Masculinity in *Brokeback Mountain*

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1 Introduction

Most discussions of masculinity tend to treat it as if it is measurable. Some men have more of it, others less. Those men who appear to lack masculinity are, by definition, sick or genetically inadequate. Gay men, for example, are often regarded as men who lack a proper hormonal balance, and who consequently are not ‘real’ men. This assumption – that we can know and describe men in terms of some discoverable dimension – is problematic because it suggests that masculinity is timeless and universal.

(Brittan 2001:51)

In 2005 Brokeback Mountain, starring Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal, came to cinemas worldwide. The tragic love story of Ennis Del Mar and Jack Twist did not become famous because of its commercial success, but because it caused an enormous sensation. Due to the controversial and especially for American society provocative content the movie was accompanied by extraordinary media interest, high hopes and expectations on the part of queer community, and condemnatory comments on the part of religious hardliners at the same time – audience reactions towards the movie were accordingly intensive and diverse. Since then, Brokeback Mountain has been hastily labeled as a story about homosexuality. However, it seems to be ignored that the central theme is not homosexuality as such, but the much more essential question: what is masculinity?

According to lifestyle magazines, television and advertising industry, this question is easy to answer – they constantly inform us what ‘real’ men do, drink or wear. However, from an academic point of view the topic is highly complex. This becomes clear when we take a look to the history books of Western civilization: the history of Western societies is a history of patriarchies in which primarily men guided the fate of mankind, decided about war and peace, and controlled politics and economy. Due to this omnipresence, masculinity has always been considered as ‘normal’, ‘natural’, self-evident. Thus, it was no subject for further investigation. Paradoxically, it was the work of feminist studies that brought masculinity studies to life: broaching the issue of suppression by male dominance and the struggle for independence in a patriarchal society, the subjects of feminist criticism suddenly became interesting – an interest that step by step became a serious branch of science, merging social, medical, and political studies.
Although masculinity studies are emancipated in scientific research and an extraordinary popular topic in Western society today, the opinions within the academic field are anything but concordant. Since the beginning in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century there have been numerous attempts to define masculinity and debates about its origins and its effects in society. The debate can mainly be summarized in the questions what 'being a man' means and if masculinity is something that men are born with, or something they acquire. Some of the theories, which take biology, psychology and social influences into account, have been proven wrong, as they produced contradictory results. Especially in the early days of masculinity studies, approaches were neither objective nor neutral and far away from being held under scientific conditions. Inexplicably, some of these ‘pseudo-academic’ ideas about masculinity have survived until today and still persist in a conservative public opinion, which takes us back to \textit{Brokeback Mountain}.

\textit{Brokeback Mountain} handles the key elements of masculinity studies, as it is constructed around the same questions: is the habit of men primarily bound to biology, mental structures or a cultural script? Does early childhood experience form sexual identity or is it the unconscious mind? What about the influence of family, friends, tradition or political institutions? And how do the underlying principles of Western society, such as patriarchy and capitalism, contribute to social construction of masculinity? As it is not possible to understand the concept of masculinity without the theoretical fundament behind these questions this paper firstly introduces the basic principles of the relevant approaches towards masculinity. Thus, we clarify why some opinions are misleading, while other theories are reliable due to their scientific evidence. Further, we analyze the mutual relation between movies, as a form of cultural representation, and the definition of masculinity. Finally, by using the example of \textit{Brokeback Mountain} we see how the theoretic construction of dominant and oppressed versions of masculinity comes to life.
2 An orientation

Since the 1970’s, North Americans have been reading about a men’s movement. We have been treated to images of men gathering in support of the feminist cause, coming together to denounce feminism, standing around roaring campfires and shouting “ho”, and gathering in football stadiums and praying to become better man.

(Clatterbaugh 1997: 1)

If we try to initiate a debate about masculinity we face a vital question that foreshadows complexity and ambiguity to come: where do we start? According to Connell (cf. 1995: 7-27) the three most important theoretical attempts to describe masculinity are: naturalistic accounts based on Freudian theory, role theory and the assumption that masculine/ feminine are two fundamentally different sex roles, and finally recent studies, new men’s studies, which paid attention to historical, social and political contexts. Connell (cf. 1995: 65) concludes in his overview that a “coherent science of masculinity has not yet been produced” and even sees this attempt as impossible. In contrast to femininity, masculinity has always been taken for granted, it has been the standard and therefore natural (cf. Edley and Wetherell 1995: 2). The history books of the Western civilization emphasize this fact – with only a few exceptions, history was mainly written by men. Thus, it is no surprise that societies developed accordingly to them: when the Old Testament speaks of ‘people’ it means men, when Aristotle describes the pursuit of ‘eudaimonia’ he naturally addresses men, and the French Revolution calls only for ‘fraternité’. Even language seems to be all masculine: the Latin grammar marks a group of 100 women and one man with a masculine grammatical suffix – words like ‘woman’ and ‘mankind’ even remind us today that Western societies have always been patriarchal societies (cf. Edley and Wetherell 1995:2). For this reason we are facing the question how we shall talk about something that is and has always been omnipresent, something that has always been considered as the most normal and natural thing ever.

For the longest time in history the correct answer for this question was: not at all. There is still a lack of articulation when it comes to masculinity, a problem that Kimmel calls the “invisibility of masculinity” (Kimmel 2000: 7). If we enter a library we find hundreds of books about feminism, female emancipation and equal rights, but only a few about men. The reason is that from a historical and social perspective femininity has always been the other, the ‘abnormal’ thing, which needed to be further
investigated. On the other hand there was no such reason for masculinity, due to its normality. Invisibility in connection with masculinity may sound paradox in a patriarchal society, but it clearly indicates that the question of masculinity is not only connected to the physical and psychological issues, but also to the question of power relations and dominant groups in society, which define the standards for ‘normal’ (cf. Edley and Wetherell: 1995: 2). It seems even more paradoxical that serious academic research about men and their habits stem from femininity studies. We will definitely not focus on gender debates in this thesis, however it has to be pointed out that our analysis will sometimes refer to the work of feminist movement for good reasons: on the one hand, studies about men would not even exist without the ambitions of female emancipation. On the other hand, the following chapters will show that defining the masculine self through its opposite, the other, the non-masculine is very popular (cf. Whitehead and Barrett 2001: 4).

What the history of studies about men and women shows, is that neither the femininity studies nor the masculinity studies as such exist. Whitehead and Barrett (2001: 2) explain that we are looking at an “area of sociology that has, since the mid-1950’s, drawn on many theories, including structural functionalism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, critical structuralism and […] post-structuralism”. While the “sociology of masculinity is relatively recent” (ibid. 2001: 2) femininity studies can be traced back to the 18th century. Since then there have been several movements, or waves, in which women tried to handle their societal position and expectations, their oppression under male dominance and their struggle for equal rights, independence and self-definition (cf. ibid: 2001: 3-4). While it was an act of compensation at the beginning, the movements became more radical after World War II, especially in the 1960’s and 1970’s: as a result of the constant oppression in private and public spheres, female activists did not only highlight the political dimension of gender debates, but they also made trivial issues, such as home matters, or intimate topics, such as sexuality, public (cf. ibid: 2001: 5). Obviously, this criticism contained a lot of vital information about men’s lives. As a consequence, some academic fields began to draw their attention on men and masculinity. Edley and Wetherell (cf. 1995: 3) say that still in the 1970’s, various theories that represented different male perspectives came up as a backlash to radical feminism: some theorists claimed that patriarchy was normal, natural and biological, others agreed that the existing system of sex relations needed a “radical shake up” (ibid: 3). Whitehead and Barrett (cf. 2001: 1) see a turning point in the 1980’s and 1990’s when finally academic writing about masculinity exploded – especially within
sociology and social theories every possible field men were involved in, ranging from sport and family to ethnicity and power relations was investigated (cf. ibid: 1). Connell, Hearn and Kimmel (2005: 1) point to the appearance of several scholarly journals in this time, such as *Journal of Men’s Studies* or *Men and Masculinities* to support this opinion. Men’s Studies emerged as an equivalent for Women Studies, cultural research analyzed the influence of images of men in popular media, while medical research questioned the biological basis of sexual behavior, and sociologists paid attention to aspects of men’s lives, such as fatherhood and sexuality (cf. Whitehead and Barrett: 3). In addition to that, Connell, Hearn and Kimmel (cf. 2005: 2) as well as Whitehead and Barrett (cf. 2001: 4) highlight that we must not forget about the studies, which specialize on ethnical minorities of masculinity, such as Black, Latino and Asian masculinity – as indicated in the introduction, we will not be able to cover these fields, but concentrate on White masculinity in the Western World. Despite the fact that this enormous body of research is overwhelming, Connell, Hearn and Kimmel (cf. 2005: 1) remind us that only awareness of the variety and the complexity makes masculinity visible.

The interest in masculinity was not only restricted to scientific research, but also became a highly popular topic in public. Whitehead and Barrett (2001:7) argue that “notions of how men should perform their gender have never been more subject to media and popular interpretation than they are in this global, post modern age”. Edley and Wetherell (1995: 5) see this popularity as ambivalent and criticize that pseudo men’s movements, which especially emerged in the 80’s and 90’s, presented “mytho-poetic” concepts rather than scientific facts. Edley and Wetherell (cf. ibid: 5) agree that the confusion about the definition of masculinity in America today can largely be traced back to this time. They see the situation of men in the 21st century as double-edged: men are generally aware of their gender status, but they are also bound to tradition, disoriented by the ever-changing adjustments in men’s lifestyle magazines, and movies, and overcharged by countless advice of how they can improve as fathers, lovers or husbands (cf. Edley and Wetherell: 1995: 4). A broader perspective, an interdisciplinary point of view, helps to emphasize how challenging the dramatic events of the 20th century were for men. As a detailed analysis of these events would be beyond the scope of this paper, we can only touch this subject cursory: Edley and Wetherell (cf. ibid:4) point out that not only world-changing events like the two World Wars or the Vietnam trauma, especially for American men, affected the perception of masculinity, but also economic changes like industrialization and urbanization, social
progress like human rights movements or female emancipation and cultural
development like globalization, to name only a few examples. Whitehead and Barrett
(cf. 2001: 5-6) see especially the rise of employed women, the constant reduction of
physical work in favor of technology-based solutions and the increase of divorces and
single status households responsible for the radical break of the centuries-old
Western stereotype of men as fathers, husbands and breadwinners. In addition to that,
women today are about to enter the last traditional masculine domains, as they hold
leading positions in business and politics. With the 21st century even more
complications are about to come, as nobody can foresee the effects of Facebook,
Twitter and other social communities on gender identities. However, these thoughts
about the status quo take us back to our initial question: most people would agree that
the analysis of masculinity must start at the beginning of life itself, in order to explain
what role biology and nature play for men.
3 The essence of masculinity

We think of manhood as eternal, a timeless essence that resides deep in the heart of every man. We think of manhood as a thing, a quality that one either has or doesn’t have. We think of manhood as innate, residing in the particular biological composition of the human male, the result of androgens or the possession of a penis. We think of manhood as a transcendent tangible property that each man must manifest in the world, he reward presented with great ceremony to a young novice by his elders for having successfully completed an arduous initiation ritual.

(Kimmel: 2001: 266)

It is interesting and somehow paradox to see how traditional conviction can triumph over scientific results. Despite the revolutionary insights in men’s lives in the last decades the opinions that a man’s anatomical idiosyncrasies compulsory implicate a specific masculine behavior, and that a true masculine core is innate to every male human being still exists. Whitehead and Barrett (2001: 7) confirm that although there has never been more “evident multiplicity of masculine expression, traditional masculinities and associated values still prevail”, meaning that many men continue to act “dominant and hard, deny their emotions” and “resort to violence as a means of self-expression”, as this is often considered as ‘natural’ masculine attitude. The belief in a masculine essence is also nourished by mass media and political institutions for obvious reasons – Edley and Wetherell (cf. 1995: 12-13) refer to Sandra Bam’s work, who explained the problematic policy behind naturalistic perspectives on masculinity: labeling men as ‘designed’ by nature to rule and make decisions, it consolidates existing power relations and maintains patriarchy. In addition to that, the idea of a ‘biologic determination’ makes sure that men fulfill a specific social role, which makes them ideal citizens and consumers. The conviction about masculinity being preprogrammed in a man’s DNA or his mind has a long tradition and still an enormous influence today, thus we will take a look at the arguments of this opinion.

3.1 The biological myth of masculinity

Ortner and Whitehead (1981 cited in Edley and Wetherell: 1995: 9) make us aware that every known culture “makes a distinction between males and females”. The most obvious way of differentiating between men and women has always been their physical differences: men have a penis to mark their manhood, while women have
breasts and a vagina (cf. Edley and Wetherell: 1995: 9). Despite the effects of female emancipation in the last decades, there is still a deep conviction that men are fundamentally different from women. According to Warren (2003: 3) the ‘naturalistic’ theories experience a renaissance today because explanations in gender debates such as offered by Stets and Burke (1996: 997) who distinguish between “gender identity” (what society says that being a man means), “gender roles” (expectations of gender related behavior) and “gender attitudes” (what people associated with one’s gender) sound rather confusing. In addition to that, Warren (cf. 2003: 4) explains that the gender roles we experience in daily life seem to support the ‘naturalistic’ opinion. As a result, Clatterbaugh (1997:10) explains, biologic accounts of masculinity claim to give simple and uncomplicated answers: according to sociobiology “social institutions and practices are significantly determined by the genetic predispositions of men and women.” However, this is the fundament for gender stereotypes, which associate men to a specific behavior, for example that men are said to be naturally unemotional. Edley and Wetherell (cf. 1995: 9) criticize that the word stereotype by definition shows that it does not reflect reality: they may be taken from a ‘real’ background, but they exaggerate and ignore the variety and plurality of men’s lives. However, we can use stereotypes as an impulse to investigate the empirical facts behind these vague opinions that automatically label men as the big, strong and competitive sex. (cf. ibid: 9) Before we turn to the outcome of medical and biological research, we need a short excursion to comment on scientific research and its results.

Science claims to be neutral and only interested in the truth. However, history has shown several times that defining the truth is also a question of interpretation. Anthropologists in the late 19th century started medical research about differences related to race and sex. Subject of investigation was the relation of intelligence, sex and brain size. The outcome was unsurprising and ‘proved’ what everybody had known before anyway: the white race is superior to all other races, and men are superior to women because of their bigger brains and their bigger body size (cf. ibid: 11). This is just one of many examples in the history of masculinity studies that reminds us always to observe academic research critically – background and conditions need to be questioned. These early attempts to ‘investigate’ masculinity were abused to justify the existing social systems and its power relations, as Brittan (1989:4) highlights. So, the question about the biological basis of masculinity was not only an academic matter, but also a political one. The effects of presenting men as naturally unemotional, physically strong and dominating are obvious: it makes men to
ideal candidates, chosen by nature, to lead and rule. In other words, it authorizes men to power in society (cf. Edley and Wetherell 1995: 12). The feminist movement rejected the existence of psychological differences between men and women: they insisted on women being as emotional as men, with the only difference that men are taught not to show their emotions. In order to highlight the contradictions in the public opinion about men, feminists explained that labeling women as more caring and cooperative would make them even more suitable for government. This means that if men are more independent and assertive, it is the result of a cross-generational and life-long learning process, rather than the result of a biological fact (cf. ibid: 12). However, at the beginning of masculinity studies insights like these were far away. Until the 20th century the majority of people was convinced that what makes a man manly is predetermined within his body, regulated by his hormonal balance.

3.1.1 Genes, hormones and chromosomes

Clatterbaugh (1997:18) explains that biological conservatives did not only “reject the rational utopianism of Enlightenment”, but also refer to Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution for evidence: according to this perspective “society is made up of individuals whose ancestors were biologically successful – that is, whose genes survived into future generations” (ibid:18). This means that if men act “traditionally masculine and women traditionally feminine, it is because these behaviors have allowed them to be biologically successful” (ibid: 18). In other words, whoever dares to challenge predetermined roles of men and women acts against nature, or God’s will. However, it is clear that differences between the two sexes exist, just as there are idiosyncrasies that can be identified as typical for men. The only question that causes disputes in academic research is the reason for these differences. In other words – are men born with a masculine gene in their DNA or not? To answer this question it is absolutely essential to separate masculine identity markers basing on a biological fundament, from those identification markers basing on adapted behavior, tradition or social convention. This distinction is insofar problematic as these two factors normally go together, although there is no necessary connection between them, what Edley and Wetherell (cf. 1995: 14) try to illustrate with the following example: as explained before, the most obvious and in our society usual factor for the determination of a man is his penis. Normally, a boy (born with a penis) is given the name ‘Mario’ instead of ‘Maria’, he might be encouraged to play football instead of ballet, he might wear shorts
instead of skirts and so on. ‘Normally’ in this case must not be misinterpreted as a judgmental category, but it means that this would happen in 99 of 100 cases. This chain of identification and presumptions also works in the other direction: if we do not know Mario and just see him as a grown-up walking down the street in a black suit, we automatically presume that Mario has a penis, which is an act of masculine identification due to our social conventions (cf. ibid: 15). What we are trying to emphasize with this example is that on the one hand there are identity markers that objectively belong to the ‘male nature’, which we cannot influence. On the other hand, there are also variable gender displays that we can chose: provided that plastic surgery is no issue for Mario, he will always have a penis, he will get body hair and a deep voice, if he likes it or not. What he will be able to choose is to call himself ‘Maria’, wear skirts and go to the ballet instead if he wishes to do so.

Fausto-Sterling (1995: 128) sees one of the roots of biologic approaches towards masculinity in the 1920’s and analyzes medical research, carried out by the American psychologist John Money. According to these studies, which had an enormous influence on the later decades, she says that biology defines the fragile starting point for male life as follows: “[…] during fetal development a single embryonic primordium – the indifferent fetal gonad – can give rise to either an ovary or a testis” (ibid: 128). Edley and Wetherell (1995: 17) pick up this thought and remind us that at any time in history a penis has always been the ‘ultimate symbol’ for manliness. However, the penis is not responsible for all the other anatomical characteristics that identify a man - therefore it cannot be the ‘ultimate proof’ for manliness. They (cf. ibid: 17) follow up this essential question and find out that in this case size truly does not matter: it is the smallest biological units in the body that determine the male sex. More precisely, Edley and Wetherell (ibid: 17) explain that the body consists of many trillion cells, containing an identical set of 46 chromosomes arranged into pairs. Each of these chromosomes, in turn, is made up of a string of thousands of different genes, which can be usefully, if somewhat euphemistically, thought of as the ‘blueprints’ for the constitution of the entire human organism. Of the 23 pairs of chromosomes, 22 are called autosomes. They regulate and control most of the physical characteristics of the individual human being. The twenty-third pair is the sex chromosomes, and it is these, the biological scientists assure us, which determine the person’s sex.
Gerschick (2005: 369) describes in other words that “the 23 pairs of human chromosomes […] carry between 80,000 and 100,000 genes that regulate the expression of all physical, psychological, and behavioral characteristics”. He concludes that these genetic differences are said to be responsible for the production of ‘masculine’ hormones, which then regulate what preferences, interests or anxieties a man has (cf. ibid: 369). However, approximately one half of the population has two X chromosomes (named after the shape), and the other half has an X and a much smaller Y chromosome. Fausto-Sterling (1992: 129) adds that early biologists called it “SDY (for Sex-Determining-Gene on the Y)” and referred to it as the “master gene” – men had it, women lacked it. Edley and Wetherell (1995: 19) also agree to the objective fact that the key factor for sexual differentiation is the “presence or absence of a Y sex chromosome”: in terms of size this means that the traditional stereotype of men being the bigger and stronger sex is not correct: women with the combination of XX chromosomes have the ‘bigger’ generic material than men with the XY chromosome. Even more important is that ‘character-forming’ genetic material, the ability to learn, the individual strengths and weaknesses, simply everything that creates a personality, lies in the 22 autosomes – the sex is determined by 23rd chromosome! This means that what we traditionally and conventionally define as ‘manliness’ cannot be related to genes. Generic material is primarily responsible for bodily characteristics, such as a penis, body hair or a deep voice. However, something like a masculine gene that predetermines men as men does not exist.

