play. The spectacle is defined as "not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people

that is mediated by images" (Debord 12). To clarify, the spectacle Debord refers to is the world culture interpreted through partially false images. As we begin to recognize that consumerism can be referred to as spectacle, that which fights/competes for our attention in the marketplace, we begin to understand better Baudrillard's concepts of sign and use-value. We are able to rationalize Hollywood's consumerist replicas of the Italian-American image in so far as we understand the push for Hollywood's commodification of the sign of *Italianity*. We are reminded that once a popular replicated image has been launched, it becomes a sign of the use-value that acts as the condition by which the sign is sold. There comes a time in this process where the replicas become more real than the real, calling into question whether or not our viewing audience *can* distinguish between the real and the hyper-real or, even more frightening, whether we care to distinguish between the two. Ultimately, we are left to negotiate through the negative associations that have ascribed themselves to the sign of *Italianity*.

So, in fact, as we begin to work within the limits of spectacle that Debord sets forth for us, we are more likely to position Andrew Greeley's statement, stemming all the way back to 1975, at the front of our analysis when he exclaimed, "the Italian-American has been recently discovered as a consumer item by media people" (qtd. in Juliani 99). Even by the mid 1970s, it was almost insignificant that at the turn of the twentieth century when Italians immigrated to America, they were treated poorly. They were given less money than the "white man" for equal job performance and were forced into specified sections of cities already being formed because these sections were where "their kind" could be found. In fact, it is suggested in Louise DeSalvo's "Color: White/Complexion: Dark" that Italians were not considered Caucasian when they first

immigrated to America. What mattered more was that much like current immigrating ethnicities, Italians brought with them their own identities. It is noted in *Beyond National Culture?* "Italians, for instance, arrived as Sicilians, Neapolitans, or Romans, rather than with a common Italian consciousness" (Jusdanis). Therefore, it would be difficult for these immigrants to all consciously conform to one concept of what it means to be from Italy, to be Italian; they were considered people of the region from where they emigrated. Jusdanis goes on to claim that it is possible that a culture/heritage can be invented through "ethnic Programs at universities [and] media … which becomes increasingly essential in maintaining solidarity" within the ethnic group. What ultimately happens is a panethnic culture is created out of the meshing together of immigrants from the same country yet from vastly different regions within that country. This panethnic culture relies on similarities in languages, physical appearances, and religious affiliations.

One way in which Hollywood writers and directors aided this creation of a panethnic culture was to group together these immigrants by way of parody. Joseph Papaleo writes in an article in 1978 that

> [t]he Italian-American media image is composed of overreactions; after bowing, smiling, and being funny, the Italian loses control. The Italian cries likes a woman, loses his temper like a trapped animal, cowers like a rabbit in danger (if he is not a gangster), and sacrifices his potential attractiveness in a competitive society by eating too much. (93)

These are among the elements that writers have used since the 1920s to capitalize on the panethnic image of the Italian American.[7] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines parody (in extended use) as "a poor or feeble imitation of something; a travesty," which is

defined as "[a] literary composition which aims at exciting laughter by burlesque and ludicrous treatment of a serious work; literary composition of this kind; hence, a grotesque or debased imitation or likeness; a caricature." Because we associate the term parody with laughter and fun, it is easy to dismiss the ugly truth that the composition connotates for those being imitated. This behavior only adds to the problem Hollywood has created for Italian Americans. Targeting and continually airing imitations of stereotyped behaviors that have been formed since the 1920s debases what it means to be an Italian in America.

Saturday Night Live[8] skits of gangster films beginning with the 1976 "Godfather Group Therapy" skit parodying both Coppola's and Puzo's versions of *The Godfather* follow Papaleo's elements of the over-reactive Italian-American image. John Belushi, who plays Vito Corleone (the Don of the Corleone crime family), is portrayed as an overweight and funny Godfather figure. He uses humor to sidestep his therapist's questions concerning his real anger issue, that of his son being killed. When he is asked about his blocked feelings, Vito responds that he is hurting because his businesses are losing money and a rival gang is moving in on his territory and this gang wants to move drugs through his zones. With his wife reminding him that he is still not being truthful with his hidden feelings of grief, the skit offers even more humor mainly because both actors over-accentuate parody of the characters they are playing. Vito also cries like a woman when he gets too emotional to contain his true feelings. Finally, when asked to act out his feelings without using verbal communication, the Corleone character mimics Vito's death scene from the film by seemingly choking on an orange peel.

The line between parody and travesty is blurred here because the images of the

Italian-American and his history are competing within the skit. We have *The Godfather* film, the character of Vito Corleone, the image of the gangster, the honorable father, the faithful husband, the doting grandfather, the peasant from Corleone, Sicily (by using the blood orange[9] as a prop, one that ultimately aids in his death), and the legitimate business man all working in tandem to produce a not-so-funny imitation of an Italian-American immigrant. This proto-type of the Italian-American happens to also be a criminal, yet one with at least some morality as evidenced by his distaste for drugs. This skit ignores what the film and Puzo's novel do not, the historical background of the peasant from Corleone, the murders of his father, brother, and mother, his tragic departure from his home at a young age, and his necessity to enter into a life of crime when he became an adult in New York City. Without finding a way to parody the Italian-American character in entirety, with the truth about his history involved, "immigrants [and Italian-Americans who have already assimilated will remain] stigmatized by images that act like chains restraining their attempts at progress" (Papaleo 95).

It is necessary to interject that the media participants who partakes in skits like this one are not alone in the blame of perpetuating these less than accurate stereotypes. We must also look to Italian-American filmmakers and writers. We are immediately drawn back to *The Godfather* with Mario Puzo and Francis Coppola. Some critics working within ethnic studies have commented that it is better to be on screen cast in any light rather than not be on screen at all. At least an ethnic character is recognized as an ethnic character, not to be ignored or rather dismissed as non-existent, if cast in a role on screen. Michael Parenti suggests regarding Italians on screen that it is "better to be a TV buffoon, or even a thug, than not exist at all" (107). And Puzo fell into the same trap

when he penned his best seller *The Godfather* just four years after his self-proclaimed "finest and most poetic and literary work," *The Fortunate Pilgrim*.[10] After writing *The Fortunate Pilgrim*, a story based on his mother's struggle as an immigrant, and not making the kind of money he needed in order to survive as a writer, Puzo decided to write a novel that was less artistic, less about the struggle and the reality of the Italian immigrant, and more about what the mass audience could identify with, the criminal element of Italian America. When writers in the field of media like Puzo and Coppola embrace the stereotypes that identify a struggling culture housed within a larger more established culture, they sacrifice "the complexity of reality […] to the simplicity of mass market tastes" (Juliani 102). This causes mass audiences to reinforce their already formed ideas concerning the less established ethnic group. This action is one more instance of the media commodifying and capitalizing on the deconstruction of, by way of stereotyping, an ethnic group.

After all, for years and to some extent still, the characterization of the media's treatment of Italian-Americans could be summed up in one statement: they are an ethnic group that "we can laugh at and not take too seriously" (Parenti 107). We are able to laugh at the dense yet violent Capone cartoon characters on the *Bugs Bunny Show* or the bumbling hunky housekeeper Tony (Tony Danza) on *Who's the Boss*. We find humor in the uneducated, street thugs like Fonzie from *Happy Days* with his catch phrase "Ayyyyyy" and Vinnie Barbarino from *Welcome Back Kotter* with his iconic yet silly repertoire "up your nose with a rubber hose." We pay little attention to the so called new, corrected images of Italian-Americans on TV, the cop/detectives, because even though they are on the right side of the law, they are playing characters who are often times

violent and who blur the boundaries of justice in order to get what they want. For example, the cop-characters of Baretta (Robert Blake 1975) from *Baretta* and Detective Lupo (Jeremy Sisto 2007-2010) from *Law and Order* are fine additions to the counter-balancing act that the media have created; however, a quick look at their personnel files will reveal their propensities towards violence and unconventional means of obtaining evidence. These officers have the ability to obtain evidence when others have not been able to gather substantial evidence in target cases leading, viewers directly back to the already formed stereotype of criminality that has been associated with the Italian American. We view these cop figures as less significant in the larger picture simply because they are more like the criminals they are hired to put in jail.

Italianity/*Italianicity/*Authenticity: The Theory at Work

The consumption of signs occurs within a cultural context. In *A Semiotic of Ethnicity*, Anthony Tamburri champions the need for "repertoire of signs" that will aid in the creation of "visual variations … represent[ing] different versions of what can be perceived as the Italian / American *interpretant"* (8).[11] He suggests that these visual variations are dependent "on one's generation" as well as gender and socio-economic situation (8). For Tamburri, the visual may lend itself to any of the arts including drama, film, painting, or sculpture. By working within new variants, Italian-Americans have expanded their presence in the arts and on screen, allowing for a more comprehensive study of the ethnic group as it manifests itself in Hollywood through communal experience. Tamburri's explanation validates the need to examine the construction of the Italian-American heritage at the hands of those in power, Hollywood directors and

writers.

In his essay, "Rhetoric of the Image," Roland Barthes explains that the image can only be a collective "re-presentation" because we attach codes, meanings, and experiences to images. He points out that "the image is in a certain manner the *limit* of meaning" (269). Barthes's reasoning is pertinent to Baudrillard's discussion of the Panzani advertisement[12] because it clarifies the elements of Baudrillard's assertions regarding the sign, and it explains why Barthes and in turn Baudrillard use the ad as subject. Baudrillard suggests that the term "Italianity" can be viewed as a code that, conceptually, is simply a myth. Since myths are not "comprised of content, they are a process of exchange" (*Selected,* 91), leading to a consumerist bartering. The term becomes currency that can be sold to an audience as truth or depicted as a sense of authenticity. Barthes makes clear that he utilizes the advertising image because "the image is undoubtedly intentional" (270). He believes that in order to sell a product, certain signifieds of the product have been formed a priori so that the message of the product can be channeled to the consumer in a clear manner. Barthes's analysis is dependent on whether the image can truly shape meaning and if it can, how the meaning attaches itself to the image. Furthermore, his study requires us to believe that a re-presentation is produced by a fixed and pre-determined system of signs rather than by unconscious stereotypes.

Having this knowledge while reading Baudrillard clarifies Baudrillard's assessment of signs as well as his discussion of the Panzani ad. Baudrillard sees the world as we know it now constructed on the representation of representations, replicas of signs. These "simulations" exist to fool us into thinking that an identifiable reality exists.

In the movement of the successive phases of simulation, according to Baudrillard, "[the image] is the reflection of a profound reality; it masks a profound reality; it masks the absence of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum" (173). If we take what Barthes sets forth in his original analysis of the ad, that when a product is designed for the consumer, it is situated in an intentional manner so as to evoke the necessity of purchase, and couple it with what Baudrillard suggests in his discussion, that signs have become conscious representations of the real product in order to mass produce and sell the image of the original sign at a lower cost for production, then we can certainly understand the movement that has become the reality of today in the viewing audience's marketplace.

In Baudrillard's *Selected Writings*, we are introduced to "Barthes' analysis of the advertisement for Panzani pasta, with its connotation of what 'Italianity' is as example" (Baudrillard 91). Baudrillard identifies in the ad that the Signified is a concept, and the Signifier is a sound image. Here, according to Baudrillard, the Signifier is a word, "Italianity,"[13] which brings out the signified, the concept of Italian-ness. This concept then becomes a sign equaling the system of Italian-ness. This sign/system influences what is perceived as "real" Italian culture. Essentially, Italianity or Italian-ness associated with the product becomes part of the commodity of the image being sold as Italian. In brief, the first order of simulacra, the stage of the shadow, focuses on counterfeits and false images. In this level, signs cease to have obligatory meanings. Instead, the sign becomes more important than the physical reality. The second order of simulacra, the stage of mimeses, is dominated by reproduction of these false images. In this order, signs become repetitive and begin to make individuals the same. Signs refer to

the differentiation between the represented signified, not to reality. The third order of simulacra rests on ultimate simulation. What is present in this order is the ultimate collapse between reality and the imaginary. It is no longer possible to tell the difference between what is real and its simulation. Thus, as a result of this theoretical system of analysis, we are better able to view the relationship between the loss of authentic historical heritage and the rise in the commodity that is known as simply stereotyping a culture.

A more contemporary example of Baudrillard's concepts at work while seen through a popular television series can be offered as evidence for this claim. In season two of the HBO series *The Sopranos*, Silvio Dante, Tony Soprano, "Big Pussy" Bonpensiero, Pauly Walnuts, and Christopher Moltisante[14] are all sitting around the backroom of the Bada Bing, a strip club owned by Silvio. They are watching what they perceive as their heritage, their "Italianity," *The Godfather*. Silvio insists that the phrase "just when I thought I was out, they pulled me back in" is a representation ascribed to Italians who try to leave the life of the mafia. It does not occur to him that this phrase could be used in other ethnic situations. He identifies with his culture and his Italian-ness (Italianity) through what media have commodified for him. In essence, he uses the phrase as cultural currency to purchase his heritage.

Furthermore, we have to consider that the viewers of *The Sopranos* are watching layers of simulation, a sort of redoublement. More specifically, the viewer is taking part in a doubling effect via a myth. Baudrillard asserts that myths "are not comprised of content. They are a process of exchange and circulation of a code whose *form* is determinant" (91). Because of this exchange and circulation process, the "Italianity" in

question becomes form. In this episode (and many others throughout the series), the history of Italians is skewed by *The Godfather* and then by David Chase, the creator of *The Sopranos*, which in turn teaches the history of "Italianity" as false. Follow this model:

The Signifier (word Italian) induces

The Signified (concept of Italian-ness) which with (the signifier) becomes

a sign

The Referent (the real Italian culture) is the effect or rather a

perception (of self and others)

It is clear that Chase is attempting to do something to the audience with this redoubled phrase, created by Puzo/Coppola and redoubled in *The Sopranos*. Perhaps he is simply trying to show how easily history can be skewed, or he may be delving deeper into philosophy, presenting a challenge to the viewer to not only know the history of Italians but also the history of Italian-ness in film and television. Regardless of his motives, this layering technique keeps his viewers coming back to the episodes in hopes that they may unravel something new for themselves in terms of plot. Ironically, when discussed in this light, it seems that Chase is feeding into Baudrillard's theory of consumerism and commodification. Yet, it is possible to both work against the stereotype that has been perpetuated by calling attention to the skewed history of the ethnic group while, at the same time, highlighting the popularity of the Italian image in order to gain currency for the repeated condemnation of the representation.

The catch phrase, "Just when I thought I was out – they pulled me back in," is a commodity. The phrase becomes referential to itself instead of referential to

gangsterism; therefore, we can trace this referential by using Baudrillard's orders of simulacra. To begin with the Symbolic order, signs are limited and fixed by rank, duty, and obligation. This is a social status linked to some sense of natural order held by the viewer.

In the first order of simulacra, a statement becomes an equivalent for social life. For example, Michael Corleone, played by Al Pacino in *Godfather III*, states, "Just when I thought I was out – they pulled me back in." This language/phrase acts as a sign that masks basic reality. Puzo was known to use real quotes from court trials, so the phrase may have originated there—or it may have been a Coppola-invented line of dialogue which may not have been intended as a catch-phrase to identify with the life of a gangster. Either way, the phrase itself becomes a sign performing a layer of pretense for the "real," which is the idea of Italian-ness by way of the notion of gangsterism.

In the second order of simulacra, simulation takes the sign (statement) and commodifies it by mass-production (here, the effect of cinema itself). The signs mask the element of a basic reality. The phrase "Just when I thought I was out – they pulled me back in" becomes a sign that represents what it means to be a gangster. Because of this referential, we can identify all Italian-Americans who resemble Michael Corleone as real gangsters whether they are or are not. Gangsters become a mass produced commodity.

The third order of simulacra is transformation of the simulation into the simulacra itself. This is when the real becomes reproducible. For example, Silvio is simulating an already simulated language (the language/phrase used by Pacino in *The Godfather III*). This fact moves Silvio's phrase even further from the nature of an "objective reality" into a reduplicated form of gangster (being a true simulacra). *The Sopranos* creates its own

reality (a simulacra) because we, the audience, are no longer able to differentiate between the mafia family of the Sopranos and "real" mafia families. It can be perceived that, as viewers, our comprehension of the mafia, in general, can only be a representation constructed through media depictions as evidenced, in part, by this scene in *The Sopranos*. This simulacra makes the Soprano crew (along with any fictional gangster) über-gangsters (super or hyper). In fact, because what we see on the screen becomes "reality" in the third order of simulacra, the reproducible image erases that there is any reality in gangsterism at all. Instead, *The Sopranos* collapses the difference between true and false, and the characters become a more perfect example of gangsters.

Herein, Tony Soprano becomes hyper-real. He is a character of depth (he goes to a psychiatrist, has meaningful relationships with his wife and children, and has a connection with animals). This depth makes it difficult to see that Tony is a fictional character, whereas in *The Godfather*, Michael Corleone is always only viewed as "the Don" of the family, mimicked by his catch phrases in a way that Tony Soprano is not. The signs bear little relation to any reality except that of alleged organized crime criminal testimony that may or may not bear truth; therefore, even if we do not know America's Italian organized crime history or *The Godfather*, we can still understand Silvio's phrase. At this point, the phrase becomes Silvio's phrase alone. New generations will associate the phrase with Silvio and *The Sopranos* because that is what they are privy to instead of America's Italian organized crime history or Michael and *The Godfather*—history has been recreated and nostalgia is invoked.

Much like David Chase achieves with *The Sopranos* as viewed through Inter-Colonialism, scholars have come to understand this representation of "Italianity" as one

of politics instead of entertainment. Through the redoubling of the system of simulacrum, the "politics of representation" (Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society* 37), the link to gangsterism through the mimicking of gangsterism, falls on the trope of parody. Fred Gardaphé utilizes critic Linda Hutcheon's discussion of parody and the marginalized[15] writer to explain, in part, why marginalized writers like Puzo and Chase via Coppola feel empowered by the use of parody in their work. Hutcheon suggests that "[p]arody seems to offer a perspective on the present and the past which allows an artist to speak *to* a discourse from *within* it" (qtd. in Gardaphé, *Italian Signs*... 111). She goes on to explain that "[t]hrough a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones. [… This irony] both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies" (qtd. in Gardaphé, *Italian Signs*... 113). Chase achieves this depiction by setting Silvio in a position to mimic Michael Corleone and, perhaps, a true historical godfather while at the same time presenting Silvio's words so that in review we see that this pseudo-gangster cannot even keep one famous catch-phrase from the ultimate godfather movie straight in his mind. The parody is truly represented when we examine the phrases in each filmic account and realize the slight yet important difference in phrases.

In "Guido, an Italian-American Controversy," Gardaphé introduces the idea of irony deficiency as a way to explain the distorted portrayals of the Italian identity in contemporary film and television. It seems plausible that Gardaphé's discussion of irony deficiency may be used to explain the differences that lie within Silvio's phrasing. The initial parody in *The Sopranos* scene works because displaced Italians along with non-Italian viewers find the humor in the characters' attempts to get the phrase right (the

Corleone phrase). However, the gap that Gardaphé mentions that ultimately causes the deficiency is caused by a loss of the Italian language, a fear that accompanies entrance into a new country, and simply not knowing the historical culture (here, Italian culture). This gap manifests itself in the characterization of the Italian-American Soprano gang members, causing the parody to become less funny to scholars (and those Italians/Italian-Americans who have held onto the home language, fear, and culture) in the field of Italian American Studies. In due course, the political demonstration of parody is what scholars find problematic when attempting to establish a plausible reason behind the perpetuation of this ethnic stereotype. Of course, writers find it easiest to continue images that the audience already understands; however, by embedding political parody of this nature, as Chase seemingly does with this scene, audiences are that much more removed from the truest essence of the irony that Gardaphé posits in his discussion. This gap is now observed as a negative social and cultural effect of stereotyping.

(Hyper) Realism and Commodification at Any Cost:

Another way in which we can view the tenets of Inter-Colonialism is through Hollywood's disregard for Italian-American history/heritage resulting in reality-based television shows that encourage the performance of ethnicity based on what we have purchased through the commodification of media signs and film depictions. As Robert Viscusi explains, "the Italian-American occupies a position that draws its vocabulary of self-construction from a world commodity culture in which the positions *Italian* and *American* derive much of their meaning from their mutual commerce" ("The History…" 35). To clarify Viscusi's term "mutual commerce" is to explain the crux of the Italian-

American in general. The Italian-American does not stand without the *Italian* system of economy including that of the legal, political, cultural, and technological constructs of the country. The Italian-American completes him/herself when the past comes together with the present, that of the Americanization of this system. In this yoking together of two nation-states, the immigrant Italian figure takes from the contemporary American figure (and vise-versa), allowing for a shared comprehension of self construction. Eventually, the positioning of the two identities merges, allowing for a newly constructed exchange, that of the image of the Italian American. *Italian* commerce in America has been appropriated and replicated by Hollywood writers and directors in order to continue the selling of the construction. In *nytimes.com* the Vice Chairman of the Italic Institute of America indicates the impact of this commerce when he says, "Incessant stereotyping has made Italophobia a safe and highly profitable suburban prejudice" (Iaconis). This is a cyclical pattern within American culture. With the decline of historical instruction through visual entertainment culture and the rise in replicated signs within that culture, we can only expect to see an even larger materialization of up-coming generational, ethnicity-based performances within our larger culture.

Ultimately, consumerism produced *Growing Up Gotti*.[16] The show centered on Victoria Gotti, mafia boss John Gotti's daughter, and her three sons. Interestingly, this show was interjected into the viewing arena as *The Sopranos* began to wind down in its fifth of six seasons. At the height of reality television, *Growing Up Gotti,* a show about the real mafia lifestyle albeit through the female child of a historical representation of Italian-American history, could not keep its standing while competing with the simulation of an organized criminal lifestyle in *The Sopranos*. Yet, it should be noted that John

Gotti's three grandsons, *not* his daughter, received the brand of media attention that one would associate with celebrity figures. The boys branded the performance of the *guido* figure in reality television and paved the way for future controversial performances in *Jersey Shore.*[17] Where *Growing Up Gotti* was a show that initially drew its audience from those who were familiar with historical figures in Italian-American history, *Jersey Shore* relied on an audience that enjoyed the celebration of *guido* culture. The show is controversial because it perpetuates (by celebrating) Italian-American stereotypes like men abusing women, loud and bratty women, men and women who are aggressive and violent, and public displays of anger and violence.

Professor Donald Tricarico, a sociologist from City University of New York/Queensborough, explains in an article in the *New York Times* that today's "urban youth subculture is a generation that consumes commodified leisure styles," and has created "a bricolage of symbols" (qtd. in Cohen). In other words, another generation has joined the census of Italian-Americans furthering the expansion of scholarship of the ethnic group at large; however, this generation diminishes the work that has already been done in counteracting such negative stereotypes. This generation has also appropriated what is left of the true/authentic historical element of Italian American-ness while it celebrates, inaccurately, the performance of the *guido*[18] stereotype. Fault is assigned to this generation because they are responsible for bringing forward the erroneous characterization of the *guido* figure and celebrating this image in the public eye. Instead of clearly identifying the background of the term *guido*, writers and in turn their viewers have caused another redoubling in terms of the simulacra. *Guido* culture becomes the commodified referent to the signified (the concept of guido-ness) coupled with the

signifier (the term guido). In this equation, *guido* has lost its identity to the newest generational incorporation.

As New York State Senator Diane Savino explains, “Guido was never a pejorative.” The term spanned from the 1950s greaser look and became a way for “Italian-American [males] who did not fit the larger culture’s definition of beauty to take pride in their own heritage and define cool for themselves” (qtd. in Cohen). If, indeed, what Savino suggests is true, then the celebration of ethnicity that takes place on *Jersey Shore* may, in fact, be bunk. The *guido* lifestyle, that which is simply the lifestyle of "a good-looking Italian guy" (qtd. in Brooks) according to Mike "The Situation" Sorrentino, one of the roommates and self-proclaimed guidos of *Jersey Shore*, is one that has been commodified by the misrepresentation of the term *guido.*

As Professor Tricarico asserts,

> Young Italian-Americans did what other immigrant groups before [them] have done: take a symbol of derision [the word guido], own it and redefine it their own way. Young African Americans did that with the [word nigger] much to the consternation of their elders, and gay people did the same by proudly using the word “queer.” (qtd. in Cohen)

This is an age-old tactic in manipulation where the masses can be “guided” into tolerance and even acceptance of a formerly less-than desirable product, here the image of the ethnic group previously disliked. By owning the term that the masses have coined as negative and making the term desirable by selling the commodity through performance, newer generations have become part of the cultural problem when it comes to performing an accurate historical characterization of their ethnic counterparts. Tricarico is correct

when he says that this ethnic performance of the guido figure is "identity politics. It's a cultural movement, but it's about consumption, not ethnicity" (qtd. in Brooks). It is this consumption that allows these reality shows to continue capitalizing on the image of the violent yet *human* Italian-American criminal represented by the Tony Soprano character. Moreover, it is this commerce that Robert Viscusi comments on that overshadows any representation of Italian American-ness that has been corrected in Hollywood. For every step forward in the counteracting of negative stereotyping of this ethnic group, we are driven backward three steps combating new obstacles in ethnic pride, even some put forward by members of the ethnic group itself like those who embrace and celebrate the *guido* culture. I stand firm on the need for the media to present an accurate historical representation of the Italian-American on screen in order for the rich history and culture of this ethnic group to become centered instead of half-truths and inexact conceptions of the group.

A Last Bastion/A Beacon of Hope

Society perpetuates this misrepresentation of accuracy when we carry the commodification of the image into our classrooms, as Scott McLemee argues in *Inside Higher Ed.* McLemee calls Elaine Showalter out over her short essay linking Oscar Wilde's devastating jailing over his homosexuality to Michael Jackson's pedophilia trial. McLemee references Baudrillard's borrowed ideal of "the obscene" (borrowed from Freud) by mixing Wilde and his ordeal with a contemporary popular culture icon like Jackson. McLemee and those of us who enable this linking, what Baudrillard may refer to as synergy, the mimicking of a more famous, more recognized person in order to

promote unconscious connections, are liable for misrepresenting history. This is not to say that utilizing popular culture in the classroom is necessarily a negative form of awareness. I mean only to point out that yoking together two seemingly different signs (here, Victorian author Oscar Wilde and 20th century pop star Michael Jackson) may, indeed, cause a disconnect in up-coming generations of students who may not be privy to the proper history of Wilde, himself. They may begin to associate Wilde and his trial unconsciously with Jackson and his trial, misrepresenting the reasons behind the two trials.

On a small scale, this example serves as a way to view the damage that Hollywood has inflicted and will continue to inflict on the Italian way of life if we do not insist on more authentic/accurate representations of Italians and their customs and traditions within their daily lives. On a larger scale, the classroom may be one way in which media stereotypes may be combated through proper presentation and characterization of ethnic representation. Although younger generations have the right to redefine stereotypes in ways that contribute to the make-up of their identities, they should also be held responsible for the impetus of the stereotypes they are performing. If it is up to the media to question this impetus, then we, as a culture, are in trouble. Perhaps scholars as well as teachers and, ultimately, viewers, can aid in the process of restoring an authenticity to the essence, the signified, of Italian-ness.

In review, the life of the immigrant Italian-American has changed over the past one-hundred or so years. Italians met, fell in love, married, and procreated both amongst themselves and with people from other ethnicities while living in America, leaving their children with the status that in later years we would come to know as Italian American.

While a fair share of Italian immigrants have generally been concerned about the next generation continuing ethnic traditions, a number of Italian immigrants abandoned these traditions along with their ethnic thumbprints (DeSalvo 18-19). As a result, there is a need to track down documentation so that we can properly historicize the first generation Italian-American experience. This need is mainly due to Hollywood's twisting of Italian-American history to fit the cultural necessity for violence. Hollywood writers have linked many Italian-American actors with criminality so that the film industry can profit from the misrepresentation of Italian-American ethnicity. Because of this constant and consistent misrepresentation of culture and the lack of a more publicly supported history of Italian Americans, this ethnic group has begun to experience derision for its identity. Even within films where Italian-Americans are viewed as trying to identify with their history, they ultimately identify with the glorified history that has been continually represented in films and on television for years. The problem with this identification is not that the characters will be viewed as simple, necessarily, or that the audience won't recognize that something larger than stereotyping for entertainment might be taking place on-screen. The issue, no matter how complexly the Italian-American character is depicted, lies in the overshadowing of the link to criminality that draws the viewer away from the complexity of the on-screen personality and back into the same old routine of associating the Italian with unlawfulness.

Essentially, we must remember that the words (Italian or Italian American) in association with the product (the characterization of the Italian [the figure eventually and ultimately linked to crime]) become part of the commodity of the image (the character, the gangster, the guido) being sold as Italian. And it is here that my claims of

Hollywood's biased depictions of Italian-Americans come to full fruition. The writers and promoters of the film industry appropriate the image of what society comes to know as Italian-ness, and from this fixed idea of what it means to be Italian comes the hyper-real reality that has begun to distort historical viewpoints and facts regarding Italian culture and traditions. Ultimately, our society is not able to differentiate between an authentic Italian-American male and a film persona of an Italian-American male in large part because money has and will continue to be made from the misrepresentation of an entire ethnic group.

CHAPTER THREE

Happy Days: Gazing at the White Ethnic

Mildred: What're you rebelling against, Johnny?

Johnny: Whaddya got?

--*The Wild One* (1953)

"It's not that I want to beat em' up; I have to.

It's street etiquette."

--Fonzie ("The Motorcycle" 1975)

The cultural build-up to *Happy Days* began in 1971 when *All in the Family* (created by Norman Lear) made its way into our living rooms. *All in the Family* maintained a number one rating for five years in a row. Normally this type of rating for a family sitcom would not be so notable; however, *All in the Family* broke through the American comfort barrier and produced what *Los Angeles Times* reviewer Cecil Smith called "the happiest and healthiest thing to hit commercial TV since the coaxial cable" (qtd. in Staiger 89). In 1971, *Variety* commented that "Norman Lear and Bud Yorkin [the producers] have made [*All in the Family*] as all-American as apple pie, hotdogs, bigotry, ethnic suspicion, political ignorance, social blindness and Grandma Moses" (qtd. in Staiger 89). *All in the Family* paved the way for other culturally audacious sitcoms. Three years after Archie and the crew began, *Happy Days* (created by Garry Marshall) emerged. Some critics suggest that *Happy Days* did not do well until two years after its pilot date because it had to compete with a culturally out of the ordinary show like *All in the Family*.[19] Regardless, *Happy Days* exemplified an "escapist appeal" for the viewers

in the seventies. Donna McGrohan suggests in *Prime Time, Our Time* that "a crisis over the traditional family" may have accounted for part of this escapist theory. Many children born in the seventies were born to single parents, and perhaps *Happy Days* was a way for these "unnatural" families to cope with their own lives, specifically through Arthur Fonzarelli, otherwise known as Fonzie or the Fonz (Henry Winkler), as an orphan (qtd. in Staiger 121). The great appeal of this show, which embodied values and morals as well as basic family communication, was that viewing families could live vicariously through the Cunningham family, a white middle-class Anglo-Saxon protestant family. *Happy Days* was a conservative show in comparison to *All in the Family*'s "paragon of social relevance" (Staiger 119).

