

Wallace McDowell

Examining the relationship between working-class Ulster Loyalism and performance 1997-2007

This research will be of interest to people who engage with; masculinities, Northern Ireland, theatre and performance, issues of identity

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1. Identity
2. Masculinity
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From a cultural materialist perspective, the research analyses changes in both attitudes to theatre/theatricality and the performance of identity in rapidly shifting political, social and cultural circumstances. Central to the thesis is the fact that these changes have a strongly gendered aspect. The research focuses on how both plays in performance and how a 'Loyalist' identity is performed reveal significant shifts in the performance and transmission of masculinities in the target communities

Research Methods

A review of how Ulster Loyalism has been staged since the beginning of the twentieth-century

Utilising theories around masculinities to analyse the impact of the plays of Gary Mitchell – the first playwright to emerge from the Loyalist working class

Semi-structured interviews with those in the Loyalist communities using theatre and performance for the first time

Case study of a project aimed at re-appropriating playwright George Farquhar as a Loyalist icon for the city of Derry

Key Findings/Ideas

- **Loyalism has begun to overcome its traditional resistance to theatre and performance (a resistance in part bound up with interpretation/performance of masculinity)**
- **This resistance has been almost universal amongst Loyalist males, but there are signs that this is also undergoing change**
- **Loyalist iconography has begun to reflect a move away from a militaristic hegemonic masculinity towards a reflection of greater diversity**
- **Mitchell's plays stage the shifting discourse of power in gender relationships as the dominant paramilitary, masculine dominated hegemony begins to collapse**