3.1.2 Non-physical differences and innate masculine behavior

The belief that there is an innate masculine behavior builds up on the idea that masculinity is implied in a man’s body. As we have seen on the previous page, this assumption can largely be traced back to early medical research, as examined by Fausto-Sterling (cf. 1992: 128). She (ibid: 128) criticizes that Money also developed a “list of ten road signs directing a person along the path to male”. Together with SDY, this guideline set a standard for normal (masculine – the presence of a Y chromosome) and abnormal (feminine – the absence of a Y chromosome) (cf. ibid: 129). She (ibid: 129) points out that the problematic aspect about it is that medicals interpreted their “own deeply social understanding of what it means to be male” into a neutral, biological process. Segal (cf. 1995: 65) highlights the significance of this misleading idea as she argues that non-physical differences do not only appear in stereotypes, but are
also responsible for the existence of sex roles that came up especially in the 50’s and 60’s in the United States. She describes them as “social expectations, rules and norms attached to a person’s position in society [that] will usually force individuals to conform to them” (ibid: 65). Edley and Wetherell (cf. 1995: 21) explain that the umbrella term for theories about sex related behavior is sociobiology. Sociobiology claims that spatial ability, mathematical reasoning and especially aggressiveness are part of the masculine character. As explained before, it uses evolution for justification: as women are bound to baring children by nature, men had to take care of hunting and other vital outdoor activities. Van den Berghe (1979: 197) says that biological conservatives call these ideas “conventional wisdom”. Gilder (cf. 1973: 97-98), who is a supporter of the opinion that especially aggressiveness is a unique and natural male characteristic, describes the male nature as competitive, violent and destructive. Even today we can still see many species in which aggressiveness, the production of adrenalin, is necessary to attack, hunt, and defend. Thus, men are said to have developed a higher level of aggressiveness in the evolutionary process (cf. Edley and Wetherell 1995: 25 - 28). Whitehead and Barrett (cf. 2001: 7) add that what we hear on the news every day, war, murder, terrorism, violence and rape – mostly committed by men – seem to verify this conservative opinion. However, Clare (cf. 2000: 22) clarifies that the rumor about testosterone being the natural source for aggressive male behavior is misinterpreted: not testosterone causes aggression, but aggressive behavior stimulates the production of testosterone.

It is not surprising that ideas of sociobiology were criticized as being not scientific and naive. Clare (2000: 217), a scientist himself, concludes that “such biological differences as exist between men and women are not of an order that casts in stone men as phallic supremacists, as sexual predators, or as violent killers”. Also McInnes (1998: 77) concludes “genitals and biological capacities aside, men and women are not different [...] Being a biological male does not confer masculinity“. There are several problems about evolutionary opinions: firstly, if aggressiveness were a unique male generic material it would have to be in the Y chromosome. However, as we already know, the majority of character-forming information can be found in the 22 autosomes and not in the sex defining Y, the 23rd chromosome. Even more important according to genetic scientists is that if something like a specific generic data that ‘causes’ aggression existed, which is very unlikely, it would be carried in the X chromosome (cf. ibid: 30). So, if this theory was true, women naturally had to be the more aggressive sex (double X chromosomes), rather than men with their (single X chromosome).
Further, another argument that identifies biological theory as misleading is the comparison with other cultures. Masculine social behavior and the status of men in different cultures around the planet show an enormous variation and are sometimes completely oppositional to the definitions of Western society. For example, Eskimo people show on their hunts that men do not have a better visual-spatial ability than women. For Eagly (1983 cited in Edley and Wetherell 1995: 23) this means that boys in Western societies have a better visual-spatial ability only because they receive more ‘training’ in this field, “ranging from sport to the choice of toys and games” – in other words, we misinterpret the result as a biologic advantage, but it is nothing more than a cultural effect. Edley and Wetherell (1995: 23) pick up this thought and argue that men are associated with power and aggression because they “occupy the most powerful roles in society ” which “encourages people to associate men with power, prestige and authority, [...] making them more likely to interpret men as knowing what they are talking about”. They (cf. 1995: 31-32) also take a look at other theories which saw the fundament of masculine behavior in the post-natal development of the human brain, its wiring and thickness and the functions of the hemispheres: beside contradictory results in the research of these theories, medicine was never able to prove the assumption that the anatomy of the brain is primarily responsible for aggressiveness (cf. ibid: 33).

### 3.1.3 Conclusion

Without the opinion that there is something unique about men, studies and research about gender would not exist. Of course, differences between the sexes and thus also unique male characteristics do exist – the question that is raised by ‘nature-nurture’ debate is if these characteristics that define masculinity can be found in the DNA. The opinion that masculinity is pre-programmed in a man’s body has a long tradition and is still a common belief today. Looking at the results of studies about the biological basis of masculinity, we cannot help but criticize that some studies were held under pseudo-academic conditions, or were politically motivated to maintain the existing societal system. As a result, these studies produced stereotypes rather than academic facts and unfortunately, still influence the perception of masculinity today. This chapter has also shown that even serious academic research in this field, such as sociobiology, genetic studies and others were not successful in finding clear evidence for this claim. Results about hormones and the brain structure as source for specific masculine
social behavior were not persuasive, if not to say contradictory. Genetic studies in 
general seem to ignore social and psychological factors or at least underestimate the 
complexity of human behavior. In addition to that, they naively tend to portray 
conventional manliness as the result of one specific gene. The fact that the biological 
determination process of eye color (which is compared to other physical or chemical 
processes within the human body a simple feature) is ‘caused’ by hundreds of 
different genes makes it more than unrealistic that there is one specific gene that 
causes the complex emotional cocktail for ‘aggressiveness’ (cf. Edley and Wetherell 
1995: 30). On the contrary, the results of medical research about the generic material 
of chromosomes make clear that masculinity does not lie in the biological data of men. 
In other words, there is no medical evidence for a necessary connection between the 
male sex and the conventional masculine behavior. Thus, the answer to the question 
what masculinity is cannot be found in the study field of biology. We will come back to 
the effects of the misleading idea that manliness is fundamentally determined by 
nature later. For now this collusion is in so far important as it refutes an old stereotype 
and leads us to the next question: if masculinity is not predetermined in a man’s body 
by nature, can it maybe be found in his psyche?

3.2 Psychological Basis of masculinity

The psychological account also starts the quest of masculinity at the physical basis of 
men. The difference is that it does not look for the masculine essence in a man’s body, 
but in his mind. This means that the focus is not on hormones, genes, and generic 
data but on “feelings, thoughts [...] and self-experience” (ibid: 38). The main argument 
is that a specific masculine identity cannot be found in biological evolution but in 
“family’s life and the boy’s early experiences of social relationships” (ibid: 38). The 
most popular attempt to define masculinity from a psychological perspective is the 
field of psychoanalysis, which is bound to the name Sigmund Freud. Connell (cf. 1994: 
12) points out that Freud’s contribution to masculinity studies is essential, although 
paradoxically he did not write a single essay on masculinity itself. Even more, 
psychoanalysis originally had nothing to do with sex and identity at all – he 
concentrated on “disorders of the nerves“ (ibid: 12), the issues of gender developed 
later in his career, step by step. Together with a number of colleagues he developed a 
theory based on medical practices for clinical psychological research in the late 19th 
century. Psychoanalysis was aiming at a systematical investigation of mental
structures and an analysis of how emotions and actions are organized, in order to explain the "origin of our psychic life" (Edley and Wetherell 1995: 38). Soon the theory left the strictly clinical purpose behind, as it gained enormous public popularity and made the principles of psychoanalysis appear to be suitable for everybody. In other words, psychoanalysis was seen as helpful to understand any man's life (cf. ibid: 38-39). As a consequence, many succeeding theories concentrated on the mental status of men as the source of masculinity, and built up on the results of psychoanalysis. Even theories that took social influences into account and dealt with role theory, social adaption and social behavior cannot deny their psychoanalytic origins.

3.2.1 Psychoanalysis

Stoller (cf. 1985: 2) describes psychoanalysis as a process in which a man's lived, real experience are subject of investigation. Freud, who had always been interested in what happens when the conscious mind is ‘switched off’, collected his findings in his first academic publication The interpretation of dreams (1900/ 1953a). As a man’s experience refers to his conscious awareness, he simply tells about the events that had happened to him in dreams, or in the past and describes how they appeared. This bunch of lose thoughts, memories and fantasies is then to be interpreted. Psychoanalysts search for patterns of “cause and effect” (Edley and Wetherell: 38), especially repeated patterns in their patients lives’ which could relate to early childhood experience. Of course, a man’s self-description is not to be taken for granted, as it is a human attitude to exaggerate or eliminate memories, to defend and deceive oneself consciously or unconsciously. Repressed feelings or wishes are often covered in layers of "subjective experience and [...] different levels of awareness and of emotions and motives" (ibid: 39). Bringing forward what is underneath these layers is what Freud and psychoanalytic theorists described as “depth analysis” (ibid: 39). Psychoanalysis has a long history and is not a “homogenous body of thoughts” (ibid: 39). The problem is that due to its popularity it reached a wide audience – thus the results of psychoanalytic research ranges from serious academic findings to abstruse and non-academic arguments. What all psychoanalytic theories have in common is the opinion that one single type of masculinity does not exist. There are many different masculine identities, which individually derive from a man’s inner core conflicts in the process of identification. Thus, the central theme in psychoanalytic analysis is early childhood experience in which self-awareness, struggle for independence, relation to
other people and the outside world forms the balance and compromise of conscious and unconscious (cf. ibid: 39-40).

Hirst and Wolley (cf. 1982, cited in Edley and Wetherell 1995: 41) point out that the key element in Freud’s theory about the development of masculinity is a man’s childhood. They explain that Freud sees the motivating forces behind a boy’s actions are innate drives he is born with. From the very beginning he experiences troubles and conflicts as his desires, wishes and his instinct, the “primitive and anarchic” (Edley and Wetherell 1995: 41) state, are suppressed. Frosh (1987: 36) adds that in order to become civilized members of society boys have to learn to swallow their individual desires “in the face of the power of the real world”. Primarily the parents are the organs of limitation and control as they teach him what is allowed and what is not. According to the Freudian theory the probably most formative parental restriction a boy experiences is what is known as the Oedipus complex. Coward (cf. 1983: 192) points out that the Oedipus complex, which Freud in his own words describes as “the fateful combination of love for one parent and simultaneous hatred for the other as a rival” (Freud: 1931, 229), is often mistaken as an explicit sexual desire in terms of adult sexuality. She corrects that sexuality in terms of young boys means that they are looking for satisfaction for their basic physical needs and desires. This means that boys get pleasure from eating, drinking, sleeping or being touched. As their mothers usually fulfill these desires, young boys are naturally attracted to them and start to see the father as a rival for the mother’s attention. Coward further explains that boys are neither biologically determined to be attracted to the other sex nor to the same sex – they are only attracted to pleasure and positive sensual experience. In other words, childhood ‘sexuality’ is a kind of sexuality that has not yet been “organized into conventional social forms” (Edley and Wetherell: 1995: 41). However, in the early relationship with his parents a boy discovers that his needs and desires cannot be fulfilled permanently: they have to be postponed or they are not permitted at all, such as the fact that intimate physical relations have to be “outside family groupings” (ibid: 42). At this stage parents also represent society, its norms and conventions (cf. ibid: 41). The result of this learning process is the beginning self-identification in which a boy learns to draw away his attention from his mother – he leaves the world of women to experience himself as a man. Edley and Wetherell (cf. 1995: 42 – 43) summarize that in this identification process the father turns from a rival to a role model, who sets standards and ideals for specific behavior. In this way, societal norms and
conventions are embodied in the father. As a result, the father becomes a ‘super-ego’ and the boy’s internal voice, which is the first experience of accepting male authority.

It is not surprising that Freud, who had the opinion that all human actions can be traced back to sexual desire, foregrounded sexual aspects of masculinity in psychoanalysis. Sexuality studies of course profited from Freud’s work as he initiated the discussion about the taboo of male sexual behavior. Edley and Wetherell (cf. ibid: 43) say that Freud explains a man’s development of distinguishing between an object of desire and love with the early experience of surprising his first choice of erotic desire, his mother. Moreover, Freud sees this initial denial as the reason why impotence and the inability to ‘perform’ is such a big issue for men. In Three Essays on the theory of sexuality (1900/ 1953b) he collects his assumptions that fear and anxieties are striking elements in male identity construction, which culminate in the fear of castration. Connell (1994: 13) explains that especially for Freud, but for psychoanalysts in general, adult masculinity is “constructed by a […] conflict-ridden process”. As a conclusion we can say that the masculine identity is a result of a young boy’s identification process in his very early years, and derives from the struggle between these innate desires and the strategic control of human communities. In contrast to a biological perspective Freud does not see an innate, generic potential that makes men masculine, but biologic instincts that all human beings have – hunger, security, aggressiveness and sexual desire. In other words, masculinity is not given by nature, but it is a product of the emancipation process between early instincts and societal rules. What Edley and Wetherell (cf. ibid: 44-45) also point out is Freud’s ‘other’ opinion about men: he sees femininity as a failed form of masculinity and women as inferior to men. In contrast to women, he sees men as able to discipline their feelings and passions, and put rational planned actions over spontaneous, emotional reactions. In addition to that, they show idealism to set actions outside the domestic circle, while women will never be as creative and outward looking as men (cf. ibid: 45). Although the stereotypical, judgmental stigmatizing ‘differences’ between men and women were corrected in psychoanalytic theories in recent years, they still are a major argument against Freud’s research about masculinity. Another problem that Connell (cf. 1995: 14) reminds us of is that psychoanalysis was developed as an individual therapy and not as sociology: neither was it tested among a large amount of participants, nor under identical conditions. Due to the fact that Freud and his colleagues “never became acquainted with the methods of social research” (ibid: 15) many claims and opinions remained speculative. In other words, the problem is that it
neither can be verified, nor falsified. Psychoanalytic research bases too much on unconscious factors and influences that make it nearly impossible to find clear academic proof for it. Most of all, the unconscious reality psychoanalytic researchers refer to differs from the social reality we are living in. However, Connell (ibid: 34) concludes that the “hypotheses, suggestions [...] and guesses about the making of gender such as Freud’s idea about castration anxiety, Adler’s argument about overcompensation, Jung’s suggestions about the gender dynamics of marriage” are fruitful sources for the analysis of masculinity.

3.2.2 Social behavioral theories

There are several theories that emerged from Freud’s psychoanalytic account, slowly opening the field of social behavior. One of the most influential in academic research is object relation’s theory which started to take a close look at the social environment young boys grow up in. Object relation theory shares Freud’s opinion that the basis of masculinity lies in the mental structure that results from a boy’s very early years, but go further when it comes to the significance of social relations: a boys' masculine identity depends on the question how he experiences and acquires masculine roles and behavior through his environment, for example at home or at school (cf. Edley and Wetherell 1995: 45-47). On the other hand, theories about social behavior and social adaption disagree with the Freudian idea of male superiority – even more, they asked the question if men are not the fragile and instable sex. Edley and Wetherell (cf. 1995: 45) argue that Freud’s claim about masculinity is absolutely oppositional to the results of research about transsexuals in the 1970’s: it is primarily men who desire to change their gender identity through dressing, drugs or plastic surgery. Miles (cf. 1992: 15) supports this opinion and confirms that constantly questioning the male identity and worrying about being masculine enough seems to constantly accompany the definition of masculinity. These negative and dark attitudes towards male identity construction in object relation theory suddenly made masculinity look like ‘abnormal’, and described it as the “absence of femininity” (Edley and Wetherell 1995: 46).

In general, social behavioral accounts see the beginning of a man’s life more optimistic and not driven by fear and anxiety. With distancing from Freud's theory of superiority of masculinity, theorists pay attention to the mother’s role in the process of male development. Edley and Wetherell (cf. ibid: 45-47) say that object relation
theorists such as Chodorow (cf. 1978 cited in ibid: 47) and Greenson (cf. 1968: 370-374) point out that the crucial time to establish the masculine identity is between 1.5 years and 3 years, which is a much earlier period than Freud suggested. They see this time as a fundamental cause for insecurity in a boy’s self-definition. Cooper (cf. 1986: 113) explains that this break occurs because a boy firstly identifies with his mother – she is his first social contact and shares a close physical and psychological relation with him. As soon as boys discover that their mothers are not ‘like’ them they start to de-identify with their mothers, and then re-identify with their fathers. This means that men have to go through a double identification process (cf. Hudson and Jacot 1991: 40). Thus, the process of male self-definition contains more risks: boys could fail in the dislocation process, or they could lack male role models and miss the re-integration process, as Edley and Wetherell (cf. 1995: 47) point out. Object relation theorists also agree with the Freudian theory that the father does play an important role in a boy’s very early social relations. They support the opinion that boys get in rivalry with their fathers about the mother’s attention and care. As long as this natural rivalry does not end up in a fear of punishment this stage must not be seen as negative – on the contrary – fathers are essential for a boy’s de-identification process from the mother as he presents an alternative role and supports him in differentiating between himself and other people (cf. ibid: 49-50). As fathers are usually biologically, locally and emotionally more distant to young children, Chodorow (cf. 1989: 34) explains that children in general, and especially boys develop away from the world of their mothers and towards the world of their fathers.

When we take a closer look at the de- and re-identification process, object relation theorists reminds us that babies are generally born undifferentiated. They do argue about how the de-identification process exactly takes place, but they agree on the fact that babies do not know anything about being male or female. Edley and Wetherell (cf. 1995: 49) refer to the work of Chodorow (1978), Olivier (1989) and Stoller (1985) to explain that babies just experience symbiosis with a caretaker, which is in 99% the mother: not only that they do not know anything about their sexual identity, they do not even know the boundaries of the ‘self’ and cannot distinguish between ‘me’ and ‘not me’. Frosh (cf. 1987: 180) further analyzes that the denial of their needs and the local and temporal absence of (usually) the mother babies learn to experience their mothers and themselves as different individuals. Psychoanalysts see this time as critical period in the development of a self-concept and the origin of self-confidence. As we already know, boys additionally have to go through a de-identification process
in this crucial period: a boy does not only experience himself as an individual being, naturally separated from the mother, but he also sees that his first identification figure is not 'like' him. Edley and Wetherell say that according to Chodorow (cf. 1978, cited in Edley and Wetherell 1995: 49), the reason for the dislocation is not biological or innate but lies in the mother’s behavior: at this age “boys may not know that they are male, but their mothers know” (ibid: 49). This means that mothers, as emancipated members of a society, project their knowledge and experience of gender identity on their sons. Scientific research has shown that mothers communicate consciously and unconsciously differently with their sons, both verbally and non-verbally. This is not at all to be misinterpreted as a judgmental question about love and affection (cf. ibid: 50). It is a simple and neutral fact that mothers experience their sons as male, as their gender opposites, and therefore usually treat them differently as their biologically similar daughters. As a result, a mother might have different expectations towards her son, depending on her internalized experience about gender identities (cf. ibid: 50). Finally, boys become masculine because their mothers treat them like they were already masculine.