The two shows were different in content in as much as *Happy Days* devoted few episodes to conventional topical situations of the time. The show concentrated more on the relationships between the middle class Cunninghams and their counterparts and eventually with the Cunninghams and the working-class Fonzarelli character. Part of the allure of the television show is couched within this socio-economic rapport between Richie Cunningham (Ron Howard) and his family and the Italian-American Fonzie. We are able to view Fonzie occupying the role of the oppressed figure, and the Cunninghams as his oppressors, specifically, the Cunninghams as an ideal of white, middle-class American values. These values are instituted in the successful small business owner, Howard (Tom Bosley) and his wife, 2.5 kids (the .5 may be Chuck, the eldest son who was phased out after only two seasons) and the dog (here, Fonzie is the "stray" [orphan] taken in and given a "kennel" in the room above the garage). To borrow Maria Laurino's term "nonethnic ethnic" and apply it to Fonzie is to explain, in part, why we[20] are so

drawn to his character, why we root for him to succeed yet simultaneously lose interest when he finally does. One could say that middle-America is consumed with what it cannot have or, in this instance, what it cannot become. Therefore, Fonzie becomes our alternative personality for thirty minutes once per week. We live vicariously through the character and act out with him against the bullies, the government and the law, and we embrace his strength and masculinity in spite of his semi-stereotyped ethnic background.

Philippa Gates, author of *Detecting Men: Masculinity and the Hollywood Detective Film,* asserts that when "[w]hite hegemonic power […] occupies the middle class and defines it as the ideal to which to aspire, [t]he middle-class then becomes a space that can not be redefined with […] meaning for the 'other'; instead it can align the 'other' with the mainstream" (214). Indeed, this is exactly what we see happening with the character of Arthur Fonzarelli. It is my contention that by applying elements of post-colonial thought to the relationships that form throughout *Happy Days* while locating the Italian-American, Fonzie, in the role of the oppressed figure, we are able to follow a transformation within the character from a lower-class variety like Marlon Brando's character Johnny Strabler in *The Wild One* to a middle-class James Dean style character. Most importantly, since Fonzie was not technically a colonized figure, I deem him inter-colonial, oppressed by the dominant white society (here, that of the middle-Milwaukee Cunninghams), always searching for a way into the center of the dominant group whether by ingraining himself into the family during traditional family holidays, making himself seem necessary to regular family problem-solving, or acting as protector to the family in a way that the patriarch of the family simply cannot. Then, once this centering is achieved and complete acculturation has been attained, he realizes that his own identity

has been dissolved, and he immediately attempts to recapture what has been lost by regressing to "hoodlumism" and sometimes even violence.[21] In spite of these negative associations with the Fonzie character, Marshall's characterization of Fonzie illustrates progress for the image of the Italian-American male. Marshall is able to show the viewing audience an element of depth within the image of an Italian-American male from the point of view of the character while he (Fonzie) struggles through his identity issues and attempts to gain entrance into a culture that he has not been born into.

In the show's first season, Marshall makes his audience somewhat aware of the everyday struggle Fonzie has to contend with as a marginalized figure in a middle-class community: the police try to drive him out of the community; parents are afraid of him because of his appearance; members of the dominant culture try to teach him the "proper" way of handling himself in situations. Fonzie is an orphan. His mother died (so we are led to believe until much later in the series) and his father left him when Fonzie was twelve. Ultimately and ironically, Fonzie is a departure from the middle-class values that the viewer deems as central or dominant. In the viewer's gaze, this builds Fonzie as a desirable Other—exotic and passionate, both stereotyped yet positive characteristics and still remaining subordinate, which makes him unthreatening. Through these mixed characteristics, Fonzie eventually became iconic.

The show's creator, Garry Marshall, deserves credit in as much as he did not over-stereotype the Italian figure. In his autobiography, Marshall states that he intended Fonzie to be a "stupid foil to the Ron Howard character;" however, when Winkler read for the part, Marshall became captivated by him, agreeing with Winkler when he stated that the Fonz was "everybody [he] wasn't. He was everybody [he] wanted to be" (131).

Because of Winkler's interpretation of the character, Marshall gave the Fonzie character an exoticism of the 50s hoodlum figure (modeled largely on elements of the Strabler character), allowing him to evolve until he takes on a position in middle-America as a teacher and business proprietor. He is the essence of an Americanized other and must grapple with his own transformative identity. But while the show progresses and American viewing audiences watch Fonzie transform, they lose interest in large part because he assimilates into the very image of what he tried so hard to rebel against in earlier seasons.

George Guida, in his article, "Novel Paesans: The Reconstruction of Italian-American Male Identity in Anthony Valerio's 'Conversation with Johnny' and Robert Viscusi's 'Astoria,'" suggests that "[l]ike other victims of stereotyping, Italian-American men particularly need to understand that they have fashioned their identities in part from an immaterial culture of semi-fictional images" (98). With this statement, we can visualize what Marshall and his team used as a model for the character of Fonzie. With the television show being set in the 1950s, Marshall could have used the Kefauver hearings and mafia kingpins as Italian-American male prototypes for his character, mainly because the kingpins in these hearings were Italian-American males and the hearings were widely broadcast. The identification of Italian-American men with crime would have been an obvious image for viewing audiences. Instead, Marshall "resisted the temptation to make Fonzie the stereotypical fifties hood" (Cook 169). Marshall suggests that Fonzie "is a hoodlum with a heart of gold…and was based on a childhood friend of [Marshall's]…who was the coolest person and the only person [Marshall] knew growing up who had a motorcycle" (Marshall 126). Martie Cook explains that Marshall

"dug deep to create a perfect dichotomy of a guy who is super-human, but at the same time a guy who is super-accessible" (169). Even though Cook's statement may seem contradictory, it is in this contradiction that the character of the Fonz emerges as an onscreen enigma.

According to the November 1977 Nielson National Audience Demographics Report, "[e]qually favorable were the show's socioeconomic and geographic profiles; adults living in upper-income homes watched almost as much as their lower-income counterparts" (qtd. in Papazian 203). In addition, according to Janet Staiger in her book, *Blockbuster TV: Must-See Sitcoms in the Network Era,* "*Happy Days* was the third highest rated show among women 18 to 49" (120). It appeared that Marshall, born of a family from Abruzzo, Italy, and his team hit the proverbial ball out of the park with the creation of *Happy Days*; however, what Marshall et. al. did not see approaching was the eruption of adulation that was to come with the introduction of the Fonz. In large part, Fonzie transforms as a character because of the American viewing audience's attraction to him. Fonzie was a character that the creators of *Happy Days* added to "serve as mise-en-scène and exoticism," wrote Ed Papazian, author of *Medium Rare: The Evolution, Workings and Impact of Commercial Television*. Fonzie began as a magical character—fifth in the casting line-up—while viewers of middle America were happy seeing Richie as the main character. Richie stood for all that was good and pure in the traditional role of son in a sitcom family. In fact, the first four episodes of the first season deal with day to day moral lessons of the traditional family structure: Richie has a date with a girl who has a bad reputation; Richie attends his first bachelor party; Richie buys his first car; and Richie and his best friend attend their first burlesque show where they are surprised to see

Richie's father. It is not until episode five where we see Fonzie enter a larger role[22] as the stereotyped hood re-enrolling in high school (yet wanting Richie to do his homework for him). Again, in episode six we see Fonzie stereotyped as a less-than-desirable character when he is the cause of Richie's punishment for sneaking out of the house to see him drag race. In these early episodes, Fonzie is allowed to share the screen with middle-America but only as the hoodlum from the streets and only as an invited guest. Even as far along as episode eighteen, Fonzie is still stereotyped as a "hood" when Richie buys a car from him and it turns out to be stolen.

The constant association of Fonzie the Italian-American with the hood figure allows Hollywood writers like Marshall to work within cultural boundaries to draw an audience for his television show. Even though Marshall was careful not to associate the character of Fonzie with direct criminality, he did not account for ethnic stigmatizing of the Italian-American with roles that portray Italian-American males as over stimulated, sometimes angst-ridden working-class people. Perhaps Marshall fell short in his characterization of Fonzie because Marshall, an Italian-American male, was trying to humanize the image of the Italian-American male by casting Fonzie as "a hoodlum with a heart" (Marshall 126). We are able to understand the drive behind Marshall's desire to humanize his character when we read Anthony Julian Tamburri's analysis of Daniel Aaron's three stages of transformation that a non-Anglo/American writer may work through while composing. He mentions that in Aaron's first stage, a writer may "create characters possessing some of the very same stereotypes, [those that are negatively associated with the ethnic group]" in order to win "over the sympathies of the suspicious members of the dominant group" and humanize "the stereotyped figure" with hopes of

"dissipating prejudice" (8). While this positioning of ethnic categorization may have cleared a way for television to include more racialized characters, it also opened up commercial television to include more portrayals of these "humanized" ethnics now referred to by post colonial critics as Others.[23]

Few critics have looked at the way tenets of post-colonialism could enlighten the reading of popular TV sitcom characters such as *Happy Days'* Fonzie as an Italian-American "other." Yet we can utilize Edward Said's and Frantz Fanon's work on national identity in articles that pertain to exotic "otherness" in oppressed African cultures and apply it to the media in America as a way to help lift oppression on a grand scale within American culture. According to Peter Barry in *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*:

> Postcolonial critics foreground questions of cultural difference and diversity and examine their treatment in relevant literary works. They celebrate hybridity and "cultural polyvalency," that is, the situation whereby individuals and groups belong simultaneously to more than one culture. They develop a perspective, not just applicable to postcolonial literatures, whereby states of marginality, plurality and perceived "Otherness" are seen as sources of energy and potential change. (198)

What Barry says rings true in circles of multiculturalism because he excludes no one. He suggests that to be colonized, subordinated and controlled is to be an "other," and Fonzie certainly fit this criteria.

One way to read Fonzie through the expanded view of post-colonial discourse is to use Homi Bhabha's principle of mimicry, that of imitation of the dominant culture by

the oppressed, as a way to define Fonzie's struggle to be accepted into the Cunningham family. Thanks to his good friend, Richie, a stable member of the hegemonic society that attempts to "tame" Fonzie of his savage and brutish lower-class Italian ways, he is guided through this difficult transformation; and, perhaps equally as important, by the end of the series, he trades in his leather jacket for a sport coat (a costume that a "nerd" would wear) as he now occupies the role of teacher at Jefferson High (the authority figure against which he has always rebelled), one step closer to completing the full assimilation into the dominant middle-class white society that the Cunninghams have, most certainly and perhaps innocently, imposed on him. By the end of the series, we know that Fonzie is aware that he may occupy both the role of oppressor and oppressed when we see his moment of double consciousness in his struggle to remain in the position of colonizer, substitute teacher, by not condoning his students' behavior when they hide his lesson plan and lie to him about the lesson they are to learn that day, sex ("Fonzie, the Substitute"). Fonzie feels what Bhabha terms ambivalence in viewing his new-found identity as the colonizer of his students while understanding that a few years earlier he, too, was the student pulling the prank. At this point, he is both proud of who he has become and yet disgusted at what he has become. He realizes that he no longer fits completely into one world. He is displaced in so far as he cannot negotiate the terms of his place in society.

Fonzie's integration into the dominant culture may also be viewed in terms of Edward Said's "knowledge is power and power equals the colonizer" (32). Thus, we might understand that because of his exoticism, his "coolness," his mystical, seductive, macho identity, Fonzie will always be on the margins (located on the periphery of the middle-class center); consequently, we can not ignore Fonzie's power, his "way with

women," his almost supernatural idiosyncrasies (hitting the jukebox to turn it on, smacking the wall to turn the lights on or off, snapping his fingers to call women from afar), and finally the power of fear he instills in anyone who dares to cross his personal boundary lines. As Fonzie represents power and masculinity even in situations where his peers in the dominant culture are powerless, it seems that Fonzie is situated for inclusion into the dominant culture from the very beginning of the series. Ultimately, Fonzie is the one to "save the day" for any member of the middle class white society.

In contrast, because Fonzie has very few members of his own ethnic group with whom to surround himself,[24] he is never placed in a condition that would question his reaction to what Said suggests is an Eastern prejudice where the East is seen as a projection of those aspects that Westerners do not choose to acknowledge about themselves (cruelty, sensuality, decadence, laziness). On a small scale, we can see this Eastern projection onto Fonzie from the colonizing authority figures in *Happy Days*. When Richie first mentions Fonzie as someone he knows, Howard Cunningham says, "What's a Fonzie?" When Howard becomes aware of who Fonzie is and what he stands for, he suggests that Richie should not take advice from a high school drop out garage mechanic ("All the Way"). The local law enforcement officer Sergeant Kirk, who "knows his [Fonzie's] type," refers to Fonzie as an Italian street hood. He wants to put him in jail "where he belongs" ("A.K.A. the Fonz"). Said's theory certainly would suggest that officer Kirk is threatened by some of the characteristics that Fonzie is able to personify with ease and grace while Kirk, himself, is unable to acknowledge these within his own demeanor (his aggression, his sensuality, etc). In season four, episode ten, "A.K.A. the Fonz," Kirk is promoted to new acting sheriff. He becomes power-hungry

and declares that "the following hood elements are expected to be out of town in 24 hours—Rocky Baruffi, Knuckles [Rocco] Schultz, Fonzie Fonzarelli" (of course, all three are a departure from traditional white middle-class standards and representative of the Italian figure in American sit-coms). Richie asks, "what have you got against" Fonzie? Kirk responds, "I don't like the way he looks. I don't like the way he dresses." After having several of his dates interrupted by Kirk, Fonzie decides to conform to what Kirk deems appropriate dress by wearing a tweed blazer, tie and hat so that he will be left alone to continue his life within the community.

When the community realizes that Kirk has gone too far by attempting to force Fonzie and his kind to conform to everyday, traditional middle-class standards of dress and practice, a special meeting is called of the Leopard Lodge (an influential social club in the community). At the meeting, after Kirk attempts to attack Fonzie through his friends (Mr. C. will lose his hardware store loading dock; Al, new Italian owner of Arnold's, will lose his dance license for the diner; Ralph's father will lose his giant eyeball on the side of his optometrist building), Fonzie demands a meeting with the sheriff that evening at midnight. We see a short-lived de-centering of the middle-class dominant hierarchy when Kirk shows up at Arnold's and the Fonz is waiting in the dark for him. Fonzie switches the lights on and says:

> Fonzie: I guess this is a showdown.
>
> Kirk: I'm ready, Fonzarelli. You don't scare me. [he looks around uneasily as Fonzie stares intently at him] Al? Fonzarelli, maybe we better talk about this outside, on the street. There's a crowd out there.
>
> Fonzie: Why don't you just cool it, Kirk?

It is clear that no matter how much power the sheriff has in the community, he still fears Fonzie because of his reputation as an Italian-American street hood and womanizer (Fonzie tells Kirk that, because he doesn't like the way the Fonz dresses, Fonz is going to date Kirk's daughter). Kirk does not know what Fonzie will do from one minute to the next, causing Kirk to struggle with a loss of control and a fear of what may happen as a result of Fonzie, the ethnic, usurping control of the situation. It is a tense few minutes until Fonzie declares he is leaving town so that his friends will be able to reclaim their rights. Kirk moves back into the position of control, claiming that Fonzie "is a broken man." It takes the community to dress like imitation Fonzies in order to back Kirk off and keep Fonzie in town. At the end of the episode, the Cunninghams and Fonzie gather around Mrs. C's new piano to sing a song together. It is here that Fonzie interrupts the song to declare, "I love middle-class families." In spite of the continual fighting to live in the community and have the same rights as any of the middle-class white teens his age, Fonzie still sees the power of middle class America and completes another step in the ultimate transition to full integration.

Interestingly, in "Fonzie the Flatfoot," it is Officer Kirk (in this early episode, Kirk is only an officer with much less power than he will have later as acting sheriff) who goes through town looking for Fonzie to help the police stop a rumble between Fonzie's old gang, the Falcons, and an opposing gang, the Dragons, over the "turf" of the local drug store. After some coercing from the Cunninghams, especially his good friend Richie, Fonzie agrees to talk to his old gang. However, it takes some manipulation on the part of the Cunninghams to get Fonzie to agree to something he feels goes against the code of the street; when they slyly suggest that he will miss out on riding the police

motorcycle if he does not agree to dress in uniform for the talk, he grudgingly acknowledges the gesture with a somewhat juvenile excitement at being able to ride the bike. Of course, it is too early in the series for Fonzie to have assimilated so soon; therefore, when he meets his old gang and the gang leader, Lefty (Jeffrey Kramer), tells him about the rival gang coming into the drug store saying, "Fonzie can sit on it," Fonzie becomes angry, stating, "I say let's tear the Dragons apart." Here, he is out for revenge alongside his counterparts in the Falcons. It takes Richie to explain to Fonzie that if the two gangs share the turf they are fighting over, everyone will be happy and violence will not have to occur.

Here we acknowledge the fact that Kirk must have some admiration for the respect that Fonzie has gained from these gang members or he would not have asked him to help the police. However, because Fonzie can identify with the gang members in a way that Kirk, himself, cannot, we are led to believe that Kirk harbors a further grudge against the Fonz that is manifested in the later episode, "A.K.A. the Fonz." Just as Said suggests in *Orientalism,* because "the tendency of the hegemonic culture [is] to read and represent the ethnic Other as a projection of the kinds of impulses the culture is afraid of acknowledging, but fascinated by, in itself" (qtd. in Winokur 193), the viewing audience can justify Kirk reaching out to Fonzie because Fonzie is so enigmatic to the local teens and so instrumental in maintaining control over situations that occur within the community, like the turf war between the Falcons and the Dragons. However, Fonzie is placed in a situation where he trades places with what he has been rebelling against his whole life, authority.

Fonzie gives in to Richie's middle class solution only after he struggles with a

solution on his own. He is manipulated by the dominant culture to talk with the gangs, wear the police uniform, and find a solution to the problem, none of which he wishes to do. He becomes a puppet for the middle class when he goes against his own notions of right and wrong by following Richie's advice and solving the turf problem in a non-violent manner. In any event, even after he has accepted Richie's solution, he uses aggression (grabs the gang leaders by their jackets) and intimidation (tells them they better shake hands or he will *guarantee* that the gangs honor the solution). Although Richie's middle-class values were used to solve the problem, it took Fonzie's lower-class street tactics to seal the deal. He struggles with his own identity while he is positioned in the center of the moral middle-class value system and ultimately returns to his true self when he resorts to violence in order to keep the peace.

Amongst the obvious issues of oppression we find associated with the character of Fonzie, we see the emergence of a stereotype that has become typical of the Italian-American male in recent productions of film and television, using manipulation as a way to control the Italian-American character and balancing the amusement found when the character reacts stereotypically to the manipulation. In an article published in 1979, "Television and the English Teacher," David England notes that "the social upper crust set the Fonz up for some laughs at his own expense" (100). We see this specifically in episode 34, "Guess Who's Coming to Christmas," when Mr. C., in true colonial fashion (he, like his counterparts, knows what is best for Fonzie), manipulates Fonzie from the moment he and Richie arrive at the Fonz's apartment. Richie and Mr. C. know that Fonzie has no family with which to spend Christmas, so Mr. C. suggests that the real reason why he and his son are there is because his Santa Claus decoration is not working,

and he would like Fonzie to fix it before Fonz catches his bus to Waukesha, Wisconsin, (his trip is a fabrication Fonzie creates so no one will realize he is alone for the holiday).

The next scene jumps to the Cunningham living room where Chuck, the oldest son who subsequently disappears after season two ends, is attempting to fix the tree lights. Fonzie walks to the tree, offers the eldest son a "did-you-ever-think" scenario (Fonzie, essentially, belittles Chuck for not knowing how to repair the lights), and fixes the lights. It is here that Mr. C's manipulation of Fonzie creates a moment of uncomfortable oppression when Mr. C. calls Fonzie's bluff, stating that he will drive Fonzie to Waukesha because he knows he wants to go. Fonzie is forced to react in a childish manner, whining that it is snowing too hard and it would be wrong for him to allow Mr. C. to drive up and back in the snow. Mr. C. allows Fonzie to maintain his dignity, his coolness and his strength, so he does not appear weak in front of others; however, manipulating him as if he were a child helps to illustrate the relationship that the show creates between the middle-class Cunninghams and the lower-class Fonz.

Further analysis of this episode illustrates Fonzie's acculturation into the dominant culture while we see him go from fixing the tree lights to asking Mr. C., "do you mind if I do [pop the popcorn]? I was just noticing that you don't do it right," to thanking Richie with a light punch in the arm for "having all [his] freckles in the right place," then to countering the thank you with a lesson on roasting the marshmallows over the fire, and finally when Joanie asks if anyone wants to read *The Night Before Christmas*, historically the job of the patriarch of the home, to dropping everything he is doing and sliding into position, telling everyone to "gather around" so he can read the story because, after all, "one thing [he is] really good at is reading poetry." He has

become a sad imitation of another Cunningham child. In this instance, Fonzie can be categorized as the Boy Scout representation that Gaylyn Studlar suggests embodies "the ideal balance of chivalry with childish 'tuft' impulses and animal spirits" (40). He is excited about being in the center of the family and therefore he places himself literally in their midst, bouncing from one thing to another, while all along his anxieties over his own identity and masculinity force him to usurp the position of the father in the Cunningham household and become the patriarch for the short time he is with them.

One of the problems with situating an ethnic character like Fonzie in a way that allows the audience to laugh at him because of his slightly stereotyped reactions to situations is that the viewing audience begins to associate the gullibility of the character type with other members of that ethnic group. This comedic moment at the expense of the character opens the door for writers to further stereotype the character's reactions and mannerisms simply because the viewing audience enjoys the humor. Throughout the 70s, Fonzie was one of the most emulated characters on television. We know his last name is Fonzarelli and we know from other episodes that he is Italian American. Although he is not stereotyped as a white ethnic, he is branded as the very image people of the 70s viewing audience had come to associate with Italian-Americans, that of the bumbling street hood, the dense hoodlum, the uneducated gangster.[25] In regards to Fonzie and his ethnicity, the Christmas episode analyzed above positions Fonzie as an impractical, child-like figure who over-asserts his need for control and coolness in order to maintain his masculine position within the show.

As a result of this comedic moment at the expense of the Italian-American character, Maria Laurino begins her chronology of the silly Italian-American character

with the "dumb but lovable" Fonzie. Clearly, when we view Fonzie alongside other Italian-American male television characters like *Welcome Back Kotter*'s Vinnie Barbarino (John Travolta), *Laverne and Shirley*'s Carmine Ragusa (Eddie Mekka), *Friends'* Joey Tribbiani (Matt LeBlanc), and *Everybody Loves Raymond's* brothers Raymond and Robert (Ray Ramono and Brad Garrett), we can see that what Laurino posits as the beginning of the "dumb but lovable blue-collar Italian-American characters" is slightly skewed in that Fonzie's depth goes beyond that of these other Italian-American male characters that follow. Unlike these other characters, Fonzie experiences personal growth for his "uncivilized" ways, helping to move him toward the center of the dominant middle class world.

Evidence of Fonzie's complexity and growth as an Italian-American character that evolves with the show's progression is revealed in his early actions/decisions which ultimately lead to examples of financial independence, unlike the majority of the characters mentioned above. In contrast to Laurino's depiction of Fonzie, he is actually an intelligent character with money enough to pay three months rent at one time while purchasing a new Triumph motorcycle outright, as we see within the first two episodes of season three. While viewing Fonzie as the exotic, masculine character he clearly is, we realize there is so much more to this character than obvious ethnic stereotyping affords us. Fonzie is a complex man. He feels deeply, possesses a coolness that stands second only to his insecurities, and constantly searches for an identity that will enable him to feel as though he is a part of the America that the other characters occupy. In the first episode of season three, "Fonzie Moves In," we get a more in-depth background of the Fonz. When Fonzie's grandmother comes to visit from Florida, she unpacks a little history on

the Fonz: her name is Nussbaum (she explains her surprisingly German name by stating that she has been married a couple of times), his nickname is Skippy, and she says Fonzie left home when he was six (this information conflicts with what he said about his father leaving when Fonz was twelve in "A Star Is Bored" [in season 2]). When Grandma Nussbaum decides to stay in Milwaukee and live with the Fonz, it is clear to the Fonz that she will have to have her own apartment because she is driving him crazy. Conveniently, when a new hardware store opens in town, the Cunninghams decide to rent out the flat above their garage for $50 per month. Because Grandma Nussbaum likes Fonzie's apartment better than the Cunninghams' garage, she remains at Fonzie's and Richie asks the Fonz to move in upstairs.

Because Fonzie has a reputation for being a hoodlum, Richie's father agrees to a one week trial period but is sure that Fonzie will mess up and have to move out at the end of the week. He does not even care that Fonzie paid three months rent ahead. His reaction to hearing the news of Fonzie as a tenant is to choke his son while screaming at his wife, "he's your son. …Where's my [ulcer] pills?" Howard's violent reaction increases throughout the series when Fonzie encroaches a little too close to the Cunningham family. For example, in "Guess Who's Coming to Christmas," Howard gets angry and begins yelling at his family because they want to invite Fonzie into their home for Christmas Eve dinner even though Howard just wants a traditional family holiday. Furthermore, in "Dance Contest," Howard erupts and threatens Fonzie when he mistakenly thinks that Marion and Fonzie are having an affair. When he realizes that they are practicing for a dance contest, the contest that Howard refused to enter with his wife, he feels defeated, having to sit back while Fonzie takes his place on the dance floor

and dances the tango with Mrs. C.

We have followed Fonzie's progression into the heart of the Cunningham family since the first two seasons. With "Fonzie Moves In," we are able to truly see Fonzie's desire for acceptance by the dominant group, and how this thought of acceptance prompts the beginning of his shifting identity as an Other into a more acculturated member of the dominant culture. We watch as Fonzie becomes a member of the Cunningham family in spite of Howard's obvious distaste for him when the trial week is up and Fonzie realizes he had better move out before Howard throws him out. When Fonzie is invited to have dinner with the family, a girl is heard screaming for him outside the house. His response is to yell back at her but only after stating, "some people have no class." Fonzie uses the idea of "class" as a weapon in his war against the dominant culture by showing the Cunninghams that he realizes the barbaric nature of yelling is less-than-desirable in the dominant culture; however, this barbaric demonstration is very much a part of Fonzie's culture when we see Fonzie's friends come to the house in the middle of the night, yelling, asking him to fix their cars; he entertains a girl in his apartment who leaves an egg on the stove too long, causing smoke to radiate out the window and into Howard's view, making him think that the garage is on fire. In the following dialogue between Howard and Fonzie, after Howard realizes that the house is not on fire, we not only see how important it is for Fonzie, himself, to be thought of as part of the family but also are reminded of Fonzie's vulnerability when intimate familial situations occur:

> Howard: It was nice having you here, Fonzie
>
> Fonzie: Do you mean that?
>
> Howard: Well sure. You're like one of the family.

Fonzie: Does everybody feel that way?

Howard: Believe me. More than I do.

Richie: Believe him, Fonz.

Howard: [shaking Fonzie's hand] Yeah, well, good-bye Fonzie and good luck to you.

Fonzie: Hey, hey, hey time-out here. Time-out. Like one of the close family?

Howard: Oh, absolutely.

Fonzie: [looking surprised] Wow!

Richie: Is there something wrong, Fonz?

Fonzie: Now you know that I ain't had a family since I was six years old, right? I didn't need em'. Feels weird being part of the family. I mean it's a good feeling, huh. I felt a little like that all week long.

Howard: Yeah, well always remember, Fonzie, that wherever you are, wherever you go, we're your family. [to Richie] Help him pack, will ya, Richard?

Fonzie: No, no, wait a minute. This changes everything. What do you mean where am I going? I'm stayin' right here.

Howard: You're kidding.

Fonzie: [puts arm around Howard] Mr. C., you just hit me right where I live. One of the fa-amily. Now wait a minute. I'm gettin' all misty [Fonzie excuses himself from the room to cry].

Fonzie has never had a conventional childhood in which he felt like a member of a

traditional familial structure. This family integration not only shows the complexity of Fonzie's character but also reinforces Fonzie's new identity. Part of his search for a stable identity can be seen through his few but telling references to his Italian ethnicity. Once, when he was sick, his mother sprinkled aspirin on his linguini and told him it was parmesan cheese; his uncle from Sicily was saved by a man to whom he owed a favor; when the garage where he works is taken over by a wealthy polo player who speaks in upper-crust double-entendres, Fonzie answers him with his street language, adding, "capiche" (*capisci* or *capisce*) at the end—feeling quite clever at having added the foreign word that is so close to his roots; we learn that he can understand the Italian language when Al Delvecchio's brother [both characters are played by Al Molinaro] comes to Arnold's and speaks Italian to him. This is something Raymond Belliotti, author of *Seeking Identity: Individualism Versus Community In An Ethnic Context,* suggests is "[e]thnic ideology, sometimes based on myths of familial intimacy […] can rekindle sentiments of wholeness and membership that soothe felt ruptures between the individual and mainstream society" (176). This is what Fonzie has been feeling during the week he moves into the Cunningham garage. He is reminded of what it is like having a family, people who care whether he is eating well (Mrs. C. sees to it that he has a proper eating schedule), and whether he has a place to go if he is in trouble (Mr. C. tells him that wherever Fonzie goes to remember that the Cunninghams are his family). The "ruptures" that Fonzie carries with him are those of a broken home. He now finds "wholeness" imbedded deep within the dominant culture. It can be said that the connection he makes between his memories of what his family was and what the Cunninghams have offered him forges the bond between himself and the middle-class

Cunningham family.

Because Fonzie transforms, progressing toward, then occupying a role in the dominant culture, we see him "[becoming] a respectable pillar of the evolving *Happy Days* community" (Papazian 203). However, the subsequent demise of *Happy Days* begins to occur when Fonzie becomes so entrenched in the middle-class struggle that middle-America rejects the notion of the "dangerous" hero as a figure of authority; the viewer simply cannot relate to what Gayatri Spivak calls the "subaltern" occupying the role of the establishment of the dominant culture. Spivak clearly states that the use of the word *subaltern* is not "simply a classy word for the oppressed, the other" (de Koch 29). She insists that Antonio Gramsci's assessment of the word is correct when she credits him with saying that "in order to be called subaltern, the group has to have been written out of the capitalist bourgeois narrative" (Kilburn). The Italians have not been written out of the narrative, as evidenced by the stereotyped gangster-figure amongst many other characterizations; therefore, the use of the term "Other" serves as a legitimate substitute for the subaltern. For this reason among others we can posit that the rise, peak, and fall of *Happy Days* can be traced through exploring the role of the oppressed/exoticized subject, Arthur Fonzarelli, and in-turn, this rise and fall reflect cultural values of Others and the Others' place in society.

In 1975, the fall television line-up included such shows as *The Jeffersons*, *Chico and the Man*, and others like them. *Newsweek* columnist Meg Greenfield criticized the networks for their choices in creating "the sense of identity and common purpose" in each character within these shows (qtd. in Schulman 76). Greenfield wanted to see a "more ethnic or racial or cultural bond" between "being a [fictionalized] worker [and]

being an American" (qtd. in Schulman 76). In this environment, with television becoming increasingly accessible to American masses, regardless of socio-economic standing, the image of the white ethnic was better able to be controlled by writers like Garry Marshall in his character of Italian-American mechanic Arthur Fonzarelli. Fonzarelli becomes a cultural icon of the seventies despite his ethnic background. With his tight jeans, Triumph motorcycle, leather jacket, and slicked hair, his introduction to America was well received. Ed Papazian writes that America has spoken when ratings elevate, making "the key to *Happy* Days (sic.) success [reliant on] the Fonzie character [… ;] as the popularity of the Fonz became evident, the producers expanded his role; thus the original chaste Richie-worldwise Potsie polarity was superseded by the more intriguing super cool Fonzie-square Richie relationship" (202). This relationship becomes the center of Fonzie's world as he emerges as Richie's protector in the first season of the show while balancing his "coolness" against the realities of growing up without a high school education and attempting to identify with peers within his own age group.

Donna McCrohan and Janet Staiger assert that nostalgia and escapism were the reasons that this sitcom was so popular (115); however, the idea of the exotic cultural Other plays a larger part in the success and subsequent failure of this sitcom. The 1950s based sitcom was so popular because Fonzie, as an Other, was exotic and sleek and not a traditional white male; therefore, women of all ages were attracted to him. He was a sexualized object of desire for both women and men—women lusted after him (on the show and in real life), and men wanted to emulate him. However, when Fonzie became like the colonizers/dominant culture, a teacher and the voice of reason, middle class

America did not want to see him, an Other, in the role held by a middle class "white" male; consequently, *Happy Days* lost its appeal, thus dwindling in ratings and eventually engineering the phrase we know today as "jumping the shark."

By the end of the first season of *Happy Days,* Fonzie had gone from sitting on the periphery of the show to occupying the center simply because he was cast as the exotic other. When we see him in later episodes, he adopts the Cunninghams' manners at the dinner table (he no longer sits straddling the dinner chair backwards; he no longer eats before the family gets to the table; he no longer shovels the dinner into his mouth as if he were an animal). The first time we see an honest, outright "softer" side to Fonzie is in the second season, episode 34, "Guess Who's Coming to Christmas," where the Cunninghams "take Fonzie in" for Christmas dinner because he has no family with which to spend the holiday. After this point, we see an increase in Fonzie's air time as the seasons accumulate. By 1976, *Happy* Days was the number one television sitcom in America, even above *All in the Family.* We can state without doubt that increased air time of Fonzie correlates with the ratings increase that Henry Winkler's role as Fonzie (again, the Italian-American ethnic, desirable Other) had something to do with this shift in ratings. We can further assert that the colonizer/colonized relationship that Marshall and his crew had established had even more to do with the ratings.

To reiterate, this is the conditioning we are left with when we depart from what has been deemed appropriate by the dominant culture, that of middle-America, to a form of cultural infusion like the one we gain from a character like Fonzie. Marshall's characterization of Fonzie, that of "a hip dropout" providing contrast to bland characters like Richie and his friends "despite [Fonzie's] macho affectations," continued to be

welcomed into our living-rooms for years to come. Papazian reports that "Fonzie was a lonely and insecure person, and as the producers molded his character, its most intriguing aspect became the hidden vulnerability of this outwardly intimidating character" (202). From season 1, episode 7, "Fonzie Drops In," we see Fonzie's vulnerability when at the end of the episode, after Fonzie drops back out of high-school, he asks Richie to "hang out" with him at the local diner. Fonzie accepts Richie's explanation that he has some homework to finish in study hall, but then mentions how tough it is to find anyone to hang out with other than the mechanic at his work who is 70, and after they share a few beers after work, he is left alone once more. This episode functions, in part, as the beginning of what shapes our perception of who Fonzie really is and what he is trying to accomplish with his life. We are led to believe that Fonzie is über-cool as evidenced by his posture (he is always leaning yet ready for a rumble), his ways with women (always seen with a new girl, kissing and touching), his reputation (he has been in two gangs and is the toughest of all street hoods), and later his magical essence (turning the jukebox on and off with a slam of his fist, turning lights on and off by the same means, calling girls to him with the snap of his fingers, controlling a crowd with a simple thumbs up or down). As the sitcom progresses, the character of Fonzie goes through a series of transformations, and with these transformations, we see new ways in which Hollywood writers treat white ethnics.

We learn that Fonzie is ultimately unhappy with his station as he defines himself through the eyes of the dominant culture. Earlier in the same episode, we see Fonzie attempt to cheat on an exam by using crib notes he has prepared because he already knows that Richie "is too moral" to help him cheat. But the girl sitting in front of Fonzie

wears the wrong set of notes in her collar. Even nature is against him as he manages to sweet talk his teacher into allowing him to walk around during the exam to the window where his other set of notes is hidden, only to realize that the birds have defecated on them. In the end, we find out that Fonzie passed the exam with a D but decides he does not need to continue in high-school. He maintains his macho coolness in front of Richie, stating that he knew he would pass anyway and that he is going to drop back out now while he still looks cool to the others. In a shot away from Fonzie's vision, we see Richie watching the Fonz admire his passing exam. In this moment, we realize that Fonzie is, indeed, uneasy with his identity; he is uncertain not only as a student but also as a male figure. In *Seeking Identity: Individualism Versus Community In an Ethnic Context*, Raymond Belliotti points out that "one's fundamental identity and most profound self-understanding resided inextricably in *la famiglia*" (50). We are informed that Fonzie does not have a family and, further, has complications with finding pals to hang out with. Later we learn that Fonzie was a member of a gang, and after determining that they were "bananas," he quit, serving as an example to Richie and the others. This action also serves as a way for him to continue his abatement from peers his own age, continue his search for a place to fit in with the show's seemingly WASP dominant characters, and continue his place as the masculine, cool worldly figure he has become in the show's lineup.

We know that in the first season of the show, the character of Fonzie was used as a backdrop for the initial model of the show, a counterpart to Richie and his teen friends. We also know that because Fonzie received such a positive response from the audience, he was cast in more scenes and eventually the show shifted to focus on him and his

relationship with Richie. We are also privy to the network's ideas regarding Fonzie's image; specifically, they used him to counter some of the teen issues that were prevalent during the 70s (as well as in the 50s) such as absentee fatherhood as in "A Star Is Bored." In this episode, Fonzie is coerced into playing the title role in a church production of *Hamlet* because his local celebrity would draw a larger crowd. He agrees so that Richie and the boys can raise money to purchase new softball uniforms. When Fonzie gets to the "to be or not to be" scene, he becomes aggravated at how ambiguous the language seems. When Richie explains that the scene is essentially a questioning of inner value, to live or to die, Fonzie becomes entranced with the dialogue. He opens up to Richie and explains that his father left him when he was 12 years old and this abandonment caused him to contemplate suicide. With this admission, the Fonz has become human to us. He remains the coolest of the cast yet he loses some of the angst-ridden savageness we have associated with him in the first season or so. He moves into a position closer to the cultural center which Richie, his friends, and the rest of the Cunningham family occupy.

Another reason Fonzie can be credited with the rise and subsequent fall of *Happy Days* is his cool demeanor and insinuated sexual promiscuity. According to Philippa Gates, "the filmic construction of *being* (the body) and of *doing* (the body in action) are both sites where assumptions about masculinity are made manifest" (38). Therefore, when we watch as Fonzie snaps his fingers to call women, swaggers into the Burger-joint, pounds the jukebox to play a song, and then props his one leg up on the seat of a booth, we are being caught up in his action. Much like, as Robert Kolker writes, "Brando was a camera-riveting presence—the way he is able to focus the viewer's gaze on the character he is making and the processes he's using to make the character foreground his

presence as the central point of the film's mise-en-scene" (127), Fonzie also captures our attention.

After the first two seasons of the show, when ABC saw the popular reception of the Fonz, Marshall was asked to write Fonzie into the fabric of the sitcom, making him "more central to the show" (Levine 179). From the first few episodes of the show, we are led to believe that the Fonz is sexually promiscuous. He is seen kissing multiple girls in individual episodes; he has his own apartment where he entertains his girls; he insinuates, in several episodes in the first two seasons and in most episodes in the following seasons, that he is a masculine figure amongst the other males in Milwaukee, that he is cool, not a nerd like the others. In "The Motorcycle" we are told by the Fonz that "[he] was a nerd, a turkey once briefly." He tried "ducktails, tight jeans, taps on [his] shoes…drag races, gang fights, one and a half years of high school," but the thing that made him so cool was his bike. He states, "my bike made me the Fonz." Historically, motorcycles have been associated with characters like Johnny Strabler (Marlon Brando) in *The Wild One* in 1953 and with the persona of James Dean, both of whom Fonzie idolizes in many ways.

Fonzie's earliest identification with Brando directly begins in the first season. In season one, episode 11, "Because She's There," Fonzie attends a Halloween party. When the gang asks why he did not dress up, he partially removes his leather jacket to reveal a tear in his white t-shirt, references Marlon Brando, and wraps his arm around his date. It seems that Brando is who Fonzie identifies with most in the first two seasons of the show. Even Richie's little sister, Joanie, associates Fonzie with Brando. When she is told Fonzie will be coming to dinner, she tells her father that "Fonzie is a hood. Fonzie's just like Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*. He rides a motorcycle, and anyone who rides a

motorcycle is a hood," and as she eagerly mentions upon meeting Fonzie for the first time, "[w]e saw *The Wild One,*" letting him know that she, too, can be "worldly" as Richie refers to Fonzie before he arrives. Dean is referenced several times throughout the series as well; however, Fonzie remains loyal to Brando as the coolest of the cool ("Fonzie Drops In"). It is not until "Fonzie Moves In" when we see Fonzie's shift from Brando to Dean. When Fonzie opens his closet to comb his hair in the mirror, on the inside of the door, we see a large poster of James Dean. As the show progresses, we see Fonzie talking to the poster and stroking the poster when he is depressed. This shift from idolizing the lower-class hoodlum character of Strabler to a more refined, yet middle-class Dean can be linked to Fonzie's own transformation from a lower-class street hood to a member of the Cunningham family, now living in their garage apartment.

Further evidence for this transformative link amongst the three men is found in "You Go To My Head" where we see Fonzie mimic James Dean in roles he has played as a lover. Only one time does Fonzie mimic Brando's role as Terry Malloy in *On The Waterfront:* "I coulda been a contender, Charlie." It is clear that Fonzie feels he needs to act in order to play the part of Dean, while the roles that Brando held pre-1956 and 1957 (the first two years of the retro-TV show) were roles that Fonzie was able to identify with mainly because he was living in the same conditions as the Brando characters. When Fonzie moves into the garage apartment and is accepted into the house as a part of the Cunningham family, in his mind, his status has elevated. Thus, he abandons the Brando characters, his old identity, and assumes a new position in society, that of the adoptive son of the white middle class Cunninghams. Of course, Fonzie's transformation runs counter to what Howard believes is Fonzie's place. When Howard suggests that Fonzie

"is with his family and you [Richard] are with your family. You're both where you belong" ("Guess Who's Coming to Christmas"), the audience can see Howard's dislike for the lower-class street hoodlum Fonzie as well as where Howard feels this hood belongs.

Contrary to what Howard thinks and feels thus far, in "Fearless Fonzarelli" (parts 1 and 2), Mrs. C (who has already accepted Fonzie into the family) tells Howard, "It's your duty as a father to talk to [Fonzie]." In this episode, Fonz thinks he's losing his cool, so he decides to prove how cool he is by jumping over a record fourteen garbage cans with his motorcycle while being filmed for the television show *You Wanted to See It*. Howard exclaims, "I'm not his father," but goes on to offer him "his middle-class homilies" on the right thing to do (Levine 179). During the conversation, Fonzie refers to *High Noon* where Grace Kelly begs Gary Cooper to run away with her when both she and he know that he can not run after giving his word. Fonzie says to Howard, "he [Cooper] should've belted her one" for asking that of him. Howard exclaims, "How can you reason with a man who would punch Grace Kelly out?" This exchange mimics a father/son relationship where the father can not understand the son's point of view. It also positions Howard back in the role of the untrusting colonizing force of the white middle class. Of course, in the same episode, Fonzie explains that he is the way he is because he is "a man [with] a motorcycle [and] a lot of intestinal fortitude," much like his idealized notion of what it means to be cool like Marlon Brando and James Dean.

After succeeding in the jump, he is taken to the hospital to have an operation on his knee. Here we see the real Fonzie as he is given sodium pentothal before his surgery. He is giddy with a nerdy laugh. He loves the feeling that the drug has given him, stating

that he would love to have it every day. He also jokes about being cool, not being afraid, and while he is being wheeled out of the room, he grabs his leather jacket to illustrate his need for a sense of security to get through his situation. Later in the episode, as he recovers on the Cunningham couch, the family has changed their routines to accommodate him: Joanie changes the television channels for him; Richie brings him word puzzles; Mrs. C. makes him snacks, brings him drinks and gives him pajamas to lounge in. We find that he will not walk around on his leg because it hurts, and he does not want to look uncool/weak by making funny noises and odd facial expressions in his attempt to walk during recovery. His insecurity at possibly losing his reputation as a cool person has placed him directly at the center of the Cunningham family, the center of attention, a child in a middle-class home that he never had while growing up. These moments of full acculturation into the white middle-class society show Fonzie's humanity, his need for an identity other than what was carved out for him in the first two seasons of the show; it is also what continues to draw the viewing audience deeper into the show as they root for Fonzie's acceptance into the Cunningham family and into white middle-class society.

According to Franz Fanon's ideas on the process of decolonization via violence, in order to gain a voice we must reclaim the past; we must attempt to dismantle the economic foundations of colonial rule (36 – 52). It could be said that because the Cunninghams are the initial colonizers in the binary dichotomy between civilized/savage (themselves and Fonzie), this dichotomy forces Fonzie to rise up and exert an inner, innate violence when reacting to situations that place him in opposition to his oppressors. For example, in "Arnold's Wedding," Mrs. Cunningham scolds the Fonz for attempting

to shirk his duties as best man to Arnold and finishes with "sit on it." As she storms out of the room, he responds with:

> Fonzie: I think I'm gonna have to hit her.
>
> Howard: No, you're not gonna hit my wife.
>
> Fonzie: [to Ritchie] Then I'll hit you!
>
> Howard: You're not gonna hit my son.
>
> Fonzie: [to Howard] Then I'll hit you!
>
> Ritchie: You're not gonna hit my father either.
>
> Fonzie: Well I gotta hit somebody. You know where Potsie is?

This violent reaction that Fonzie feels so justified in making is a response to being controlled by the middle class surrogates that have been "training" him to be a better member of their society. Of course, we can not ignore Fonzie's blatant disregard for women throughout the series and especially in this scene where he threatens to strike not only a woman but the woman who is seemingly so motherly to him. Fanon might view this and other violent bursts as a way for Fonzie to reclaim what the Cunninghams have appropriated from him, his identity as an Italian American.

Incidentally, it is not until the beginning two episodes of season five that we see Fonzie complete his transformation to middle-class status. In "Hollywood, Part 1" and "Hollywood Part 2," two talent scouts from Paramount Pictures come to Arnold's looking for Fonzie, the mechanic, to fix their broken down car. When they see him, they decide that he has the look, charisma, and way with girls to become the next American James Dean. They coerce him into traveling to California to audition. The Cunninghams, Potsie and Ralph all accompany Fonzie to California, where Fonzie is

eventually challenged by a beach-goer named the California Kid to water ski jump over a penned-in white shark, the scene that originates the colloquialism *jumping the shark*, a term defining the moment a show loses its appeal. Of course, the Fonz accepts the challenge, but this time he feels he has something to prove because, although his screen test went well at Paramount, the directors liked Richie better (who had been rehearsing with Fonzie). Richie tells Fonzie that "it is the All-American apple-pie face" they want. Before he returns to Milwaukee, Fonzie needs to prove to himself that he is not a "double-failure," so he jumps the white shark and all his cool is restored (Fuller, "*Happy Days:* Season 9 Episode Guide").

Season five began the downward spiral for the show's ratings. From this point on, Fonzie does not mention James Dean again. He has completed the transformation into American middle-class white society with the prospect of becoming the next James Dean. When he gets to the studio and sees that there are a number of other Dean wannabes, he slowly realizes that he is living the life of the Dean persona back in Milwaukee. Now that he identifies with Dean's persona more so than Brando's, he realizes his inner change and so too does the viewing audience. At this point, Fonzie returns to Milwaukee and assumes his previous lifestyle, with the exception of trying to prove "something" to the world. He becomes an authority figure for his cousin Chachi (Scott Baio), partners with Al Delvecchio as co-owners of Arnold's, gets a long-term girlfriend and plays father to her daughter, goes to night school to become a teacher, eventually adopts a young boy, and becomes a home owner. He is now the epitome of a white middle-class Cunningham.

By granting Fonzie admission to the center, Marshall must explain his change in

course for the character. One way in which he may clarify this change is by suggesting what Fred Gardaphé summarizes in Brian Harper's notion of "'simulacral realism—whereby television programming is conceived as propounding scenarios that might subsequently (and consequently) be realized through the larger social field, regardless of whether they actually preexist there" (211). Perhaps Marshall used his character of Fonzie to work through his own ethnicity issues. Divorcing the male lineage of their Abruzzo roots, Marshall's father changed the family name from Masciarelli to Marshall before Garry was born. Although there is no direct indication that the character of Fonzie was created by Marshall while in the position of what Anthony Tamburri credits Daniel Aaron, author of the influential article, "The Hyphenate Writer and American Letters," with, that of a "first-stage writer, […] 'a pioneer spokesman for the … unspoken-for' ethnic, racial or cultural group, that is the marginalized" (8), we could, indeed, read the effects of the characterization of Fonzie alongside the goals that Aaron's writer hopes to achieve. In doing so, Marshall may very well have achieved the first and second goals of the first stage writer: "winning over the sympathies of the suspicious members of the dominant group" and "humanizing the stereotyped figure […] thus dissipating prejudice" (8) without consciously realizing what he was doing.

The first episodes of *Happy Days* show the Cunninghams and their "family values" as the primary voice of reason. They help to get Fonzie off the streets and into a respectable environment. Their interference is necessary to save Fonzie from his own hapless errors and to guide him onto the path of the dominant culture's ideal, the moral majority. Fonzie has his own voice at Arnold's, the local teen hang-out, and in his office, the vulgar men's room to which we banish all that is undesirable or not acceptable in

public. Yet, as the series progresses, Fonzie begins to take on a more central role. He slowly advances from an oppressed subject—told what is right and wrong, merely permitted to sit at the table—to a more popularly dominant voice of reason. He loses the angst-ridden, tortured propensity to rebel and becomes an integral, moral character, worthy of that seat at the dinner table. But it is this transformation with which middle America seems to have problems. Becoming a member of the dominant culture is acceptable as long as he remains exotic, different, and perhaps even "cool," but the Other must always remain hierarchically lower. Once Fonzie is integrated into multiple layers reserved only for oppressors, namely Jefferson High school teacher, proprietor of Arnold's, and adoptive father, he is deemed to be a threat to the already established orders of the viewers, and they respond by changing the channel.

CHAPTER FOUR

Masking Identity by Redefining Masculinity

Carlos Cortes' title suggests Italian-American males have moved from the status of immigrants to icons; however, Maria Laurino suggests, "Italian-Americans have not evolved much" in the past ninety years. Unfortunately, throughout film history, there are few Italian-American male actors who have been cast in roles other than those of the Latin lover, gangster, or criminal depictions that have helped to bring Italian-American males to iconic status. In contrast and in keeping with the immigrant notion that hard work will result in attainment of "the American dream," the characters of Marty Piletti (Ernest Borgnine) in *Marty* (1955) and Niccolo "Mac" Vitelli (John Turturro) in John Turturro's *Mac* (1992) serve as unconventional roles cast by Italian Americans. In *Marty,* the title character is focused on purchasing a butcher shop in order to secure his future. Marty works against the typical Italian-American stereotypes of the time in that he isn't good-looking, overly charming, or even graceful. He is simply a shy man in his 30s who wants to stop being a sort of stand-in for his father in his mother's life and find a woman to share his life. In *Mac*, we see Mac's emphasis on craftsmanship as he insists on building houses honestly and loving his job while doing it. Of course, noteworthy of mention, while both films offer alternative roles for the Italian-American male, they both stereotype the Italian-American females as weeping characters afraid of abandonment from their surrogate sons.

After the blockbuster hits of Coppola's *Godfather* films and the success of Scorsese's *Goodfellas*, alternative roles for Italian-American males opened up to include, among other depictions, that of the "honest" cop (in *Donny Brasco* and in *Serpico*), the

hard-working bus driver father in *A Bronx Tale*, as well as the casino manager (in *Casino*) and the priest (in *The Sopranos*). In addition, the priest in *On the Waterfront* (long before *The Godfather*), provides an alternative role for the Italian-American. There was a need for the balancing of ethnic representations, says Carlos Cortes (123). It would seem that the many new roles opening up to Italian-Americans as a response to this need would act as a starting point for the reduction in the tired, old stereotyping that has been the norm for writers/directors in Hollywood; however, only a few roles really have, in fact, escaped the traditional masculine, aggressive, violent, womanizing stereotype of the Italian-American male in film. In reality, all Hollywood writers/directors have done is to depict the sexuality and masculinity of the Italian-American as more fluid and complex. But these moves have allowed Hollywood to continue to rely on the roles of the lover, the tough-guy gangster, and the criminal. In terms of the depiction of the Italian-American male character, what the viewing audience is left with is exactly what Hollywood has used to commodify the ethnic character, the traditional stereotype. To explain the persistence of these stereotypes and the recent variations, I will explore the fluidity of masculinity in Italian-American figures in chronology from Rudolph Valentino's persona to the characterizations of Vito and Michael Corleone and Amerigo Bonasera in *The Godfather*, Tommy DeVito in *Goodfellas*, and Paulie Gualtieri in *The Sopranos*.

We could credit the lynching of 11 Italian-Americans in New Orleans in 1891 (the largest lynching in US history) as the first notable news about Italian-Americans in US history.[26] From this point, Americans came to associate Italian-Americans with lawlessness, the vendetta, and the mafia. The irony of this statement does not go un-noticed within the canon of Italian American Studies. Among the reasons given for this

mass lynching was the immediate suspicion of several Sicilian immigrants in the murder of the New Orleans police commissioner. Although these immigrants were found not guilty, the accusation of their criminality prompted distrust for the ethnic group that has labeled them thenceforth. It was not until Rudolph Valentino emerged in 1917 with an uncredited bit part in *Alimony* (directed by Emmett J. Flynn) that another well-known Italian-American stereotype emerged, the lounge lizard or the Latin Lover. This image of a tango-dancer who lives off of women and makes men jealous because *their* women compared them to him, vaulted Valentino's career forward and ultimately carved his cultural place in history. Adding to this persona and subsequent stereotype that was created for Valentino on-screen, Valentino's first wife admittedly gave him food, underwear and clothes, attesting to his poverty and highlighting his way with women. Miriam Hansen writes that Valentino was the exotic that the film world was looking for. His appearance helped to mold him in his stardom. He had small eyes, a flat nose and a large mouth, which, combined with his dark, olive skin tone, and a little promoting behind the scenes to complicate his sexuality helped make him a star (257). This persona that Hollywood molded for him began to cause Valentino trouble as he was cast in such films as *The Sheik* where his "Otherness" was equated with the exoticism, violence, and sexuality of the immigrant (Studlar 180 - 182). Although it can be argued that shaping Valentino's character to embrace the lounge lizard or the Latin lover stereotype heightened his career, it also can be viewed as his downfall. Gaylyn Studlar suggests that Hollywood promoters had to do damage control in order to keep Valentino's career from being further damaged by his lack of appeal to the American male viewer. As a means of "fixing" the problem, Hollywood promoters offered a way in which to challenge

Valentino's perceived immigrant savageness and purposeful exploitation of women by complicating his sexuality. Hollywood promoters thought that if the viewing audience would concentrate more on Valentino's feminine associations (consequently, that were influenced by his second wife, Natasha Rambova) like his European manners, elaborate clothing, spats, slave-bracelet and jewelry, his dancing and his being "kept" by women, then they would forget about his immigrant status and his roles as "Others." Therefore, it stands to reason that when Valentino's masculinity came under attack in the press, Hollywood promoters would do little to diffuse rumors.

With Valentino's already stereotyped past, that of the Italian immigrant who dances and charms women, Hollywood promoters were able to capitalize on the masculine characteristics of his persona while coupling these characteristics with the feminine to create what Michael Moon calls the "hyperfeminine"/"hypervirile" (29). We see Moon's juxtaposing concepts at work when, in 1921, Valentino plays Julio Desnoyers, a privileged heir of a ranching family, in *The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse*. Valentino's role in this film can be seen as the role that launched his career mainly because "his dancing in the film carried over beyond the film to represent Italianate masculinity in American culture" (Gardaphe, *Rudy*…5). Valentino's character Julio dances the tango, mastering the female body by using hot hip contact, collects applause from the pub-crowd, sits with his partner on his lap only to cast her off to the floor when she laughs at his grandpa for falling to the floor drunk. This physical force coupled with the aggressiveness of the tango dance places the character in position as the typical hyper-masculine Italian-American male; however, juxtaposing this hostile nature is his feminine side where he shows a tender concern for his grandpa, kisses and caresses

his mother, and kisses the hem of his lover's veil. Furthermore, the pinnacle of the change in persona for Valentino's character can be seen in the scene where Marguerite, now a nurse-maid in the army, inspires Julio to enter the military and sacrifice himself. The scene begins with Julio whining about the couple's happiness being lost because of the effects of the war, Marguerite's husband coming back blind and a hero. After Marguerite explains that it is her atonement for their affair that she remain loyal to her husband, caring for him as they grow old, she mentions that Julio, being a man, could never understand her reasons for doing so. Julio seems to think he understands as he explains that he will fight for her country because certainly she would never love a coward, and that is what he feels he is in his lover's eyes. He enlists in the French Army, as a result. Ultimately, Julio is killed, but his transformation is seen completely when his ghost encourages Marguerite to continue caring for her husband in spite of her desire to leave him to look for Julio.

The fluidity of Valentino's persona was also showcased in 1922 when Valentino stared in the role of Spaniard Juan Gallardo in Fred Niblo's *Blood and Sand*. When we see Juan's friend slain by a bull, Juan's initial instinct is to enter the ring in a rage, and driven by emotion, murder the animal that has killed his friend. After Juan murders the bull, he immediately runs to be by his friend's side while he dies. Chiripia dies in Juan's arms. Juan kisses him, genuflects, and weeps passionately, showing his sensitivity. Here, we can see Valentino's image, though his character, transforming him from immigrant womanizer to aggressive, emotional Italian American.

The Talkie Era, the 1930s, introduced to the classic gangster genre. With films like *Scarface: Shame of the Nation* and *Little Caesar*, Hollywood was able to comment

on the collapse of the American Dream as well as entertain people while the Great Depression was going on (1929 – 1939). Ironically, the classic gangster genre was the shortest lived classic genre in US history. Within the two years following *Little Caesar* (1930), there were 31 gangster films made; after *Scarface* in 1932, there were 40 additional gangster films made. Peter Bondanella suggests there were so many gangster films made in such a short period of time that a 1935 moratorium on gangster films was invoked by the Hays Production Code. Bondanella explains part of this moratorium was based on the fact that directors were showing too much of the gangster's life and not condemning the gangster enough (183). In fact, director Howard Hawks refused to shoot the alternate ending of *Scarface* because he did not believe that it was necessary to surpass art for the sake of a social message. The gangster figure in these films is slightly different from the gangster figure in the next few decades mainly because of the moratorium. To explain, in *Scarface* Tony is stereotyped as an extremely protective brother (taken from the story of the Borgias in Italy). The relationship he has with his sister Cesca can be viewed as incestuous: he refuses to let her go dancing or to date; he tells her what she can and cannot do; he even kills her husband Rinaldo (in a stereotyped rage because of the misconception that his sister was defiling her commitment to the Catholic church by sleeping with a man out of wedlock).

In contrast to Tony in *Scarface*, Rico Bandello (Edward G. Robinson) in *Little Caesar* illustrates the gangster who does not want to be rich but just "wants to be somebody." Rico wants power. He wants to be respected. He comes from the country with his friend Joe (critics suggest Joe is his tragic flaw, hinting at a possible homosexual connection between Rico and Joe) to the city where he can make something of himself.

Rico does not display typical stereotyped gangster traits not because he is not incestuous like Tony, but because he does not drink (until the end); he does not want to be bothered with women; he is more violent than Tony. With sound coming to the motion picture, we are able to hear the gun shots fired in the streets and in the cafes. In summary of Carlos Cortes comment on the emphasis of violence in film, the only other ethnic sound that gave the gunshot sound a run for its money was the whoops of Indians (111). It is important to also note that after these two pinnacle films, the gangster stereotype was solidified and remains intact today. A large part of the stereotype was created because the films were shown in Europe where alleged gangster Al Capone was simply not well known. He was somewhat of an enigma to the European commoners. When European directors decided to depict Capone in their films abroad, the American papers began to pay a lot more attention to him. While prohibition existed, and criminality abounded, Capone only reinforced the depiction the Europeans branded him with, that of the Italian immigrant associated with crime. The realness of the need for gangsterism along with the lack of economic fortitude in America caused some American immigrants of Italy to realize that the American Dream was a myth. This realization prompted the start of jobs associated with crime being marketed by already established Italian and Jewish criminals toward down and out immigrants so that they could pay the bills and feed their families. This activity invited Hollywood writers/directors to add to the already shady persona of the Italian-American male. While it appears this stereotype has been perpetuated by writers/directors, its birth can be traced back to a sort of coupling of immigrant necessity and Hollywood consumerism.

In the 1940s–1950s (post-war) film noir and the 1960s, a new stereotype emerged,

that of the "pompous, stupid, incompetent and even cowardly" good for only an Italian song soldier (Cortes 112). During WWII (1939 – 1945), America and Italy were at odds, causing Americans to wonder if Italian-Americans in America would fight for Italy or America. In order to try and sooth these war-time concerns, Hollywood writers and directors decided to take pot-shots at the credibility of the Italian soldiers. By painting Italian soldiers as buffoons, writers and directors were able to create a sense of relief for the American people who were frightened by the perceptions of Fascist Italians fighting against American boys while still providing the people with entertainment. For example, in Billy Wilder's *Five Graves to Cairo* (1943), the Italian is included as an important character in theory; however, the character is Italian General Sebastiano (played by Fortunio Bonanova) who has his gun stolen from him and who is associated with fun-loving musical comedy within the film. Conversely, *Christ in Concrete* (1949) serves as one of the chief films of this time where positive post-war social messages about Italian-Americans began to surface on-screen. The two main characters, Geremio and Anunciata, are viewed as the first positive characterizations of Italian-Americans in film. We are privy to the pride in hard work that is evidenced in these Italian-American characters even though Geremio takes an unlawful job for more money and ultimately ends up dying because of this decision. In the end, he is able to provide that house he worked so hard to buy for his wife and children albeit with the insurance money from his death.

From this aftermath of war-time disarray, a call for America's own battle fighting against ethnic oppression was revealed. Hollywood writers and directors were able to begin tackling ethnic oppression on-screen with crooners like Frank Sinatra. In concert,

the microphone made it possible for the singer to sing directly to the audience or a single member of the audience, causing Sinatra's female fans to swoon. Although entertaining was not the most desirable occupation for an Italian-American attempting to complete the American Dream of the nuclear family, performers like Sinatra made a direct impact on "Italian-ness." In 1954, when Sinatra won an Oscar for his part in *From Here to Eternity,* it was clear that America was ready to embrace Italian-Americans and ethnicity. Sinatra kept a clean record until his publicist (the man who kept his chaos out of the papers) died, and America found out that Sinatra was what Italian-Americans and now American filmmakers were trying to dismiss as true: he was associated with the mob (he attended a mob conclave in Havana with crime family leaders Luciano, Buonnano, Gambino, Marcella, and Valachi); he was temperamental (he drank, smoked, and womanized); he was misogynistic (he cheated on his wife and slapped her around), and he was violent (he put a journalist in a hospital). Just when it seemed that Italian-Americans had turned a corner in the film genre, Sinatra's antics caused a slip in positive Italian-American depictions.