One consequence of the experience in the identification process is that men relate mothers to dependency and the negation of feelings and needs – in other words men experience powerlessness. Object relation theorists also see this experience as the reason why boys do not like to be mothered and why they consciously and unconsciously reject their mothers, femininity and all the things that are associated to it in order to gain independence when they grow up (cf. Chodorow 1989: 34). Ryan (cf. 1985: 22) also thinks that the early feeling of vulnerability could explain why in most patriarchal cultures everything associated to femininity is seen as a threat to the existing system, and why masculinity is so often vigorously defined as ‘not feminine’. For Edley and Wetherell (cf. 1995: 51) this would also clarify why most men are anxious about intimacy and close relation, as it reminds them of their early experience of dependency and frustration. However, defining masculinity as the absence or the opposite of femininity is a more than fragile concept. The narrowness of this opinion would mean a permanent anxiety of losing manliness, as it would always be in danger of getting lost and collapsing into femininity, a problem that Fausto-Sterling (cf. 1995: 128) had already detected in medical research about the biological origin of masculinity. According to Formaini (1991, cited in ibid: 53) it is this constant insecurity about their manliness that makes it difficult for men to accept their “real and authentic selves, desires and needs”. As a result, masculinity becomes a “fantasy of conduct
and behavior which can never be realized in practice” (ibid: 51). As we have seen on the previous pages, object relation theorists agree that it is mostly men who show extreme dissatisfaction with their sexual identity, resulting in sexual disorder, perversity and sexual violence. Stoller (cf. 1985: 30-31) also confirms that while men seem to compensate internal conflicts with their sexuality through exhibitionism, fetishism and even rape, perversion among women is more than rare.

All in all, object relation theorists state that a man’s self-perception is formed in the very early family relationships. The difference to classic psychoanalysis is that Freud sees the essence of masculinity in instincts, innate drives and how they are suppressed –supporters of social behavioral account say that it is the internalization of the early social relationships that defines a man. The unconscious is not the result of innate human desires but the social influences a boy experiences in the very first months. Frosch (1987:4) also concludes that is not the biological drives that underlie male behavior, but the quality of the social relationships which then form “psychic structures [...] for later relationships”. The critical process of de- and re-identification is ambivalent: Stoller (cf. 1985: 28) for example sees the conflicts of this process as important, as the rejection of desires and frustration causes boys to grow and mature. He argues that it is this conflict that leads to a “barrier to symbiosis” (ibid: 29) and pushes boys in the direction they are supposed to develop. Others see de-identification period as dangerous and state that many sexual disorders can largely be traced back to this time. In addition to that, theorists are discordant about the significance of parental influence on a boy’s gender identity: Stoller (cf. 1985: 30-31) has investigated family structures with transsexuals for 25 years and found out that if fathers are absent or not available, mothers are over-involved in their son’s lives. As a result the core gender identity becomes female. He concludes that the more mother and the less father a boy experiences, the more feminine he will be. Edley and Wetherell (cf. 1995: 56) on the other hand refer to Ross (cf. 1986, cited in Edley and Wetherell 1995: 56) who disagrees with this result: he thinks that the absence of a masculine role model causes an exaggerated performance of masculinity, meaning aggression, violence and attraction to everything connected to masculinity. This example emphasizes that social behavior theories lack cohesion and congruence and are therefore far from being coercively persuasive. Apart from that, it has to be said that these approaches were successful in drawing the attention to social influences in the definition of masculinity. Even more, they made us aware of the fragility of masculinity and pointed out that labeling men as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ needs to be
reconsidered: neither biology (it is men who develop an additional Y-chromosome in their generic material) nor psychology (it is men who de- and re-identify) justify this ‘title’.

All in all, psychoanalysis was without a doubt the biggest revolution, and is still the most popular term in the history of psychology. In Western society the psychoanalytic account questioned the self-perception of human beings as being self-determined, rationally acting from reasonable, clear and comprehensible motives (cf. Edley and Wetherell 1995: 39). It challenged the traditional image of men who have been established as the rational and unemotional sex. From an academic perspective Freud’s theory is problematic: firstly, the assumption of male superiority buys into an old stereotype and has nothing to do with scientific fact. Secondly, psychoanalysis was a therapy for individuals and not carried out under scientific conditions of a social research. Thirdly and most important, psychoanalysis cannot be verified or falsified: an unconscious reality, in which according to Freud the basic principles of masculinity can be found are beyond the scope of measurable scientific research. In addition to that, psychoanalysis has a rather dark or “destructive, assimilating tendency in identification”, as Nixon (2003: 317) puts it. Most of all, it downsizes and sometimes even ignores external influences such as society. Connell (1995: 16) concludes that despite the critic, the fact that Freud had been corrected later and that Freud “opened more doors than he walked through”, we must acknowledge that “the leads he had given for the analysis of masculinity were remarkable enough”.

### 3.3 Conclusion

The opinion that there is some kind of a unique ‘essence’ that makes a man has a long tradition. It is the result of tradition that many people belief that masculinity lies ‘inside’ a man, in his mind, or even in his DNA. This means that if we talk about the biological and psychological principles of masculinity, it is essential to differentiate clearly between assumptions and scientific facts. This is easier said than done when in the United States political and religious hardliner still justify their opinion about what men should look like, do, or think according to their alleged biological basis. From today’s scientific, rational and critical worldview it is more than paradox to see that despite the fact that many theories which state the innateness of masculinity and the biological naturalness of ‘masculine’ behavior were not able to give scientific evidence
for their claims, presented contradictory results or even could be proven wrong, still seem to have a big influence.

A naturalistic account towards masculinity, biological and psychological approaches, defines an important starting point for our research: the anatomic idiosyncrasies that define men are not only the basis for the natural distinction from the female sex, but also for further gender display. Psychological approaches already indicate that masculinity is related to external factors. They pay attention to a boy’s very early experience with social relations, the very first steps of his identification process and his self-awareness of being an individual ‘self’ in the world. Although these theories concentrate on a young boy’s internal condition and the sequences within his mind when he grows up, they also describe the connection between the identification process and outside influences, such as parents. In this way, these psychological attempts to define masculinity highlight a critical period in the process of male self-determination. However, a psychological approach fails to acknowledge the multiple effects of society. The influence of other formative social relations a boy experiences such as school, friends or societal institutions are mainly ignored. ‘New’ theories, such as object relation theory, which emerged from psychoanalysis turned away from the misleading exaggeration of inner conflicts and unconscious forces towards the mental structures that underlie masculinity. Despite this beneficial progress for masculinity studies, the results of object relation theory and early attempts of social behavioral theories, they have to be criticized in the same way as Freud himself: theories that are in many ways not verifiable make it difficult to label them as scientific.

Neither biological nor psychological accounts of masculinity have serious medical evidence for their claims – on the contrary – their scientific results are not concordant, if not to say contradictory. Additionally, both perspectives naively reduce masculinity to a stable and fixed system, ignore human progress as well as developmental potential and underestimate the complexity of the human body and mind. It is true that early childhood experience does have an important influence on identity construction, but it is hard to believe that either a specific generic data or unconsciously acquired mental structures define masculinity and control a man for the rest of his life. Before we will now turn to the social construction of masculinity and we will dispose of once and for all the misleading idea of a ‘masculine substance’: masculinity is not innate, it is not something men are born with, but something they acquire – a ‘masculine essence’ does not exist.
4 The concept of masculinity

The starting point for this body of work remains the critique which feminists have advanced over the past twenty years. Central to these injunctions has been an analysis of men’s power and from this a problematizing of the dominant exclusive forms of masculinity which were seen to underpin it. What these injunctions have emphasized, then, has been the negative effects of dominant definitions of masculinity on women’s relationships with men in both the public and private worlds.

(Nixon 2003: 297)

According to psychoanalytic opinion, a man’s gender identity is primarily determined by the quality of family relationships he experiences in his very early years. Without a doubt it is true that this period is essential as the experience of sympathy and rejection builds up a boy’s mental fundament. He also implicitly acquires societal gender roles from his parents, depending on the way they perform them. However, the question occurs what happens when a boy leaves the isolated microcosm of his family and gets in contact with society itself. In order to become an accepted member of society everyone must experience the variety of society’s expectations, rules and values himself. David Lee and Howard Newby (1984: 256) describe the process of socialization as “the business of learning the normative standards of society”. Edley and Wetherell (1995: 70) explain in other words that it is “the process whereby members of the species homo sapiens become people: individuals who obey laws, vote in elections, marry, got to school and universities, hold down jobs, believe in God and so on”.

Scientific progress after World War I and socio-cultural studies acknowledged the enormous cultural variation of manhood, and also asserted that masculinity must be related to the organization of society. So, in this chapter we will not only turn to social constructionism, the only approach towards masculinity that was able to portray the flexibility of the concept, but also to the underlying, basic structures of society. The fact that Western society is democratic does not mean that it is neutral and objective – on the contrary – inequalities between men and women obviously show that not all people are valued equally. Additionally, it is certainly not a result of nature that most Western governments do not give homosexual men the same rights as heterosexual men. This example makes clear that there are dominant groups in society that support some forms of masculinity and oppress others. These power relations are complexly
expressed in different ways: patriarchy, capitalism, family, tradition, laws, politics and the media. Finally, they all result in the construction and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity, the prevailing version of manhood.

4.1 Learning to be manly

After agreeing that masculinity is rather nurtured than natured, Edley and Wetherell (cf. 1995: 70-72) say that some theorists developed the dramatic opinion that all social behavior is viewed as a kind of performance. This would mean that being a man is nothing more than playing a role. An established representation of this perspective in academic research is role theory, which is situated between psychology and sociology. According to Edley and Wetherell (ibid: 71) role theorists doubt that it is possible to say that people are “doing their own thing”. They say that male behavior is socially prescribed making men to “actors on a stage, playing out parts which have been assigned to them” (ibid: 71). Or as Connell (2001: 32) says: “Strict sex role theory treats masculinity precisely as a social norm for the behavior of men”. In other words, it supports the idea that masculinity is an act rather than an essence. Role theorists have the opinion that social roles are founded upon social positions and social expectations. Social positions depend on the cultural background and can be variable: political positions, institutional positions and positions of daily life – concrete examples of these categories would be a president, a priest and a sportsman. Each of these positions carries individual expectations – a president is expected to be capable of making decisions and deal justly, a priest reliable and patient and a sportsman energized and fair (cf. Edley and Wetherell 1995: 71) Edley and Wetherell (ibid: 72) point out that according to sex role theory expectations are not bound to the person, but to the position: they conclude that “as long as there is somebody to take over the part, the show goes on”. Connell (cf. 2001: 33) criticizes that due to this perspective, sex role theorists ignore any kind of individuality and personality and drift towards an essentialist account.

Important in the sex-role theory is the question of sex-role assimilation. Parsons (cf. Parsons and Bales 1953, cited in ibid: 78) who is one of the key figures of this theory in the middle of the 20th century compares societies to biological organisms: to fulfill the basic needs every single element must contribute to this process in order to keep the balance. In societies these elements are men and women who perform
contradictory social activities, which finally form a “perfectly complementary partnership” (ibid: 78). Blankenhorn (cf.1995: 114-115), a moral conservative, even sees one of society’s duties in the encouragement of traditional masculine behavior and attitudes, as they are beneficial contributions for society. The opinion that men are instrumentally oriented, while women are made for any kind of social actions, obviously refers to a naturalistic account and Sigmund Freud. Parson finally faced the same critic as Freud, due to the unscientific claim of unconscious mental mechanism. However, he did open the field of social learning theory in which later any psychoanalytic concepts were eliminated. Social learning theorists share the opinion that boys are simply ‘taught’ to behave appropriately and simply imitate their fathers (cf. Edley and Wetherell 1995: 79) In the same moment, Edley and Wetherell (cf. ibid: 72) relativize the common misunderstanding that all behavior is prescribed, by using the example of a wedding: bride and groom are expected to follow a certain script, to exchange rings, to kiss at a certain time and so on. While the actual wedding procedure follows strict guidelines, the couple is free to “improvise’ with their new roles as husband and wife” (ibid: 72) as soon as it leaves the church. This means that although expectations exist, the practical output differs from one person to another: it is people who “actively bring social roles and thus social structures to life” (ibid: 72) as they depend on “socially-shared roles and rules” (ibid: 72). Acting out a role, or bringing it to life means that men consciously, or unconsciously display themselves as “a particular kind of person […] to an audience” (ibid: 72). The comparison of masculine behavior with theatrical performance is indeed useful to highlight the importance of modern social life, but Dahrendorf (cf. 1973: 13-14) warns that this metaphor is not to be accepted at a face value: he reminds us that an actor on a stage displays unrealistic events, puts down his dramaturgical mask as soon as the show is over and returns to his real life, and his true self. The masculine performances in society are more than masks; they cannot be taken off because there is no absolute and true reality to which a man can return. In other words this means that although men sometimes do not behave accordingly to their emotions and thus can feel a distance between themselves and their actions, they do not have to think actively about their gender performances. As Edley and Wetherell (1995: 78) put it, every man would probably sense himself as “‘being’ masculine rather than ‘playing’ masculinity.

The discussion about ‘being’ or ‘playing’ masculine brings us to the question what ‘masculine’ or ‘manly’ actually means in our society. Colloquial phrases such as ‘acting like a man’ or ‘taking it like a man’ clearly refer to something that is accepted
as conventional masculine behavior. According to Edley and Wetherell (ibid: 74) especially in the United States the importance of the definition of masculinity was the “dominant paradigm in American psychology” between 1930 and 1970. The starting point was a severe anxiety about the loss of manliness because “50 per cent of their World War I recruits were declared unfit for the military service” (ibid: 74). As a result there was an urgent feeling to ‘recreate’ masculine men. Edley and Wetherell (cf. ibid: 74) add that the book *Sex and Personality* by Terman and Miles (1936) also had an enormous influence. They presented masculinity and femininity as “two opposing types of personality, located on either end of single bipolar dimension” (ibid: 75). According to their scale men could be feminine and vice versa, but psychological health was determined upon the question if men behaved appropriately to their gender roles - men with ‘feminine’ attitudes were seen as sick. Terman and Miles developed a test that is a perfect example for the kind of pseudo-academic research Fausto-Sterling (1995: 128) had criticized in the previous chapters: the main part of the test was a list of ‘characteristics’ that were seen as gender differentiating: the participants had to choose from a pair of words, for example between blue and pink. They got +1 point for choosing blue, the ‘male’ answer, and -1 for choosing pink, the ‘female’ answer (cf. Edley and Wetherell 1995: 76). It is needless to say that this judgmental and stereotypical work has been in the center of critic in later decades, due to the unscientific form. Unfortunately, this opinion remained dominant in the United States until the 1970’s when feminists such as Bem (1974) and later Sedgewick (1985) corrected this misinterpretation: Sedgewick (cf.1985: 15-16) made clear that masculinity is a dichotomy, a flexible dimension which was supported by Bem (1974 cited in Edley and Wetherell 1995: 76), who described masculinity and femininity as “independent rather than oppositional states”. All in all, Terman and Miles’ male-female test is another example of early research that did not describe masculine personalities, but the stereotypical behavior people expect.

If we return to the question what concrete characteristics can be named for ‘typically’ manly, Edley and Wetherell refer to the results of Pleck and Saywer (1974), Fasteau (1974) and Pleck and Thompson (1987). According to the data they had collected, America defines the masculine role with the “dual maxims ‘get ahead’ and ‘stay cool’” (ibid: 77). David and Brannon (1976: 11-35) further subdivided these basic attributes into four essential categories to explain what makes a man:

‘No sissy stuff’ – avoid anything that could be labeled as feminine (emotional, passive)
‘The big wheel’ – success and status in sexual and financial issues
‘The sturdy oak’ – toughness, confidence and independence
‘Give em’ hell’ – aggression and violence

Edley and Wetherell (cf. ibid: 77) see these categories as embodiment of traditional male values and attributes. Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (cf. 2003: 44) locate the origin of these and other sex roles in the domestic circle: although fathers are not the ‘role models’ any more and despite the fact that there has been a “conceptual shift from simple models of sex role reproduction to the active production of complex identity formations” (ibid: 45), a conservative image of fathers as caretakers and protectors still persist today, especially in the US. Conservatives such as Gilder (cf. 1986: 95) and Blankenhorn (1995: 102) do not only see feminism as damaging to the fundament of society, but also as responsible for the destruction of family structures, due to the fact that androgyny social roles leave no place for traditional fatherhood or traditional sexual bonding between men and women. However, not only parents but also institutions like school, church or the media encourage boys to conform to the masculine sex-role. The process starts at home when parents rather paint a baby boy’s room blue instead of pink and would buy action figures instead of dolls for playing. It continues at kindergarten and at school in the games boys play, in the way boys are spoken to and in the way boys are encouraged to behave and participate. In addition to that, male role models in music industry, movies and television support this masculine role (cf. Edley and Wetherell 1995: 78). Buchbinder (cf. 1998: 34-38) identifies the problem about male sex-roles (similar to biologic accounts) in the attempt to offer orientation for boys and young men – but in doing so, they refer to a “deep masculine” (ibid: 34), a transcendent, archaic state of masculinity that does not exist. Connell (cf. 2001:32) describes sex role theory as a normative definition that tries to set blueprints for masculinity, which are embodied by fictitious men such as movie heroes – unfortunately, nobody is able to match the ‘blueprints’ of these ‘super-men’. Connell (cf. ibid: 33) therefore legitimately asks where the sense in setting a standard that hardly anybody meets is. According to social learning theorists, the motivation of gender socialization for a boy is that he is “rewarded for performing its constituent behaviors” (Kohlberg 1966, cited in Edley and Wetherell: 1995: 82). This opinion is contradicted by cognitive developmental approaches, which state that “once the boy becomes aware of his gender status, the impetus for performing sex-appropriate behavior originates from within the boy himself. He does not need to be tempted and coerced. Rather, a supposedly natural tendency ‘to ascribe worth to
himself impels the boy not only to see his own gender as inherently superior, but also to view all objects and activities associated with his gender as similarly preferable” (ibid: 82). The disaccord of these theories is in so far beneficial as it draws our attention to new aspects about the discussion, such as the process of growing up, the persons, institutions and events that occur on this way.