The moratorium on gangster films was still in effect until the 1950s when, luckily, filmmakers began ignoring it in order to compete with television. We get originality in gangsterism with comedy in *Some Like It Hot* when Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis change into drag in order to keep from getting "whacked" after watching Spats Colombo engineer a mob hit reminiscent of Capone's St. Valentine's Day Massacre. In addition, we see elements of the tough guy stereotype in the Italian character of Tony Curtis. He is always grabbing Jack Lemmon's character around the throat and threatening him with bodily harm in contrast to the non-Italian Lemmon

character who walks like a lady, talks like a lady, and begins to embody what it means to be a lady of that time period (namely, he wants to get married and be loved and have a partner to share his life with). This character actually becomes engaged to a man and when he tells the man that he is a man, himself, the man doesn't care. The audience is left with an ambiguous portrait of this couple at the end. Meanwhile, Curtis is in the back of the boat with his sweetheart girlfriend (played by Marilyn Monroe) planning their lives together. Here I might add that the tough guy stereotype is enhanced by the fact that Monroe's character goes off with the Curtis character in spite of the many lies and tricks he has played on her. She desires him, perhaps, even though he is a womanizer and is preoccupied with his appearance. He tells her that she is too good to get "the fuzzy end of the lollipop": i.e., himself, causing her to feel safe and secure in her decision to be with him. Even with complicating the identities of the two male characters and masking the Lemmon character's gender, Hollywood is able to continue the connection to crime and violence through the Spats story and through the Curtis character.

In fact, because writers/directors began complicating the identities of Italian-American characters, it seemed a likely choice for the 1972 character of Johnny Fontaine in *The Godfather* to be modeled after Sinatra. Sinatra's lifestyle provided the subtle connection to crime and violence that Hollywood writers/directors could use to capitalize on the already stereotyped Italian American. Interestingly, however, in the film, Fontaine was one of the only males to weep openly, offering the audience a glimpse at his emotional disposition. This could have been an ideal moment for critics to view the Italian Fontaine character as something other than the stereotyped male criminal figure; however, the audience is forced to view Fontaine as a weak failure because of his

inability to land the part in Woltz's new film and then his inability to keep his composure when he talks with his godfather about his tribulations. The film feminizes the character in spite of his crooner persona simply based on his collapse of masculine character because of his weeping in public. It is important to note that, in the Coppola film, Fontaine does not exhibit an aggressive nature unlike in Puzo's novel where Fontaine beats his wife and sexually assaults his mistress. The film audience needs a feminized character to balance the heinous acts of the other Italian characters. Here again, we see the complicating of the stereotyped Italian-American figure by replacing the aggression and violence with the complexity of an alternative identity mainly by way of feminization. We must note that, here, this feminization is associated with weakness more so than in the past.

What's more, the 1970s continued the tough guy/gangster image with films that made ethnicity appealing. More ethnic filmmakers, such as Martin Scorsese, were interested in doing work that would embrace their own ethnicities. Scorsese filmed *Mean Streets* with the idea of depicting the way he grew up in New York. His films are gritty and violent and add much to the characterization of the gangster figure. He was also able to balance these rough backdrops and characters with religion, marriage, and family life. In addition, according to Bernard Beck, Scorsese attempts to make his characters speak to the audience so that they are viewed as any one individual in the audience. This technique helps to garner sympathy and support for his characters, many of whom are gangsters (94). Scorsese is noted as being a new kind of filmmaker. Robert Kolker writes that Scorsese's films are "made self-consciously and are about self-consciousness" (89). We see this at work with Travis Bickle's paranoia in *Taxi Driver* (1976) and with

Jake LaMotta's fluctuating weight in *Raging Bull* (1980). We'll also see this method in more detail later when we see Tommy DeVito's character come face to face with his own masculinity issues in *Goodfellas*. Scorsese's characters "try to fight the world's imposition on them and impose their own will and spirit back on the world" (Kolker 91) much like Scorsese does in his process of filmmaking.

In contrast to Scorsese's films, and even though Coppola used the same themes in his work, Coppola's *The Godfather and Godfather II* made a political statement by using the mafia as a metaphor for family. Coppola said the films were "not about a mafia family"; they were "about a classic noble family…about power and the success of power" (Lebo 217). The characters of Michael and Vito Corleone epitomize the stereotype of the gangster that we have come to associate with modern day gangster figures. Michael is calm, cold, and calculating when he wreaks havoc on the five families during the baptism scene in *The Godfather*. Vito is equally cool and calculating when he kills Fanucchi, the Black Hand, in his apartment during the San Gennaro festival in Little Italy in *Godfather II*. Even though these two characters epitomize the stereotype of the gangster, Vito and Michael Corleone along with Bonasera, the undertaker of *The Godfather* serve as different examples of three forms of masculinity that run throughout this film in the way of father (the powerful Mafioso), the pseudo son (the undertaker), and the son (the silent officer). These three forms of masculinity progress to demonstrate the pinnacle of masculinity in Michael's stereotyped hyphenated American character, always returning to the ruthless Italian-American gangster/criminal figure.

Because of the familial connection, we find ourselves making excuses for the sensitive relationship Vito and Michael have with one another. For example, in the

second scene of the film, Connie and Carlo's wedding reception, we see the family gathering for a family photo. When Vito realizes that Michael is not present for the photo, he says "we are not taking the picture without Michael." The audience is able to see that this action is not unreasonable because Michael is a member of the family, and the purpose of the photo is to capture the entire family; however, we must question Vito's physical actions as he walks away from his biological family and directly to his mafia family while awaiting his son's return. Vito's moodiness, although a long standing stereotype of the Italian-American male, causes the audience to question his motivations regarding Michael. When we meet Michael a few scenes later, sporting his Marine attire and with his girlfriend by his side, gliding through his large family, we realize Vito's respect for his son, the officer. Now the picture can be taken because the "one who got away from the family business" has arrived. Of course, Vito respects Michael because of his ownership of self and drive to become something other than a criminal. The importance of this scene is to illustrate Vito's acceptance of his son's occupation even though Michael chose not to finish college and ultimately become a senator or governor as his father dreamed for him.

At this early point in the film, we are privy to Vito's feelings for Michael, and with a short scene between Michael and girlfriend Kay, played by Diane Keaton, where Michael tells Kay the story behind why Luca Brasi, played by Lenny Montana, is such a close friend to Vito, the audience can see Michael's feelings toward his family. After entertaining Kay with the story of how Luca and Vito got Vito's godson's (Johnny) contract released, Michael assures his girl, "that's my family, Kay. That's not me." This famous line foreshadows the transformation Michael undergoes in the remainder of the

film. The audience is left viewing Michael as an uncharacteristically naïve officer, a child, because we know that there will come a time when Michael, as a hyphenated Italian and Mafioso son, will have to take a position in the family business in spite of his current status outside of the family circuit.

In juxtaposition to Michael's society-approved masculinity (his status as officer) and looking back upon the opening scene of *The Godfather*, we hear the undertaker Bonasera, played by Salvatore Corsitto, utter the first words of the film, "I believe in America." He begins what can be interpreted as a testimony of his daughter's beating by two non-Italian boys and ends with a plea for justice that can only be given by the power of Don Vito Corleone. Bonasera is centered in the frame of the shot while the camera pulls back to reveal a dark background soon to be understood as a study. As the camera slowly continues to pull back from Bonasera, he is depicted as a less powerful father figure while he tells the story of his daughter's injustice. His image becomes less masculine as the rest of the study comes into focus. Next we see a backside image, closer to the screen, of the Don himself. Bonasera is placed in the distance of the frame, crying now as he is handed a drink by a non-identified male (later to be known as Sonny, played by James Caan, the Don's second son). As we see Bonasera lose the stereotypical masculine trait of males by showing sensitivity or weakness in front of other males, especially other powerful males, we are introduced to the powerful mafia figure, one who never shows weakness. This scene, according to Peter Bondanella, is

> one of the most famous shots in the history of cinema using a computerized zoom attached to a Mitchell camera that pulls back in an extremely slow reverse zoom reveal[ing] the true subject of the sequence:

Don Corleone in a low-keyed lighting in a dark study that combines the rich textures of oaken desks and leather chairs. (240)

Don Corleone's presence is felt by the audience as we can visually couple his powerful ambience with his title in La Cosa Nostra. The Don further asserts his masculinity when he demands, always in a calm tone, for Bonasera to come closer to tell the Don what he wants from him. We see Bonasera reclaim his masculinity by positioning himself over the Don to whisper in his ear, stereotypically a feminine action demanded by the Don. Here we must note that while the Don is positioned beneath Bonasera, he strokes a cat which sits on his lap. Coppola is able to keep the Don's powerful persona in spite of the positioning of his counterpart because the Don has control over the notoriously temperamental cat species, and because Bonasera is ordered to come closer and whisper in the ear of the Don, he remains demasculinized in the viewers' minds. The audience is further intrigued by the Don's persona because, in spite of his obvious connection to murder and the underworld, he is humanized via the cat as he caresses and cups the cat's head in his hands while it plays, lying across the Don's lap on its back with its feet stretched out, an all trusting position.

Consequently, in the last segment of the scene, when the Don stands up, placing the cat on the study desk between himself and Bonasera, we see first-hand the power that dominates Don Corleone's character as well as the human side of the mafioso through the dialogue between him and Bonasera and again between him and his adopted son Tom Hagen, played by Robert Duvall:

VITO CORLEONE

We've known each other many years, but this is the first time you came to

me for counsel, for help. I can't remember the last time that you invited me to your house for a cup of coffee, even though my wife is godmother to your only child. But let's be frank here: you never wanted my friendship. And uh, you were afraid to be in my debt.

BONASERA

I didn't want to get into trouble.

This first segment of the scene hints at the Don's sentimental characterization we see earlier with Michael and the family photograph; however, this sentimentality is coupled with the Don's *frankness*, a characteristic attached to a man of his position. Ironically, in being frank, the Don radiates an unnatural whine for Bonasera's lack of friendship, stereotypically a more feminine quality, and then ends his dialogue with the most masculine phrase thus far, "you were afraid to be in my debt." In contrast to Don Corleone, Bonasera's admission of fear illustrates his feminine depiction. As the dialogue continues between the two figures, we see the Don, eloquently and calmly, validate his lifestyle while all along becoming more powerful through his words in the eyes of the audience as well as in Bonasera's:

VITO CORLEONE

I understand. You found paradise in America, had a good trade, made a good living. The police protected you; and there were courts of law. And you didn't need a friend of me. But uh, now you come to me and you say -- "Don Corleone give me justice." -- But you don't ask with respect. You don't offer friendship. You don't even think to call me Godfather. Instead, you come into my house on the day my daughter is to be married, and you

uh ask me to do murder, for money.

BONASERA

I ask you for justice.

VITO CORLEONE

That is not justice; your daughter is still alive.

As the scene progresses, Don Corleone moves into the role of judge as Bonasera pleads for justice. It is clear to the audience that Bonasera does understand the rules of La Cosa Nostra. Don Corleone cannot refuse any request on the day of his daughter's wedding. But if the Don is approached at any time, he should be treated with respect according to the laws that bind omerta [code of silence], such as referring to the Don as Godfather, not insulting the Don with an offer of money, and, other demonstrations of respect:

BONASERA

Then they can suffer then, as she suffers.

(then)

How much shall I pay you?

VITO CORLEONE (stands, turning his back toward Bonasera)

Bonasera... Bonasera... What have I ever done to make you treat me so disrespectfully? Had you come to me in friendship, then this scum that ruined your daughter would be suffering this very day. And that by chance if an honest man such as yourself should make enemies, then they would become my enemies. And then they would fear you.

BONASERA

Be my friend --

(then, after bowing and the Don shrugs)

-- Godfather?

VITO CORLEONE (after Bonasera kisses his hand)

Good.

(then)

Someday, and that day may never come, I'll call upon you to do a service for me. But uh, until that day -- accept this justice as a gift on my daughter's wedding day.

BONASERA (as he leaves the room)

Grazie, Godfather.

VITO CORLEONE

Prego.

(then, to Tom Hagen, after Bonasera leaves the room)

Ah, give this to ah, Clemenza. I want reliable people; people that aren't gonna be carried away. I mean, we're not murderers, despite of what this undertaker says.

As the scene ends, the Don has transformed Bonasera, a seemingly law abiding Italian American, into a weakened man forced to bow to and kiss the hand of the most powerful man that he knows. Although Bonasera's request was granted, Don Corleone has gained an ally when it comes time for him to need a favor. Note here that the correspondence between Bonasera and Don Corleone is reminiscent of a father/son relationship with Bonasera pleading his Godfather for help and Don Corleone schooling Bonasera in the ways to ask for a powerful man's help. Interestingly, it is the speech that Don Corleone

gives to Bonasera that makes this scene so dramatic. As Chris Messenger states in his book, *The Godfather and American Culture: How the Corleones Became "Our Gang,"* "The speeches made by the Dons show the accumulated wisdom of the […] men who have survived their reigns of murder and mayhem to now stand at the pinnacle of a business network too important to be left unregulated" (192). The dramatic impact that this speech has on the audience is not without merit. The speech supplies the audience with a sense of Don Corleone's power as well as his soft spoken compassionate side.

The contrast in this scene between Bonasera and Don Corleone in terms of their masculinity is beautiful. We see Bonasera's naïve nature and weakened demeanor (he is slumped over as he stands, sweating and crying) at the same time we see Don Corleone's strong stature, but are overtaken with his ability to project such a soft-hearted speech. We are left to think that Bonasera is a good-natured character because even though Don Corleone emanates compassion, he still radiates power. Unfortunately, Coppola abandons this early representation of the "good" Italian-American in Bonasera as we see him again only after the Don requests his services as an undertaker to repair Sonny's bullet-riddled body.

Consequently, as the Vito Corleone/Bonasera relationship comes to an end with a fulfillment of the pact that the two made earlier in the film, the true father/son relationship between Michael and Vito emerges. With Sonny, Vito's heir, murdered, Vito is forced, against his better judgment, to make arrangements with his rivals for Michael, his next successor, to come back to America safely from hiding in Sicily. Vito wants to be sure there will be no attempts on Michael's life as revenge for Sonny's murder of Philip Tattaglia's son Bruno. It is at this point we see Vito's tragic flaw; he

makes a deal with the other mafia families to allow drug trafficking, the end of La Cosa Nostra as Vito knows it, for the safe return of Michael to America. Vito knows that with the onslaught of drugs will come greed among the younger, less traditional Italian Americans, and this causes him to retire from the mafia as Don. Of course, this deal is not the only reason for his early retirement. He has been shot; his son has been murdered, and, most of all, the only son that has been able to steer clear of the family business (aside from Fredo (John Cazale), the middle born with mental afflictions) has been initiated into the business as a direct result of loyalty to his father. When Vito was shot, Michael stepped up and assassinated the men responsible, leaving Michael to flee for cover in Sicily until he could be cleared of murder. By bringing Michael back to America, Vito also brought him in direct contact with the life he never wanted for this son.

Brando's character undergoes a moral centering that costs him his son's law-abiding future, something that his character protected and cherished above all else. According to Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumin, authors of *Me Jane*, this moral variance is superseded by the character's construction of gender. They suggest "such is the nature of gender construction that it can be used in an almost arbitrary way to carry any number of ideological attributes and play these out in a form of moral conflict" (qtd. in Shail 67). Because the character of Vito Corleone chooses to "throw in with" the other mafia families and their drug trade business, an act that eventually causes him to consider and then accept retirement, he can appear weak to the audience. Still the audience is torn between the visual image of Vito, a seemingly powerful man, tall and broad with deep eyes, and an eerie voice and the feminine mannerisms of the character. His

indecisiveness, his desire to keep out of the drug business because of the effects it could have on children, and his obvious affection for his son are strongly reminiscent of the stereotyped female. When Vito ignores his practical business sense to make a deal that will place his family and the family of La Cosa Nostra in jeopardy to bring his son home to America, the audience is privy to change in the film, the change in the character of Vito, and the impending doom that will inevitably come from this impractical arrangement.

As leadership of the Corleone family transfers from Vito to Michael, the audience is taken back to a familiar place, the Corleone study. Coppola uses the study as a device to not only frame the first installment of the trilogy, thus ending this era, but also to show the difference between the father/son power positions. Of course the audience has just viewed the sinister yet necessary disposal of all that led to the transfer of Dons and "all opposition to his power from the other families" (Bondanella 250), knowing that Michael, the new Don, has initiated these deaths and those of Tessio, his father's friend, as well as Carlo, his brother-in-law and father of the child to whom he has just served as Godfather at the child's baptism. Already, the audience can see differences in the Dons. Michael lacks the compassion and empathy that his father so gracefully embraced, and although shorter in height and thinner in stature, the character of Michael Corleone exhibits none of the feminine characteristics that we attributed to his father. In fact, the final two scenes of the film, used to establish Michael's over-the-top masculinity, also serve as a contrast to Bonasera's and Vito's strong masculine demeanors that are fouled with feminine mannerisms in the crying and indecision. Bondanella writes, "the film ends in a brilliant fashion, back in the darkened office in which it opened" (250).

Although the office has been updated to reflect 1951 instead of 1945 when we first meet Vito, we realize that nothing has changed except the leadership of the family. In this scene, the scene where Michael "allows" Kay to "ask [him] about [his] business this one time," we see Michael's lack of compassion and ability to blatantly lie to his wife about the murder of Carlo. Bondanella notes, "the penultimate medium long shot through the frame of the study door reveals Michael in his father's place, now with his own Mafia 'family': Michael's henchmen congratulate him and kiss his hand [this act echoes back to the opening scene with Vito and Bonasera]" (250). Now the audience is left with Kay looking into the office in disbelief as the door of the office is shut, essentially "shutting her and Michael's genetic family, away from his Mafia family" (250). Even though little time has passed between the changing of guards in the Corleone family, the audience knows that Michael is the possessor of all power. He kills his relatives, lies to his wife, and shuts his "genetic" family out of "his business" simply because he has the disposition to do so.

As the years go by and Hollywood has had more time to work with the Italian-American image in film, viewers would assume a more rounded character depiction of the Italian-American character; however, Hollywood defaults to the typical criminal character in order to sell films. If Hollywood created an Italian-American gangster film like *Donny Brasco* (1997), with gangsters like Lefty (played by Pacino) and Sonny Black (played by Michael Madsen), then Italian-American civil rights groups called for more equally positive roles for Italian-Americans like the role played by Johnny Depp, Joe Pistone, aka Donny Brasco. Even though Depp's character was a cop (an honorable occupation for any ethnic group), we see the character transform into the very thing he is

trying to put behind bars. Pistone goes undercover to infiltrate a mafia cartel, and he becomes one of them, a Guido. He begins to talk like them (New York or Brooklyn accent), dress like them (tasteless clothing and tons of jewelry), and greased back hair. He slaps his wife when she doesn't listen to him (the stereotype of battering misogyny). Emerging from the collapse of the Hays Production Code in 1968, filmmakers are now able to use excessive vulgar words, unnecessary violence, and overabundance of sexuality in their films. The problem with this film is that while it is trying to equalize the stereotype of the Italian-American male by depicting an Italian-American (half Italian-American here) in a respectable job, it illustrates what Raymond Belliotti suggests is the lure of the organized criminal, that power, pride, and praise Italian-American men get when they are accepted into a group such as the mafia (48, 248). Ultimately, what is gained from a film like *Donny Brasco* is the chance to see an Italian-American play the role of a good-guy even though he struggles with the ideals that he comes to understand about the mafia. This character does exhibit negative stereotyped qualities that have been associated with the Italian-American male in film; however, he ends up doing the right thing by his family and by his badge. The confliction that the film displays in terms of characterization of the Italian-American serves as an example of how Hollywood writers/directors have worked to continue the link between the Italian-American and lawlessness on screen. In contrast, *Serpico* (1973) features Frank Serpico, an honest Italian-American cop who refuses to take a bribe in order to save face with the other cops (most of whom are Irish). Serpico goes to the police commissioner to report the misconduct of some of his colleagues and ultimately is shot in the face for his honesty. This remains one of the very few depictions of Italian-American males that is not tainted

by Italian-American criminality or associated with the mafia.

We are able to see the Italian-American in an honorable position of father in *A Bronx Tale* (1993) where DeNiro, also the director, plays the father of C. (played by Lillo Brancato), a boy who witnessed a murder and kept his mouth shut when the police showed up. He becomes the surrogate son to the gang leader who committed the murder, Sonny (played by Chaz Palmiteri). DeNiro sets the film up with the idea that a choice must be made between what is right and what is wrong in life. C. chooses to follow Sonny, the local gangster, until Sonny's murder, at which point he realizes that his father is really the better role-model. DeNiro is able to illustrate hard work, the manual work of a bus-driver, and the pride Italian-Americans took in the hard work that they did. The "honest worker" bus driver is a lot like Serpico, the honest blue-collar cop. These characters are both masculine in their own rights; their occupations are those that we associate with "the man of the house" in their respective time periods; their demeanors, unshaven faces, and unabashed honesty indicate a masculine security within, and their work ethic is that which is associated with a long day's earnings, that of a man's world.

Films function as a "keeper of America's collective conscience—a repository of fears, guilt, and hopes" (qtd. in Donalson). Moreover, the ability to identify with a character has historically been essential to society's coping with societal ills. Martin Scorsese provides this identification in the 90s for males through his creation of strong, masculine characters like Tommy DeVito, played by Joe Pesci, in *Goodfellas* (1990). As Robert Shail suggests in his article, "Masculinity and Class: Michael Caine as 'Working-Class Hero,'" it is this "tough, aggressive, sometimes violent maleness" (68) that we are drawn to in troubled times. Herein, I assert that even though the main character in

Goodfellas is Henry Hill, an Irish Italian, the character of Tommy DeVito not only embodies these qualities of masculinity Shail speaks of, but also stands as the only primary character on the set that serves as what Maria Laurino, author of "Italians on TV: From the Fonz to The Sopranos, Not Much Evolution," terms as the "nonethnic ethnic." In truth, we view Tommy DeVito, a full-blooded Sicilian-American, as the character that is most entangled in masculinity. By tracing Tommy's actions and narrative through *Goodfellas,* we can arrive at a definition of masculinity that has been both contrived by Hollywood in stereotyping the ethnic gangster and ignored by Hollywood when the reality of this stereotyping was uncovered by activist groups, a definition that questions our contemporary ideals surrounding what it means to be masculine in our world today.

In analyzing Pesci's character, Tommy DeVito, in *Goodfellas*, a film based on the book *Wiseguy* by Nicholas Pileggi, we can see stereotypical depictions of ethnic masculinity at work. Directors like Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola, the master behind *The Godfather Trilogy*, have used historical depictions of masculine characteristics in order to promote films which appeal to both male and female viewing audiences. By capitalizing on the idea of power in male characters, these directors are able to create films that deal with both history and a societal concern in said eras. The objectification of Italian-Americans in these films, and here in *Goodfellas*, allows these directors to concentrate on the history of La Cosa Nostra as well as the fear that this brotherhood created in the communities of the time. What Scorsese creates in his version of La Cosa Nostra, the mafia, is, essentially, "a group that exemplifies how masculinity becomes reinforced through homosocial bonding" (Lee). At the pinnacle of this group lies the idea of a patriarchal system, one father and many sons. Once a "choice between

imitating [their] father[s] and the gangster across the street" (Bondanella 274) has been made, these men are initiated into this group, becoming closer than biological brothers.

It is clear that masculinity in film has been redefined over the past eighty years or so; however, one characteristic that has remained associated with masculinity is aggression. To illustrate the possession of a temper and to act on that temper is to show one's inner-self, the self that most people try to mask. As Perry Nodelman, Professor of English at the University of Winnipeg, points out, there are six main components that create a system for conventional attributes of masculinity (phallic, warrior, self-sufficient, group, structural/cultural, and psychoanalytic masculinity); and aggression, in one aspect or another, is evident in all six sections. From the 1940s and 1950s with film noir, we have evidence that the main male protagonist of the film "loses his cool"; he yells, hits things, and strikes others.

By providing our current viewing world with a stereotyped version of an Italian-American gangster, as cast in *Goodfellas* and *Casino,* Hollywood directors have fed into the already dented image (the stereotyped image) of the Italian-American man. *Italian and Irish Filmmakers in America: Ford, Capra, Coppola, and Scorsese* suggests "ethnicity is a strong draw at the box office […] because it creates a sense of the Other who can both be admired and at the same time ridiculed" (Lourdeaux). While it is important to illustrate the various histories within ethnic backgrounds, it is as important to be careful not to recreate the ethnic history with a stereotyped knowledge of ethnic realities. Scorsese, admittedly, admires the gangster figure in Italian-American history, and his vitae proves his admiration for this type of character as a large number of his films represent this figure from Italian-American history . Yet, most of Scorsese's

current viewing audience can only rely on films like *The Godfather, Goodfellas,* and *Casino* (the heavy hitters) as a basis for their knowledge of the history of Italian Americans, a history that has been redefined by directors like Scorsese unbeknownst to him.

At first glance, Robert Shail's comment on the transformation of masculinity in film that "tough, aggressive, sometimes violent, maleness […] is replaced by a more playful, humorous […] identity" (68) seems faddish; however, when we look at Pesci's character Tommy, it is clear that what Shail suggests contains some truth. Tommy begins as the "tough, aggressive male," depicted as a hot-headed Sicilian who acts on impulse before thinking of how the consequences of his actions may hurt those around him, especially his friends. For example, in the scene at the basement card game, Henry, Jimmy Conway (played by Robert DeNiro), Tommy, and other wiseguys are playing cards. Tommy is drunk as he opens his jacket to reveal his gun. Spider, a younger male played by *The Soprano's* star Michael Imperioli, who has already been shot in the foot by Tommy during one of Tommy's previous outbursts is, "paying his dues" to get into the gang by serving drinks at the card game. Spider gets angry when Tommy yells at him for not bringing him a drink. The dialogue goes like this:

> Spider: [hesitating] Why don't you go fuck yourself, Tommy?
>
> [stunned silence]
>
> [Jimmy throws some money on the table]
>
> Jimmy: Here, Spider, this is for you. I got respect for this kid. He's got a lot of fucking balls. Good for you, don't take no shit off nobody. He shoots him in the foot he tells him to go fuck himself.

[to Tommy, joking]

Jimmy (continues): Tommy, you gonna let him get away with that? You gonna let this fucking punk get away with that? What's the matter? What's the world coming to?

[Tommy pulls out a gun and shoots Spider in the chest]

Jimmy (continues): What's the matter with you, huh? What is the fucking matter with you? What are you stupid or what? Tommy, I'm kidding with you. What the fuck are you doing, what are you a fucking sick maniac or something? [shouting] I'm fucking kidding with you, you fucking shoot the guy?

Tommy: Kidding? How am I meant to know you're kidding? You're breaking my fucking balls.

Within this narrative, not only do we see how incredibly impulsive Tommy is, we also see his reaction to what he views as verbal disloyalty when his friend Jimmy gives validation, his approval, to another male. Tommy becomes enraged, perhaps because he feels demasculinized by his friend's "ball busting" or perhaps because he feels he is entitled to the kind of respect a full blooded Sicilian deserves even though he is not yet a made-man (a full blooded Sicilian initiated into La Cosa Nostra). Tommy knows he is the only one of his two friends that can ever be "made." He is unsettled by the fact that he has to wait his turn to become a full member of his own "family," so he acts out in an aggressive manner, knowing that he has the security of his "brothers" who will clean his mess up and tell themselves that "boys will be boys."

Yet, beyond this aggression is the transformation into playfulness and humor that

Shail speaks of. Even though Tommy acts without thinking, impulsively killing an undeserving youth and placing his friends in a position that could get them "pinched," we still laugh at his dialogue and wait to see him in the next scene. We are drawn to his charismatic ability to shrug off guilt and go on to the next hurdle in his life. We applaud his ability to survive and identify with his feelings of inadequacy that are triggered when his truest friends poke fun at him for being "less than a man" by not defending himself against Spider's disrespectful comment. After Tommy shoots Spider and the three must "dispose" of the body, we witness the following exchange of dark humor:

> Jimmy: You dumb bastard, I can't fucking believe you. You're gonna dig the hole.
>
> Tommy: Fine, I'll dig the fucking hole. I don't give a fuck.
>
> Jimmy: I'm fucking kidding with you; you fucking shoot the guy?
>
> Henry: He's dead.
>
> Tommy: I'm a good shot, what do you want from me? I'm a good shot.
>
> Anthony Stabile (played by Frank Adonis): How could you miss at this distance?

Although there is a reality to the unpredictable nature Tommy exhibits in these two scenes, we identify with him as he listens to Spider's insult and while his friends make fun of him. We empathize with Tommy through his humiliation because we have been in the same position. We do not want him to kill Spider, but before we can feel anger toward Tommy for his impulse, he atones for his sin by his witty comeback about digging the hole. The comedic moment stems from the intonation in Tommy's voice. He acts as if he has given a friend a childhood "wedgie" when in fact he has murdered a youth over

an insignificant comment. The context of the crime is displaced, causing us to laugh at an otherwise sad moment in the film. Here, the scene is complete and we forget about the horror attached to killing a youth. We await the next dramatic scene where Tommy will act out on impulse (what we wish we could do in our lives), get bailed out by his friends, and then say something funny to make the harsh reality of what he did vanish. Consequently, we are confronted with the question of Tommy's masculinity in looking back on this scene. Tommy overcompensates for his inability to handle Spider's insult, an insult from a younger male with no real connection to the mafia world Tommy lives in. Accordingly, Tommy's masculinity is called into question when we see him take a life over a childish insult.

Another scene in the film that offers a different perspective on Tommy's character in terms of masculinity yet still illustrates that dark comedic moment is the scene where Tommy, Jimmy, and Henry go to Tommy's mother's house in the middle of the night to get a shovel so that they can use it to dispose of yet another body that they are transporting in the trunk of their car. We figure, along with Tommy, that his mother will be sleeping; however, when the guys arrive at the house, Tommy's mother has already awakened and begins to make the boys something to eat (an Italian stereotype). Even though the boys have a dead body in their trunk, they stay for a late dinner, talking and laughing with Tommy's mother. We concede that the scene, itself, is problematic in that it yokes together the obvious gangster mentality of aggression and brutality (killing a man and leaving his body in the trunk of the *company* car) with the sensitive, loving side of a son. Tommy feels secure enough to go to his mother's home (where he also lives) with a dead man to get tools for the disposal of the body. We, as the audience, find

ourselves able to identify further with Tommy because he has such a loving relationship with his mother. By staying to eat with Tommy's mother and not immediately disposing of the body, the boys are increasing their chances of getting caught for the murder; however, Tommy and the boys eat and talk as if they are at a friend's house after school on a Friday evening sleepover. Tommy's mother becomes a Holy Mary figure who treats the boys like children. She asks them questions about their love interests and their families, and even comments to her son that he should be more like Henry, the quiet one with a wife and children:

> Mom [to Tommy]: Why don't you get yourself a nice girl?
>
> Tommy: I get a nice one almost every night, Ma.
>
> Mom: Yeah, but get yourself a girl so you could settle down!
>
> Tommy: I settle down almost every night but then in the morning I'm free! I love you, I wanna be with ... I wanna be with you.
>
> Jimmy: Why don't you settle down?

In this dialogue, we see the love that Tommy has for his mother when he references his mother in an Oedipal way: "I wanna be with you." We also see Tommy's dark wit creeping out when he playfully admits to his mother, an old-fashioned Catholic Italian woman, that he uses women for sex and then leaves them the next day so that he can remain free, adding that he remains free from commitment so he can be with his mother. Even though this type of relationship seems unnatural on the page, we are mesmerized by the sensitivity Tommy has in the presence of his mother. He becomes a "good fella" in our eyes, allowing us to see him as a sensitive male even though he still exhibits one of the main brutish qualities of masculinity, bragging about his sexual stamina.

As the film progresses, we see Tommy's playful attitude shift into a more volatile manner. Tommy becomes more aggressive when confronted with playful "jabbing" from other men as he did in the example with Spider. Tommy's rage is fueled by his need to prove himself through violence. After he commits a violent act, like murdering Spider, he gains awkward approval from his "brothers" in part because they see how psychotic he becomes when provoked and are afraid of how he will react to their disapproval. In fact, it is ultimately Tommy's failure to arrive at manhood that serves as the climax to the film. When we view the scene of the getting out of jail party of rival Gambino crew member Billy Batts, where Tommy, Jimmy, and Henry also happen to be having a few drinks, we see the ultimate demasculinizing of Tommy through the narrative shared between Tommy and Billy concerning a "job" as a shoe shiner that Tommy used to perform as a child:

> Tommy: No more shines Billy.
>
> Billy: What?
>
> Tommy: I said, no more shines Billy. Maybe you didn't hear about it, you've been away a long time, I didn't go up, didn't tell ya.
>
> Billy: Ah.
>
> Tommy [becoming visibly agitated]: I don't shine your shoes anymore.
>
> Billy: Relax, would ya! What's got into you!? I haven't seen you in a long fucking time, and I'm breaking your balls a little bit, I'm only kidding with ya.
>
> Tommy: Well, sometimes you don't sound like you're kidding, you know there's a lot a people here.

Billy: I'm only kidding with ya.

Tommy [calm but angry]: It's ok.

Billy: I don't mean to offend you.

Tommy: I'm sorry.

Billy: I'm sorry too.

Tommy: It's okay.

Billy: Salud. Now go home and get your shine box.

At this point in the scene, Jimmy and Henry realize that Batts has provoked Tommy beyond reason. Tommy leaves the bar demanding that Henry and Jimmy keep Batts there. When Tommy returns, he brings a gun and his violent rage. He attacks Batts, kicking him until everyone thinks he is dead. Here we see the connection from the opening scene of the film as that scene follows the beating of Batts. Because we know that the film is set up through the narration of Ray Liotta's character Henry, we expect an update on the damage this altercation has caused for the three men. In a narration from Henry, we realize that this act is the climax of the film:

> We had a, we had a serious problem with Billy Batts. This was really a touchy thing. Tommy'd killed a made guy. Batts was part of the Gambino crew and was considered untouchable. Before you could touch a made guy, you had to have a good reason. You had to have a sit-down, and you better get an okay, or you'd be the one who got whacked. [A freeze-frame holds on Henry's face as the screen turns red and the noise of sizzling rises on the soundtrack].

Clearly Tommy's anger at being treated disrespectfully in front of his friends is what

drives his need for retaliation. He is made to feel like the little boy who used to shine the adult's shoes when, in fact, he is one of the adults working side by side with men like Batts. His masculinity is questioned as a result of Batts's "ball busting," and Tommy responds in the only way he knows how, by violence. His act of violence allows him to feel accepted by his friends and by the mafia circuit he belongs to; however, as Henry narrates, Tommy has gone too far with his need to prove himself. He has disregarded the rules of the mafia world to which he belongs. In essence, he has defied his father, the don of the crew. We know that his punishment for this crime, after his boss finds out about it, is death, but in Tommy's mind, Jimmy and Henry will clean this mess up as they have done in the past. Tommy shows no concern for what he has done. He does not consider the fact that his two friends are connected to this murder even though they had little to do with it. The audience is waiting for Tommy's quick, witty comeback so that they can move onto the next scene with ease; only this time, it never comes.

This act of violence is what makes us question Pesci's character's masculinity, as masculinity does not equal cold-blooded, savage murder. In the other examples in which we have viewed Tommy's masculinity, we were able to dismiss his aggression because of the comedic atonement Tommy goes through. We were even able to sympathize with him because of his obvious issues with his own masculinity (he is short and chunky with a high pitched voice, and he lives with his mother); however, in the scene with the most obvious attempt at demasculinization of Tommy, we are able to see him as the primitive savage he truly is depicted as throughout the film.

It is not until scene 18, "The Digging Expedition," that we see Tommy in his playful manner, atoning for his mortal sin of killing Batts. Six months after the murder, it

is discovered that the abandoned plot of rural land in upstate New York, where the boys buried Batts, has been sold to a real estate developer and the body has to be excavated and moved to another site before the authorities find it. This scene serves as another instance of black humor for the film:

> [Henry, Jimmy and Tommy are digging with shovels to find Batts's corpse. Henry is sickened by the stench, but the others don't appear to be bothered]
>
> Tommy: Hey Henry, Henry, hurry up will you? My mother's gonna make some fried peppers and sausage for us. Oh hey, Henry, Henry. Here's an arm.
>
> Henry: Very funny, guys.
>
> Tommy [laughing]: Hey, here's a leg. Here's a wing. Hey, what do you like, the leg or the wing, Henry? Or do you still go for the old hearts and lungs?
>
> [Henry vomits]

The audience is now able to view Tommy as the funny, playful boy we saw when he atoned for Spider's murder and when we saw him in the scene with his mother. By providing this humor, Scorsese has set us up to feel sympathy for Tommy, at the end of the film, when the bosses of his family ultimately find out he was behind Batts's murder and have him *whacked* to save their relationships with the other crime families and, more simply, as punishment for disobeying rules.

Much like the character of Tommy DeVito, played by Pesci, we can see similar treatment of the character of Peter Paul Gualtieri, played by Tony Sirico, in *The*

Sopranos. Gualtieri is not only associated with the renowned Soprano family from New Jersey, but he is *an old timer* in the organization and constantly refers to his time "coming up with Johnny Boy [Soprano]," Tony Soprano's father. Of course, now we make the connection between Peter Paul and Paulie Walnuts. He is Paulie Walnuts as David Chase, writer and executive producer for the HBO series *The Sopranos*, nicknamed him. In Italian-American culture, more specifically in *la Cosa Nostra*, naming plays a significant part in radiating the perfect image of each member in the organization.

In the history of *la Cosa Nostra*, we recall such members as The Dapper Don, Scarface, Joe Bananas, and Lucky Luciano, all receiving elaborate initiations into *this thing of [theirs]* and being nicknamed based on their personalities. Following the code of Omerta consistently down to the use of nicknames, Chase attaches a persona to Gualtieri that will stay with him beyond the ending of the series. Some critics like Sara Lewis Dunne and Martha Nochimson suggest Chase's inclination to name his characters via "obvious [profane and obscene] linguistic markers" (Dunne 215) is an attempt to authenticate the modern Italian-American gangster vernacular. With characters named Pussy (Big Pussy and Little Pussy), Johnny Sack, and Paulie Walnuts, we can see that Chase attaches significance to the "corruptions of sexual slang" (Dunne 215). However, we must ask ourselves what being named Walnuts represents for Paulie. It is clear from the episode titled "I Dream of Jeannie Cusamano" (Season 1, Episode 13) when Paulie admits that he has seen a therapist because he lacks "coping skills," that his character is complex in many ways. We are able to see his anger before we have a chance to experience it in *almost* every scene. Chase casts him this way mostly due to his

demeanor: he has rough skin, a slicked back black hairdo trimmed in white on the sides, and although coined by Chase on the official HBO website as "the most meticulously coiffed and manicured capo in the Soprano crew," he has an old-fashioned gangster's sense of dress. Beyond his visual persona, we are privy to the fact that

> he's highly superstitious and has a violent - at times literally murderous - temper, as well as a distrust of others that borders on the paranoid. […] Paulie, whose "issues" with the opposite sex are common knowledge, [has] had his fair share of goomars, the only Mrs. Gualtieri is Paulie's mother - on whom he dotes with the reverence of a true son of Italy. ("The Sopranos")

As walnuts are "tough nuts to crack," so is Paulie himself. It is evident that Paulie has always been struggling with his identity as a member of the Sopranos crime family, much as Tommy does in *Goodfellas*, and with his more personal, inner struggles like his anger and sexuality, and so perhaps his very name symbolizes his own attempt to subdue his conflicted sexual identity.

According to Cindy Donatelli and Sharon Alward in their article, "'I Dread You'?: Married To The Mob in *The Godfather, Goodfellas,* and *The Sopranos,*" an organized criminal has cause to question his sexuality because "a social structure without women raises questions about homoerotic desire in organized crime [families]" (70). We know that Paulie has relations with women, his goomars, and that he feels that men in the *business* should not have wives because they cannot, due to the oath they have taken, give them what they need, the respect of being honest in a one-to-one relationship. He insists that "there is no room for women in this thing of ours." Although we see several

instances of gentle-natured behavior in Paulie, like his ideas of women in *la Cosa Nostra* or his kindness to his mother (both directly linked to his older, more traditional Italian upbringing), the balance between good vs. evil for his character is not given credibility. Any doubts about Paulie's good nature are tossed away when in Season 4, Episode 12, titled "Eloise," Paulie breaks into his mother's friend's home to steal her "mattress money," her savings. When she finds him in her bedroom, he suffocates her with a pillow, takes the money, and leaves. We know that this is the life [Paulie] has chosen; therefore, he must do whatever he needs to in order to "kick up" money to Tony each week, even if it means "whacking" an old woman.

Juxtaposing this seemingly violent characterization, Paulie exhibits tendencies that are too feminine to simply dismiss as "meticulously coiffed and manicured" ("The Sopranos"). For example, in "Mr. Ruggerio's Neighborhood" (Season 3, Episode 1), we see an exchange concerning healthy behavior between Soprano consigliore Silvio Dante (played by Steve Van Zandt) and Paulie:

> Paulie is washing his hands because he just tied his shoelaces....
>
> Silvio: What the fuck are you doin'? Lunch is ready.
>
> Paulie: I'm washin' my hands.
>
> Silvio: You just washed your hands.
>
> Paulie: (Nodding) Then I tied my shoes.
>
> Silvio: So what?
>
> Paulie: I can't stand touchin' fuckin' shoelaces! Ever go to tie your shoes and ya notice the end of your laces are wet? From what? Why would they be wet? […] You go to public bathrooms? You stand at urinals? […] Even

> if the lace is dry, and even if you don't touch the body of the shoe, bacterium virus migrate from the sole up. […] Your average men's shithouse is a fuckin' sewer! You look at Ladies Johns. You could eat maple walnut ice cream from the toilets. Eh! There's exceptions. But, the Men's! Piss all over the fuckin' floor, urinal jammed with cigarettes and mothball cakes. And they can put all the fuckin' ice they want down there my friend, it does nothing to kill germs. Even if you keep your shoes tied, you're still draggin' your laces through ...

Clearly, it is important for Paulie to maintain proper hygiene even in the spotlight of criticism from his crew friends; however, it is more peculiar that Paulie goes into such an elaborate diatribe to prove his point. We must remember that Paulie is a man who kills for a living. He spends the majority of his time in a strip club, the local meeting place for the Soprano crew, and he has jumped from woman to woman, replacing the last with the next goomar. It is strange to think that a man who lives such an unclean life would be so concerned about hand washing and bacteria-ridden shoelaces.

To further explore this femininity attached to Paulie's persona, in the opening scene of "Pine Barrens" (Season 3, Episode 37), we see Paulie having a manicure at a beauty parlor. He receives a phone call from Tony demanding that he pick up Silvio's collection from a Russian who owes them money. When Paulie finds out that Silvio cannot make his own collection because he has the flu, Paulie becomes visibly enraged while calmly reporting that he has plans with his mother for the afternoon. Although Paulie's anger is plausible because we know his strong and loyal feelings for his mother, the audience cannot help but wonder if he is simply angry because his manicure has been

interrupted. Paulie practices what Pierre Bourdieu calls "'the practical materialism which inclines [him] to censor the expression of feelings or to direct emotion into violence,' a definition of maleness that succinctly describes" (qtd. in Messenger 272) Paulie's behavior. We see this channeling of emotion into violence when Paulie shows up at the Russian's apartment to collect Silvio's money. In order to regain control of his conflicting identity (that of a feminine Paulie vs. a masculine gangster), he taunts the Russian by calling him names and making fun of rubles and Russian toilet practices and breaks the phallic remote control—a way of asserting his masculinity/power over the larger Russian. When the Russian responds by saying "go fuck your mother," Paulie reverts to violence in order to control the situation and once again solidify his masculine persona as a made-man in the organized crime syndicate. That Paulie is conflicted is evident in the feminine actions he demonstrates. Of course, these actions are unacceptable in his world. Paulie is, ultimately, left out of the center of the syndicate because he over-exerts his macho aggression in order to control what is viewed as his feminine desires (manicured hands, clean foot-wear, etc.).

Alternatively depicted as a man of the cloth, Father Phil Intintola, played by Paul Schulze, in *The Sopranos*, Martha Nochimson points out, is not what we would expect in a catholic priest and embodies the stereotyped masculine characteristics of less holy characters. Nochimson notes that the Father is close with the women in the HBO show (11). He makes house calls and invites himself to dinner. He imposes himself onto the women who need his spiritual guidance the most, i.e. Carmela (Edie Falco) and Rosalee Aprille (Sharon Angela). When Tony takes Meadow to visit colleges over a weekend, Father Phil ends up spending the evening at Carmela's home. Clearly, this is not the type

of behavior a traditional priest would exhibit. However, what we learn about the priest the night before is that, as Carmela says, he "loves to flirt with sexuality" all the while knowing he cannot act on it. Later in that season of the show, Carmela goes to the church to bring the priest some baked ziti when she happens upon Rosalee Aprille (her son was just murdered and she has needed the guidance of the priest since then) giving a watch (one that belonged to her dead husband, the leader of the crime family) to the priest. This priest, who I might add, continues to be accepted into the Soprano home for picnics and parties, manipulates women into cooking for him and then uses them for sick gratification (he can turn them on and then refuse them in the name of the Holy Father – making him stronger in the eyes of the Lord). Oddly, Father Intintola exhibits many of the stereotypes that regular Italian-American men have been associated with: power, misogyny, and manipulation.

In comparison, and in further support for my claims of inequality amongst Italian-American male characters, Father Barry in *On the Waterfront* can be viewed as a priest who, without purposeful intent, becomes mixed up with criminality because he is trying to maintain order in an otherwise chaotic, volatile situation. Father Barry is criticized in *Unspeakable Image: Ethnicity and the American Cinema* for being too over-the-top in trying to get the dockworkers to turn against the mob. This priest gets himself beat up, his church bombarded by artillery, and Terry in a position that ultimately gets his brother Charlie killed, that of the man to turn-coat on the mob. Both Italian-American priest figures show growth for Hollywood writers and directors in that their occupations are more than simply criminal; however, it is clear that even as a character who holds a holy title, the Italian-American male has not been stripped of all negative associations with

criminality.

Unfortunately, throughout film history, there are few Italian-American male actors who have been cast in alternative depictions other than gangster or tough guy. Some of the depictions that have held up over the years are the ones that are true to the immigrant notion that hard work will get us to the "American dream." Even though that dream is never fully attained in these films, and arguably the reason some of these pieces mentioned, specifically *The Godfather, Goodfellas,* and *The Sopranos,* have not been analyzed much in terms of these particular alternatives is because these images are not what the public wants to see. The public wants to view films that use the classic stereotypes because the gangster/criminal is more fun to watch. Bernard Beck says it all when he insinuates that from the 1930s to present, viewing audiences want to be entertained (27). Entertainment equals chaos found in the gangster character. Chaos equals conflict, and conflict equals money. As Richard Gambino, a veteran writer on the Italian-American experience, suggests, "Italian-American identity is in danger of being dissolved in a sea of inauthentic myths" (qtd. in Guida, "Conversation…" 97). Unfortunately, Valentino, Copolla's Corleones, Scorsese's Tommy DeVito and Chase's Paulie Walnuts add to those myths.

By casting these characters as hot headed killers with sensitive and comedic sides, these filmmakers have created characters with which we can identify as well as detest. What we perceive at the end of the films is the idea that men in an organized society live by a set of rules governed by their own kind, a group of money hungry murderers who just happen to be Italian. Perhaps through individual film analysis of characteristics that are used to create these characters, we can truly differentiate between the character and

real Italian males. Melvin Donalson asserts that "since the 1930s films have presented various forms of masculinity, reflecting dominant mainstream social traditions, images of men and manhood within the culture." These characters do reflect the traditions of the mafia and the necessary amount of masculinity needed to maintain their positions of hierarchy held within the film; however, by overcompensating with violence and aggression for their lack of masculine stature, they become damaged male characters, and the audience is forced to view them in light of their ethnicity as savage, primitive Italian Americans.

CHAPTER FIVE

"Hey Joe (Palooka)": Hollywood Prize Fighters On and Off Screen

Because of the many negative associations that prizefighting has linked to the Italian American, one of the most overlooked positive depictions of the Italian-American is that of the prizefighter. Scholarship on the history of boxing and particularly prize-fighting within the Italian-American ethnic group has been written by many critics of the Italian-American canon including Peter Bondanella and Fred Gardaphé. Scholars have emphasized the term "palooka" and its metamorphosis from a positive origin (ironically, one that has not been ascribed to any one ethnic background) to a negative association. Yet, this metamorphosis has not been examined closely. In reality, the change in this representation stems from a deep-seated hegemonic bias against the Italian-American and against the mentality of the prize-fighter. To help expose and to further explain the obvious unfairness American viewing audiences have come to embrace when being challenged by films that depict Italian-Americans as less than whole characters, viewers can study films like the 1976 *Rocky* (director John G. Avildsen) and the 1980 *Raging Bull* (director Martin Scorsese). At first glance, viewers can say that the directors' treatment of the two boxers in these films is less than positive in terms of making strides against demonizing the Italian-American male in film because these films call attention to associations with the mob, heightened violent and displaced outbursts and overbearing misogynist attitudes. However, upon closer analysis, viewers can distinguish elements of depth within the images of the Italian-American males, both Rocky Balboa and Jake LaMotta, as they struggle through their identity issues and attempt to gain entrance into a culture that they have not been born into, much as viewers have seen in an earlier chapter

on Fonzie.

Both of these characters, Rocky and Jake, come from working-class backgrounds and are left to make their way in the world alone and by any means necessary in order to come to peace with an internal struggle each has brewing within. Ultimately, in spite of critical commentary suggesting that both directors have damaged the image of Italian-American males by producing biased films, the directors have achieved the building of two strong-willed, admirable, and loyal characters. These characters, by going through a gamut of emotions and by struggling with identity shifts and transformations, can be viewed by American audiences as the pinnacle of what it means to be an American male: strong, masculine and full of heart, drive and determination. Undoubtedly, *Rocky* as well as *Raging Bull* are films about identity and social class. Both explore the inner rage of men who have been cast off by society in one way or another. They fight because that is what they know, what they have been conditioned to accept by their fathers. Their stories are the stories far too many men from their era have lived; yet, the directors of these films allow for their *palookas* to have a real "shot" at a life worth living, in terms defined by the Italian-American fighters themselves.

The History of the “Palooka”

This chapter explains how the prizefighter who was once referred to as a “large and stupid […] oaf or lout” (qtd. in Bondanella 93) became synonymous with the term “palooka,” meaning “an incompetent or easily defeated player, especially prize fighter” (qtd. in Bondanella 93).[27] The American public has come to view this term, “palooka,” negatively, even though it once was used as a positive term to describe a fighter with

heart, someone who earned a positive viewing even though he may not be a champ. Although the definition of "palooka" is now obscure, the image of "palooka" has become tainted because of the stereotypes the media has associated with it. As such, it is clear to see that the definition of the term has morphed into yet another way in which the image of the Italian-American male can be distorted. The term *"palooka"* and Hollywood representations of "palookas" have changed extensively over the past ninety years to include more urbanized, ethnicized meanings, ignoring historical relevance and aiding today's marginalization of the Italian-American heritage.

In addition to the historical / cultural significance of the term "palooka" and its transformative association with the Italian American, American viewers must also acknowledge the Eurocentric paradigms that are most certainly attached to the Italian-American and, in this case, the Italian-American prizefighter. These structures of thought help to shape the image of the Italian-American "palooka" and what this image says about the culture that created it. Nearly four million Italians immigrated to the United States between 1880 and 1920, carrying with them a desire to succeed in life. When they made it to America, they began to develop colonies of Little Italys where they could band together and form support systems for each other. They were met with the expectation that they "were incapable of assimilating into Anglo-Saxon society" (Aguirre 227). In part because of this prejudice, the men were not offered well-paying jobs. It was difficult to get out of the Little Italy they were born into unless they became a *somebody*. One legitimate way to do this was to become a prizefighter. In his chapter titled "Palookas: Hollywood Italian Prize Fighters," Bondanella writes:

> Juveniles growing up in the lower socioeconomic levels, who saw gang

> fights as a normal condition of life, entertained fantasies about "easy money," lacked real vocational opportunities, and remained generally isolated from middle-class culture, were as likely to become criminals as boxers: the major difference resided in the role model available for the youngster, whether criminal or prizefighter. (95)

Becoming a prizefighter was a safer way to gain a lucrative income even though the sport was contaminated with criminality; ironically, the underside of the criminality associated with the sport was controlled by two Italian-Americans named Frankie Carbo and Blinky Palermo. These two men controlled the fight game for years, setting up fighters to take dives when the odds were in the fighter's favor in order to boost betting profits and manipulate the outcome of prizefighters' careers. These men preyed on their own ethnic group because they knew they could manipulate these young men by promising them that they would be celebrities, something they themselves remembered desiring when they were younger. In addition, these young men "saw boxing as a means of joining mainstream culture" (Bondanella 96), something that their parents were likely never invited to do because they were viewed as less-than-desirable, uneducated and non-fluent in English. This desire for assimilation drove a number of young men to become fighters even when they did not possess the poise a prizefighter needs. Because boxing had become a popular social event, promoters put anyone in the ring that would fight.

Fighters like Rocky Marciano, Rocky Graziano, and Jake LaMotta in the 1940s and 1950s, came out of Little Italys, and these "[b]rawling fighters—those with heart" (Bondanella 94) perpetuated the stigma of the palooka and solidified the connection of the term with Italian Americans. These fighters were crowd pleasers who could endure

much more physical punishment than the average boxer could. They did not possess the speed or accuracy of boxers like Ali or Frazier, but they could punch their way into a win against an opponent who may not have had equal "bravery" or "courage." Joyce Carol Oates refers to these boxers as "interesting symbolic figures" who "[sought] physical pain" (qtd. in Bondanella 94). It is this symbol that Hollywood writers latched onto when they realized that boxing films were becoming as popular and as lucrative as films from the gangster genre. Boxing films go back to the beginning of cinema.[28] But I will concentrate on two that hail from the 1970s and 1980s, a time when Italian-American males were attempting to build a cultural identity beyond that of the gangster and the palooka. The symbol of the palooka became the center for such films as the *Rocky* franchise, a story about a boxer with heart, and *Raging Bull* (1980), a chronicle about boxer Jake LaMotta's downfall, where the palooka character—the Italian-American boxer—has transformed the term into one that has none of its original definition and has been replaced with negative Italian-American stereotypes. Of significance, these two films coupled together represent a progression in the depictions of Italian-American males in film. With this background, viewers are closer to understanding the culture that has caused these males to make life decisions based, in part, on the way they have been perceived through American eyes and have been depicted through the Hollywood lens. More importantly viewers are able to see a context for Inter-Colonialism by reading the characters of Rocky and Jake against elements of masculinity, misogyny, and aggression, the very characteristics middle-America ascribes to Italian-American males in film and, often times, uses to oppress these characters on-screen. Fortunately, both Rocky and Jake are able to transcend this demonization in ways that allow their identities to grow and

shift positively.

In 1926, the most important boxing publication, *The Ring*, defined a "palooka" as "a tenth rater, a boxer without ability, a nobody" (qtd. in Bondanella 93). However, it was Ham Fisher in 1920, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, that popularized the term when he sketched "the comic-strip character Joe *Palooka*, a well-meaning but clumsy prizefighter" ("palooka"). Although the image of Joe Palooka transformed from time to time to match the image of the current boxing champ, it is the first image of Joe Palooka that helps to explain the American public's connection of the character with Italian Americans. It is common knowledge within sports arenas that the Joe Palooka character for the comic strip was modeled after a "big, burly, and inarticulate boxer" whom Fisher met "outside a poolroom in [Fisher's] hometown of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania" (Waters). In "Joe Palooka: A Comic Strip Character Goes to War," T. Wayne Waters suggests that the first image of the palooka character, one that "scored big with the American public," was "ugly, dark-haired, bug-eyed, and quite stupid" and a "dim-witted roustabout" (qtd. in Kashatus 25). By the time the character was being used by the American government as wartime propaganda, Palooka had been transformed into what Waters refers to as "handsome, blond, clear-eyed, and merely inarticulate," the opposite in almost entirety of the original Palooka character. In other words, to clean him up for presentation to the American public, Joe Palooka was made less ethnic. Cleaning the character up for war and sketching him as an "all-American bastion of honesty, humility, courage, and devotion to duty" (Waters) may have aided the US government in the acceptance and bolstering of national pride, but it certainly did nothing to help deflect the associations of the character with Italian-Americans in spite of the term's (palooka)

unknown origin. Because the palooka had been directly linked to the Joe Palooka character when the character was said to have been sketched to emulate boxing champions like featherweight champion Tony Canzoneri,[29] for instance, naturally the comic character would share a physical likeness to the Italian boxer; however, it is the association with Italian ethnicity that attaches itself to the palooka term, always smearing its meaning with a connotative overtone linked to the criminality associated with the Italian in America.

Even as a war hero, Joe Palooka's character was questionable as later in 1942 while fighting in North Africa, Palooka shot a Nazi soldier in the back who was attempting to escape. Waters explains that "this questionable act from the clean cut bastion of American fair play upset" a number of his American readers. Just as modern-day media constantly gain revenue by associating the Italian-American character with crime in one way or another, it can be said that Fisher, most likely, began the negative associations, albeit unconscious ones, when he sketched his newly-polished character as a shady soldier with criminal capability.

Viewers know that during the 1920s a great influx of Italians immigrated to the United States in hopes of fairer treatment under governmental rule.[30] Because Italian-American boxers predominately settled in the northeastern areas of the United States and were known for their un-stylistic, violent street fighting way of boxing much like Palooka's quick and intense anger, "thunder in his fist," and *luggish* demeanor (Kashatus 26), America, naturally, began to associate this character with the Italian-American boxer. Yet, in the early years of his portrayal, Palooka's "refreshing innocence" (Kashatus 23) was his most famous trait. Readers found this innocence humorous, and

the humor is what connected the character with his readers in the company of the common man. In "Wilkes-Barre Boxing Legend With a National Punch," William C. Kashatas explains that it is Palooka's quick and intense anger and his name (meaning third rate boxer) that

> appealed to the common man, especially in northeastern Pennsylvania, where the immigrant's own experience of winding up as the patsy for those with less virtuous ambitions and plenty of guile seemed to mirror Palooka's innocence and sense of trust. (26)

Herein, the immediacy of the image of the palooka is compromised by what Kashatas implies because he is simply stereotyping the northeastern Pennsylvanian common man as a dim-witted patsy, mirroring the palooka. Viewers could suggest that instead of highlighting the positive aspects of the character of Joe Palooka and his place in boxing, Kashatas increased the blemish of the image of the "palooka" by attaching it to that of the immigrant patsy. While referring to Joe Palooka as a patsy could simply be a way for Kashatas to sympathize with the plight of the less politically powerful immigrant, the term "patsy" implies a lack of swiftness or intelligence. In fact, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines patsy as "[a] person who is easily taken advantage of, esp. by being deceived, cheated, or blamed for something; a dupe, a scapegoat." Viewers have to remember that at the time of the grand emergence of Italian immigration, Italians banded together in Little Italys so that families who were being oppressed because they were Italian immigrants could help one another by living together and working together much as they did back in their old country. By forming these communities, exclusive to their own ethnic group, Italians appeared as if they did not desire to become part of everyday

America, and as a result, were becoming a symbol of a non-desire to assimilate. This is one reason lower and middle class Italians had become threatening to WASPs, causing the white-collar non-Italian-Americans to blame the Italians for activities like criminality in communities. The term palooka is now associated (*a priori*) with Italianità as it has expanded beyond simply being a clumsy, northeastern prizefighter to a lower/middle class individual associated with criminality.

In "Palookas: Hollywood Italian Prize Fighters," Peter Bondanella explains that the film roles of Italian-American prizefighters have done little to change the "distorted images" of the Italian-American and "merely continue the identification of Italians with lower-class environments" (93). He goes on to say that boxers such as Rocky Graziano and Jake La Motta, who both have written autobiographies that have been used as stories for Hollywood depictions of Italian-American prizefighters, are to be viewed as palookas instead of dagos. Viewers are to assume from Bondanella's descriptions of the two fighters that he associated them with the palooka, a more pejorative term than dago because of its association with lower-class origins, a lack of education, a violent fighting style, and a violent profession. He indicates that there is a vast difference between the dago and the palooka (suggesting that there are four main categories of Italians: dago, palooka, romeo, wiseguy). However, viewers must distinguish the two terms, dago and palooka, from one another in order to understand the origin of the palooka and the implications the palooka has on the American viewing audience. As Bondanella points out, even though "[t]he Hollywood Italian Palooka hails from the same urban, working class, and East coast background" as the dago, sharing "a number of anti-intellectual traits and behavior patterns," the language spoken by the palooka marks him as "a semi-

literate, anti-intellectual […] whose brains are in [his] fists, not in [his] head" (130).

Viewers begin to distinguish the dago from the palooka at the onset of the Joe Palooka comic. Immediately viewers know the image of the Italian-American in the comic is different from those that were shown on Saturday morning cartoons[31] that were so popular from the 1940s to the 1960s. Something different is under attack. The image of the Italian-American has changed slightly to include now less of the mustache Pete stereotype and more of the second generation characteristics, a little more assimilated yet still less literate than the typical boxer and uninitiated in terms of further education.

In the renowned sociological article written in 1952 titled "The Occupational Culture of the Boxer," Wienberg and Arond suggest that the phrase known in and amongst boxing arenas, "You have to live up to being a fighter," stands as a justification for the way in which boxers with a "fighting heart" persevere in the fight world. To have a "fighting heart" means to never admit defeat (462). Weinberg and Arond go on to suggest that this mindset is what characterizes the boxer/fighter as a crowd pleaser, a spectacle as such (462). It is obvious to the viewing audience that these boxers who enter the ring labeled as underdogs and who literally punch their way to a victory are viewed as virile and masculine as well as animalistic, Neanderthals, to say the least. The audience of such fights then becomes enamored with the boxer with heart because viewers identify with the underdog that we tend to view as ourselves. With the economy at a low during the mid 1900s and post World War II aftermath, the common man's identification with the palooka was certainly evident. The fact that the palooka was able to draw a crowd is exactly what allows him to continue in the sport of boxing regardless of whether he possesses the necessary skill and technique a boxer must have to win.