The opinion that men act out roles sounds true and familiar from the perspective of practical experience. Every man can remember situations where he has been taught by his parents to behave in a certain way, or advised what is or is not suitable for a man. Even the idea of imitation seems credible as a man's mimic and gestural movements often seem identical to his father’s. Role theorists see more behind actions like these than just intuitive behavior. One of the most remarking changes in this theory is that this perspective moves away from psychoanalytic writing as it describes aspects that are observable for scientific research. Compared to a biological or psychoanalytic account it does not only contain better explanations for the development of men in the history of humankind, but it also highlights the connection between society and the individual. The message of role theorists could be summarized with the conclusion that men would be different if they were taught differently. In this way, men and women share the same faith – both suffer from expectations and could develop their full human potential without predetermined sex-roles (cf. ibid: 84-86). Whitehead and Barrett (2001: 10) warn that this oppressive socialization process makes men more likely to suffer from disorders related to stress and generally leave many men “locked in a [...] crude display of masculinity”. Pease (cf. 2000: 1) does not only support this point of view but adds that men are in the same way oppressed by sex-roles as women, leaving them emotionally damaged and more likely to relearn masculine characteristics such as aggression and violence.

It might be true that a man acts differently at the office than he acts in a group of friends, but the argumentation sex-role theorists offer for this conclusion is not persuasive enough to give clear answers. If the ‘social-self performance’ needs to be distinguished from the ‘true-self performance’, where does the true self come from? Which influences affect it and if they are not social ones, what are they then? Or has the true self always been constant and stable in its form? Even more important is the question that if a man’s life is a simple collection of many different socially predetermined roles, does something like a true, inner self exist at all? All in all, role theory is supposed to be a social theory but overlaps with and sometimes even bases
on biological accounts. Additionally, role theory underestimates the fact that men have always held the more powerful positions in society and ignores that dominant versions of masculinity, which have been established over the years “reproduce or maintain” (Edley and Wetherell 1995: 92) power relations. Pleck (cf. 1981: 1) uses the same argument and does not only criticize that role theorists portray masculinity as a static role, but also that they do not deal with power and inequalities within a society at all. So, role theory does not only fail to see that masculinity is a question of ideology but it also is blind to a discursive account and even to the obvious development of men in the history of humankind: if a young man simply has to imitate old role models in order to become a member of society, why then are there so many different types of manliness in history? Why was the idea of being a ‘real man’ in the 1950’s completely different to what the Puritan version? Why do men act differently today than they used to in the middle age? Change does happen to the definition of masculinity as a consequence of the negotiation process of different groups in society and due to economic and technological influences.

4.2 Power relations and dominant ideologies

We have seen that there is a simple idea behind role theory, namely that a man’s identity is determined by his position in society. Role theorists point in the right direction with the opinion that this position is a result of social expectations and cultural norms. (cf. Edley and Wetherell 1995: 96). However, role theory does leave many questions unanswered. Despite the fact that we will pay special attention to the categories capitalism and patriarchy in the coming sections, as they are necessary in order to understand the mechanisms of Western society, we leave the “categorical theories” (ibid: 127) of masculinity behind. In doing so we will be able to find answers where role theorists and others came to their limits. Categorical theories try to persuade us that masculinity is bound to a singular cause. Although they each deal with important issues of masculinity, such as biology, family and sex, they exaggerate specific aspects at the expensae of other equally important details. However, masculinity has to be understood as a whole – in other words, we must be aware of its multidimensionality, variety and complexity. Edley and Wetherell (ibid: 128) deal with this problem as they describe masculinity as a “set of social processes, activities and practices which are continually changing through history.” They (ibid: 78) also explain: “This system throws up certain social structures or constraints on people’s actions,
interacting with social systems of class and race. Certain practices and activities become dominant and habitual in certain areas of society as a result of prevailing material pressures. As a consequence, different types of men emerge […] and different types of masculinity” (ibid: 128). Nixon (cf. 2003: 300-301) adds that masculinity is, like all identities, an invented category, which he describes as “the product of the cultural meanings attached to certain attributes, capacities, dispositions and forms of conduct at given historical moments” (ibid: 301). Although it is a characteristic of such a category to “lack the guarantee of a foundation” (ibid: 301), it would be a mistake to discount them as fiction: firstly, they contain cultural information, secondly they “help us to locate ourselves in relation to others” (ibid: 301) and thirdly support the process of organizing “a sense of who we are” (ibid: 301).

Feminist studies pointed out that “most organizations are saturated with masculine values” (Burton: 1991: 3). If we follow this comment we come to an aspect that has been neglected so far in our discussion – power relations. This brings us to the “basic underlying principle, the notion of the social determination of masculinity” (Edley and Wetherell 1995: 96), or in other words to class division, capitalistic ideology and patriarchal structures. This “materialist account”, as Edley and Wetherell (ibid: 97) put it, is necessary to emphasize the “close connections between expressions of masculinity and power relations within broader society” (ibid: 96). They further explain that “people’s experience and sense of themselves will reflect their economic position, or […] will reflect the currently dominant human solutions to the material problems of life” (ibid: 97). Capitalism is one of these attempts, trying to organize a society’s basic economic needs such as the production and exchange of goods, labor, personal property, security and family life – the Feudal system in the middle age was another attempt, dealing with the social and economic circumstances of that time (cf. ibid: 97).

These circumstances have an enormous influence on the definition of masculinity, as they offer a social and economic frame in which a man builds up his identity and experiences himself as masculine, automatically reflecting the norms and ideals of the society he lives in: History shows, as Whitehead and Barrett (2001: 8) identified, that change in the image of men is connected to larger social and political concerns, such as “possible wars, economic recessions, rises in crime, educational underachievement, or the moral fabric of a nation”.

Before we will analyze how power relations work in society, it is interesting to investigate the term ‘norm’ itself: in one of the previous sections we have heard
Connell’s (cf. 2001: 32-33) criticism about the unrealistic ‘blueprints’ norms produce. Also Edley and Wetherell (cf. 1995: 90) agree that the definition of ‘norm’ often leads to confusion, even in scientific research. On the one hand it can be described as “any type of rule that is actually recognized and followed by a substantial portion of the membership of a group” (ibid: 90), meaning that it can describe how men usually behave. On the other hand, it can also refer to an idealistic norm, to how society expects men to behave. This irresponsible usage of the term has had dramatic effects in scientific research – especially sex role theorists saw any kind of variance not only as different, but as a failed attempt of becoming a member of society (cf. ibid: 90). Edley and Wetherell (ibid: 90) legitimately speak of a “stigmatization of those who were interpreted as being ‘abnormal’”. As a result, men often excessively conform to the accepted normative ideal, as nobody wants to be stigmatized as ‘outlaw’, as unnatural or unhealthy. In addition to that, the strong tendency to focus on the idealistic standard in masculinity studies disregarded nearly everything that was not white middle class: it is certainly no coincidence that there are hardly any sex role studies about black males, or that gay men have been ignored completely for a very long time (cf. ibid: 90).

A distinction between descriptive and idealistic meaning of ‘norm’ makes clear that norms do not objectively describe what is usual and most common, but represent the “privileged versions of masculinity which the holders of social power wish to have accepted” (ibid: 90). This does not only lead us to the question who would benefit from a dominant ‘sex-role norm’, but encourages us to ask what power relations actually are and how they work. Foucault (cf. 1981: 99) indicates that power relations are neither stable nor static and become visible in many different aspects of society, to which we will turn shortly – economic structures, patriarchal ideologies, or medial representations. Holter (2005: 17) shares the opinion that power relations are difficult to explain as they are more an “implicit notion than […] a systematic theory” and correspond to “widely held social norms, cultural images, and behavioral patterns”. Collinson and Hearn (cf. 2005 : 295) explain that power relations traditionally referred to inequalities between men and women, concerning paid work, societal positions and domestic responsibilities. Today we know that they also exist within masculinity itself, known as hegemonic masculinity. The result is a dominant ideology of masculinity, which Beynon (2002: 162) describes as “a way of looking at, interpreting and living the world”. The problem is that ideologies sometimes “give a ‘true’ insight into reality” (ibid: 162) but mostly they support and represent the “interests of a particular class” (ibid:
Collinson and Hearn (cf. 2005: 295) argue that this creation of dominant and oppressed versions of masculinity shows the necessity to redefine the position of those who are considered as ‘other’. Edley and Wetherell (1995: 91) agree to this perspective and mind that homosexuality, for example, should be reinterpreted as an act of resistance of an oppressed group, as an attempt to “redefine normality in ways more in line with their own interests”. All in all, the following sections will explain how patriarchy, capitalism and ideologies help us to identify masculinity as a concept constructed by society.

4.2.1 Social Constructionism

Due to scientific progress, especially the work of feminist studies, and the awareness that no research has been able so far to portray the complexity of masculinity adequately lead the way to social constructionism. Social constructionism considers a culture’s social, economic and political background and thus identifies masculinity as a constructed concept. Connell (cf. 2005: 79) supports the theory as he emphasizes that influences on both, the macro- and micro-level, need to be considered: for example, men in Germany, who grow up in a politically stable system, develop a different form of masculinity than young men in Israel, who are confronted with occupation and resistance, or as South African Zulu men, who experience violence and imprisonment. Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (cf. 2003: 85) say that these cross-cultural investigations were beneficial for social constructionism to prove that masculinity is socially constructed. Whitehead and Barrett (2001: 20) explain that the theory builds up on post-structuralism and the ideas of Foucault, Lacan, Derrida and de Beauvoir – in the field of Queer theory it gained academic popularity through Judith Butler. They describe post-structuralism as the account that linked “social action and power relations with identity processes” (ibid: 20). From this point of view, masculinity is “always in process, never finally accomplished” (ibid: 20). This means “there is no core, grounded, or fixed self, but rather a fluid arrangement of multiple subject positions” (ibid: 20). Benwell and Stokes (cf. 2007: 14) see the most important distinction in social constructionism between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’: while ‘sex’ refers to biological differences like penis, vagina, breasts and body hair, ‘gender’ means the ‘roles’ men perform in society. As we already know from the previous chapters, men are not interested in cars, computers and other technical stuff because they are born with an adequate gene, but they are ‘taught’ to be interested – at home, at school, at
the doctor, at church, in magazines, in movies, etc. Connell (cf. 1995: 45) mentions that social constructionists are aware of the different reproduction systems of men and women, but highlight that there are far more similarities in capacity and potential than differences. Gerschick (2005: 370) adds that these “minor differences are socially nurtured” and create the categories of sex. In other words, masculinity is a concept integrated into social life and society and is thus driven by its underlying norms and values (cf. Benwell & Stoke 2007: 16-17). Or as Butler (1990: 140) says in her own words: “Gender is thus a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions – and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction ‘compels’ our belief in its necessity and naturalness”. This means that external factors make it is almost impossible for men to be entirely free and autonomous in their decision, as the self is always in relation to an ‘other’. Social constructionism raised awareness that identity is a public and social phenomenon that is performed, constructed and interpreted by others. Benwell and Stoke (2007: 20) call this a “radical shift from the private realms of cognition to the public realms of discourse”. Nixon (2003: 302) defines discourse as a “group of statements which way of representing a particular topic”. These statements “appear at more than one institutional site, but are connected by a regularity or underlying unity” (ibid: 302). Whitehead and Barrett (2001: 17) confirm that “discursive or ideological power is not located in a single position and does not require external surveillance and control in order to be sustained and legitimized”. So, the manifestations of ‘manly’ images only work in combination of different sites of representation, such as television, advertisements, posters, books and magazines. Masculinity is thus signified and constituted within these categories through specific codes and defines the boundaries between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ (cf. Nixon 2003: 304).

The basic element to understand social constructionism is discourse. We can say that reality as such would not exits without discourse, or even more that discourse creates reality. Whitehead and Barrett (cf. 2001: 20) explain discourse in Foucauldian terms as “the very means by which subjects come to be individuals and come to understand themselves as woman and men”. In this respect, discourses are “highly powerful messages” that suggest what is seen as ‘truth’ (cf. ibid: 21). Foucault (1984: 100) himself concludes that “discourse transmits and produces power, but it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it”. In
order to illustrate how identities, and thus reality, are produced within discourse, Benwell & Stoke (2007: 19) use one of Butler’s examples: “when a policeman hails a passerby on the street, and the passerby recognizes himself as the one who is hailed, a discursive production of a social subject, or identity, takes place which is accepted and performed in the exchange of the policeman and the passerby”. We would have an entirely different situation, a different discursive process, different identities and a different reality, if the policeman talked to his wife at home, or to his chief officer at the police station (cf. 2007: 19-21). Thus, they conclude that masculinity is “actively, ongoing constituted in discourse” (ibid: 21) and that it is a process men both inhabit and employ. White (1997: 20) also thinks that “different styles of masculinity are developed historically, not given for all times and places”. The dominant versions of masculinity we have today are a result of “colonialism, the movement towards modernity, and now globalization” (ibid: 20). In other words, male identity construction is a question of context and discourse – masculinity needs to be performed. Or as Bell (1999: 3) puts it: “identity is the effect of performance, and not vice versa”. However, the ambiguity, negotiations and contradictions of a discursive process brings masculinity to life – as a result we have not the masculinity, but many masculinities. Benwell and Stoke (cf. 2007: 26) even go so far to say that gendered subjects are endlessly produced through discourse. The “lack of existential coherence” (ibid: 26) is important for the definition of masculinity: this instability allows media and other dominant institutions ever new interpretations and definitions of masculinity, which are profitable for them. In reference to Foucault, Benwell & Stoke (2007: 23) remind us that identities are a “product of dominant discourses that are tied to social arrangements and practices”. This means that dominant groups in society generate discourse in order to justify their own position. This supports our conclusion from chapter one, as it shows that identity construction is often politically motivated, implies a hierarchical order and serves psychological and social goals such as boosting self-esteem, or maintaining suppressed power-relations (cf. ibid: 23).

4.2.2 Capitalism and patriarchy

Western society bases on two massive pillars – capitalism and patriarchy. As underlying driving forces of the Western World it is difficult, if not to say impossible, to analyze them separately – both are dominant and obvious to see, but in the same moment difficult to perceive, hidden behind complex societal structures. This
complexity is pointed out by Holter (2005: 19) who uses “direct gender hierarchy, or inequality” as synonyms for patriarchy. He says the problem is that the “key links to patriarchal structures [...] often seem to be covered by a veil of secrecy, an untouchable neutral and yet mostly male zone” (ibid: 19). While on the one hand it is visible in the “social problems of rape [...] it is not so easy to tell the societal and cultural causes and the effects on society in general” (ibid:19). We can say that patriarchal structures are reproduced through “fatherhood or through other social institutions and patterns” (ibid: 20) but the only specific characteristic of patriarchal societies is the fact that it is a non-egalitarian society, meaning that women and unprivileged men are oppressed (cf. ibid: 20). Thus he concludes: “a patriarchal society is one that displays [...] power relations between and across the genders” (ibid: 20). Collinson and Hearn (2001: 147) identified patriarchy as a system of many “mini-patriarchies”, which builds up on hierarchical structures and dominance such as “capitalist work, the family, the state, violence, sexuality and culture” (ibid: 147).

From a historical perspective patriarchy has to be put first, as male dominance has a longer tradition in Western societies then the struggle for profit. While Edley and Wetherell name a general definition of patriarchy, namely patriarchal societies are “organized around the interests of men” (Edley and Wetherell 1995: 122), Tolson (cf. 1997, cited in Edley and Wetherell 1995: 99) specifies that patriarchy and capitalism share the same goal – both demand adaption and conformity. He says that patriarchy bases on the sets of behavior in capitalistic economy, but also on “old vestigial traditions of patriarchy” (ibid: 102). This means that it is a “set of ideas, customs and traditions which men inherit from their fathers and through their families” (ibid: 102). It bases on peoples opinions and beliefs, especially on “the ideal of the male breadwinner [...] represented in the duties and privileges of that position” (ibid: 102). In this way boys learn to associate work with their fathers, as they usually experience fathers spending an enormous amount of time in the world outside. Work is portrayed to them not only as a privilege but also an “important sign of manhood” (ibid: 103), although the workplace can also mean “powerlessness, [...] an experience of humiliation through subordination to authority”. In reference to various studies about men’s life time employment, Collinson and Hearn (cf. 2001: 146) also come to the conclusion that a man’s gender identity is primarily constructed around success at work, as employment allows him to hold a position of authority and control in the public and private sphere. Kimmel (cf. 2001: 271) explains that it is not only money, representing economic strength, what made the workplace a masculine terrain, but
also the constitution of work as such: organizational construction, hierarchy, aggression and competition. He says, “the marketplace is the arena in which manhood is tested and proved” (ibid: 271). Connell (2005: 79) illustrates male dominance in employment more concrete as he explains that men especially dominate “large scale organizations such as state agencies”. He further says that men hold “the large majority of top positions in governments, corporations, courts, armies, churches, political parties and professional associations” (2005: 79).

Hearn (cf. 1987: 98) explains that it is a dominant ideology to associate men with production and productivity. Edley and Wetherell (1995: 99) follow this thought and pay extraordinary attention to the process of capitalistic work: they point at the connection between labeling men as “competitive, aggressive, emotionally inarticulate, detached and oppressive in their dealings with others” and the capitalistic structure of economy in Western society. With reference to the fundamental critique of Marx and Engels they explain that capitalism builds up on comparison and competition – competition among the producers who try to sell goods and among workers who are looking for employment. The organization of paid work and economic production automatically produces inequalities – most important, it creates divisions between people: every company separates working class from management, promotes their best employees and fires their worst (cf. ibid: 99-100). This results in a conflict between owners and workers, as owners try to create “surplus value from their workers” (ibid: 99), meaning that those who offer work benefit from time, energy and creativity of those who sell their labor power. The actual producers loose contact to their creations, an alienation process reinforced by the changes from manufacturing to assembly-line work: usually manufacturing meant that a man was the creator, producer and seller of his product (cf. ibid: 101). A carpenter for example makes his own ideas a material truth, with his own hands, step by step. But as capitalism is driven by profit this intimate connection got lost in mass production, in which men fabricate commodities that are not their owns, or even produce only a single component of the product. So, we can say that companies do not care about a worker’s ideas, his talents or his interests, but only about the question in which position he would be profitable. Edley and Wetherell (ibid: 101) argue that that the psychological result of this capitalist structure is the process of “depersonalization”: men turn into frustrated “working machines” (ibid: 101) who reduce their jobs to a simple instrument to earn money for making a living (cf. ibid: 104). The vicious circle in this depression is that on the one hand men feel forced to adapt to the demanding set
of capitalistic behavior. On the other hand they often refuse to rebel because leaning up against the system might make them loose their source of income and destroy their position of the breadwinner (cf. ibid: 102). In addition to that, as work becomes a place in which there is no space for unfolding the masculine potential, the feeling of having two identities, a professional one at work and a ‘true’ one at home, is supported (cf. ibid: 102)

Another effect can be that men compensate this loss of potential in the private spheres of their life, especially working-class men are more likely to compensate their experience at work with “exaggerated masculine culture […], a language of brotherhood, a chauvinistic sexuality, blatant machismo” (ibid: 105). In order to understand this process, we must not forget that the sense for the masculine identity develops differently according to the social class a man belongs to: the experience a middle-class man makes who feels secure due to his higher education, maybe even a university degree, and who is given responsibility and the freedom to make decisions independently in his job will be fundamentally different to the experience a working-class man makes. Middle class men identify with their jobs, as “personality, character and social skills become a commodity to be sold on the labor market, along with knowledge and expertise” (ibid: 105). As explained above, the subordination and control that working-class men experience lead to the feeling of distance and alienation in their jobs making “consumption and hobbies […] the principal way of defining a sense of personal identity” (ibid: 105). Collinson and Hearn (cf. 2001: 146) argue that employment, the position of power and authority are traditionally men’s terrain, also influences the domestic circle. As they are responsible for economic resources, it is mostly men who decide in which amount and for which purpose money is spent (cf. Edley and Wetherell 1995: 119). Additionally, Beynon (cf. 2002: 84) points out that although the number of employed women dramatically increased after World War II, the traditional opinion to associate domestic work and especially childcare with women remained constant until today. If men participate in the household it is seen as voluntary and some men even experienced doing housework as “humiliation” (ibid: 86). Of course, we must distinguish between different versions of fatherhood, as Russel (cf. 1983 cited in Edley and Wetherell: 118-120) reminds us, ranging from an uninterested and mostly absent father, to a modern, egalitarian father who shares responsibility with the mother. This variation also makes us aware of the danger of stereotyping, as the life of working-class men is less investigated than of middle-class men: this means that the body of research does not cover masculinity, but only a certain kind of
masculinity (cf. Edley and Wetherell: 1995: 108). Another question we need to ask is in how far scientific research was able to keep up with economic and social transformations that capitalism and globalization brought in the past decades.

Edley and Wetherell (cf. ibid: 122) acknowledge that Marx capitalistic critique was successful in showing the inequalities in Western economy and beneficial to identify that patriarchy and capitalism work together as a “dual system” (ibid: 125) that creates the social and economic structure of society, in which the concept of masculinity comes to life. However, he failed to realize that men gain power from the social structures in the same way as owners benefit from economic structures. This dominance is not necessarily expressed explicitly or physically, but in a more subtle way without being less effective: on the one hand, men get paid money for masculine interpretations of being productive (when they go to work), while women’s traditional ‘productivity’ (fields of domestic work) is not accepted as payworth. On the other hand, women are limited in their decisions when it comes to abortion legislation for example, although tradition declares children as a fundamental feminine terrain. Even today, there are still countless examples how men “routinely perceive privileges without recompense for them” (ibid: 123). Connell (1987: 104) concludes that patriarchy in the same way as capitalism is “run by, and mainly to the advantage of, men”, while Edley and Wetherell (1995: 125) warn us that it is essential to understand patriarchy not as a “matter of choice, or a male conspiracy”. It creates and is bound to a system that “exists over and above the individual actions of any particular men” (ibid: 125). Nixon (2003: 300) remarks that patriarchy does not only regulate the relation between men and women but also criticizes that patriarchy is “weak at explaining the relations of power between different masculinities”. The contribution to power relations of patriarchal systems is much more complex than the “poles of masculine domination and female subordination” (ibid: 300) suggests. Thus we need to be aware of the processes that put different forms of masculinity in relation to each other (cf. ibid: 300).

4.2.3 Hegemonic masculinity

Finally, we come to the question what concrete effects social constructionism, discourse, patriarchal structures and capitalistic values have on the definition of masculinity in Western society. The answer is simple – it creates hegemonic masculinity, or as Edley and Wetherell (1995: 129) say the “power of certain groups of
men to force an interpretation of what masculinity should be and, thus, to subordinate or repress other styles of masculine expression”. As most of the results and consequences have already been mentioned in the previous pages of this chapter, there is not much to add at this point. Despite the fact that political and social contexts did change a lot in the past decades, not all versions of masculinity are equally valued – Black, gay and working class men remain subordinate to the dominant, hegemonic, forms of masculinity (cf. Edwards 2005: 59). If we take a close look at the term ‘hegemonic’, Fraser (1992: 179) offers a simple definition: it supports the dominant positions of privileged groups and establishes “the fund of self evident descriptions of social reality that normally go without saying”. Kimmel (2001: 271) specifies that “one definition of manhood continues to remain the standard against which other forms of manhood are measured and evaluated”. Goffmann (1963: 128) makes clear how a ‘real’ man, especially in America, should look like: “a young, married, white, urban, northern heterosexual, Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports.” She remarks that this image is more than an orientation as “any male who fails to qualify in any of these ways is likely to view himself […] as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior” (ibid: 128).

Edley and Wetherell (1995: 123) use marriage, which initially had a far less romantic purpose than we would expect, as an example to illustrate how hegemony comes to life: fatherhood in contrast to motherhood has always had an “insecure status”, meaning that a mother can be absolutely sure that a child is hers, while a man needs proof. So, before the time of DNA tests marriage was an instrument for men to gain control over reproduction of generic data. Until today the church and the state have supported this hidden power relation that puts men in a position of authority. However, efforts to maintain a dominant image of masculinity refers to men as well, as there are constant “struggles between groups of men over the proper expression of masculinity” (ibid: 128). They can be dramatic, especially when it comes to the expression of male sexuality, which is underlined by the fact that law regulates which sexual practices are accepted and what needs to be forbidden (cf. ibid: 124). Ibson (2007: 189) identifies homophobia as one of the most striking consequences of hegemony:

“homophobia afflicts all males in our society, those who genuinely are sexually attracted to each other […] as well as those whose love or simple affection has no sexual dimension […] boys who learn to stop kissing their fathers, putting their arms around or holding hands with
their male friends, and having sleepovers with their buddies – all are victims of their society’s extraordinary discomfort with male-to-male affection”.

Homosexuality is seen as “transgression” (Edley and Wetherell 1995: 124) and thus regulated heavily by law, as the extract from Jarman (1992: 4) shows: “For the first twenty-five years of my live I lived as a criminal, and the next twenty-five years were spent as a second-class citizen, deprived of equality and human rights. No right to adopt children and if I had children I could be declared an unfit parent; illegal in the military…” It would sound like a bad joke to call homosexual men simply oppressed or excluded from society: homosexuality has been categorized as a disease until the late 20th century and additionally, gay men were often victims of homophobic violence. The stigmatization of homosexuality is just one, but a very powerful, example of hegemonic masculinity (cf. Edley and Wetherell 1995: 129).

4.3 Ideological reproduction from a historic perspective

The previous paragraphs have shown that masculinity is not at all a stable concept. Nearly every culture in the world has a particular viewpoint on masculinity and thus more and less dominant interpretations, or as Connell (2001: 32) put it: “there is no statement without a standpoint”. These interpretations are linked to “practices, activities and everyday modes” of men and result in “cultural ideologies” (Edley and Wetherell 1995: 146). The problematic aspect about ideologies is that they “operate as taken-for-granted world views” (ibid: 146) and thus support the process of subordination and domination. So, before we will conclude our findings of chapter four, we will take a quick look at the field of cultural reproduction. For this purpose the historical development of the concept of masculinity is beneficial for illustrating how interpretations of masculinity do not only vary among different cultures, but also within one specific cultural group.

Hoch (1979: 124) claims that although the concept of masculinity in the last 3000 years of Western civilization experienced changes, two masculine ideals stand out – either one, or the other has been the dominant version in society: “the Puritan”, characterized by duty, hard work, struggle and fighting, and “the Playboy”, an “aristocratic figure” who puts pleasure and fun over work and duty (ibid: 125). The puritan ideal developed in medieval times when men lived the life of a “farmer-warrior”
(ibid: 126), were responsible to feed themselves and their families and fight other clans. It was brought to perfection in the 9th century with the feudal system and experienced a comeback in the 16th and 17th century when men were, as a consequence of Protestantism, associated with extensive work and battlefield skills (cf. ibid: 128). The last era of the Puritan men, according to Hoch, was in Victorian England and swept over to America with the masculine ideal of courage, determination, and an infinite capacity for vigorous activity (ibid: 129). In contrast, the Playboy ideal of masculinity can be found in the “Roman Empire, Renaissance and Enlightenment periods” (ibid: 129). In these different epochs ‘real’ men preferred to let soldiers fight their wars, and constructed life around “consumption, [...] cultivated prostitution, high culture” (ibid: 131). Hoch points out that there were no “absolute changes” in the definition of masculinity, but adoptions to the cultural dominance, depending on which of the “two discourses of masculinity” were in charge. With special attention to American culture Rotundo (cf. 1987 cited in Edley and Wetherell 1995: 139) supports Hoch’s opinion that the Puritan version of masculinity had an enormous influence on the American ideal, but he also emphasizes the existence of three competing images: Rotundo (ibid: 139) calls the first type the “Masculine Achiever”, who is associated with success, wealth and independence: influenced by political philosophy of Enlightenment, he looks for self-achievement, success and wealth, basing on self-discipline and hard work. In contrast to the Masculine Achiever is the “Christian Gentleman”, who sees “love, kindness and compassion” as the basic principles in his life (ibid: 139). Finally, the “Masculine Primitive” (ibid: 139) was an opposite to both of the other types: affected by the theories of Charles Darwin he believes in the survival of the fittest, he tries to live a man’s natural passions, is concerned about his masculine strength, aggression and body, rejects any kind of civilization and looks for the wilderness (cf. ibid: 139) Edley and Wetherell (cf. 1995: 141) explain that Rotundo’s research is essential as it shows the discursive process of masculinity: three opposing groups of men, representing capitalism and economy (Masculine Achiever), tradition and morality (Christian Gentleman) and physical strength and courage (Masculine Primitive), each highlight certain aspects about masculinity and struggle over the proper expression.

Before we move on we will, with special attention to traditional American perspective on masculinity, make a detour by giving a concrete example how dominant personalities, with the necessary political support and suitable historic circumstances can bring ideologies to life. History offers a huge amount of persons to exemplify this
process, but according to Fehn (cf. 2002: 52), Theodore Roosevelt is the best example for the United States. In order to understand the correlation, Ehrenreich (cf. 2002: 45) explains that in America violence and militarism are considered as a fundamental expression of masculinity. She even says that in America “military service is one of our rites of manhood; it makes men men” (ibid: 45). Segal (1995: 20) adds that the army does not only train young men for war, but it also trains the “masculine moral”. From her perspective, the main idea behind military service is “not a celebration of violence but an anxiety of anything soft or wet” (ibid: 20). For Fehn (cf. 2002: 53) it is clear that this opinion can largely be traced back to Theodore Roosevelt in the 19th century. He appeared at a time when the young nation’s stability and security was far away from being assured – as the American hero in the war against Spain Roosevelt embodied powerful manhood more than anybody else. He became a role model for America’s young men, promoted aggressive, manly activities such as strenuous hiking, big game hunting, and long rides on horsebacks (cf. ibid: 43). Dalton further explains that Roosevelt encouraged young men to transform their bodies from “precious boys” (ibid: 43) to physically “exuberant and competitive” (ibid: 43) men, through vigorous exercises: he embodied “virile manhood for American public” (ibid: 44) and inspired thousands young Americans to follow his guidelines. According to Dalton (cf. 44), Roosevelt himself had sympathy for medieval knights and especially cowboys, who he saw as embodiment of the American ideal, as they represented everything the country stood for – freedom, strength and fearlessness. However, the Puritan-based ideals of masculinity remained constant until the 20th century, which the American history reflects: the two World Wars, the rise as the economic and military world power, and home of democracy and freedom.

In the 20th century masculinity had to face the biggest challenge, not only because of political and economic changes or scientific progress, but also due to the rise of entertainment industry: as we will see in the next chapter, books, lifestyle-magazines and especially cinema portrayed masculinity as a cultural reproduction in the media. Edley and Wetherell (1995: 132) say that in order to find out the current opinion about men and manhood in Western society, it would be enough to “switch on the television or open a book or a magazine and study the ways in which men are talked about and portrayed”. In order to emphasize how the theoretic term ideology becomes visible in reality, Edley and Wetherell use four basic images of men that convey information how our culture defines masculinity: the first image is the “James Bond type” (ibid: 132), who is a perfect gentleman, aggressive in an elegant way, stylish, with good
manners, but always willing to take risks. The second image shows a cowboy, a much more primitive form of masculinity, wild without elegance or cultivation. It portrays roughness and the rejection of social conventions, but also highlights that manliness is a “state of mind rather than body” (ibid: 132). The third image represents the complete opposite – it reduces masculinity to the minimum, namely to the athletic body, physical power and athletic strength. It is portrayed in a close-up shot of male muscles, as it is often seen in advertisements. The fourth and last image shows a man together with a woman in a sensual, intimate, romantic moment. It represents emotions and desires and emphasizes the vulnerability of men. These images are “positive representations of masculinity” (ibid: 134) and explicitly illustrate what a man should be made of. Interesting about the function of these images is that they “buy into a set of already established ideas about men” (ibid: 134), which especially advertisements explicitly use for their own purpose. However, it would be a mistake to think that the media and entertainment industry simply seize and process existing ideas about men, as the following chapter shows.

4.4 Conclusion

We have come a long way so far. After identifying the opinion of biological conservatives about masculinity as misleading, role theory draw scientific attention to influences of the social environment. This approach raised awareness that masculinity cannot be found in the male body, it opened discussion and asked many questions that were beneficial for scientific progress in masculinity studies. However, role theory leaves many of these questions unanswered: for example, it does not explain where sex roles actually come from, which is why it was finally questioned if sex roles exist at all. In this way, role theory does not see the roots of masculinity in society but within a mystical, biological, pre-existing masculine self. In addition to that, some theorists portray the process of ‘becoming a man’ in a society as damaging and cruel, rather than a process of constructive development and progress. The most problematic aspect is the distinction between inner, authentic selves and social selves as role theory compares masculine behavior with a theatrical performance. Finally, role theory (as well as all other approaches that see a one-dimensional idea behind masculinity) has not been able reflect development, progress, change, and the variety of the topic. From an academic position we can say that there is only one approach that was aware of the fact that gender systems are not absolute, static or stable.
Social constructionism identified masculinity as a concept and investigated how it comes to life in society: first of all the underlying principles of society itself, its economic structure and the legal system define the frame for masculinity. Dominant groups in society do not only implement and enforce an image of masculinity but they also maintain it through mechanisms of control. This means that certain ideas and opinions are implemented and supported by law or dominant institutions: laws, religious beliefs and the value of paid work convey societies’ expectations towards men. Further, tradition and family are another major influence for the process of self-definition, and the definition by others. The masculine roles a boy adopts through his parents and the experience of hierarchical structures and significant male behavior in his private sphere draw lively pictures of what a man should be like. Thirdly, as shortly indicated, the media, or more general the entertainment industry, including television, newspapers and lifestyle magazines, movies and music culture has to be named as an important factor in the process of distributing and maintaining hegemonic masculine images. Due to their influence they are not limited to simply reproducing existing images, but they are also able to produce new ‘versions’ of masculinity. What we must not forget is that all identities are produced through discourse, as Benwell (2003: 12) points out – movies, television shows, life-style magazines, and popular music explicitly and implicitly adopt this discursive account through analyzing, negotiating and inventing various images of masculinity.
5 Masculinity and the movies

Only within the gay movement have there appeared specific discussions of the representations of men. Most of these, as far as I am aware, have centered on the representations and stereotypes of gay men. Both within the women’s movement and the gay movement, there is an important sense in which the images and functions of heterosexual masculinity within mainstream cinema have been left undiscussed. Heterosexual masculinity has been identified as a structuring norm in relation both to images of women and gay men. But is has rarely been discussed and analyzed as such.

(Neale 2008: 9)

The previous chapters indicated that entertainment industry implicitly and explicitly represents a culture’s dominant values and ideologies. Before lifestyle magazines, music and movies started to dominate cultural representation in the 20th century, Brod (1995: 13) explains that work and war manifested the “importance of the male body as a productive or heroic figure”. As a result they “undermined traditional male identities” (ibid: 13) while the “dynamics of advanced capitalism turned the male body from a site of production to a site of consumption” (ibid: 19). This means that media and especially advertisement made masculinity something that can be bought, swallowed or worn: tests in lifestyle-magazines ‘how manly is your man?’, in which a list of attributes must be ticked true or false, or popular sayings such as ‘just like a man!’ keep the idea of masculinity being a predetermined, static, universal something alive (cf. Beynon 2002: 56). The rise of masculine role models in movies explains Nixon (cf. 2003: 293 - 294) with the fetished and narcissistic display of men: while narcissisms means a “foregrounding of the pleasures associated with the dressing and grooming of the body” (ibid: 294), fetish refers to an intense focusing on details of the body or accessories such as clothes, shoes or gadgets. This has two consequences: firstly, the connection to capitalism becomes obvious as mainstream movies – they are usually packed with product placements and have their own advertisements and merchandise campaigns – they try to associate their images of masculinity to something of a “higher value” (Edley and Wetherell 1995: 134) and thus present it as achievable to the audience. Secondly, and even more important, this highlights how movies actively contribute to the concept of masculinity: on the one hand they reflect society’s opinion about men and reproduce the hegemonic image. On the other hand, they also give impulses to influence and renew the definition of masculinity. Nixon (2003: 301) also insists that a movie is one specific form of cultural language or a
system of representation, which does not reflect a pre-given masculinity but actively constructs the “cultural meanings we give to masculinity”. This means that the close connection of movies to society and culture makes them both, a cultural “representative site” and a “mobilizing force of crucial cultural shifts” (Benwell: 2003: 14).

Neale (cf. 2008: 9) points out that observing masculinity on screen has the same problem as masculinity studies in general: firstly, due to its ‘normality’ it was not seen as a subject for further investigation and secondly as a result of feminist studies, the attention in academic research has concentrated more on women. Although the situation improved with gay movement in the 1970’s and 1980’s, research about the cinematic portrayal of men still faces difficulties: firstly, there is the enormous variety of visual images of men, due to the long history of film industry. Secondly, mainstream movies do not reflect the multidimensionality, the variation and the ambiguity of masculinity, but only support one ideology. Although this is indeed problematic from the perspective of cultural variation and equal rights, it is beneficial for the aim of this thesis as it exhibits how dominant images of men are maintained within society. Since the beginning of traditional cinema in the 20th century some ‘genres’ developed as typical male territory: Western, gangster movies and especially war films are “purely masculine genre”, according to Modleski (1998: 125). Within these traditional male genres, traditional images of men appeared and remained dominant until today. In this way, it is obvious that Brokeback Mountain (2005) was an affront for the predominant ideology of American masculinity. However, before we will turn to the analysis of the movie itself in the final chapter, we will now see what movies can tell us about men and manhood. How are dominant ideologies reproduced in cinematic productions, why do men and spectacles go together in Hollywood movies and what is the connection between the masculinity and genre?

5.1 Screening the male

Since the beginning of the feminist movement the role of women in movies has been discussed in numerous books and articles in order to research the connection between political and social ideologies and the female figures in movies. As Neale (2008: 9) points out, there has been no equivalent academic concern about the role of men in movies. He criticizes that while gay movement has been observing
“representations and stereotypes of gay men” the “images and functions of heterosexual masculinity within mainstream cinema have been left undiscussed” (ibid: 9). Neale further explains that inside and outside movies “heterosexual masculinity has been identified as a structuring norm in relation both to images of women and gay men” (ibid: 9). In this way, Cohan and Hark (2008: 1) argue, classic Hollywood films helped to produce and maintain the “status of the male both in the cinema auditorium and on screen”, a status that was accepted as the “unproblematic given of the system” (ibid: 2). In other words, mainstream movies do not represent masculinity in its true variety and complexity, but it uses men on screen to distribute the “ideological agenda” and “screens out the socially unacceptable […] constructions of masculinity” (ibid: 3).