Once the managers see how many people the palooka draws to the fight, they begin selling the fighter to the promoters for a larger profit, which hypes the fight and begins the gambling ring associated with the sport of boxing. It is clear that the managers "regard boxing as a business and the fighter as a commodity" (Weinberg and Arond 466). Ethnic background does not matter when money is the object of the sport. Promoters are concerned with attracting a large audience; and managers, although they are expected to care about their boxers, seem to be more concerned with winning to promote themselves and gaining even more work in the field. To insure more control over the boxers, the promoter, who cannot legally be a manager, appoints certain managers to boxers. Thus, the boxer is powerless in the direction of his own career.

To this end, boxers are turned into products up for purchase in our country of consumerism. Actual fighters like Rocky Graziano, Rocky Marciano and Jake La Motta had to endure this constant demeaning exploitation even after they completed their careers in the ring. Graziano and LaMotta wrote autobiographies that were turned into films focusing on the events that could be sensationalized by the directors of the films. Ultimately, it is within the filmic representations of these Italian-American prizefighters, the palookas, where viewers are able to see what this image says about the culture that created it, that of the consumer. The image of the palooka became the center for many films chronicling these prizefighters, strengthening the negative association of Italian-Americans and crime that the media creates for the American viewing audience.

On Our Way to Palooka-ville

In "Italian-Americans in Prize Fighting in the USA," James Mancuso mentions

that after viewing the film *The Hurricane* (1999) the audience is made to feel that Rubin Carter should have won the bout because Joey Giardello is associated with the idea of "[some] evil Italian-American machinery," a comment on his way of fighting, perhaps marking him as a palooka before the others. An interesting note Mancuso makes involving this film is that "the writers and directors took advantage of the widely circulated and accepted Italian-American criminal imagery that Hollywood has assiduously cultivated" by portraying the law enforcement officers as Italian-Americans "who harbored racist ideologies." We can suggest that this is a negative portrayal of the Italian American, even though his occupation is not that of the traditionally stereotyped gangster or criminal. The creation may be because Hollywood has conventionally depicted members of this minority group as less than fully American, that is to say less moral and ethical than the average American. It is additionally possible that the racist characteristics attached to the law enforcement characters in *The Hurricane* are a way for the center of the American Hollywood scene to preserve a majority order in Hollywood and continue to oppress the Italian American.[32]

Aiding in the further decline of Italian-American ethnic identity on and off screen is a film that showcases the life of 1940s middleweight champion Rocky Graziano. Graziano embodies all that has been associated with the term palooka and can be credited as one of the Italian-American males who made the association between the term palooka and Italian ethnicity solid. Graziano's own history with crime and his personal drive to clean up his life and begin a new chapter mirrors the beginning of Ham Fisher's Joe Palooka strip and cinches the connection between the term and the Italian origin. In Robert Wise's 1956 film, *Somebody Up There Likes Me*, Graziano's life of crime is

glorified by the casting of Paul Newman in the lead role.[33] Newman was a relatively unknown actor when he took the role of Graziano in the film. It has been noted by director Josh Logan that Newman "carried no sexual threat" (qtd. in Levy 110) although he was much larger than Graziano, who only weighed between 144 and 165 pounds and stood a mere five feet, seven inches. Newman, therefore, decided to train at Stillman's Gym, the same gym Graziano trained in, and for six hours a day as Graziano did in order to transform from a slim frame to a muscular, more sexually threatening build, like Graziano's.

Newman spent a lot of time with Graziano in order to absorb some of his personality and was quoted as saying that "there were two things" that he learned about Graziano: "[o]ne was that there was very little thought connected with his responses; they were immediate and emotional. Another was that there was a terrific restlessness about him, a kind of urgency and a thrust" (qtd. in Levy 111). Of all the things for Newman to highlight about Graziano, he chose to call attention to Graziano's temperament, the temperament of a fighter. Instead of calling attention to Graziano's ability to keep personal information about his family to himself, for example, the author of Newman's biography chose to quote Newman's assessment of Graziano in these two sentences. Never mind that in Levy's book, Levy quotes Newman mentioning that one night he and the director of the film attempted to get Graziano "stoned so that he'd loosen up and talk about himself" (111). Newman mentioned in a short aside that it was really he and Wise who ended up talking about themselves to Rocky—"Rocky loosened *us* [sic] up. We told him *our* [sic] life stories" (111). The image of Graziano as a patient man listening to his friends' life stories is dropped in the book directly after this quote where

Levy goes right back to molding Graziano as a palooka when he writes that Newman said "he [Graziano] spits a lot" (111). Viewers associate spitting with the blue-collar worker, the less than desirable image that Hollywood likes to cash in on when working with Italian Americans. Levy goes so far as to mention in his book that Graziano played the part of "a punch-drunk palooka" (111) in public while Newman shadowed him for his part in *Somebody Up There Likes Me*. Newman wanted to get inside Graziano's soul but was only able to truly adapt Graziano's physical demeanor and mannerisms.

This film is noted as making Newman's career, and afterward Newman would be compared to Marlon Brando.[34] Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* wrote, "Let it be said of Mr. Newman that he plays the role of Graziano well, making the pug[35] and Marlon Brando almost indistinguishable" (qtd in Levy 113). Here, again, Graziano is referred to by the media as something less than desirable, an ape. This image associates him physically with the palooka, which is oaf-like in stature. What viewers can take from Graziano's experience with Newman and *Somebody Up There Likes Me* is that Graziano is portrayed as the palooka figure Bondanella speaks of, and Newman and director Wise have benefitted from this commodification of the Italian-American fighter. Newman's career was launched and Wise made a lot of money as the film won two Oscars.

Even though the director and lead of *Somebody Up There Likes Me* portrayed Graziano as a broken, damaged man with a criminal and abusive past who makes it to the top, the story of Graziano's life was, in fact, told. Out of this story, and something Graziano and Italian-Americans in general, can be proud of, is the inspiration that Graziano gave to other actors of the 50s playing similar roles of anti-social, rebellious

youths like Marlon Brando in *The Wild One* and *On the Waterfront* and James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*. As Gerald Early states in "The Romance of Toughness: La Motta and Graziano," these new actors began "aping on screen the kind of mannerisms of the misunderstood, antisocial youth that Graziano had cultivated in real life […]. Graziano became a kind of pathetic pop gestalt of the bad white urban kid turned establishment hip" (389). Graziano helped shape the contemporary definition of the palooka in its essence by allowing the true image of his life story to be told through his autobiography and then through the film version of the autobiography. When Newman portrayed Graziano in the film version of *Somebody Up There Likes Me,* Newman brought to the "wily character" (Levy 111) a humanity that allowed the American viewing audience to root for the underdog. However, Wise, like other directors before him, softened the harshness of the Italian-American actor as well as the ugliness of his childhood so that the audience could find common ground with his character and connect with his plight.[36] Here, by casting a non-Italian to play the Italian Graziano, Wise began softening the ethnic harshness that Graziano carried with him. The director's softening of Graziano's character suggests that Italian-Americans like Graziano, palookas, need to be altered in some way before they can be accepted by mainstream culture.

Even though the character was softened, Newman was allowed to mimic Graziano's speech patterns and mannerisms in so far as he could use these adaptations to garner sympathy from the viewing audience. Of course, mainstream America feels badly for a semi-illiterate, disadvantaged immigrant who continually is abused by his father because his father's own dream was squashed by economic realities of the time. Mainstream America also begins to root for Graziano because his story "is the story of

human reclamation" (Rubin 428). He is able to "learn to be somebody else" (Rubin 428). And this is ultimately what white-collar non-Italian-Americans want from immigrant ethnics, for them to assimilate into, and thus become something other than what they were when they came to America.

The Italian Stallion: Transcending the Palooka-figure

Sylvester Stallone's character Rocky Balboa breaks out of the traditional Italian-American stereotypes; and even though he starts as a palooka and is often viewed as a stereotype, he is in truth a complex character. We recognize his complexity when we see him systematically dismantling those seemingly negative depictions as circumstantial moments that Rocky overcomes, and this overcoming causes his transformation. Specifically, viewers can justify his involvement in the mob, his violence and misogyny, and further, viewers can explore Stallone's cinematic use of music to reveal the depth of feeling that defies stereotyping.

While many critics point to racial content in the film, I find arguments of racism to fall short. For example, Peter Biskind notes in *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* that *Rocky* was the type of film that made people feel good in an otherwise chaotic time. He goes on to suggest that because the African American character of Apollo Creed was based on Muhammad Ali, and that generations, both black and white races, adored Ali, Creed was a means for Stallone to take a racist jab at Ali (385). Although it seems likely that Stallone played off of the hype Ali and his followers created, it is doubtful that Stallone intended for Creed's character to embody a hidden racism. It is more likely that Stallone borrowed characteristics from Ali, when Ali was in his prime, for Stallone's model of

Creed as a business man and politician. Bob Marcink cites Frank Tomasulo's suggestion that "[a]t its core, *Rocky* wallows in white lower-class resentment over Black economic gains in a time of recession" (316). He goes on to suggest that because Rocky's locker was taken away and given to the African American, Dipper, the film promotes the cleansing of white guilt, that Stallone writes this scene to show the fear of the white man's jobs being replaced by the black man (317). I contend that within this chapter, Marcink does not supply adequate support for this claim against Stallone, and, in fact, this statement demonstrates the lack of any station for the Italian-American in this film. It is a stretch to suggest that Stallone was working with these constructs in mind when he penned the script in the three days it took him to write the film.

What is clear about this film is the authenticity it exudes when depicting lower-class Italian-Americans from the northeast of America and the survival of those who are fulfilling the palooka prophesy. As background to the film, viewers should note some of the traditional stereotypes that Rocky overcomes, that of the traditional family structure, for instance. Rocky comes from an Italian family where, in a confession to Adrian, he states that his father told him, "you weren't born with much of a brain, so you better start using your body," a statement a lot of young males growing up in America with immigrant parents have heard. Viewers see Balboa mirroring his idol Marciano even in childhood as Marciano's father also made a similar comment prompting Marciano's older brother to fight (*Rocky Marciano - A Life Story*). Here, Stallone keeps it real with Balboa, steeped in a lower-class immigrant family atmosphere, literally using brawn to fight his way out of his parents' economically-stalled household. Oddly, viewers do not hear about Rocky's family after this conversation with Adrian. She sees a picture on

Rocky's mirror of two people posing together and asks if they are his parents. He answers, "Yeah, that's both of them." She asks if the picture of the little boy situated underneath the parents is him. He replies simply that it is. Viewers expect Rocky to relate more about his parents if he is to be the stereotypical Italian-American with an intricate family structure.

Earlier in the film when viewers see this photo, the camera zooms in on it as if to suggest that Rocky is thinking of the time that has lapsed between the time when the photo was taken and the place where he is currently in his life. Instead of concentrating on familial structures and family traditions, as a large number of other Italian filmmakers have—arguably causing an increase of current stereotypes for the Italian-American community—Stallone uses this opportunity as a way for the audience to begin to understand who Rocky Balboa is. Viewers know that he is unhappy with his choice in professions not because he outwardly acknowledges so, but because he explains that if his two pet fish, Cuff and Link, could sing and dance, he "wouldn't have to be doing this." By explaining why Rocky has joined the fighting game, Stallone is better able to situate his character into the *everyday* way of life in which so many lower, working-class Americans of the time found themselves living.

Much like the *Joe Palooka* comic strip, this film provided an outlet for and an identification with the lower, working-class man in the Italian-American world, and if viewers are to believe stereotypes of cinema, these stereotypes include a stint working for the mob. However, Stallone problematizes this seemingly easy stereotype by authentically creating the circumstances by which Rocky really has no choice. Because Rocky is a 30-year old man in the mid 1970s trying to make a living as a boxer but

clearing only "$40.55" per win, he is forced to go to work for the local thug Tony Gazzo (Joe Spinell) collecting debts from low-life gamblers who haven't paid their vigs (a fee added to a bookmaker's loan). Of course, in Joe Palooka fashion, Rocky is a gentle collector. He has a soft-spot for the "bums" from whom he is collecting. In one instance, he is told to collect $200.00 from a man named Bob who is late in payment. Gazzo tells him to break Bob's thumb if he doesn't pay. When Rocky tracks Bob down and realizes he only has $130.00 (plus a winter coat Bob has offered up), Rocky takes the $130.00, gives the coat back and tells him that he should have planned ahead. He doesn't break his thumb, though. Later in the film, when Gazzo questions Rocky as to why Rocky didn't break Bob's thumb, Rocky answers that he figured Bob wouldn't be able to pay in the future if he couldn't work because of a broken thumb. Bob didn't do anything to Rocky to warrant violence or retaliation.[37]

Another easy stereotype viewers can dismiss is the idea that Rocky, as an Italian American, embodies a propensity for a violent temper. Viewers come to understand more of the structure of Rocky's personality when we see him interacting with men who are not directly mean or bad to him. He only loses his temper and pounds on those who directly offend him in some way. For example, when Buddy (Joe Sorbello), Gazzo's driver, insults Rocky's face and later calls him a "meat-bag," Rocky gets physically angry and charges the car, yelling, "I shoulda broke your thumbs." Later in the film, when Rocky and Gazzo are meeting up, Buddy refers to Adrian as a "retard" and tells Rocky to take her to the zoo because "retards like the zoo." Rocky, again, reacts physically by lunging after Buddy. Stopped by Gazzo, Rocky is told that Buddy doesn't like Rocky, that "some guys, they just hate for no reason."[38] Although none of these men

are related by blood, they have formed a relationship that transcends the bounds of what is expected of a thug and a younger potential protégé. Viewers see this when Gazzo gives Rocky some extra money for his date with Adrian, when he gives Rocky $500 for training when he hears of the Creed match (he even takes the cigarette out of Rocky's mouth, warning him that he is in training now), and later in this film as well as in later *Rocky* films when Gazzo shows up to the Creed/Balboa fight(s) and to Rocky's wedding. He is someone who represents stability for Rocky. In fact, in the meat-cutting shop where Paulie, Adrian's brother (played by Burt Young), works, Paulie makes a joke about Gazzo to Rocky as they walk past a piece of beef hanging on a hook: "if you don't pay Gazzo, you end up on a hook," pointing to the beef. Rocky defends his friend by saying, "Come on. Gazzo's a good man. You know that," as if to suggest that simply because Gazzo runs a business that could be viewed as underhanded he isn't necessarily bad; he isn't a common criminal like the "other" Italian-American men who are found in the same line of business. As viewers, we do not get the sense that Gazzo is involved in anything more than a little usury in the betting industry, a simple loan-and-collect business. After all, his driver/bodyguard is armed only with childish words and his "enforcer" won't hurt the men he's collecting from. And Gazzo doesn't fire either of them.

Viewers also see more of Rocky's true disposition in the way that he interacts with those who hurt him emotionally. Heather Collette-VanDeraa suggests that "*Rocky* presents a nuanced, if somewhat sentimental, archetype of a man who must negotiate his masculinity through complex emotional relationships with others, while simultaneously developing his physical strength" (19). The early scenes between Mickey (Burgess

Meredith) and Rocky are tense and filled with Mickey's animosity while Rocky attempts to be gentle in his dialogue with the gym owner / manager. After Rocky wins a fight against Spider Rico, a man Mickey refers to as a bum, Rocky goes to the gym to take a steam. When he gets to his locker and realizes that he can no longer access the lock with his combination, he breaks into the locker by snapping the lock off with a nearby fire-extinguisher. He asks Mike, the gym custodian, whose "stuff is this?" When Mike tells him his things have been replaced by Dipper's, the fighter Mickey says is "a contender, a climber," Rocky is hurt to see his things put on "skid-row" (hung in a bag from a hook without a locker). What is important here is that Rocky doesn't fly into a rage or even yell at Mike, the bearer of the bad news. He calmly asks where Mickey is, and when he is told that Mick is in a bad mood, Rocky's response is "so am I." Based on the Italian-American stereotype of uncontrollable anger in on-screen males, viewers assume he will smash things, slam lockers, punch or brawl with someone. Instead, Rocky maintains his composure and walks up to Mickey ring-side, first asking him how he is feeling and then asking why his things were turned out after six years. Mickey growls that Dipper is "a contender, a climber" and that Rocky is "a tomato," that he has "heart but [he] fight[s] like a god-damned ape." Mickey continues, "The only thing special about you is ya never got your nose busted - well, leave it that way, nice and pretty." Viewers can see that Rocky is hurt by Mickey's comments in the way he responds; however, he does not yell at Mick. He explains that he fought last evening and won and that he feels he deserves a steam for his accomplishment. Thus Stallone's characterization of Rocky is consistent throughout the film in terms of his non-violent temperament.

In the next scene, as Rocky walks away from Mickey, Dipper says, "Hey, hey. I

dig your locker, man." Rocky doesn't respond. He continues to walk away, seemingly unaffected by the jab. Uncharacteristically for the stereotyped Italian-American male character, viewers do not see the effect of this interaction until later when Rocky tells Adrian that he has had a tough day, that they have taken his locker away, and that he has had it for six years. He's quick to mention that "it doesn't bother [him] none." He justifies the action by saying that "lockers are bad anyway cause people get the combination and they break into them and steal money." Viewers get another glimpse at Rocky's temperament when he is sitting in The Lucky Seven Tavern and the owner, Andy, suggests that Creed is a clown. Rocky, with real sentiment, immediately defends Creed by saying, "Clown? Ya callin' Apollo Creed a clown? Hey, Andy, are you crazy? This man is champion of the world. He took his best shot and become champ. Huh? What shot did you ever take?" To Rocky, Andy has dishonored the accomplishments Creed has attained. Viewers are cued into a calm yet passionate character who displays a dislike for "cheap shots." Again, Rocky doesn't yell or become violent. He simply comments and defends the champion. When Andy responds, "Hey, Rocky, you're not happy with your life. It's nice. But me, I've got a business going, I don't have to take no shots," Rocky is reminded of the place he holds in society, the jobs he does to earn a living and the home he so affectionately says "stinks."

Viewers can see exactly how unhappy Rocky is and the depth of his character being revealed when Rocky deals with the initial "blow" from Mickey at the gym, someone whom he respects. Viewers begin to truly *feel* for Stallone's character after realizing that he is much more than simply a palooka with a heart. He is really grappling with an identity crisis in his own world, a world that he was born into and bred to

embrace. He lives in a violent world, the world of boxing. He is supposed to fight in order to "get out" of his economic situation because his father has instructed him to do so. As evidenced by his nostalgia for his childhood through photos, his heart-to-heart with Cuff and Link, his disbelief that Mickey had his "stuff" moved to "skid-row," and his interaction with Mickey after he accepts the fight with Creed, it is clear that Rocky didn't think he would end up a broken down, thirty year old, second-rate boxer. It is in this interaction and exchange between Rocky and Mickey where viewers are poised to accept the character of Rocky Balboa as something more than simply a "large and stupid […] oaf or lout" or "an incompetent or easily defeated player" (Bondanella 93). Ironically, in this scene, viewers see the only overly aggressive action Rocky takes when Mickey says, "you can't buy what I'm gonna give ya." He wants to help Rocky, to "take care of him." He says he has pain and experience that will help train Rocky. Rocky is already hurt that Mickey has taken his locker away. Viewers remember back to when Mickey summoned Rocky to the gym after he lost his locker to tell him Creed's agent called for sparring partners. When Rocky repeats why the agent would want his number, Mickey snaps at him, calling him, "a dumb dago." Unhappy with Mickey's unwarranted anger towards him, Rocky asks, "I've been comin' here for six years and you always stick it to me. How come?" Mickey's answer is simple. Rocky had "talent to become a good fighter" but went to work for Gazzo instead.

Here viewers see the cause of the tension between the two: Rocky goes to work for a thug to make a living, and Mickey feels Rocky wasted his talents doing so. Thus begins the father/son connection for the audience even though viewers see that Rocky's treatment of Mickey throughout the film has been one of a son-figure. The film shifts

from Rocky as palooka figure to a more complex reflection of a boxing character directly after Rocky's aggressive burst during his monologue below. Walking back and forth and positioning himself between the panels of a door frame, Rocky begins pounding the frame:

> Rocky: I got pain and I got experience too.
>
> Mickey: Now listen, kid...
>
> Rocky: Hey, yo. Hey, Mick. I needed your help about ten years ago. You never helped me none. You didn't care.
>
> ...
>
> Took you long enough to get here. Ten years to come to my house. What's the matter? You don't like my house? My house stink? That's right. It stinks! I didn't ask no favors from you! Don't throw it around! Talkin' about your prime. What about my prime, Mick? At least you had a prime! I ain't had no prime! I ain't had nothin'! Legs are goin', everything's goin'! Guy offers me a fight. Big deal! Wanna fight the fight? Yeah, I'll fight the big fight. I'm gonna go and fight that big fight. I'm gonna get that! I'm gonna get that! And you wanna be ringside and see it? Do ya? You wanna help me out? Huh? Do you wanna see me get my face kicked in? Legs ain't workin', nothing's workin'! They go "Go on, fight the champ!" Yeah, I'll fight him. Get my face kicked in. You come around here! You wanna move in with me? Come on in! It's a nice house! Real nice! Come on in and move! It stinks! This whole place stinks! You wanna help me out? Well, help

me out! Come on! Help me out! I'm standin' here!

Ultimately, after releasing this tension that has been building thus far in the film, Rocky can clear his mind and accept Mickey's help. This is a moment of catharsis for Rocky as he runs after Mickey, who left the house when Rocky began to punch the door frame in the middle of his monologue. Viewers see Rocky stopping Mickey, Mickey shaking his head no, Rocky placing his hand on Mickey's back, both men shedding a few tears, shaking hands, and then hugging. Viewers know the deal has been made between boxer and manager.

To fulfill the complexity of *Rocky*, we must examine Stallone's music placement within the film. To begin, Stallone uses the song by Bill Conti (sung by DeEtta Little and Nelson Pigford), "Gonna Fly," to parallel Rocky's transformation and to allow him to unveil a little more of his identity. The only lyrics to the song, "Trying hard now, its so hard now, trying hard now / Getting strong now, wont be long now, getting strong now / Gonna fly now, flying high now, gonna fly, fly, fly," highlight the strength training Rocky goes through mentally, while he struggles with his own transforming identity and physically, while he prepares for his fight with Creed. This song is played strategically after each moment in Rocky's life where he comes to a realization of who he really is. Viewers hear a portion of this song at the beginning of the film and in a variety of places throughout the first part of the film more so than after Rocky's monologue. In fact, the scene directly after the monologue highlights Rocky's inner struggle and provides a further look at the complexity of this character as more than just a palooka from the streets or an Italian-American stereotype. The scene begins with Rocky waking up at 4 am to begin his training in sequence with a radio morning show

when the DJ prank calls a woman because he says everyone should be up so early if he has to be. The back and forth about the cold and unseasonably warm—"getting away with murder"—weather during the day in the Philadelphia winter is placed nicely while Rocky begins his training for the big fight. In his mind, Rocky is unconsciously shifting back and forth between the warmth of the neighborhood (and Gazzo and Mickey) and the biting cruelty he has felt over the past ten years from the majority of the "slums" that want a piece of his good fortune now. He starts out on the streets of Philadelphia in his working-class neighborhood. Viewers see hauling trucks, newspaper delivery trucks, City Hall, and finally the steps of the Museum of Art where he runs half-way to the top, finally stopping to hold his side as it aches, showing the audience glimpses of his "broken" body. He is breathing hard and almost crying. All along the run, Conti's score is playing in the background.

These instances lead to the point where Rocky realizes he is good enough to "go the distance" but not good enough to win the match with Creed. It is the night before the fight and Rocky can't sleep. He goes to the arena where he sees that the poster promoting his image is wrong (white trunks with red stripe instead of red with white stripe). Here viewers are reminded that Rocky resembles the palooka-figure as he is told by Jergens, the fight promoter, that "it doesn't really matter does it? I'm sure you're gonna give us a great show." Conti's score follows this interaction, alerting the audience to Rocky's breakthrough—"I can't beat [Creed]; ain't even in the guy's league." Rocky's realization that he is a different brand of fighter than Creed is where viewers begin to see the deviation from the traditional palooka figure. Rocky is expected to entertain as the palooka did, and he is from a working-class background, still loyal to the

neighborhood from which he hails, yet he admits that he can't beat Creed in the fight. This admission is important in terms of the stereotyped palooka-figure because viewers know that the traditional palooka would never admit defeat. Rocky has grown, though. He can admit that he won't win. He can admit that he doesn't have the boxing style and poise that he needs to beat a champ like Apollo. However, he reaches within himself to see what he can accomplish in spite of his new awareness. He can "go the distance" with Creed, and this is what, in the end, allows this character to break out of the traditional Italian-American palooka stereotype to become what viewers come to know as the complex Balboa character.

Even though Rocky has been accused of misogyny or exerting power over women, specifically Adrian, he uncharacteristically (in terms of Italian-American stereotypes) focuses much of his energy on putting Adrian ahead of his own desires, which results in the viewing audience seeing him overcome the claim of misogyny. It is not without merit that viewers can see "*Rocky* is at its core a love story that problematizes unilateral assumptions about masculinity as being defined through violent physicality and brute strength alone" (Collette-VanDeraa 23). We are able to accept Balboa into our living rooms in spite of his clear working-class immigrant persona: his working for Gazzo, his desire to fight, his lack of intellectuality and intelligence, and his lack of decorum around Adrian at the beginning of the film, because viewers see the great love story brewing between Rocky and Adrian. When Paulie arranges a date between Rocky and Adrian on Thanksgiving, viewers can see Rocky's nervousness at attending the dinner at the Pennino home. He isn't sure that Adrian wants him there, that she knows he'll be there. He is also feeling vulnerable as he mentions that he hasn't had a

Thanksgiving in years. Of course, after Paulie and Adrian have their argument and Paulie throws the turkey out the back door of the house, Adrian hides in her bedroom.

Viewers see Rocky's true nature when Paulie tells him to take his sister out for the night. Rocky clumsily walks to her bedroom door, turning around to Paulie several times as if he isn't sure if he should further any attempts at a date. He is nervous when he approaches Adrian, and he is embarrassed at having to talk to her through a door. This scene situates Rocky and Adrian on even turf, laying a foundation for the love story Collette-VanDeraa hints at in her article, "Transcending Masculinity." From this point, Rocky and Adrian "fill gaps" as Rocky puts it. They discover each other and embrace their similarities while they celebrate their differences as viewers have seen thus far. Even early on in the relationship in his vulnerable and uncomfortable state, Rocky tries to make Adrian feel better by saying he "didn't want turkey" and "Thanksgiving is just a Thursday" to him. Viewers know that Rocky underplays his real emotions by shrugging off what bothers him like the incident with his locker, so we are immediately cued into his emotional state while he tries to make the mishap with Adrian's brother better for her.

After their date, Rocky brings Adrian to his apartment. He coaxes her into the apartment against her better judgment. She feels uncomfortable being in a man's apartment and wants to leave, but she doesn't walk away. She says she shouldn't be there, that she doesn't belong there, and then she asks to use the phone to let her brother know where she is. Rocky immediately goes to his window and yells out to Paulie, telling him that his sister is with Rocky, seemingly unaware that the neighborhood has just heard reports of Adrian's tarnishing reputation. Rocky doesn't realize he has the power to diminish her reputation in this fashion. When Adrian mentions that she feels

uncomfortable being in his apartment, Rocky says he doesn't feel comfortable either, but as he says this, he takes off his shirt, revealing his massive upper body outlined by a white tank top. He sets the stage for a night of "necking," putting on music and luring her to the couch. When she heads for the door, he blocks her, one hand on the door and one on the other side of her, cornering her. Whereas, this action would seem aggressive and frightening to most, Adrian doesn't seem afraid. Rather, she seems agitated at Rocky's attempt at duping her. She settles into his "trap" while he takes her glasses from her face and her hat from her head, complimenting her: "I always knew you was pretty." He wants to kiss her and tells her such, but just when viewers think he will ask for her permission, he surprises us, giving her permission NOT to kiss him back if she doesn't want. Instead of viewing Rocky as an aggressive sexist, viewers are forced to see him as the palooka (inarticulate, un-intellectual) bumbling phrases like the "permission NOT to kiss" phrase. He means no disrespect to Adrian when he "puts the moves" on her. The feeling between the two is mutual, and viewers are left at the end of this scene certain that the two will be together as they collapse into each other's arms onto the floor.

Later in the film, after Rocky begins training for his fight with Apollo, the audience becomes certain that Rocky and Adrian have consummated their relationship as they see Adrian kneeling in front of a cold and sore Rocky. She attempts to ignite an evening of intimacy by kissing his neck and rubbing his legs, but Rocky dismisses her advances, saying that, "there is no foolin' around during training […] I wanna stay strong." He feels badly for turning her down but asks her, "Why don't you just make the meat?" Adrian becomes angry, standing up in a rush, stomping off to the kitchen, repeating that she'll just "make the meat." Viewers know from the music cue (Conti's

score) that Rocky is toggling between emotions. He is sore and tired and cold from training in the Philadelphia winter, yet when he sees that Adrian is truly upset, he drags himself limping, wrapped in a blanket, to the kitchen so that he can comfort his girlfriend by embracing her. The audience, at this point in the film, is forced to view Adrian as the aggressor in the relationship based on her, albeit stereotyped Italian-American female, role as the bratty, high-maintenance character.

The final support for Rocky being exonerated from any sexism comes in the form of yet another battle between Adrian and Paulie. This eruption between Adrian and Paulie illustrates the heightened abuse she has taken from her brother for the years she has been forced to take care of him. Coming home drunk and walking in while Rocky and Adrian are having a conversation about what Paulie wants from Rocky, Paulie goes on a rampage, yelling and smashing lamps. Rocky shields Adrian from any debris while she gears up for a yelling match with her brother. Paulie tells Rocky to get out of his house, and Adrian steps in to remind Paulie it is hers too. She becomes physical when she grabs Paulie around the collar and shakes him, screaming that she takes care of him, cooking and cleaning, etc. When he tells Rocky, "I even gave ya my sister," and then tells Adrian, "You're busted" (not a virgin anymore), Rocky grabs him around his neck. Because, and only because, Rocky understands the plight of the working-class immigrant, he lets Paulie go after hearing him whine, "I can't haul meat no more."

Here viewers can see that "Adrian and Rocky complement each other in the most basic way, a way that never denigrates Adrian's status as a female counterpart, but rather provides a foundation for a relationship based in mutual regard, balance, and equality between them" (Collette-VanDeraa 20). As a result of this infighting, Adrian asks Rocky

if he needs a roommate, to which he responds, "absolutely." Together they begin to build a life that not only transcends the typical boundaries of gender negotiations but also that of stereotypical ethnic roles. The representation of Rocky as palooka figure continues to dissolve. Of course, Rocky deals with the characteristics of being a palooka in *Rocky II,* as well, but by *Rocky III,* the concept of the initial palooka figure has been bred out of him (he can read now; he is no longer a tenth rate boxer, and he has a stake in politics in the ring and in America, as we see in *Rocky IV*). In large part, Rocky is able to transform because of Adrian's influence. It is important to note that viewers do not see Adrian portrayed as a stereotyped Italian-American woman from this point and beyond.[39] Rocky and Adrian get married, have a child, and vacillate between being members of the working-class (Adrian at the pet store and Rocky as a collector and dock worker and as a fighter) and the white-collar class (where Rocky does interviews and bit parts in commercials). While the character of Rocky Balboa ultimately becomes an American icon, I contend, by viewing him through the lens of Inter-Colonialism, Rocky is only accepted into mainstream American culture because he assimilates into a figure that Americans can accept and identify with as one of their own, a working-class underdog who made it big. Audiences treat the Rocky character the same way that they treat the Fonzie character; audiences accept them when they assimilate then turn them away after they *jump the shark.* For Rocky, this happens only after he falls from grace in later *Rocky* films.