Cohan and Hark see the underlying problem of Hollywood’s images and narratives about men in the “masculine subjectivity in patriarchy” that links men to “activity […] and story” while women were connected to “passivity” (ibid: 2). As a result, Neale highlights that mainstream movies make masculinity a “spectacle” (Neale 2008: 10), or as Hol mund (2008: 214) puts it a “masquerade”. Beynon (2002: 64) generally describes masquerade as the process in which actors turn into their screen images, which “are far more exciting” than the roles we experience in everyday life such as “fathers, teachers, neighbors and older brothers”. How technical this process can work, shows Jackson (cf. 2001: 19) as he describes how Archibald Leach invented his alter ego Cary Grant. He quotes Grant (or Leach) who says: I pretended to be someone that I wanted to be and I finally became that person. Or he became me... Everyone wants to be Cary Grant. Even I want to be Cary Grant” (ibid: 19). Needless to say, the sophisticated, romantic gentleman Cary Grant became the masculine role model, not Archibald Leach. Miller (2001: 244 ) explains that in the following decades masquerade was not limited anymore to the meaning of becoming someone else, but it idealized the exaggerated performance of “Sylvester Stallone, Bruce Willis, Arnold Schwarzenegger” as typical manly. Thus, looking closely at the portrayal of men in orthodox cinema is an important example to show “the masculine as a social construction in American culture” (Cohan and Hark 2008: 3).

The most important effect of traditional Hollywood cinema is that it produces images of masculinity that enforce identification. Neale (2008: 10) explains that identification is a complex, sometimes even contradictory process, which means more than simply being impressed by the male protagonist on screen. Identification explains how every film distributes and reproduces the “socially defined and constructed categories of male and female” in terms of “sexual division, […] sexuality, social identity and
Traditional Hollywood movies are constructed around a male protagonist, putting him in the center of attention as the one who actively takes over control of the story. As a consequence, the spectator automatically links the protagonist to “power, omnipotence, mastery and control” (ibid: 11) and makes him his “more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego (ibid: 12). Neale (ibid: 12) calls this process “narcissistic identification” and names numerous examples of movie history for this phenomenon, such as Clint Eastwood movies, Charlton Heston or Mel Gibson. Narcissistic identification is in two ways problematic: on the one hand, the spectator might realize that the ‘super-ego’ will always be out of reach, due to a movie’s unrealistic fictionality, leaving him with the “feeling of castration” (ibid: 13). On the other hand, the intensive looking at another male has something voyeuristic and makes men an “erotic object” and an “object of desire” (ibid:14). Bordo (cf. 2000: 168) explains that in this way movies continue what lifestyle magazines had started – especially fashion advertisements violated a fundamental taboo, as they started to bring forward a man’s “feminine qualities into mainstream” (ibid: 168) with the display of men with a sensual and sometimes even sexual connotation. However, in terms of traditional cinematic conventions a degrading from the omnipotent subject to a passive object would be harmful for the patriarchal image of powerful activity. In this way, Neale (ibid: 18) emphasizes that in traditional Hollywood cinema only women are “objects of an erotic gaze”. Mulvey (cf 1975: 14) agrees to the positioning of men as the active, controlling subjects and women as visual spectacle to be looked at: while men are the ones to take the lead in narratives, women are often used to emphasize characteristic aspects of the male protagonist, a “performance ladder to fame, fortune, popularity and success” as Beynon (2002: 65) puts it – sometimes they are nothing more than beautiful props to dress up the scenery. Men act, women are acted on. As a result of the implicitness of masculinity, Neale (2008: 19) concludes, “where women are investigated, men are tested”.

We see that the maintenance of power relations is the most essential issue in the presentation of men in traditional Hollywood movies. The fact that there are heroes and villains to distinguish ‘good’ masculinity from ‘bad’ masculinity, and that villains are often played by minorities, such as Asians or Blacks, clearly supports this hegemonic perspective (cf. Holmlund 2008: 223). Speaking of good masculinity, Beynon (cf. 2002: 65) says that it becomes complex and paradox when it comes to the portrayal of the male body: the image of a naked man with muscles represents male strength and power, but in the same moment it is, as we have seen, in danger of
meaning the opposite. In order to avoid any kind of objectification and especially to avoid any homoerotic tensions, mainstream movies make masculinity a spectacle. Spectacles identify Hollywood as Hollywood – they are constructed, exaggerated sceneries of ‘pure’ masculine action. Neale (2008: 16) states that spectacles are constructed around ideas of “victory and defeat”, or a “battle of will and strength” and that the protagonist “makes something happen”, or that he is “forcing change in another person”. Holmlund (2008: 214) supports this opinion and uses Sylvester Stallone’s action movies as an example. She claims that it is no coincidence that almost every scene in which Stallone, who is “built on muscles as a perfect masquerade of masculinity” and who represents the “tough guy image” and “incarnates unquestioned virility, unassailable heterosexuality and a US might and right which is, most decidedly, white” is shown without a T-shirt and followed by violence, explosions or gun-fights. According to Segal (cf. 1995: 112), the image of the tough guy emerged in the post war years. She sees this process connected to Ernest Hemingway as he promoted this kind of lifestyle through his stories full of action and adventure. In addition to that, with alcohol, guns and women as his daily business Hemingway himself did not leave out a chance to prove that he was “fully-blooded masculine” (cf. ibid: 112). Neale (2008: 16) on the other hand thinks that action movies are determined by “masochistic scenes” to avoid sexual connotation. In other words, fights, combats, explosions, gun battles, blood, torture and fists do not only idealize male strength but also “draw the attention away from the male body to the spectacle” (ibid: 17) Another popular example in traditional Hollywood cinema Neale names are gun-duels in Western (ibid: 17). The possible sexual tension of the typical, repetitive close ups of the opponents’ faces before the shooting starts, is ended with the aggressive facial expressions, blood, wounds and death.

There are forms of male representation that work more subtly or implicitly on screen than muscles, gunfights and explosions. The rejection of marriage for instance is a popular image of “narcissstic omnipotence”, according to Neale (ibid: 14). Especially in Western movies marriage, as it stands for “social integration and social responsibility” (ibid: 15) would be a threat to the omnipotent position of male characters such as John Wayne. These powerful positions are also underlined in the appearance of male heroes as “men without women”, as Tasker says (2008: 236). Jeffords (2008: 254) observed that the male protagonists play fatherly figures who want to “preserve and protect”, or as Bingham (2001: 259) puts it, hold positions of leadership that display them as “warm and confident […] suave and virile and […] roistering and overbearing”
figures. However, traditional male heroes also lean up against authorities, reject any “institutional oppression” (ibid: 257) and finally succeed in their individualistic ‘against-all-rules’ performance. Kimmel (1996: 23) explains that this individualism is an effect of the predominant American ideal of the self-made man – “success must be earned” and as a consequence “manhood must be proven – and proved constantly”. Tasker (2008: 236) sees another typical expression of Hollywood masculinity in the fact that the movie’s action takes place in “all-male environments” for example in “sport, prison and the world of work”. Men are also portrayed in “father and son poses” or perform traditional male behavior such as “messing around with cars, playing football, drinking beer” (ibid: 236). In terms of conventional masculine attributes, Bingham (2001: 258) adds that the male character seems to be structured around the concepts of avoiding “softness”, refusing to “cry” and being “tough” and a “fighter” (ibid: 260) instead. In order to maintain this position of powerful toughness, Kimmel (1996: 23) especially points out the connection between anger and frustration and the cinematic definition of masculinity. This is often expressed in macho comments, slang language and homophobic insults or swear words to demonstrate power, as Bruce Willis does in the Die Hard movies (cf. Tasker 2008: 240). All this stereotypical male behavior portrays men as being tempered and always having “control over the emotions” (ibid: 237).

Further, props, clothes or jobs of male protagonists emphasize what society sees as achievable for men. Holmlund (2008: 222) for example sees Stallone’s dressing in “Armani Suits” in Tango and Cash (1989) as a link to money and success for example. Kimmel (1996: 17) also interprets the portrayal of the male protagonist who “derives identity entirely from activities in the public sphere, measured by accumulated wealth and status” as an orthodox American cultural idea. In this way, Edley and Wetherell (1995: 141) name Michael Douglas’ role of Gordon Gecko in the movie Wall Street as a perfect representation of the American masculinity in the 1980’s – a ruthless and aggressive desire for “power and status”. According to them, around 1990 these values began to decline and offered an opportunity for a more “caring, sensitive and emotionally expressive” masculine figure. Miller (2001: 245) agrees to the changes in the cinematic images of masculinity, explaining it with the effects of “consumer capitalism”, as the figure of James Bond exemplifies: he developed from a gentleman killer to a symbol associated with tailored suits, luxury cars and the latest technical gadgets.

All in all, it is not difficult to conclude what we can say about the traditional Hollywood images of masculinity. Male performances firstly refer to activity and subjectivity, and secondly they are constructed as a spectacle. It is true that violence, physical strength
and the willingness to take risks have always accompanied the definition of masculinity and represent power relations of patriarchy, but spectacles do more than that: they also avoid a sexual tension in the identification process of spectator and protagonist and draw away the attention from the male body as an erotic object. It is this anxiety of being degraded from a controlling subject to a passive object that makes masculinity a “fragile inapproachable illusion” (Bingham 2001: 258) and an “overblown […] fantasy” (Miller 2001: 248). The attempt of mainstream movies to compensate the instability of the concept through exaggerated masculine behavior, which Tasker (2008: 237) calls “excessive masculinity”, let muscles and tough sound bites look like “decoration” (ibid: 239). Even more, they display “heroism as a costume” (ibid: 242). Brod (1995: 17) reminds that there is a significant difference between performance and masquerade, namely the “distinction between the artificial and the real”. While masquerade refers to the opinion that “behind the facade of the mask lies the real face” (ibid: 17) which is revealed when the show is over, performative theory says that “performance is all there is” (ibid: 17) – there is no ‘true’ or ‘real’ person behind the performance. However, the socially constructed and politically motivated nature of traditional images of men in Hollywood cinema cannot be ignored. Holmlund (2008: 224) for example states that Stallone’s “mask of happy healthy, heterosexual white masculinity is reassuring to the Right”, the figure of James Bond seems like a “post-imperial fantasy” (Miller 2001: 252) trying to compensate the loss of political influence of the former Empire, and is certainly no coincidence that the traditional, pumped up action heroes like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone or Bruce Willis especially emerged in the years after the lost war in Vietnam, which demanded a “remasculinization” (Fuchs 2008: 197) in America. In other words, men in Hollywood movies represent American “ideologies” and are abused as a “product of patriarchy and a servant of its interest” (Bingham 2001: 259).

5.2 Masculinity as a question of genre

Movies can be categorized upon different criteria, such as iconography, visual effects, modes of production, artistic performance or filming techniques. Categorization generally bases on a movie’s content and theme. In cinematic terms we call these categories genres: according to Ryall (1998: 327) genre is a “body of conventions” that specifies the “ways in which the individual work is to be read and understood”. He further explains that genre produces a frame in which the “work acquires significance
and meaning” (ibid: 328). In other words, genres are categories that help us to classify and distinguish different types of movies, on the basis of different features. Categorization is a human attitude because structuring our knowledge in categories supports our understanding of the world. This means that a genre is determined by particular attributes, descriptors and indicators that a film needs to fulfill in order to become a member of this genre. For example, when a character in a film suddenly starts singing on the street we can identify the film as a ‘musical’, or when we see a character riding on a horse in dusty landscape, wearing a dirty coat, a hat and a bill with a gun we can put the film into the category ‘western’. Of course, there are many different opinions how genre can be defined: Ryall (ibid: 330) distinguishes between “genre systems” and “individual genres”, meaning that some categories derive from historical contexts (e.g. gangster movies) and some from a personal, artistic context (e.g. love films). He further highlights that as genres refer to differences in style, theme, topic, producers, characters, settings and effects on the audience, the boundaries are fluent and result in “hybrids” (ibid: 331), which are overlaps of different genres such as “Western-musicals” (ibid: 331).

Some of the genres of traditional Hollywood cinema developed as typically ‘manly’ as a consequence of the constructed masculine ideals: Western, war movies, gangster movies and later sport and action films became fundamental male territory. The examples of Hollywood male images we just discussed in the previous chapter can be found within these genres. They perfectly idealize the expectations of a patriarchal society – power, dominance and control. Ehrenreich (2002: 46) explains this connection that violence, action and danger “establish the masculine identity”, as they demand ‘pure’ masculinity. Nixon (2003: 319) agrees to this point of view as he states that “the codings of masculinity in these films privilege the attributes of toughness, hardness and being in control”. He further explains that they involve visual codes which “do not allow the display of ambiguities, uncertainties or weaknesses […] for the male spectator” (ibid: 320). As a consequence of the identification of protagonist and spectator this leaves a man with the “fantasy of power and control” (ibid: 320). However, genres do not only exist within mainstream movie culture, but also on a meta-level. As we already know, Hollywood cinema is most dominant and influential in cinematic history, but it is not the only representation of cultural ideologies. Independent movies identify themselves as the opposite of Hollywood movies and bring oppressed minorities and socially unpopular topics on screen. While mainstream movies portray the dominant images of masculinity, independent movies display other,
socially unaccepted versions of masculinity. Independent movies can thus be seen as an alternative to Hollywood, and more important, as an individual genre. Thus the categorization of a film – whether independent or not – tells us a lot about what society thinks about men and manhood. As the question of genre will play an important part in the analysis of *Brokeback Mountain* and in order to understand the connection between genre and masculinity, it is necessary to talk about the definition of independent.

While the traditional American film industry, or short Hollywood, is a billion dollar industry According to, independent cinema presents itself as the opposite and as an alternative to the products of the gigantic cinematic empire (Newman 2009:16). The ambiguity of the word independent makes a clear definition nearly impossible. Generally, Newman points out that the ‘Indy-culture’ has become an ideology, a concept of “alternativeness” (ibid: 16) since the 1980’s. This concept that cannot be found only in the movie, but also in the music and fashion industry, promotes an oppositional lifestyle towards the dominant cultural values. This means that ‘Indy’ refers to distinctions both from a producer's and a consumer's perspective. On the one hand, ‘Indy-culture’ is said to give information about the people who produce it, namely that they appreciate artistic dedication, and put the value of true art over the value of profit. Independent movies are associated with small-scale productions that concentrate on creativity, artistic qualities and charismatic performances of their actors. Quite contrary to Hollywood films which are seen as inflated assembly line productions that focus only on financial success and have nothing to do with artistic work anymore. In other words, while in Hollywood quantity seems to count, independent movies care about quality. Thus, Newman (ibid: 17) emphasizes that independent movies claim to be more authentic, realistic and to have a higher quality than mainstream productions. On the other hand, ‘Indy-culture’ is said to give information about the people who consume it, namely that they are critical observers who decided to refuse mainstream and that they have a ‘good taste’ as they value true art. People who watch independent movies are seen as sophisticated, well-educated and affluent (cf. ibid: 16-20).

Newman warns that the stereotypical attribution leads to an animosity towards everything that is somehow ‘mainstream’. While traditional Hollywood cinema is accused of being a “force of mindless conformity” (ibid: 19) independent productions determine themselves as a “creative expression through cultural production” (ibid: 19),
represent a separation from dominant cultural ideologies and promise authenticity and autonomy. This means that the ‘Indy-culture’ not only defines itself as the oppositional alternative to the common mass culture, but also as privileged elite (ibid: 24). However, concrete differences can be found on macro and micro levels: these includes the level of budget, producers, theme, advertisement, story and scenery but also the level of directors, characters, technical equipment and camera technique. Hollywood, as the figurehead of the global entertainment industry, concentrates more on the entertaining factors of a movie. This means that usually the story is easy to follow, information given through visual images (camera angles and shots) and dialogues are congruent, the plot and the scenery are built up logically as well as chronologically and special effects draw the spectators’ attentions away from content and characters. Independent cinema is demanding and expects the audience to watch the movie actively. Independent movies often present topics that are controversial and complex. In addition to that, the stories frequently base on true events or deal with real life, especially aspects of life our fun and wealth society does not want to see. Due to the small budget, independent movies for example cannot always afford the latest technical equipment, special effects or statists. As a consequence, the illustration of the story and the performance of the characters have to be interesting and captivating enough to compensate what money can't buy. This is the reason why actors mostly play round and complex roles in Indie-movies and directors use many different camera techniques to support the dramaturgy and highlight a particular mood in a scene – for example to show hierarchies, drug influence, confusion or mental processes. Additionally it is common to avoid many cuts, shoot long takes and scenes in which the attention is on characteristic details of the author, or the setting. The result is movies that are close to real life and therefore authentic according to their credibility (ibid: 17 - 21).

A problematic aspect about independent movies that needs to be mentioned at this point is that members of ‘Indie-culture’ also define themselves from an ideological perspective. It seems contradictory that consumers and producers of independent movies call themselves creative, educated and open-minded, criticize the narrow-mindedness in society, but at the same time do not accept any kind of ‘otherness’ that is different to their own ‘otherness’. It is simply paradox that a cultural movement who claim to support cultural variation, equality and freedom of opinion at the same time implicitly demand radical conformity with their own perspective. In other words, ‘Indie-culture’ criticizes society, its judgmental classifications and prejudices, but does
exactly the same thing. Additionally, it seems inappropriate to accuse mainstream culture of consumerism and profit values when independent movies, music and lifestyle have become a commercial niche as well that makes huge amounts of money every year. Finally, ‘Indie-culture’ also creates ‘ingroup – ideology’ that justifies its own values and excludes others. So, the question is if defining yourself arrogantly as an elite that is superior to others really is a sign for sophistication? However, if we reduce the term independent to its neutral facts this perspective allows us to define independent movies as a genre, due to its individual aesthetic conventions. Ryall (1998: 335) argues that “iconography, syntax and visual style” in independent movies justify the generic separation. The problem is, as already explained before, to determine where the field of ‘Indie-culture’ starts and where it ends. When is a film privileged enough to be called independent? Do all the criteria, all the independent film-conventions, we have mentioned have to be fulfilled? Can a movie that presents a politically controversial topic, develops not chronologically and has brilliant and complex characters be labeled as mainstream, only because two Hollywood stars plays the main character?