Raging Bull: Palooka or Animal

Martin Scorsese's 1980 film *Raging Bull* exemplifies an extraordinary likeness to John G. Avildsen's 1976 *Rocky* in that it also breaks away from the traditional Italian-American stereotypes viewers have come to look for in film. *Raging Bull*, much like *Rocky*, begins with the typical onslaught on the Italian-American boxer figure, setting him up as the palooka from the neighborhood; however, these films are both able to surpass conventional expectations because of the casting of the lead actors in the pieces. Robert DeNiro plays Jake La Motta, a fighter with heart, much like Stallone's Rocky. Conversely, the character of LaMotta deviates from the All-American palooka figure, making it big by simple determination and heart while viewers are privy to his enormous personality flaws of which he seemingly is aware but is unable to control. Worthy to note is Jake's preoccupation with his weight. In fact, it is equally important to mention that both Joey (played by Joe Pesci) and Vickie (played by Cathy Moriarty) make reference to Jake's weight throughout the film, perhaps, as a way to highlight Jake's declining self-awareness and loss of control during his life. Part of Jake's identity manifests itself in his struggle with controlling his weight. His wife references his inability to perform in the bedroom and calls him a "fat pig" on several occasions, while his brother Joey comments that instead of concentrating on his eating habits, he should be training for fights.

Jake, himself, is edgy when Joey signs him up to fight Janiro, a fighter who stands between Jake and the title shot he so wants. Jake is worried that he won't be able to get down to weight in time for the fight (he needs to lose 13 pounds). He'll also lose

$15,000 if he doesn't make weight. His brother nonchalantly tells him to "Stop eatin'." Directly after Joey and Jake discuss Jake's concern about his weight, Vickie not only mentions that "Janiro's good-looking and popular" but also that "Joey's right." This immediately shifts Jake's focus from the fight and his weight to jealousy. He turns obsessive about his wife and her fidelity, so much so that it takes over his world and destroys his marriage, his relationship with his brother, and ultimately his career. But neither his compulsive weight concerns nor his obsessive jealousy are what define this character. It is the nature of the Bull that viewers must concentrate on while deconstructing the image of Jake LaMotta.

As a crowd pleaser and as a fighter with heart, Jake LaMotta, who was crowned the Bronx Bull by ring announcers, is noted as a "brawler" in juxtaposition to his all-time opponent Sugar Ray Robinson, "the dancing master." LaMotta is a flat-footed fighter while Robinson dances around the ring with ease and finesse, more traditional in his fight style. Viewers can liken LaMotta to the long-established palooka-figure most noticeably while contrasted with the likes of Robinson, who in the film is a clear image of Ali or Frazier armed with the speed and accuracy of the professional fighter. LaMotta represents the palooka who shows courage and bravery, but above all acts as a human punching bag in order to gain currency in the ring. In fact, one of the reasons LaMotta hasn't had a title shot thus far in his career is because, as someone who will take powerful punches and continue forward, he is "dangerous and [someone] no one wants to fight," his brother says. Coupled with his brawn is his determination to "make it on his own." There is a consistency in drive and determination in the palooka figure that declares itself in the image of the beholder.

Here, in LaMotta's image, viewers see this drive and determination unleashing itself in the form of control. The only thing that LaMotta can control in the end is his ability to win or lose the fight against Robinson. LaMotta encourages his opponent to pummel him one blow after another until blood sprays from his body as if to purge himself of all the rage that being a boxer has poisoned him with, knowing that no matter what the outcome of the match is, it will be on his terms. After the loss of his Middle Weight Championship to Robinson, he taunts, "Hey Ray, never went down Ray. You never got me down, Ray." Viewers see this same palooka mentality in the Rocky character when he faces Apollo at the end of the film. Rocky, although seemingly not struggling with the same control issues that Jake struggles with, is equally proud of himself for "going the distance with Creed." This way of thinking marks both characters as palooka figures in thought as well as in fighting style and background, both bred from Italian working-class East Coast neighborhoods. Interestingly, whereas viewers find the characteristics attributed to the palooka-figure in Rocky Balboa adoring and endearing, in Jake LaMotta viewers find these similar characteristics almost disturbing. Perhaps these characteristics, overshadowed by LaMotta's apparent violent demeanor, beg a dissimilar impression of the character.

While direct association with violent tendencies is a stereotype of the Italian-American male in film and television and is clearly not a positive image for the Italian-American community, the violence associated with the character of Jake LaMotta affords the viewing audience an opportunity to see within the character as his rage is enhanced and driven by jealousy. This clear-cut indication of non-control is evidenced not only by LaMotta's treatment of his wives but also by the treatment he deals out to the "pretty"

opponent he becomes preoccupied with during the film. When his second wife, Vickie, suggests that the press has deemed Janiro a nice looking boy and Joey's mob friends mention how pretty his face is, Jake becomes enraged and fully obsessed with his wife's comment. His focus is drawn completely away from his first preoccupation, his weight, and leads directly to his next fixation, the idea of his wife's infidelity. A mere mention of Vickie thinking this fighter is nice looking makes Jake crazy with envy. He questions her immediately, and when she shrugs her comment off as "nothing," he dismisses her into the next room. He then continues his unfounded belief that Vickie is unfaithful behind his back when he questions Joey. He explains to his brother, "You and I both know, any woman, given the right time, the right place, the right circumstances, they'll do anything." He asks Joey to watch out for Vickie when he's not around.

In the next scene, the boys and Vickie are at the Copa before Jake goes away to train for a fight. Joey's mob friends send drinks to the table. In Jake's mind, he doesn't want to associate with these types of people because he knows they are no good. Vickie was associated with Salvy, a member of this crew, when he met her, so he already suspects a relationship between Vickie and Salvy. When she goes to the bathroom and stops by Salvy's table to thank him for the drinks, the camera focuses on Jake's savage and unforgiving stare. His look exemplifies his disgust at Vickie's behavior. He feels she has disrespected him by leaving his side to go to a table of other men. In fact, when she returns to Jake's table, he questions her about her whereabouts and then tells her that she embarrasses him and that she needs to shut up or he'll smack her in the face. At this point, Joey and Jake are required by etiquette to thank Joey's mob friends for the drinks by walking over to their table. When Jake sits down to talk to Charlie, the leader of the

crew in the neighborhood, Charlie mentions Jake's weight and then comments on Janiro's pretty looks; he's a "Very attractive guy. No marks. Clean." At the constant preoccupation the table has with Janiro's good looks, Jake asks whether he should "fuck him or fight him." In the background, viewers hear the comedian in the Copa pipe in with the phrase, "these are just jokes," emphasizing the joke that Jake feels he has become at the expense of Vickie and of the Janiro fight. It is clear that Jake has a real anxiety over not being the number one contender in the life of everyone who surrounds him.

Jake LaMotta provides a clear deviation from the palooka figure in *Rocky*. Rocky is not an obsessive, overly jealous man. He has respect for every fighter he meets in the ring. Even though he has moments of less than desirable treatment of his girlfriend, he does not show infidelity or brutality. In contrast, Jake pummels Janiro, making it personal, because his obsession with Vickie's fidelity drives him to act like the animal his neighbor Larry calls him at the beginning of the film. He slaps her around when she deviates from his ideal of how a wife should act. From the very beginning of the film, when the two of them meet, Jake controls Vickie's actions. He tells her to sit closer to him in the car on their drive. He tells her to move closer, then onto his lap, while at Jake's father's house. He tells her how to be intimate with him before one of his fights (he can't be with her because of the fighter logic that women weaken the legs). He dictates her every move in their relationship until she decides for herself that at twenty years old she has a husband who won't have a sexual relationship with her, and she wants to go out and have some fun. Jake loses a little more control of Vickie, causing him to suspect her of infidelity even more. He becomes so crazy that he even accuses his own

brother of having an affair with his wife. Joey's overall response is, "Try a little more fuckin' and less eatin'. If you don't have troubles upstairs, you won't pick on me." Ultimately, this accusation leads to a rage that leaves the brothers estranged and Vickie packing her bags after a punch in the face. She doesn't leave him this time because he tells her that he is "a bum without [her] and the kids. Don't go." Again, Jake manipulates his woman into staying by his side while he continues his self-destructive path. She does, indeed, stay by his side while his brother, Joey, is left on the outside.

The rage that Jake exhibits when he thinks that Joey and Vickie have had an affair fuels Jake's tendency to obsess and over-analyze his relationships. When his neighbor calls him an animal, he becomes enraged and yells that he'll eat the neighbor's dog and then his neighbor's whole family. He turns into a savage, pummeling Janiro and destroying his "pretty" face. He turns on his own brother, attacking him in front of his own wife and children, beating on him and tossing his sister-in-law and his own wife off of him as if they were incidental to the situation at large. It is only a matter of time before Jake turns his outward aggression inward.

As a result of Jake's excessive need to monitor Vickie's outings, Joey is forced to defend his brother's honor when Vickie is spotted out at the Copa while Jake is away training for a fight. Joey watches as Vickie shmoozes with her old friends, Salvy and the others, making a mockery of her marriage with Jake. Joey starts a fight that turns into a brawl between him and his friend, ending with them both summoned to a meeting with Tommy Como, the neighborhood wiseguy. Tommy explains that by Jake doing things his own way, he makes Tommy and the others look bad because they can't "deliver a kid

from [his] own god-damned neighborhood." Tommy gives Jake the title fight but Jake has to do the old "flip-flop," take a dive.

It isn't so much the idea that Jake took the fight and then decided not to "lay down," that he lost by not answering the bell, or even that, as a result, his career is being reviewed by the sporting authority; it is that Jake went against himself, his true identity as a fighter. This is what makes him react so out of character. After the fight, after the "technical knockout," Jake goes back to the locker room and weeps openly. He brings tears to his brother's eyes and his ring man's eyes as well. He cries over and over, "What'd I do? Why did I do it? Why?" Here is where the audience is able to look past Jake's violent nature and into his personality to see a wounded, broken man. He has betrayed himself by trading his dignity and his desire to make it on his own for the title match on somebody else's terms. Whereas viewers would expect to see Jake's über aggressive nature as a result of his own inability to be true to his ideals, we see him crumble mentally, indicating that he needs to control his own life on his own terms or he will lose a part of himself.

Viewers see this same reaction in Jake when he lets himself down again, only this time over an incident with an underage girl drinking in his club. The men from the District Attorney's office come to collect him after a night of drinking and womanizing because they say the girl he let drink at his club said he also introduced her to men from the club. When he can't raise enough money to grease the palms of the elite who will overlook his indiscretion, he is placed in Dade County jail solitary confinement where he is treated terribly because, even though he was a champion, now, according to the Dade county police, he is "not the champion there." They wrestle him into confinement as if

they were caging a bull. He smashes his head and fists against the wall over and over, mimicking a child's temper tantrum, yelling, then crying:

> Dummy. Dummy. Dummy. Why? Why? Why? You motherfuck! Why? Why'd you do it? You're so stupid, so fuckin' stupid. Stupid! They call me an animal. I'm not an animal. Why do they treat me like this? I'm not bad. I'm not that bad. I'm not that guy. Not that guy.

This moment is Jake's realization that he has lost everything that has mattered in his life: Vickie, his brother, his kids, his house, his title belt. His reaction at being referred to as an animal is overwhelmingly dramatic for a man his age who has had a career as a fighter, often associated with animalistic behaviors within the ring.

The traditional Italian-American stereotype of violence related to males on-screen is transformed by the character of Jake LaMotta in these instances of conscious development. There is anger and rage, even, within these scenes; however, there is also the beginning of self-understanding taking place for Jake. He grows as a character—a repulsion, an Italian-American who is "convinced that [he doesn't] deserve what has happened to [him]" (Brunette 90). In an interview in 1981 with Michael Henry, Scorsese suggests that Jake hits rock bottom in the jail scene in Florida. It is here that the character turns his life around. When Jake recites, "I'm not that guy," in the cell, he has hit the proverbial wall in his life. He realizes that he is, indeed, that guy—the *mammalucco,* the bum, the clown—that he never wanted to become. Scorsese suggests that even though Jake doesn't go on to live a highly desirable lifestyle after this point, he does turn his life around. He no longer is the uber aggressive man he once was, as evidenced by the heckling he shrugs off in the club he works at in New York City

(Brunette 90 – 91, 97).

Finally, the character of Jake LaMotta transcends the typical construct of the palooka figure by defying traditional Italian-American stereotypes through cinematic complexity. In the opening scene of the film, the audience views Jake LaMotta, alone in the ring, warming up in his corner of the ring. Because he is in the ring with the audience cheering in the background, viewers are led to believe that he is a true champion, an All-American palooka. Although he is alone in the ring, indicating his exile from all that is close to him, the crowd remains on his side (viewers know that a mark of a palooka-figure is to be entertaining for the crowd). He trots back and forth between the crowd and the viewing audience like a caged animal, hence the raging bull. With the combination of the fighter moving in slow motion, the mist encasing the screen and the music score, Scorsese lays the foundation for the dual-characterization viewers see in the character. According to Michael Henry, Scorsese likes to bring together the notion of the criminal and the saint in his films, and in *Raging Bull*, he manifests these contradictory elements in Jake (90). Therefore, throughout the film, the audience is constantly pulled from one idea of Jake to the other. Although Scorsese suggests that LaMotta is a horrific character—he calls him an animal—the audience has to grapple with the contradiction between Jake's actions and the cinematic presentation that causes us to question Jake's character. Viewers want to root for him, and cinematically through the chants and screams for Jake during this scene, we are outwardly on his side; however, we are left wondering why he is the only one, physically, in his corner. By the film's end, we know that he has systematically pushed everyone he loves away from him ending up alone. It is easy to see Jake's inability to have meaningful relationships other than the one he has

internally within the ring. The *mise-en-scene* that Scorsese highlights with the violence that takes place in the ring, tells the story of Jake through visual clips. Again, using slow motion for Jake's final fight against Ray allows Scorsese to capture the fall of Jake's career while showing Jake as a Christ-figure, someone to respect. Rinsing Jake with the bloody water from his bucket symbolizes a tragic rebirth reminiscent of Christ's dreadful murder and Ascension. Here, we watch as Jake's career dies along and wait for his own Ascension, not to heaven but away from his internal demons he bears while being center in the ring.

Throughout *Raging Bull*, Scorsese uses several Italian-American stereotypes to highlight the life from which Jake has come and in which he is currently living. For instance, the two brothers hang out at the neighborhood pool, talking about the local hoods whom they survey from a distance. At least Jake knows to keep his distance from that element of the neighborhood. Here, Scorsese's use of distance in framing the scene exceeds the typically Italian-American stereotype of criminality by accenting Jake's decision to stay away from that element. The audience immediately falls prey to Jake's different form of morality (he is a young man who knows how to fight but does not know how to relate to girls necessarily) and begins to root for him as the palooka figure viewers associate with other Italian-American fighters in film like Rocky Balboa.

However, when La Motta systematically wears down his first wife's dignity by emotionally and physically abusing her, then being unfaithful to her, he begins to show his bad side. Later when he becomes enamored with Vickie, the 15 year old girl hanging around with Salvy, the neighborhood thug, Scorsese repositions the audience to root for Jake again. Scorsese shoots these initial scenes of Jake and Vickie, positioning Vickie in

superior juxtaposition to Jake. In the scene where Jake meets Vickie, the two are separated by a chain-link fence, Jake positioned on the outside of the neighborhood pool. Vickie towers over Jake since she is tall to begin with and is also standing on the deck of the pool area, thus showing that she has the upper-hand in the meeting between the two. In the car, when the two go for their first ride together, she remains in the dominant position even when Jake tells her to move closer to him. She sits up higher than he does in the seat. Scorsese begins the dismantling of the upper-hand in the relationship early on, though, as he has Jake *tell* Vickie to move closer rather than ask her to. Later, when they reach Jake's father's house—in the building that Jake makes it a point to tell Vickie he bought for his father—Vickie sits across from Jake at the kitchen table. He *tells* her again to move closer. When she doesn't move close enough, he takes her hand, leading her to sit on his lap. He offers her a drink (of alcohol), and when she turns it down, he gives her a glass of water, taking it to her mouth for her as if she were a child. With these actions, Scorsese shows that Jake can be a gentle and tender, caring man instead of the stereotyped savage Italian-American.

Ultimately, in the final fight scene between LaMotta and Robinson, Scorsese's cinematic genius is evident in his yoking together Jake's need to purge all that is toxic within him with the elements of the stereotyped palooka-figure. Scorsese puts Jake's body on display by using it as a focal point for the rebirth that takes place in the ring (again we are reminded of a baptism of sorts and the Christ-figure). The scene opens with Jake's body, his neck, his back, and then his chest and stomach being saturated with bloody backwash from the corner bucket. There is intermittent silence while this cleansing takes place. The fact that the water is stained with blood reinforces the dual

identity that Jake exudes throughout the film. He doesn't want to be that man, but he is that man. He eggs his opponent on in the ring, knowing all too well that he will lose the fight and the championship belt. But something is different with this palooka figure. LaMotta doesn't have something to prove but something to purge. Scorsese shows Robinson winding up for the last punch. He is centered and viewers see a close up of Robinson's upper body, then his face, and then a cut to LaMotta's upper body and to his face with the focus on his eyes. Scorsese then shifts from slow motion to regular speed as Robinson begins to pummel LaMotta, spraying blood all over LaMotta's body including his legs.

Rocky was able to tke this kind of beating and still come out a winner, not by the count but because he went the distance. In *Raging Bull*, LaMotta's is a palooka-figure who conforms with the fixed stereotype of "never admitting defeat" yet resists the idea of ending as a fighter with heart. Unlike Balboa, LaMotta's peak fight ends with him struggling against his inner self rather than finding it. Even though he ends the scene touting the fact that his opponent never got him down, he leaves the audience with the impression that he has lost more than just the fight. He punishes himself for the things he has done by allowing his opponent to destroy his body. Scorsese shows LaMotta's destruction and banishment of his savage side by showing his body literally having the blood and the toxins beaten out of him. LaMotta purges himself of all that he deems undesirable by receiving the proverbial beating while, ironically, still controlling his life through his body.

While it seems that the journey from palooka to top-rate boxing champion and back to somewhere in between is what brings these two characters together in this

chapter, it is, more so, the complexity of the Italian-American characters that situates itself deep within these film representations. Both directors (John G. Avildsen and Martin Scorsese) locate their Italian-American male characters in a stereotyped world with associations to the mob, heightened violence, out of place outbursts and domineering attitudes. However, this analysis unveils elements of profundity in the representations of the Italian-American males, both Rocky Balboa and Jake LaMotta, as they struggle through their identity issues and attempt to gain entrance into the dominant culture. Whereas Rocky tries to become a *somebody*, a man whom he can be proud of (one unlike his father and the other male role-models around him), Jake desires power and fame. He wants to be a celebrity of sorts. One thing that both characters never resolve about their identities is the reasons behind their individual drives for excessive personal brutality in the ring. The constant pummeling by their opponents is provoked by both characters, perhaps, in order to fight against the mentality that haunts them from the beginning of their careers, being labeled as "a tenth rater, a boxer without ability, a nobody" (Bondanella 93), a palooka from the neighborhood. Ultimately, what these two representations of Italian-American fighters show is that beyond the stereotyping that has become so typical, we are able to see an emerging identity that can be viewed and highlighted with elements of Inter-Colonialism. These elements, like pride and pain, humanize the Italian-American onscreen figure and allow the audience to read further into the characterization, past the stereotypes, so as to see newness in the depth and humanity of the figures.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

This dissertation has provided a survey of the image of the Italian-American male in history, film, and television. I use a theory close to that of post-colonialism to explain the plight of Italians on American soil which can be read within the discipline of Italian American Studies. This theory I deem Inter-Colonialism provides the necessary tools and language to consider the history of Italian-American males in film and television and to situate this history within current discussions taking place in the academia of Italian American Studies. Contemporary Americans have been taught part of the history of Italians through film and television, which emphasizes popular culture's need for violence and power, ultimately resulting in a loss of authenticity regarding Italian history and culture. From this experience, Americans begin to view the Italian-American as an exotic other. For example, the mafia, once an organization formed to protect families against ruthless subordination, has been turned into an organization of manipulated vigilantism specific to money laundering and drug-smuggling. By constructing a stereotyped Italian-American male character as a Mafioso or an idiot, not "capable" of earning a proper living, American film and television have replaced Italian history with one built for popular consumption. From this transformation, the evolution of the gangster figure, most specifically, has made an enormous impression on American society.

In spite of the negativity that the gangster illustration on screen has caused in American culture, I emphasize that filmmakers like Scorsese and Stallone as well as others like Coppola, Marshall, David Chase, and John Turturro redeem themselves in

spite of perpetuating this and other stereotypes somewhat because of their directness and attention to the tradition of the Italian-American community, that of religion, food, and hard work. Family and religion are two extremely important driving forces in the creation of a genuine Italian-American character in film, a character that harkens back to the identity that was nearly lost with the depression-era gangsters. I assert that this group of filmmakers belongs to a specific collection of filmmakers in Hollywood who desire to bring a little of their own ethnic communities into their work. They attempt to show portraits of life that evoke nostalgia for Italian-American communities hoping to restore some of the images that have deteriorated through years of erroneous stereotyping. We can see some of these images in films like Turturro's *Mac* where the Vitelli brothers start a construction business to honor their dead father and to keep true to their father's work ethic. We also see positive images in films like *A Bronx Tale* when we watch Robert DeNiro's character show his son C. (played by Lillo Brancato) how an honorable man makes a living by driving a bus instead of hustling people out of their money like so many of the gangsters on the corner. Films like these and critiques like those stemming from Inter-Colonialism serve as a beginning to the rebuilding of the Italian-American image of yesteryears.

To begin, Carlos Cortes in "Italian-Americans in Film: From Immigrants to Icons" explains that from 1900 – 1928, Italian immigrants were made to feel as if they needed to immediately become Americanized because they were looked at as an undesirable element within American society (108-109). During this time, films like the lost Marx Brothers' silent film *Humor Risk* (1921) and their *Animal Crackers* (1930) depicted Italian immigrants as "cute and cuddly, foreigners" (110). Much like Chico is

viewed in most of the other Marx Brothers' films, Italians were portrayed with "odd, quaint, humorous customs" that could be "cured" by Americanization (Cortes 109). However, as time passed from 1928 - 1945, so too did the American temperament toward the Italian, now assimilated into the Italian-American with a mix of Italian and American customs, norms, and rituals.

With fears of World War II approaching and the economy dismal, the Great Depression brought a need for Americans to search for an escape from daily woes. Viewing films like *Little Caesar* (1930), *The Public Enemy* (1931), and *Scarface: The Shame of the Nation* (1932) were a way for the American people to escape their own realities. It stands to reason that escape could be achieved in films like these because the criminal element was seemingly so far removed from the major world changing issues at the time. That being said, scholars suggest that with this type of film came the building of an ethnic characterization, a political maneuvering that would mold a negative image of the Italian-American for years to come. Jonathon Cavallero, author of "Gangsters, Fessos, Tricksters, and Sopranos: The Historical Roots of Italian-American Stereotype Anxiety," suggests that these three films armed the American people with a reason to blame the Italian-Americans for the fall of the American Dream (57 - 58). A simple means of escaping everyday worries of war and economic hardships, America began to focus on the criminal element, a small portion of the American evils of the time. By depicting Rico (played by Edward G. Robinson) in *Little Caesar* and Tony (played by Paul Muni) in *Scarface* as Italian-American criminals (modeled after Al Capone, himself), along with the messages at the beginning of the films warning the American people that they must work to rid America of this extremely undesirable element (the

Italian-American criminal), the lasting association of the Italian-American with criminality began.

Although *The Public Enemy* casts James Cagney as an Irishman named Tommy Powers instead of an Italian-American character, the film does not alleviate any already conditioned notions of the Italian in gangster films. When Tommy crosses the Italian mob, he is dealt with by excessive force, sending a message back to the Irish gangs not to mess around with the Italians. In one of the most horrifying scenes in the history of gangster films, Tommy is supposed to come home to his mother's house to recover from his gun-shot wounds but is instead intercepted by the Italian mob, wrapped as a mummy and delivered to the Powers' home. The image of this seemingly remorseful criminal mummified, falling face first into the path of his war-hero brother, is both shocking and frightening. After viewing the treatment of the Irish Powers in the film, the image of the Italian-American as a ruthless criminal became engrained into the minds of the American people. It is noteworthy that the "classic" gangster genre blueprint enjoyed the briefest lifespan of any classic genre (1930 – 1932) because outside influences (the threat of censorship and boycotts, the rise of the Production Code in Hollywood, the films' controversial images of corrupt politicians and law enforcers and the definition of what the gangster represented) forced Hollywood to redesign what the gangster figure represented in film.

Robert Warshow's "The Gangster as Tragic Hero" (1948) examines America's fascination with classic gangster films like *Little Caesar* and *Scarface* and shows how easily viewers can be duped into believing what they are shown rather than what is known as truth. Filmmakers begin to use the exoticism of masculine power as a means of

pulling viewers into the story. The allure that Warshow discusses in his article can be understood by noting that the main characters of these films, the gangsters, feel as if they are obliged to become successful, and that is what drives them in an ultra aggressive manner. Essentially, this aggressive nature leaves the characters vulnerable to their enemies and ultimately draws them to their demises (85-88). So, it is not necessarily the act of violence that drew these characters to their deaths but the over-aggressive temperament that caused them to become compromised in their quests for monetary or personal success. However, the association of on-screen criminal mayhem with Italian Americans had been established. Of course, filmmakers of this time were expected to bring these criminal types to their ends as a way of punishing moral deviance rather than as a means of glorifying criminal activity. Herein lies a problem as the criminal characters gained an audience because of their deviant morally repugnant ways. Yet, the denunciation of Americanization by way of lawlessness and criminality ultimately produced official outrage at the classic gangster genre. However, censoring and boycotting the classic gangster genre did little to erase the damage that had already been done to the image of the Italian-American in film and television.

Another traditional stereotype of the Italian-American male onscreen is that of the über masculine criminal. It is clear that the gangster films of the 1930s set a precedent for Hollywood to set up, expose, and then condemn Italian-Americans all in the search for good ratings and profits even if the antiheros in the films were gaining popularity from their extremely masculine roles. When we look back at the characters of Tony Camonte and Rico Bandello, we see conflicting images of masculinity through their associations with criminality. It is clear that these characters exude traditional macho

qualities to their peers through their aggressive and violent tendencies; yet, they show elements of fluid masculinities, allowing viewers to identify with the characters in more than simply a superficial way. The characters become humanized to viewers rather than remaining one-dimensional gangster personas. Tony and Rico are not the most intelligent criminals; they rely on instincts that associate them with animalistic tendencies. According to Camile Paglia, quoted in "Political Correctness, Italian-Americans and *The Sopranos*," this "savage" animalistic quality is attractive for women who find comfort in the arms of a powerful man (Shareff) like Tony or Rico; however, that comfort is short-lived when Tony's masculinity is called into question at the end of *Scarface.* Tony is so over-protective of his sister Francesca that he kills her husband, his best friend, upon returning from a business trip to find that Cesca has moved out of her mother's home and in with a man. Tony does this at the same time as the police are gunning for him.

In the scene where Cesca dies, she notices that her brother is visibly scared. She even comments, "Tony, I must die now. You're scared, Tony." The audience sees Tony melt into madness as he begins to cry, shoots back at the police squad, and leaves the penthouse only to find the police commissioner Gaffney (played by Boris Karloff) waiting to cuff him and take him away. In a moment of bravery (or cowardice at what he would face in jail), Tony makes a run for it, only to be shot down. Although some would say that his character's life ends in a moment of glory ("you live by the gun; you die by the gun" gangster mantra), others like Bondanella comment that this is the declining of masculinity within the character (crying, madness, running away). Likewise, the masculinity of the character of Rico can be called into question in the following ways: he

is not seen with women; his male secretary lies on his bed at waist level, connoting a homosexual desire; he has too much compassion for his best friend Joe to kill him; he is able to be goaded out from the flophouse and back into the police limelight with a few false accusations that place his manhood as a gangster into question.

By 1945 World War II was over, but the image of the Italian-American as masculine gangster was only strengthening in the film industry. The 50s and 60s were a time when a lot of roles were being offered to Italian American actors; however, those roles, as critics suggest, always ended in violence whether through criminality or boxing, which was yet another stereotyped role for the Italian American. The role of the palooka seemed to be a safe alternative to the crime-ridden roles of the classic gangster genre. Boxing films are just as popular as gangster films, it can be suggested, in part because the violence and link to male virility found in boxing films like *Rocky* and *Raging Bull* is so closely related to criminality. However, it is here, within the boxing genre of film, where we see an alternative role being offered to Italian-Americans. Chiefly, I concentrate intensely on the roles of Rocky Balboa and Jake LaMotta because I see the Italian male identity evolving on screen that show progress for the image of the Italian-American in film. Both characters hail from working-class backgrounds in union-heavy states which aid in their rough upbringings and help to provide foundations for their conflicting class struggles throughout each film. On one side, these characters resist full assimilation into the mainstream American culture by remaining true to their ethnic heritages. Yet, they both strive to gain entrance into popular conventional culture in order to be recognized as men who matter either in name or by way of personal success, much like the gangster characters of *Little Caesar*, *The Public Enemy,* and *Scarface: The Shame of the Nation.*

Helping to shape this alternative role (and additional stereotype) of the Italian-American was the ethnic-revival of the 60s and 70s in American culture. Couple this revival with the disappearance of the Hays Code in 1968, and it is easy to see why the lawful alternative on-screen depiction for Italian-Americans became tainted. Along with explicitly sexualized scenes, unnecessary violence was permitted on screen. In both boxing films, viewers are able to see the boxer's link to organized crime even if only on the periphery of the film's trajectory. Beck mentions in his article, "The Myth That Would Not Die…", that not only women (Italian-American as well as not), but also men and youth "are drawn to the deplorable yet fascinating," masculine yet sincere, characterization of Italian-American gangsters. I suggest that it is this connection to the persona of the sexually illicit and dangerous criminal that encourages viewership in these films even though there is an obvious appeal to the working-class underdog in both films.

The idea of appropriating the exoticism of the criminal for the sake of capturing viewership is one more way in which we can use Inter-Colonialism to read the image of and subsequent damage to the Italian-American on screen. In 1972, when Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* was introduced, the film industry certainly capitalized on the lure of the criminal element with the Corleone crime family while evoking a nostalgia for the Italian-American community with the film's many images of early to mid 1900s Italian-American neighborhoods. This film stands out as the pinnacle of the Italian-American gangster film. As Beck suggests, this is one of the films where masculinity is also a focal point. Critics suggest that this film solidified the image we now encounter of the Italian-American gangster because it opened up the film industry to more product tie-ins that could culturally attach themselves to the commodification of the hit film.