5.3 Conclusion

As we have seen the driving force behind the portrayal of masculine images in Hollywood movies is society in its patriarchal and economic structure. The dominant cultural ideologies of manhood are supposed to be justified, naturalized and maintained by male protagonists on screen. The spectacles around masculinity are constructed to keep up existing power relations, which concretely vary from one genre to another: as the analysis of typical Hollywood performances of men has examined, trained muscles and tough sound bites are more likely to appear in action movies, blood, explosions and struggle in war films, brutal violence and swear words in gangster movies, activity and competition in sport movies and independence and individualism in Western movies. Genres within mainstream Hollywood cinema transmit messages differently, but the message itself is always one and the same – power, dominance and oppression. Of course, this works implicitly much better than explicitly – Fuchs (2008: 196) for example says that “women are [simply] omitted from the movie plots” and thus the male self-identity is automatically defined through the absent. In addition to that, mainstream movies that tend to cross borders, are not easy to be put in a category, or convey controversial images about masculinity face serious
problems. Cohan and Hark (cf. 2008: 18) tell that John Travolta was target of ridicule by film critics, politicians and state authorities, due to his erotic dancing in *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) that made him a sexual object. Studlar (2008: 23) says that in the 1920’s Fred Astaire in his dance movies experienced similar problems. The explanation is simple: the genre of dance movies is neither profitable nor helpful for the dominant ideology of masculinity. However, mainstream movies do not represent the masculinity, but only one version. Independent movies as a genre stand for otherness and represent alternative versions to the dominant ideology about men. There is a reason why serious stories about the life of homosexuals were either fully omitted in Hollywood movies, or only shown in images of parody, comedy and laughter. There is a reason why intimate and explicit sexual action of a heterosexual couple is nowadays considered as usual in movies, while two men kissing on screen still seems to be a major moral catastrophe. There is a reason why transsexuals or transvestites, Black, Asian and handicapped people are simply ‘overseen’ by mainstream cinema and are pushed into low budget production as niche products. And the reason is that masculinity is indeed a question of genre – dominant, socially accepted versions of masculinity can be found in dominant modes of film production, while oppressed minority versions of masculinity are displayed in the genre of otherness. This observation is not only essential for film analysis itself, but it supports the thesis in every way that “masculinity is an effect of culture – a construction, a performance, a masquerade – rather than a universal and unchanging essence” (Cohan and Hark 2008: 7).
6 Brokeback Mountain

Indeed, what we see in the screenplay throughout these scenes is [...] the introduction of normative and thus normativizing representations. [...] The film is concerned with depicting the ways that Ennis is hogtied by a culture of masculinity and heterosexuality.

(Arellano 2007: 64)

When the tragic love story about two cowboys (or shepherds) came to cinemas worldwide in 2005, it had been in the center of attention even before it was published: gays and lesbian communities celebrated it as a step towards acceptance of queerness, while conservatives demanded the movie to be banned from cinemas. The reactions to the movie clearly represent the problematic and controversial content (cf. Patterson: 2008: xlvii-li). It showed homosexual love explicitly and distributed the probably most explosive topic in America to a large-scale audience (cf. ibid: xiv). However, there is more to the story than simply two men falling in love. Many people would probably answer the question what Brokeback Mountain can tells us about masculinity with ‘nothing’, as we do not see conventional male images. However, it is a perfect example to illustrate how theoretic terms such as ideology, capitalism, patriarchy and power relations come to life and actively maintain hegemonic images of men and oppress subordinate versions. Brokeback Mountain is a perfect example to show how social construction of masculinity takes place. While it is easy to agree that Brokeback Mountain is disruptive of conventional, traditional masculinity it is difficult to explain what exactly makes it so disrupting. Thus, on the following pages we also discuss in which ways Brokeback Mountain violates the unwritten laws of masculinity.

As we now turn to our analysis, we need to clarify an essential issue in order to avoid misunderstanding: in the previous sections we explained the double function of newspapers, lifestyle magazines, television shows and movies in the discursive construction of masculinity. They do not only pick up existing images or opinions about men, but also develop new images of masculinity: due to their powerful positions these ‘new’ images can be highly influential, and thus even affect a culture’s perception of masculinity as a whole. While in the United States in the 18th and 19th century influential religious institutions and dominant individuals political beliefs were mainly responsible for this process, books, men’s lifestyle magazines and movies took over this part in the 20th century: Segal (cf. 1995: 112) identifies Ernest Hemingway as
the most important male archetype in the Untied States since Roosevelt, Nixon (cf. 2003: 294) highlights the importance of magazines such as the *New Lad, New Face* or *Playboy*, and the classic movies with John Wayne or later Sylvester Stallone as examples. However, in this analysis we will neither work out the question if and how *Brokeback Mountain* influenced the image of masculinity in general, nor in which way the movie contributed to the development of a ‘new’ discourse about masculinity, such as giving gay men a voice, or making homosexuality more acceptable. Although we will mention some of the reactions towards the movie, the analysis will concentrate on the screenplay itself. In other words, subject of investigation is not the movie’s social and cultural effects but the story within the movie.

### 6.1 Social Construction

From the first minute it is clear that Jack Twist and Ennis Del Mar are bound to their cultural scripts: despite they both feel the tension that became passion, despite the mental and sexual intimacy they experience, they refuse to stigmatize themselves as gay throughout the movie. For a good reason: they are aware of the fact that what they feel, what they say and do, is not permitted. Patterson (cf. 2008: xv) says that society in rural Wyoming in the 70’s has no space for alternatives to the traditional image of men. Even more, acting against the laws of masculinity can be harmful, dangerous and even deadly. However, society itself is an active construct to which various elements permanently contribute. Despite the fact that the movie is fictional, it reflects society’s expectations, norms and values. This means that the story about Jack and Ennis exemplifies how theory, gender construction, ideologies and power relations, becomes reality. *Brokeback Mountain* clearly shows that the capitalistic principles and the constricting expectations of patriarchal tradition construct the dominant and accepted version of masculinity and maintain the existing power relations.

#### 6.1.1 Capitalism

In the previous chapters we concluded that it is nearly impossible to separate capitalism from patriarchy, as they form a dual system that builds the fundament of Western society. However, we will try to distinguish between the two as good as
possible for the purpose of analysis. Today capitalism is often misleadingly reduced to consumerism or people’s will to gain wealth, status and recognition in the job they are doing. Money and finances are central issues in *Brokeback Mountain*, not in a consumeristic way but in terms of oppression and independence. The story of Jack and Ennis shows that capitalism is an invisible might that forces people to conform to a certain form of lifestyle, and to a certain form of masculinity – thus it is primarily about authority and dominance, about the question who has the power ‘to make the rules’ and who has to obey them. Perez (2007: 81) in other words says, “Economics and place also circumscribe what identities are available to each character”. Jack and Ennis are implicitly as well as explicitly driven by these power lines, which will burden them, in different ways, for the rest of their lives.

The movie introduces the two protagonists as healthy young men. Although details about age and education are missing, it soon becomes clear that they both come from a rural, working class environment. Both seem to have a poor financial background, but Jack obviously is slightly better situated: Jack at least drives an old and rusty pick-up (cf. Lee, *Brokeback Mountain*: 2,30) in the opening scene, while Ennis has to hitchhike and carries all his belongings in a grocery bag (cf. ibid: 1,15). Ennis also tells Jack that his parents who died when he was a child left him nothing at all (cf. ibid: 21,37). When the two are told to come down from Brokeback earlier, Ennis is extremely upset about being cut off loan, while Jack reacts contained and remains less concerned about money throughout the movie (cf. ibid: 38,00). After the season has ended on Brokeback, Jack has a place to return to (his father’s farm) for work – Ennis has no plan at this moment how to make ends meet. As the movie moves on, we witness Ennis doing several part time jobs – which he will remain doing for the rest of his life - while Jack can afford to try his luck at rodeo (cf. Stacy 2007: 36)

Their different attitude towards money intensifies as the story continues: Jack’s financial worries soon disappear as he marries into money, which he gains through the marriage with Lureen (cf. ibid: 37). Ennis’ situation of financial insecurity continues as economic burdens become more than less with his duties as father and husband: he rejects moving to the city due the high rent (cf. Lee, *Brokeback Mountain*: 48,15), his home looks poor and degenerated if not to say miserable (cf. ibid: 47,03), the money to take the ill kids to the doctor is missing (cf. ibid: 47, 40), the cars are always old and rusty and even his clothes never seem to change over the 20 years in the story (cf. Stacy 2007: 37). Ennis complains to Jack several times about having no
money and also Alma points out that she is worried about the open bills as she once refuses to sleep with Ennis (cf. ibid: 1,17,00). Especially after his divorce from Alma his economic and his personal situation decreases drastically, due to alimony payments and the single person household in which nobody takes care of housework anymore. Finally, Ennis ends up in a shabby trailer park alone (cf. ibid: 1,59,30). In their last meeting Ennis resumes on the priorities in his life: when Jack does not understand why Ennis is not able to meet him in August, he explains, “I gotta’ work, huh? […] You forget how it is bein’ broke all the time! You ever hear of child support?” (ibid: 1,43,05). In this way, the movie does not only show his constant financial struggles and his working class standard, but also his attitude towards life. For Ennis paid work is the fundament of his world, as he says in his own words, “I doubt there’s nothin’ we can do. So, I’m stuck with what I got here – makin’ a livin’ is about all I got time for, now” (ibid: 1,05,15). Perez (cf. 2007: 80) also concludes that Ennis’ economic situation is about survival, a treadmill of paying bills, which he cannot escape: all his life is about making a living, but he still remains at the bottom of the ladder.

Jack is on the other end of the ladder, or at least on a much higher step. Due to the big farming business of his father in law, L.D. Newsome, money is not an issue for him at all. He does not experience the same financial struggle as Ennis does. The movie emphasizes this in Jack’s high living standard, the luxurious home, his new cars and the latest fashion he wears. His financial security does not only expresses in material aspects but also in his opinion (cf. Perez 2007: 81). Work has a fundamentally different meaning for Jack: as he is beyond the stage of simply making a living, he starts to see money as an opportunity to gain independence and construct life accordingly to his own ideas (cf. Stacy 2007: 38). Jack becomes a visionary, trying to find a way that they could be together. On the one hand, his ideas often seem naïve and beyond reality, as Harris (cf. 2007: 129) puts it. On the other hand, Jack leaves no doubt that money is the solution for their problems. However, there is one scene when Jack suggests moving to Texas to Ennis that highlights how far their different financial circumstances separate them (cf. Brokeback Mountain 2006: 1,29,00 – 1,31,23): Jack philosophies about inflation and interest rates, which Ennis sarcastically comments, “That’s some high class entertainment if you ask me” (ibid: 1,29,44). Jack complains about Lureen who only cares about business and questions the capitalistic ideal of always making more money as he concludes, “For what is it worth?” (ibid: 1,29,48). Ennis’ facial expression, the obvious lack of understanding, makes clear that financial security is a world Ennis does not know.
Capitalism and dominance are especially embodied in the character of Mr. Aguirre. Although we only see Mr. Aguirre, played by Randy Quaid, at the beginning of the movie, he is an essential character for the story, which becomes clear in the opening scene: he arrives at his trailer, where Jack and Ennis wait hoping to get a job for the summer, walks up to his door, takes a quick look at the guys, unlocks the door and closes it in front of their noses. Jack and Ennis, who intended to follow him inside, obviously are confused about this short demonstration of hierarchy. After a few seconds he opens the door again and harshly calls them in. Before Aguirre gives them the job, he unleashes his anger on a caller on the telephone. While he instructs them what to do, Jack and Ennis do not say a single word and obediently look down on the floor. When Aguirre is done with giving orders, he silently looks at them with a killing glance. His face makes clear that they are to leave his trailer – immediately (cf. ibid: 3,40 - 6,20). The first appearance of Mr. Aguirre does not leave a doubt who is in power and who is not. We do not need any additional information to understand that the large-scale farmer is a “critical observer” (Alley 2007: 9) who symbolizes the capitalistic fundament of society – he is in a financially privileged situation, he provides jobs, so he also makes the rules: Aguirre has the power to push other men, such as Jack and Ennis, around. Later, we see him disgustedly observing Jack and Ennis through his binoculars, as they play and fool around with each other, without their shirts on (cf. Lee, Brokeback Mountain: 33,31). While Alley (2007: 13) describes this image as “innocent happiness”, the expression on Aguirre’s face makes clear what he, what capitalistic society, thinks of people such as Jack and Ennis. When Aguirre counts the sheep after they came back from the mountain, he expresses his opinion clearly, “You ranch stiffs, you ain’t never no good” (Lee, Brokeback Mountain: 41,31). Aguirre’s capitalistic and patriarchal aura is also emphasized by the fact that he reminds Jack of his traditional “family obligations”, as he informs Jack about his uncle’s health problems (cf. ibid: 34,10). The power relations and the authority of capitalism are also underlined with a cinematic technique in this shot: glasses are often used to emphasize cleverness or wisdom – a person who wears glasses is able to look closely, he can see, meaning that he understands, he knows. Even more important, the binoculars support Aguirre’s dominance as they put him in the position of the active spectator, or as Jones (2007: 22) says the “critical, judgmental overseer”, and subordinate Jack and Ennis as passive objects. The last scene in which we see Mr. Aguirre is in his trailer when Jack comes back to ask for a job the following year. Aguirre’s answer is unmistakable: “You’re wasting your time here […] I ain’t got no
work for you” (Lee, Brokeback Mountain: 46,00). As Jack asks for Ennis, Aguirre accosts Jack “You wasn’t paid to have the dogs baby-sit the sheep, while you two stem the rose” (ibid: 46,20) and shows Jack the place where he think Jack belongs: “Now, get the hell out of my trailer” (ibid: 46,35).

As we can see, their financial situations do not only affect Jack and Ennis way of thinking but also form their characters: what seems possible in Jack’s worldview seems impossible from Ennis’ perspective. We will turn to the questions in which way their self-definition and their self-acceptance result in their willingness to lean up against the rules in a later section. However, capitalism for Jack and Ennis means more than earning money to cover the basic needs of daily life – it forces them to conform to a traditional version of masculinity. While Jack at least has a possibility to escape the harmful hegemony, Ennis suffers from the capitalistic principles of society: he is trapped in the constant struggle of earning money, paying bills and taxes like a slave. Nearly every time they meet they have a discussion about economic responsibilities and independence: Ennis, sometimes desperately, refutes Jack’s suggestions of living together, moving away or at least seeing each other more often several times with reference to his financial duties. He even turns down his daughter in the first place, due to a job, when she invites him to her wedding. Ennis experiences that money means power – those who have it make the rules, those who lack it obey to them. Even Jack, the naïve visionary, is convinced that only financial security, or in other words independence from the capitalistic treadmill, would enable them to live their version of masculinity: he suggests buying land somewhere from the money that L.D Newsome would pay him, if he would leave Lureen (cf. ibid: 1,08,15). Ennis short and clear answer shows how far beyond Ennis’ scope this suggestion is: “I told you, it ain’t gonna be that way” (ibid: 1,08,40).

### 6.1.2 Patriarchal traditions

If we look back to our theoretic background of masculinity, we discovered two important aspects about patriarchy: first, it goes hand in hand with capitalism and secondly, its traces are difficult to follow. This means that much of what we found out about capitalism in Brokeback Mountain, Mr. Aguirre, the hierarchy of paid work and male dominance in the public sphere, refers in the same way to patriarchy. Further, it also means that we have to look closely to see how patriarchal structures in the movie
contribute to the construction of hegemonic masculinity. Stacy (cf. 2007: 35) says that details of Christian Fundamentalism in America’s 1960’s are missing in the movie, or at least reduced to a minimum of a few images and dialogues. In addition to that, we also do not find any other dominant institutions or political parties that distribute patriarchal ideologies in the movie. As a result, we have to turn to ‘society’ itself, Jack’s and Ennis’ daily life and their familiar experience. In this way, we are able to identify that the public opinion, tradition and family structures in *Brokeback Mountain* support the conventional image of young, strong, competitive, heterosexual men.

In the opening scene we see a truck, in which Ennis arrives as hitchhiker, passing three telephone poles that look like crucifixes, which seems like a foreshadowing of the ultra-catholic and traditional worldview in Wyoming in the 1960’s (cf. Lee, *Brokeback Mountain*: 0,58). Stacy (cf. ibid: 36) thinks that Ennis’ anxieties can largely be traced back to the judgmental opinion of the Christian Church in America. As Christianity defines homosexuality as a sin, it is certainly no coincidence that we hear Ennis praying, “forgive us our trespasses […] lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil” (Lee, *Brokeback Mountain*: 44,03) his wedding ceremony. However, within this conservative frame, there are two scenes in which Jack’s end Ennis’ roles as fathers are used to explain society’s opinion about men: during the celebration of 4th of July, Ennis, Alma and the kids are molested by two motorbike bullies (cf. ibid: 52,00). As they refuse to stop, Ennis knocks both of them down. In the same moment the firework starts right behind Ennis, which makes the scenery look like a celebration of pure manliness – a man as caretaker and defender of his family (cf. Stacey, 2007: 39). Jack, on the other hand, meets Lureen at a festival: she is attracted to him, as she sees him winning the rodeo competition (cf. Lee, *Brokeback Mountain*: 54,20). In other words, Jack earns respect and desire when people see him as a young, tough, successful rodeo guy (cf. Tsika 2007: 174). Another example is the scene when Jack and Lureen celebrate Thanksgiving together with Lureen’s parents (cf. Lee, *Brokeback Mountain*: 1,22,00 – 1,24,30): as L.D. overrules Jack’s parental principles towards his son, Jack shouts at him, “Now, you sit down, you old son of a bitch! This is my house, this is my child and you are my guest. You sit down before I knock your ignorant ass into next week!” (ibid: 1,23,40). While L.D. is stunned, Lureen is obviously delighted by this eruption of masculine aggression and authority (cf. Arellano 2007: 66). With this performance, Jack is, at least for the moment, suddenly in the position of patriarchal power within his family clan – Lureen adores, L.D. bows down to and his son obeys him.
Patriarchal ideologies cannot only be found in Jack’s and Ennis’ roles as fathers and husbands, but also within their own childhood experience (cf. Kittermann 2007: 55). Although the movie does not provide explicit scenes about this time, a flashback and some dialogues clarify in which social environment they grew up. Ennis once tells Jack that he knew two old men who were living together, when he was a child (cf. Lee, *Brokeback Mountain*: 1,09,20). They were said to be gay, so one of them was brutally killed by a group of men – they tightened a rope around his penis and dragged him around, until it ripped off. His father made him see the scenery to make sure that he learns this lesson for life. His father was successful as Ennis sums up, “Hell, for all I know, he done the job” (ibid: 1,10,10). The film shows this dramatic event in Ennis’ life in a flashback: it is the key element to understand why Ennis always remains more pessimistic, more frightened than Jack: his childhood experience made him a broken man, haunted by fears and anxieties (cf. Stacy 2007: 40). It explains his insecurity when he is with other people and the constant fear of being ‘detected’. It is no surprise that Ennis concludes: “We’re around each other, and this thing grabs hold of us, again… in the wrong place, in the wrong time, and we’re dead” (Lee, *Brokeback Mountain*: 1,09,05). Jack also talks to Ennis about his father – he describes the relation as cold and distant (cf. Stacy 2007: 41). With comments such as “Can’t please my old man, no way” (Lee, *Brokeback Mountain*: 07,15), and “Never taught me a thing, never once came to see me ride” (ibid: 21,18), it seems that he shared the faith of many children in the US, who experience their fathers traditionally as emotionally unavailable, uninterested and mostly absent. When we see John Twist at the end of the movie, the disturbing scenery supports this opinion (cf. 1,54,35 – 1,55,30): Jack’s father sits on his patriarchal throne (the chair at the very end of the kitchen table), his wife (obviously taking care of the household) seems like a servant and the house itself is all white, purist with a crucifix as only decoration on the walls. John Twist’s conclusion about his son, “But like most of Jack’s ideas, they never come to pass” (ibid: 1,55,15) summarizes the patriarchal restrictions Jack had to experience all his life. Freud would probably identify Mr. Twist as personification of moral authority for Jack – this becomes clear in John Twist’s last act of patriarchal dominance over Jack that even goes beyond his life, as he denies Jack’s ashes being brought up to Brokeback: “Tell you what, we got a family plot, and he’s goin’ in it” (ibid: 1,55,25).