Although the Corleones are considered to be a more ethnic family (the traditional Italian weddings; the traditional food; the trips back to the namesake land, etc.) than the 1999 – 2007 Soprano family (Donatelli), they are still commercialized by society as thugs and have been credited as the source of the "take the gun, leave the cannoli" bumper sticker market. With products like bumper stickers and t-shirts that utilize popular phrases like the above and "I'll make him an offer he can't refuse," Hollywood cornered the market on profit making in the name of ethnic devaluing. One critic even suggested that with this commodification of the bumper sticker/t-shirt industry, more Italian jokes were being made. Thus, as Hollywood attempted to project alternative depictions of Italian-Americans on-screen, media representations of "what it means to be Italian" began to flood the consumer market, furthering the already engrained gangster/violent male label. This commercialization of the gangster image is, in part, to blame for society's tired view of the Italian-American male as hoodlum.

To cash in on this trend, even Italian filmmakers and producers like Garry Marshall, Sylvester Stallone, Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, and David Chase were prompted to (re)create the sense of what it means to be an Italian in order to produce an Arthur Fonzarelli, Rocky Balboa, Jake LaMotta, Michael Corleone, or Tony Soprano. Unfortunately, as products up for consumption by the viewing audience, these characters took on a more powerful representation of Italian Americans. In creating these commodified representations of Italian-American males, these writers, producers, and directors limited America's access to the rich cultural heritage and strong traditions of the Italian in America. Moreover, by continuing this type of stereotyping, as modern day America has, third and fourth generation Italian-Americans stand to lose their own

identities to the lack of truth Hollywood writers, producers, and directors continue to exude.

One way to ensure the idea of incorporating alternative images of the Italian-American culture on-screen is to pay attention to relationships that run counter to stereotyped ideas. Critics insinuate that because Michael and Vito Corleone (Al Pacino and Marlon Brando) are so calculating and calm, seemingly gentle in their demeanors, and family men above all else, they are eroticized as masculine figures in the minds of the viewers. It is this "*gallismo* (the Italian word for *machismo*)" that makes women want them and men want to be them (Belliotti 48). In *The Godfather I* and *II,* family is center to the Corleones. Coppola uses the dynamic between Michael, his mother, and his father as a way to show the ethnic connection to authentic Italy. When Michael reads of his father's shooting, he immediately goes to his mother's home where the women are praying the rosary and wailing and the men are plotting revenge. This is a family activity—all members of the family are under the same roof, working on their duties to their family when in crisis. As Vito's son, Michael will protect his father with his own life. We see this at the hospital when Captain McCluskey (played by Sterling Hayden) pulls the guards from Vito's room and Michael has to quickly work to hide his father before the ambush comes. After McCluskey confronts Michael concerning Michael's reason for being at the hospital and Michael questions McCluskey about the lack of guards protecting his father, McCluskey breaks Michael's jaw for being disrespectful to law enforcement. As a result, Michael decides that he will be the one to protect his father by hiding him from the rival gang that is coming to kill him and by ultimately killing his father's enemies. No one will see him coming because, up to this point in the film,

Michael has simply been a college boy and a war hero not involved in the family business. In the touching scene after Vito is transported home and awakens to ask where Michael is only to find that he was the one that killed the enemies, Vito sheds a tear because he knows that his dreams of handing a legitimate business down to Michael are gone. He will never attain his dream of assimilating into an upper-middle class America.

We see Michael's mother, the archetypal mama figure, at the beginning of the saga, dancing and singing (in Italian) at her daughter's wedding, then again at the kitchen table, and then we only hear mention of her when Michael leaves for Italy after killing Sollozzo (played by Al Lettieri) and Captain McCluskey. Even though this character is not a major reoccurring character within the films, her presence is known as Sonny (played by James Caan), Michael's bother, tells Michael that he will "make it right with ma" that Michael left without saying goodbye. In the *Godfather* films, as critic Sara Dunne suggests, we see an authentic sense of culture as the food scene at the wedding and at the dinner table is used to illustrate the ethnicity of the characters (219). Moreover, we see the character of Michael rounded when he hides out in Italy and finds an Italian woman to marry (forgetting about Kay, his WASP girlfriend back in New York). McCarty suggests that Michael is assimilating to the Italian way of life, leaving his privileged home and life in America a distant memory. The final time we see mama Corleone is when Michael finds his way to his father's old study where his mother spends most of her time sitting by the fire praying the rosary. Michael goes to her to ask, in Italian, what his father would have done for his family. What sacrifices would he have made to keep the family safe? When his mother answers that his father would do whatever needed to be done to make the family safe, at any cost to his heart, she

unwittingly gives Michael the license to have his brother Fredo killed after the passing of his mother. Of course, in the terms of the Corleone business, Fredo deserved to die because he betrayed his crime family by giving confidential information to an enemy family regarding the Don of his family. Not only did Fredo betray the crime family, he betrayed his own brother by unknowingly aiding in a botched attempt on Michael's life. According to omerta (a code of honor that relies on a code of silence), this type of betrayal is met with death. On a more personal level, Michael knows he will never be able to trust his brother's sincerity again, and, as a result, the Corleone crime family will have a weak link if Fredo is allowed to live.

In *The Sopranos*, we see working class gangsters like Tony Soprano and his crew characterized through family and religion. Although Tony and his crew are Catholics, they do not frequent the church. We see them at funeral parlors paying their respects with a sign of the cross; we see them before a dinner making the sign of the cross and kissing their thumbs and two forefingers as a sign of respect to the heavens for the food they are about to eat. We rarely see them in a church; however, Carmela (played by Edie Falco), Tony's wife, finds solace in her Catholicism. Her character is troubled by the criminality that her husband has exposed the family to over the years. She feels the guilt that her husband should feel. In an episode titled "College," while Tony takes his daughter Meadow on college trips to determine which school she wants to go to, Carmela is at home with a cold. Father Phil, the parish priest who frequently stops by for ziti and DVD viewing, drops in that evening, gets stuck in a rain storm, and ends up spending the night. After a little too much Chianti and a lot of emotional discussion about Carmela's guilt, Carmela and Father Phil find themselves in a sensual situation where Carmela pulls

away, stating that "this is inappropriate." This act sends Carmela away from the church, and she is able to deal with her blood-money guilt at least until the next time she decides that she needs to confide in someone about her unholy life.

What is important about this character and her connection to religion is that she, as well as her family, is guilty of only illustrating the knowledge of what Belliotti says is symbolic culture. They are traditional to their heritage when it is convenient: when Carmela feels guilty, when Tony wants to show his daughter what their grandfather built when he came over to America, at holidays with traditional food and wine, and during sacraments like confirmation or baptism. Moreover, this contemporary view of the Italian-American is coupled with a sense of ethnic assimilation, where, in this case, the Soprano family is more American than Italian American. They are still working-class people; however, they live in a neighborhood next to doctors and lawyers, they eat expensive foods and drink expensive wines, they have a maid, and they purchase a new car on a whim. The best proof of this assimilated family can be found in moments like the last episode of season one; after Tony finds out that his mother wanted to have him whacked, he only wants to have dinner with his family, wife, and two kids. They get caught in a storm and pull into old friend and restaurant owner Artie Bucco's place. The power is out but Artie sets a table with a candle and cooks for them on a gas burner. We see the same closeness of family in part 1 of season 6 when the entire extended family come to Tony and Carmela's for Christmas Eve dinner. Son A. J. has his girlfriend and her son there, and Meadow calls to wish everyone a Merry Christmas from California where she resides with her boyfriend. Of course this scene comes just after a meeting with a boss of the New York crime family where Tony made peace with him before

chaos erupted like the chaos that caused Tony's mother to try to have him killed. And so at the precise moment we see the story falling away from the traditional Italian-American stereotype of heightened criminality and gangsterism, the series refuels its images, and the characters return to promoting that which reflects the traditions of the mafia.

It is, of course, this display of ultra masculinity through aggression and violence rather than quiet, assimilated familial moments that continues the depiction of the Italian-American as a savage, maintaining audience viewership. Philosopher Raymond Belliotti in his book *Seeking Identity: Individualism versus Community in an Ethnic Context*, a study in the authenticity of Italians – Italian Americans, states that we only are privy to "symbolic ethnicity" (rituals reminiscent of the old country ways), specifically in films like *The Godfather I* and *II,* and shows like *The Sopranos,* causing "Italian-American youth and assimilated Americans of Italian ethnicity to identify with a false impression of what it means to be Italian American" (174). Ultimately, this experience, which only provides a sampling of the genuine history of the Italian-American, acts as a representative for what is not completely negative in on-screen representations of Italian-American culture. The performance of symbolic ethnicity in these films is, in part, what helps to push authentic culture further from contemporary understanding of that culture, much like we see in episodes of *Jersey Shore* where the guido and guidette personas are celebrated and even over-performed to attempt to attain the highest votes amongst reality television shows. Whereas the film and television industries can claim credit for producing films / shows with alternative depictions of Italian-American culture because of their displays of symbolic ethnicity within the pieces, scholars are aware that this brand of imaging can be easily turned on or off and, as Belliotti suggests, "ethnic

ancestry unaccompanied by subjective acceptance of ethnicity and salient ethnic behavior is empty" (175). It is at this vortex in my film criticism that I see Inter-Colonialism at work most emphatically to unveil the complexity of characters that are otherwise being used by Hollywood to fulfill a quota of engineered ethnic inclusion.

In brief, it is my contention that Hollywood writers, directors, and producers have always capitalized on the idea of what it means to be an Italian-American because they knew that what viewers did not know about this ethnic group would appear exotic, drawing a larger audience for the pictures. In addition, these writers, directors, and producers have taken liberties in writing scripts that characterize Italian-Americans as over-sexualized criminals because sex and violence draws an audience and in turn makes money in theaters. There has been little regard given within the film industry to genuine historical characteristics associated with Italy and the embodiment of what it meant for this ethnic group to come from their country to America aside from documentary films like Scorsese's 1974 *Italianamerican*.[40] Additionally, those filmmakers who have attempted to provide alternative Italian-American roles on-screen have not completely been able to sever the association between the Italian-American and criminality, mainly due to consumer-driven insatiability. Finally, I urge scholars to continue to dress-down Hollywood writers, directors and producers in the form of analysis for their part in the departure of authentic, historical images of the Italian-American. Moreover, I advocate, scholars should persist in pointing out any promising alternative portrayals of Italian-American identity or culture that may have been unconsciously overlooked by Hollywood writers, directors, and producers while making their pictures much as I have attempted to do specifically with characters like Arthur Fonzarelli, Rocky Balboa, Jake

LaMotta, and Tommy DeVito. While having positive alternative characters like Mac Vitelli, Marty Piletti and Lorenzo Anello (C.'s father from *A Bronx Tale*) stand as a balance to the stereotyped gangster and boxer figures in film, there is hope that we may see more traditional, authentic images within future films starring Italian-American actors. Through analysis scholars can continue to call attention to over-used stereotypes for the Italian-American character and, perhaps, produce an even richer reading of the characterization, using identity and masculinity along with the tenets of Inter-Colonialism as tools for discussion.

Notes

[1] As a means to discuss the Italian-American ethnic group as an oppressed people after immigrating to America and while remaining within the borders of America, I have constructed a theoretical framework, Inter-Colonialism, to work inside so that an organized and well-rounded study can take place planted at the center of the field of Italian American Studies. Inter-Colonialism is a post-colonial type oppression of a minority population that has migrated into the dominant culture of America.

[2] For more information regarding generational abandonment of practices in the Italian-American community, see Guglielmo, Jennifer. "White Lies, Dark Truths." *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made In America* Ed. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno. New York: Routledge, 2003. 1 – 14.

[3] The article was presented at the American Italian Historic Association Conference in Baton Rouge, LA 2009.

[4] His concept of the West's view of the East is derived from what he feels Westerners are afraid to claim in their own identities, the things that frighten them and the things that they despise (decadence, secrecy, sexuality, exoticism). By being able to displace these deprecating characteristics onto what he calls the Other (someone we feel is different from us), the Westerner is placed in the position of power. Said says that "knowledge is power" in his text. Therefore, the one who is in a position to become educated, the one who has been living the life of the Westerner in the West where education is accessible will be the one to hold the power. Since the West is essentially a metaphor for the colonizer, it is clear to see how post-colonial thought progresses into Frantz Fanon's work.

[5] Spivak suggests in her essay, "Can the Subatlern Speak?" that the use of the word *subaltern* is not "simply a classy word for the oppressed, the other" (de Koch 45). She was insistent that Gramsci's assessment of the word was correct when she credits him with saying that in order to be called subaltern, the group has to have been written out of the capitalist bourgeois narrative (Kilburn). Even though some of their traditions have been, the Italians have not been written out; therefore I will use "Other" instead of subaltern.

[6] This plan can be reviewed at the following site: http://archive.org/stream/cihm_45274#page/n3/mode/2up NOTE: "North America, Intercolonial Railway [microform]: return to an address of the honourable the House of Commons dated 30 June 1864, for copy of correspondence between any of the North American provinces and the Imperial government, relating to their application for assistance in raising a loan for an international railway, in continuation of Parliamentary Paper, No. 210, of 1863 (1864)." Also see Ken Cruikshank "The Intercolonial Railway, Freight Rate and the Maritime Economy" for valuable reading on this topic.

[7] Greasers and Lounge Lizards of the teens were also amongst the images that have been used to capitalize on the panethnic image of the Italian American.

[8] It premiered on NBC on October 11, 1975, under the title *NBC's Saturday Night.*

[9] "Sicily is famous for a particular kind of orange, the so-called blood orange…Sangue chiama sangue (blood demands blood)" (Bondanella 268).

[10] Wikipedia contributors. "The Fortunate Pilgrim." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 20 Jan. 2012. Web. 13 Feb. 2012.

[11] Tamburri clarifies that he uses the term *interpretant* in the same fashion that Daniel Aaron uses the "hyphenate writer" (8).

[12] The Pazani advertisement as quoted in Barthes essay, "Rhetoric of the Image," "some packets of pasta, a tin, a sachet, some tomatoes, onions, peppers, a mushroom, all emerging from a half-open string bag, in yellows and greens on a red background" (270). Note: Barthes footnotes that his description is carefully given because he feels that it already suggests a metalanguage.

[13] Roland Barthes refers to this term as *Italianicity* in his essay, "Rhetoric of the Image.

[14] Silvio Dante (Steve Van Zandt), Tony Soprano (James Gandolfini), "Big Pussy" Bonpensiero (Vincent Pastore), Pauly Walnuts (Tony Sirico), and Christopher Moltisante (Michael imperioli)

[15] The Italian-American actor along with the writer and filmmaker can be viewed in terms of marginalization as evidenced by the lack of non-stereotyped roles for Italian-Americans over the last decade. In addition, we have seen, in this dissertation, the issues that Marshall, Scorsese, Coppola, and Stallone (amongst other Italian Americans) have had to overcome in Hollywood in order to become the great filmmakers they are today.

[16] *Growing Up Gotti* is a reality show aired on A&E from 2004 – 2005 for three seasons.

[17] *Jersey Shore* is a reality television show highlighting the lives of eight 20 something Italians living and working at the shore. It aired in December of 2009 on MTV.

[18] "There's no date stamp on when the term Guido came into play, but Tricarico theorizes that it very well may have originated as an insult from within the Italian-American community, confer[r]ing inferior status on immigrants who are just *off the boat*. It clearly references non-assimilation in its use of a name more at home in the old

homeland. In fact, in different locales, the same slur isn't Guido: in Chicago the term is *Mario* and in Toronto it goes by *Gino*. Guido is far less offensive, among Italian-Americans, than another G word, which is also used in the names of countries in equatorial west Africa." (Brooks)

[19] See Janet Staiger. *Blockbuster TV: Must-See Sitcoms in the Network Era.* New York: New York University Press, 2000.

[20] The pronoun "we" is used to represent the viewing audience (see Ed Papazian. *Medium Rare: The Evolution, Workings, and Impact of Commercial Television*. New York: Media Dynamics, 1991, for full statistics on social, racial and gender makeup).

[21] This cycle that Fonzie goes through takes place in the first four seasons and ends with the first two episodes of the fifth season. From that point forward, Fonzie's need for inclusion into middle-class America becomes redundant until the end of the series where he mirrors the Cunninghams with an adoptive son and a newly purchased home.

[22] As we move into the third season of *Happy Days,* more than just a larger onscreen appearance of Fonzie is evident. The set is modernized. The family uses the front door (it has been moved from the left to the right side of the home) as their primary door, allowing for the back door to be open to Fonzie who now stops in every day so Mrs. Cunningham, affectionately referred to by Fonzie as Mrs. C. (Marion Ross), can fill his thermos before work. The show has also moved from a single-camera shooting style to a multi-camera style (and has added a live audience) fashioned after the shooting of a play. We also see more violent tendencies on the part of the characters: the phrase "sit on it" is born in all its raunchiness; Mrs. C. takes on a more dominant role in the household; and Fonzie is seen balling his fist in anger many times throughout. Interestingly, it is in this third season that the show earns the number one sitcom position. Afterward, the show falls by one ranking for the next two seasons and then into the teens for the remaining seven seasons.

[23] Further studies may include the character of George Jefferson's (Sherman Hemsley) wife Louise (Isabel Sanford) in *All in the Family* and the Jewish character of Arnold Horshack (Ron Palillo) from *Welcome Back Kotter*. While Louise is married to a man who has a distaste for white people, she is characterized as the voice of reason and the martyr always finding time to give at The Help Center. Even though Arnold embodies a number of the more traditional Jewish associations (his high-pitched voice, his propensity for guilt), his character is humanized by way of the absolute kindness and understanding he provides for his friends and for people in general.

[24] Laverne DeFazio (dates Fonzie), Rocky Baruffi (Fonzie's best friend before Richie), the Malachi brothers (rival gang members), Leather (friend to Fonzie) and Pinky Tuscadero (Fonzie's fiancé), Al Delvecchio (second owner of Arnold's), Spike Fonzarelli

(Fonzie's cousin), and Chachi Arcola (Fonzie's cousin) are all Italian-American characters who have shared the screen with Fonzie; however, none of these characters have had the same appeal with American viewing audiences as Fonzie. In fact, Al and Chachi are the only Italian-American characters other than Fonzie who have been seen in more than twelve episodes of *Happy Days*.

[25] For example, Vinny Barbarino (John Travolta) in *Welcome Back Kotter* (1975 – 1979), Tony Manero (John Travolta) in *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), and Johnny Boy (Robert deNiro), Charlie (Harvey Keitel) and Tony (David Proval) in *Mean Streets* (1973).

[26] "1891 New Orleans prejudice and discrimination results in lynching of 11 Italians, the largest mass lynching in United States history" - http://www.niaf.org/milestones/year_1891.asp

[27] Ironically, the term palooka has little to do with the idea of male virility that so many critics draw attention to when writing on boxing. In fact, the definition, here, implies a lack of masculine characteristics associated with sports in general as the palooka is ultimately a loser of the match.

[28] While analyzing films that encompass the many years that boxing has been depicted on-screen would detract from the overall basis of this chapter, it is important to point out a few important films that illustrate the tradition of cinematic representations of boxing. *Any Old Port!* (1932) directed by James Horne, *Kid Galahad* (1937) directed by Michael Curtiz, *Golden Boy* (1939) directed by Rouben Mamoulian, *Kid Dynamite* (1943) directed by Wallace Fox, *Body and Soul* (1947) directed by Robert Rossen, *The Ring* (1952) directed by Kurt Neumann, *Requiem for a Heavyweight* (1962) directed by Ralph Nelson, and *The Great White Hope* (1970) directed by Martin Ritt are amongst the body of work available.

[29] Canzoneri beat Benny Bass for the championship on February 10, 1928.

[30] For further reading on the three waves of the Italian diaspora, see http://www.italianlegacy.com/italian-immigration.html

[31] *Racketeer Rabbit* is a 1946 animated short film in the Looney Tunes series produced by Warner Bros. Cartoons, Inc. It stars Bugs Bunny, who duels with a pair of racketeers or gangsters, Rocky and Hugo forerunners who resemble Edward G. Robinson (Rocky, not to be confused with the aforementioned Rocky) and Peter Lorre (Hugo). ("Racketeer Rabbit").

In the 1950 short *Golden Yeggs*, Porky Pig and Daffy Duck defy the mob. Creator Freleng "redesigned Rocky for this short, making him a more generalized caricature of the tough guy gangster rather than Robinson in particular" ("Rocky and Mugsy").

Several more episodes of the cartoon utilize the mob image and Italian characteristics. In 1953's *Catty Cornered*, Sylvester the Cat and Tweety Bird meet up with gang leader Rocky and his "hulking" simpleton named "Nick" ("Rocky and Mugsy"). In 1954's *Bugs and Thugs*, "Nick" is now "Mugsy", and "though his over-muscled body stays mostly the same, his hair is gone, and his facial expressions are decidedly less intelligent" ("Rocky and Mugsy"). The duo also appeared in *Bugsy and Mugsy* (1957) and *The Unmentionables* (1963). Mugsy also appeared in the 1956 short *Napoleon Bunny-Part*. Note: Rocky and Mugsy are parodied in the South Park episode, *Crippled Summer*, where Nathan (Rocky) tries to arrange fatal accidents for Jimmy Vulmer (a counterpart to Bugs Bunny), but his plans are always ruined by Mimsy's (Mugsy's) stupidity ("Rocky and Mugsy").

[32] Hollywood can be seen exerting patriarchal order by its insistence on associating honest alternative depictions of Italian-Americans like police officers with negative racial epithets. See James C. Mancuso's "Italian-Americans in Prize Fighting in The USA."

[33] James Dean was to play the role of Graziano in the film, but he died in 1955 before filming began.

[34] Marlon Brando, at the time a method actor, gave Rocky Graziano and his wife tickets to the show he was starring in on Broadway, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. When Graziano saw Brando's character, he said, "that kid is playin' *me* [sic]" (qtd. in Levy 112). Brando had watched Graziano work out at Stillman's for a few weeks prior to completing his role in *A Streetcar Named Desire.*

[35] A monkey, an ape. pug, n.2
Third edition, September 2007; online version June 2011.
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/154210>; accessed 23 June 2011. An entry for this word was first included in *New English Dictionary*, 1909.

[36] Also seen in films like *Cobra* directed by Joseph Henabery, and *The Gay Divorcee* directed by Mark Sandrich, for instance.

[37] This sequence highlights the stereotype of Italian-American culture that is always somehow linked to the underworld, the mob. Of course, in the boxing arena, the "protection" racket plays a significant role as was previously mentioned in this chapter, but the palooka figure finds himself surrounded by these elements of crime that have come to associate the Italian-American with that which is undesirable in the dominant culture.

[38] This exchange between Gazzo and Rocky is reminiscent of the father / son relationship in Robert DeNiro's *A Bronx Tale* between Sonny (Chaz Palminteri) and Calogero (Lillo Brancato).

[39] Talia Shire, who plays Connie Corleone in the *Godfather* film, represents another of the Italian-American female stereotypes (see my conclusion for a discussion of the earth-mother figure), that of the spoiled brat. She flits about, teasing Carlo (her future husband (played by Gianni Russo)) about the family business; she draws her brother into her relationship with her husband, knowing that he should not meddle, according to her father; and she whines about how her brother deals with the family business when he excludes her husband.

[40] Scorsese's *My Voyage to Italy* stands as a great resource for those interested in tracing depictions of Italian / Italian-Americans in film from the Italian Neo-Realist films through contemporary American depictions of the Italian experience.

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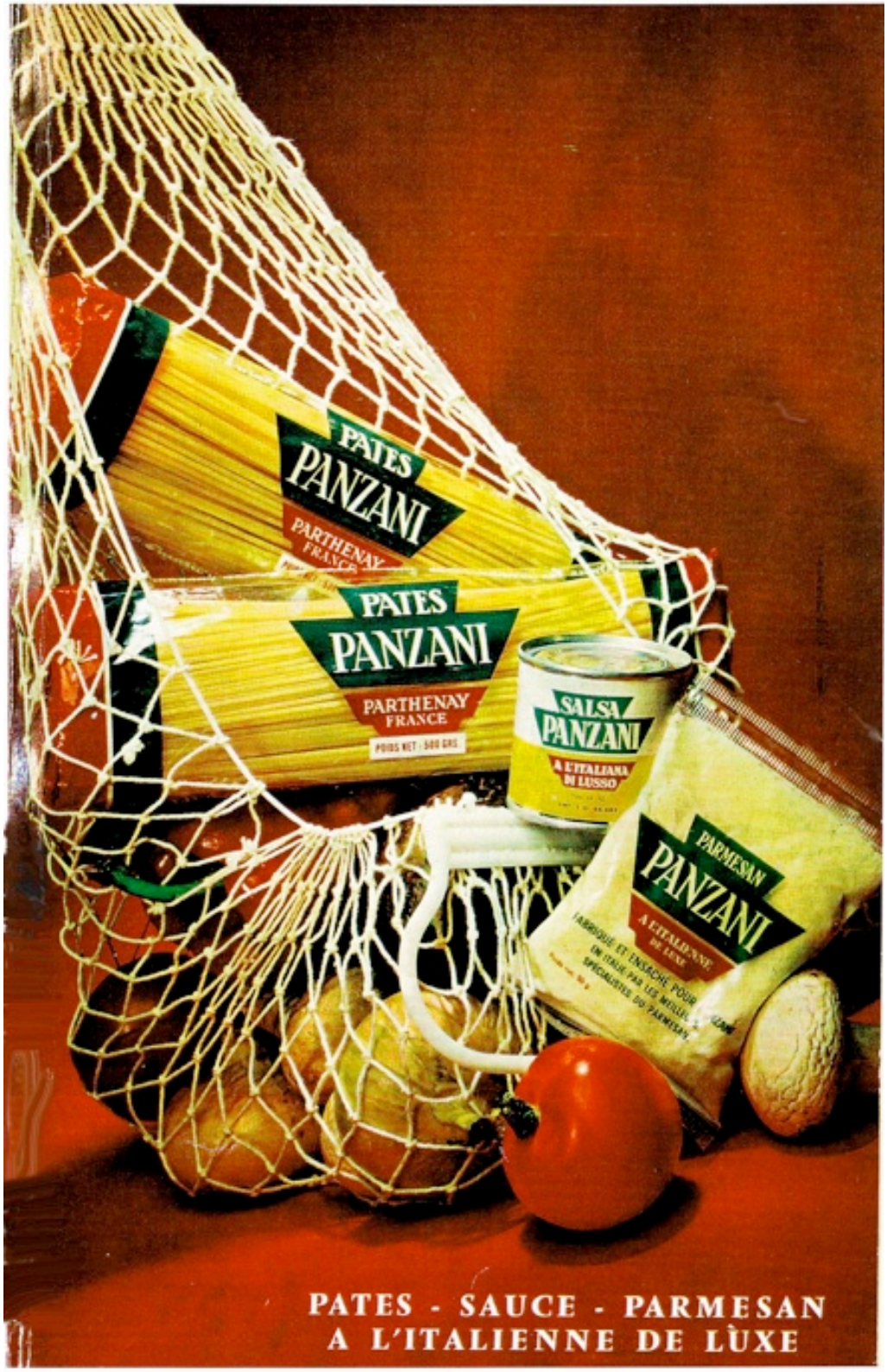
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A L'ITALIENNE DE LUXE

Saturday Night Live Transcripts

Season 1: Episode 9

75i: Elliot Gould / Anne Murray

Godfather Group Therapy
..written by: Michael O'Donoghue

Therapist.....Elliot Gould
Vito corleone.....John Belushi
Sherry.....Laraine Newman
Garrett.....Garrett Morris
Michael.....Michael O'Donoghue

[open on Group Therapy meeting in Therapist's Office]

Therapist: Okay, okay.. before we begin, I'd like to say that because of a personal committment, Group will begin at eight o'clock instead of seven next Tuesday, if that's alright. [Group nods] Now, when we left off in our session last week, Vito was telling us his feelings toward the Tattaglia Family. Vito?

Vito Corleone: Well, the Tattaglia Family is causing me deep personal grief. Also, things are not going so well at my olive oil company.

[Sherry raises hand]

Therapist: Sherry?

Sherry: Vito, I think you are blocking.

Therapist: Vito?

Vito Corleone: Blocking what?

Therapist: Sherry?

Sherry: Your true feelings about the Tattaglia Family.

Therapist: Vito? Do you want to respond?

Vito Corleone: Alright. The Tattaglia Family is moving in on my territory. They've taken over numbers, prostitution, and restaurant linen supply, and now they want to bring in drugs. Also, they just shot my son, Santino, fifty-six times.

Therapist: Ah! Now we are getting somewhere. What do you think about this?

Vito Corleone: Drugs, I am against.

[Sherry raises hand]

Therapist: Sherry?

Sherry: You're still blocking your real feelings, Vito. What about everything else?

Therapist: Vito?

Vito Corleone: Well, the restaurant linen supply was never a big money-maker..

Sherry: You're hurting, Vito, and you're covering up.

Vito Corleone: Alright, alright, you're right. It is hurting me. Numbers alone, I'm losing fifteen to twenty grand a week.

Therapist: Vito, you're still blocking. How do you feel about them shooting Santino fifty-six times?

Vito Corleone: Terrible. We had to go to the mattresses. Tessio sleeps with the fishes. Johnny is through in Hollywood. They blew up Michael's wife and a lovely car. The Tattaglias, Barzinis, and Boyardees all have contracts out on me, the Feds are watching me, Kefauver is investigating me, and the ASPCA is after me over this horse thing.

Garrett: Evading. Vito's evading.

Sherry: Blocking.

Michael: Feel it. Feel it, Vito.

Therapist: Settle down. Vito will tell us what he's feeling when he's ready. Vito? Ready, Vito?

Vito Corleone: [head in his hands] I could have been Senator Corleone, Governor Corleone.. but there

wasn't enough time..

Therapist: Vito, this is getting us nowhere. I want you to try to act out your feelings for the Tattaglia Family non-verbally.

Vito Corleone: Do I have to?

Sherry: Vito, we're with you. We're on your side. We know where you're coming from.

[everyone encourages Vito; he gets up, does orange peel mime, has heart attack and dies. No one reacts.]

Therapist: Sherry? How do you feel about what Vito just went through?

Sherry: Oh, you know, different strokes for different folks is what I always say. I mean, through my work as a stewardess I have rully learned to understand other people and their problems. Like my friends kept bugging me, kept asking me, "God, Sherry, why do you want to be a stewardess?" And I ralzied that it's 'cause I love people, I rully do. I love to serve them and help them try to fall asleep sitting up. And, like I had to get outta the Valley, I'm not kidding, man. It was rully getting hairy. But I knew I had a bitchin' bod and a good personality.

Garrett: You're blocking, Sherry.

Sherry: So, I just took off, man, and I did a summer blonde commercial, and then I went to stewardess school.. and since then I can't believe how much I've grown, emotionally, I mean. Like when I went back to the Valley a coupla weeks ago, everyone seemed so immature. And Brad, that's my old boyfriend, found out I was back. So, real late at night, he drove past my window in his Vega and laid a patch. And I thought: "Some people!" You know, Norman Miller was right, "You can't go home."

Therapist: Okay. Before I forget, because of a personal committment, Group will begin at nine o'clock next Tuesday instead of seven, if that's alright?

[everyone nods in agreement, then leave the therapy session, Vito still lying on the floor dead]

[fade out]