There are many examples for patriarchal influence in *Brokeback Mountain*, but nobody represents them better than L.D. Newsome. He is not only a successful large-
scale businessman, but also the leader, devoutly respected by his daughter and wife, of his family clan. His brisk behavior and the positions of power within the private and public sphere make Lureen’s father the archetype of patriarchal authority (cf. Stacy 2007: 39). L.D Newsome never directly insults or violates Jack, but leaves no doubt what he thinks about men like him (cf. Perez 2007: 83): he visits Lureen in the hospital after she gave birth to Bobby, as he recognizes that he left the presents in the car (cf. Lee, Brokeback Mountain: 59,20 – 1,00,02). L.D. denounces Jack to his errand-boy and orders him out to take them. He does not ask him, he does not call him by his real name, he does not look at him and he does not even address him personally – he says, “Rodeo can take them” (ibid: 59:41). While he seems to care lovingly about his daughter, he does not treat Jack like a human being, or even as if he did not exist at all: as he sees the baby in his arms he proudly announces, “He’s a spittin’ image of his grandpa” (ibid: 59,50). At Thanksgiving, the scene we mentioned before, L.D. permits his grandson to watch football during dinner, although Jack did not allow it. He argues “Want your boy to grow up to be a man, don’t you daughter? Boys should watch football” (ibid: 1,23,09). Moreover, he acts out the patriarchal ritual of slicing the Thanksgiving turkey, although he is Jack’s guest (cf. ibid: 1,22,13). He takes away fork and knife from Jack with a deep, implicit conviction that only he is manly enough in this room to do that (cf. Stacy 2007: 39).

6.1.3 Self – definition and attempts to lean up

*Brokeback Mountain* shows that hegemonic and subordinate versions of masculinity are mainly, just as they are in reality, constructed by patriarchal ideologies and capitalistic structures. However, this process is also supported in the way Jack and Ennis define themselves and as they ‘lean up’ against the oppression: both suffer, both wish to change their situations, but both have different opinions about what is possible. The permanent struggle of defining who they are, and the attempts to break free from prescribed societal roles would not be necessary if there was not a dominant, and harmful, ideal of masculinity. Jack and Ennis reject the stigmatization of being officially gay throughout the movie, as they know that violating the laws of traditional masculinity is not only unacceptable, but also dangerous (cf. Li 2007: 113). So, the only place where they can live their true nature safely is far away from any kind of civilization, or as Jack emotionally resumes at their last meeting, “So, what we got now is Brokeback Mountain! Everything is built on it, that’s all we got, boy! So, I hope
you know that, if you don’t never know the rest!” (Lee, Brokeback Mountain: 1,44,55). Jack and Ennis suffer from their situation in different ways, and thus develop different opinions what solutions there are: while Jack seems more in terms with his unconventional sexual tendencies, Ennis remains unable to accept his ‘otherness’, due to the restrictions of society (cf. Stacy 2007: 206). Finally, Ennis is right after all when we hear him say to Jack “Two guys livin’ together? No way. We can get together, once in a while, in the middle of nowhere, […] If you can’t fix it Jack, you gotta stand it […] For as long as we can ride it. There ain’t no reins on this one” (ibid: 1,10,20).

When the have sex with each other the first time, after Ennis ignored his obedience to watch the sheep. It is Jack who initiates it and Ennis who reacts with disgust, confusion and horror when Jack takes his hand to touch his penis (cf. ibid: 26,30). The camera shows this confusion in a close-ups shot of their faces. The next morning, Ennis sneaks out of the tent. When Jack follows him, we see Ennis loading his weapon, the absolute symbol of power and masculinity, according to Segal (cf. 1995: 19). It seems as if he had to touch his rifle to proof himself he is still masculine (cf. ibid: 28,40). Later, we see Jack watching the sheep when Ennis arrives from behind. He sits down next to Jack, still holding the rifle, and mumbles, “You know I ain’t queer” (ibid: 31,32). The camera shows that his back is turned on Jack, which once again supports their instability. Jack replies, “Me neither” (ibid: 31,35) but it is obvious to see that Jack’s confusion stems from being emotionally overwhelmed, while Ennis is confused in terms of deranged. Jack tries to qualify what happened, “It’s nobody’s business but ours” (ibid: 31,28). Li (cf. 2007: 110) says that Brokeback is not only the place of their coming-out, but it will always be the only place where Ennis does not need to hide – the movie underlines this freedom with the breathtaking scenery of the landscape around the fictitious Brokeback Mountain: nature in its true form, as an expression in itself, wild and free, untouched by the rules of society (cf. Alley 2007: 11).

Throughout the story Ennis is not able to fully accept his new desire (cf. Stacy 2007: 32). Even up on Brokeback, when they continue their sexual interaction, we see Ennis sitting in the front of the tent, nervously rubbing his fingers and constantly turning his head back and forth (cf, Lee, Brokeback Mountain: 31,48). It is not clear if he is wondering about right or wrong in this moment, or fears that someone might see them. Jack seems to read his mind and ensures him “It’s all right” (ibid: 32,53) to make him calm down and relax – this will not remain the only situation in which Jack decides to
make his own rules. However, in the years after their season together on Brokeback, Jack is willing to follow his emotions – Ennis denies them, tries to hide them from others, and even from himself. Ennis restricts his sexual desire for men to Jack only, whereas Jack looks for ‘alternatives’ several times, as a result of Ennis’s constant refusal to intensify their relationship (cf. Harris 2007: 129). The anxiety of being labeled as ‘other’ in society lies so deep inside Ennis that he once threatens Alma to knock her down, as she tells him that she knows about Jack and him (cf. Lee, *Brokeback Mountain*: 1,25,20). When he sees Jack for the very last time, he says “I hear what they got in Mexico for boys like you!” (ibid: 1,44,06). Even after 20 years of exhausting and painful denial of his true sexual identity, he refuses to be called gay.

The fact that Jack is willing to lean up against societal rules, while Ennis prefers to stay on the safe side when it comes to the question what is acceptable, is emphasized early in the movie (cf. ibid: 16,50): one evening on the mountain, as both complain that they do not want anymore beans, Jack suggests shooting a sheep. Ennis rejects the idea and warns that this would be against Mr. Aguirre’s rules: “What if Aguirre finds out? […] I’ll stick with beans”, but Jack insists, “Well, I won’t” (cf. ibid: 17,00). Stacy (2007: 32) concludes on this scene, “Jack reveals a greater willingness to buck the constraints of society, while Ennis sticks to the script of convention to avoid the label queer”. As the story unfolds Jack’s revolutionary attitude grows: he initiates the contact after some years, he comes to visit Ennis every single time, and he develops concrete plans of living together. Ennis rejects these plans as unrealistic and in some scenes we can see the fear that drives Ennis: when Jack criticizes that Lureen only cares about business Ennis asks, “She don’t ever suspect? You ever get the feelin’, I don’t know…when you’re in town, and… someone looks at you…suspicious, like he knows? Then you go out on the pavement, and everyone’s lookin’, like they all know too?” (Lee, *Brokeback Mountain*: 1,30,00). At the beginning Jack accepts Ennis’ explanations why a life together is not possible, but as he matures, which is indicated in the movie by growing a moustache, he competes with Ennis’ worldview (cf. Alley 2007: 14). When they meet for the last time Ennis tells him that he will not be able to see him in the following year. As a result, Jack loses control of his temper: “Why is it we’re always in the freaking cold?! We oughta go south, where it’s warm, you know? We ought to go to Mexico” (Lee, *Brokeback Mountain*: 1,42,12). Ennis replies “Mexico? Hell, Jack the only travelin’ I ever done, is round the coffee pot, lookin’ for the handle” (cf. ibid: 1,42,20). This discussion is more or less the same they had 15 years earlier, as Jack suggested living together. While Ennis’ paranoia forces him to conformity,
Jack makes clear that he does not want to deny their ‘otherness’ any longer. He demands to fight against the denial by society and also defends his sex-trip to Mexico: “You have no idea how bad it gets” (ibid: 1,45,19). Although Ennis generally is an introverted character, not communicative and much less emotional, the drama of their last dialogue makes clear how exhausting the permanent denial is for him, as he breaks out in tears and sobs, “I’m nothin’, I’m nowhere [...] I can’t stand this any more” (ibid: 1,46,00).

6.2 Disruption of traditional masculinity

_Brokeback Mountain_ is in many ways an extraordinary movie and it crossed lines in many ways as well: the line of hegemonic social conventions, the line of dominant cultural ideologies and certainly the line of mainstream movies, only to name a few. In the previous chapter we emphasized that the definition of ‘independent’ is beneficial for our discussion: firstly, ‘Indy-culture’ shows that ideologies do not only occur in political contexts, but also in the fields of art and culture. Secondly, in terms of cultural reproduction independent movies are an alternative to mainstream and represent topics and opinions that are unpopular, unconventional and unwanted in society. Many people will disagree with the opinion to call _Brokeback Mountain_ an independent movie. Considering the criteria of independent, the main argument against an independent labeling is the cast: the protagonists Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal are actors who have already been successful in Hollywood and thus violate independent tradition. Another argument against the independent ‘origins’ of _Brokeback Mountain_ is the production company, Focus Feature. Focus Feature is a sub-company of a ‘big player’ in Hollywood, Universal Studios. In addition to that, _Brokeback Mountain_ had been criticized by independent fanatics due do its commercial success and its high budget. However, the arguments against Brokeback Mountain are more than vague. First of all, Gyllenhaal and Ledger show extraordinary authentic performances of their complex and round characters. Additionally, we need to point out that some of the ‘Indie-cult-movies’ such as _Pulp Fiction_ (1994) with John Travolta, Bruce Willis and Samuel L. Jackson, _Fear and Loathing Las Vegas_ (1998) with Johnny Depp and or _21 Grams_ (2003) with Sean Penn also had a ‘Hollywood cast’. Further, in terms of production companies we have to ask why _Pulp Fiction_, which was produced by another traditional Hollywood studio, New Line Cinema, is accepted as an independent production? _Brokeback Mountain_ had a budget of
approximately 14 million dollar— it was certainly no low-budget production and more expensive than *Pulp Fiction* with 8 million, but also a lot cheaper than other Independent movies such as *Fear and Loathing Las Vegas* (1998), or *21 Grams* (2003) (cf. Stacy 2007: 3). In fact, *Brokeback Mountain*’s independent character in financial matters can be proven legally: Randy Quaid, who plays Mr. Aguirre in the movie, accepted reduced payment as he was told to play a character in an independent production— after the huge financial success he felt deceived by New Line Cinema and tried to sue the company. Quaid lost (cf. Waxham 2002). Finally, if we also consider that *Brokeback Mountain* was directed by Ang Lee, a respected director of independent movies like *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) and *Ride with the Devil* (1999), the accusations of not being an independent movie are highly fragile. It would be more than doubtful to denounce the quality of a movie because it was acknowledged by a wide audience and financially successful. *Brokeback Mountain* met the most essential criteria for independent movies as it crossed boundaries and presented a story with the probably most explosive topic in America.

Everybody who saw the movie confirms that *Brokeback Mountain* presents an unorthodox and unconventional form of masculinity. The interesting question to which we will turn in this section is in which way the movie is disruptive of traditional masculinity. It may sound paradox to begin with some thoughts in which way the movie conforms to traditional American masculinity. In the very first scene we get to know Ennis del Mar and Jack Twist somewhere in Wyoming as two young and vital men, who wear jeans, denim shirts, rough boots and cowboy hats. The iconography does not only underline the traditional image in the way the protagonists dress, but also in the use of landscape and nature: mountain green, horseback rides, rivers and fireplaces are all images we know from Western genre. In addition to that, their ‘daily-life’ behavior identifies them as traditional men: both are capable of using firearms and are talented in horse riding, they smoke and drink, they speak as little as possible and if they do, they have a strong working class slang and use swear words. They behave aggressively in many situations, use their fists instead of words, drive trucks and prefer working with their own hands. They even perform heterosexual love, have wives and children of which they take care and which they defend. However, all this, this apparent ‘normality’, makes it so disruptive. Jack and Ennis are tough, white and handsome, they could be former football high school stars and in love with the most beautiful girls in town. We would not expect Jack and Ennis to fall in love with each other, as they seem to be like any other conventional young man in America. In this
way the movie does not buy into stereotypical images of gay men, who live in a fancy, glittering apartment in San Francisco, wear bright and shiny clothes and speak with a high pitched female voice. It distances from the irrational portrayal that homosexual men are stigmatized through the way they dress or behave – *Brokeback Mountain* shows that being not conventionally masculine does not necessarily mean to be fundamentally unmanly. In addition to that, we know that movies enforce identification with the protagonists. In a patriarchal society we are used to see protagonists who personify the conventional, dominant version of masculinity because it makes them ideal identification figures. This of course becomes problematic when the characters are homosexual, as it is in the case of *Brokeback Mountain*. It is not only Jack's and Ennis’ feelings for each other that makes them unsuitable male role models for hegemonic masculinity, but also their inability to perform the fundamental masculine roles as breadwinner husband and father accordingly to the societal expectations.

### 6.2.1 Form, content and cinematic techniques

In the introduction paragraph of this chapter we have already mentioned some of the thoughts in which way *Brokeback Mountain* tries to differentiate itself from existing rules. The movie is definitely an apparent break from the traditional, often conservative, Hollywood narrative conventions about men (cf. Patterson 2008: xii). Firstly, and most of all, the movie is disruptive of traditional American masculinity in terms of content and form. Regardless of the question if the movie is to be labeled independent or mainstream, no movie with a serious homosexual love story as the main plot has ever before reached such an enormous audience – this fact, although we have already mentioned it several times so far, cannot be emphasized enough as Bui (cf. 2007: 157) insists: the movie brought a topic on screen that has been totally omitted by mainstream cinema. Deep romantic emotions and uncensored pictures of a couple’s explicit sexual activities have been fundamentally restricted to heterosexual love – until *Brokeback Mountain*, movies portrayed gay relationships mostly in a funny and humorous context or in an unimportant side plot of the story (cf. Patterson 2008: liii): Aranson and Kimmel (cf. 2001: 47) name *My best friend’s wedding* (1997) as ideal examples, *Bird Cage* (1996) would be another one. While straight couples were shown naked, kissing and having sex since the abolishment of the production code, gay couples were presented as joking buddies rather than intimate lovers. Although some movies such as *Philadelphia* (1993) had a more serious attitude towards
homosexuality as the movie’s topic, scenes with explicit physical emotions, romanticism or kisses were completely left out (cf. Li 2007: 109).

As we discovered in the previous chapters, the motivation for the omission of gay love is obviously commercially motivated, due to the fear of repelling the conservative American audience. In addition to that, *Brokeback Mountain* is not only about two men falling in love, it is about two cowboys falling in love, the last persons on earth we would expect to be homosexual (cf. Kittermann 2007: 48). Cowboys have an enormous ideological significance in America: they are stylized as ‘real’ men and “embody the primitive, unadorned, self-evident, natural truths of the world” (Brod 1995: 13). Of course, we could argue over the question if Jack and Ennis are truly cowboys, as they are initially hired as shepherds at the beginning of the movie and in addition to that, nobody would call *Brokeback Mountain* a Western. However, the movie does use visual codes of this genre, as Patterson (cf. 2008: xiv-xv) highlights: clothes, landscape, accessories and many more. As a result, this iconography builds up a scenery in which a spectator would expect nothing but ‘pure’, traditional manliness and is more than stunned to be confronted with homosexual men. Most of all, we must not forget that a movie demands identification with the story and the protagonists, which in case of *Brokeback Mountain* must have been more than disturbing for the mainly heterosexual audience.

Secondly, the movie avoids displaying masculinity neither as a spectacle nor as a masquerade. In this case, it can be argued over the definition of masquerade: on the one hand, we know that Jake Gyllenhaall and Heath Ledger ‘put on’ the characters of Jack Twist and Ennis del Mar. On the other hand, it does not idealize a specific version of masculinity, least of all the dominant one in America in the 1960’s (cf. Alley 2007: 6). It does not support the existing power relations, it criticizes them and even more attempts to defend and justify an oppressed form of masculinity (cf. Li 2007: 107). Additionally, Jack and Ennis are no pumped-up, muscle packed model types but authentic young men who are portrayed realistically in their physical appearance and their lifestyle (cf. Stacy 2007: 34). Especially Ennis is explicitly shown in poor circumstances, marked by the burdens of his life and sometimes even looks unhealthy and sick. Moreover both of the protagonists are neither in powerful positions, nor are they in any way capable of being in control of their lives – instead of making their own decisions they are rather driven by a conservative, patriarchal and capitalistic society
and suffer from its expectations towards men. In cinematic terms this means that Jack and Ennis are not in charge of the narrative, but the narrative is in charge of them.

The inability to control the story violates the fundamental concept of displaying men as active and powerful subjects: as Stacy (2007: 34) explains while Ennis “lacks the courage, Jack […] is waiting on Ennis”. This surrender to conformity is underlined by the fact that the masculine spectacle is missing – instead of overblown masculine comments we experience Jack and Ennis as weak, confused, insecure and anxious. In addition to that, there are no explosions, gunfights or car chases which would distract the spectator from the physical male appearance – on the contrary – they are often explicitly displayed as erotic objects, which according to Patterson (2008: xiii) is considered as “obscene and shameful” in terms of social relationships. This is explicitly shown in the sex scenes and in the images of nudity. We see several shots of Jack and Ennis partly and even completely naked in which the camera frames and thus emphasizes their bodies. A perfect example is the opening scene in which the two meet each other for the very first time (cf. Lee, Brokeback Mountain: 2,20 – 4,00): when Jack arrives in his old and rusty pick-up, Ennis is already waiting at Mr. Aguirre’s office, leaned against the wall of the trailer. Jack gets out, leans against his car and intensively looks at Ennis. The camera gives us a full body shot that perfectly frames Jack’s physical appearance – the image reminds us of a lascivious pin-up girl poster, as figure… shows. As the camera shows a close-up of Jack’s face, we see his eyes underneath the flap of his hat lustfully observing Ennis with a decent smile on his face. When Ennis who mainly looks down on his feet realizes that he is being observed he immediately looks away. Jack seems like a womanizer in a bar who waits for the right moment to go over to a girl and ask her out. In this situation, the camera switches several times between Jack and Ennis, highlighting different aspects about their bodies, especially their faces. There are no other influences in these intense minutes, which would draw the attention away from them. After a cut, we see another cinematic encoding of the upcoming sexual desire and the progress of sexual objectification: Ennis is sitting on the steps in front of the trailer, while Jack is shaving in front of the side mirror of his car. Through the mirror Jack keeps an eye on him, which frames Ennis as an object to be looked at. After the season on Brokeback has ended, Ennis appears one more time in the side mirror of Jack’s car as he drives away. Once again the camera frames Ennis as the object of Jack’s desire.
6.2.2 Inability to perform traditional masculine roles

Within the narrative itself we, the spectators, soon discover that Jack and Ennis do not conform to traditional masculinity in. The first and most striking moment to realize this is when they have sex for the first time (cf. Lee, *Brokeback Mountain*: 26,40). In doing so, they violate the fundamental taboo that men are not supposed to make love to other men. As the movie continues we find out that they do not only break the most masculine rule of all, but also fail to perform accordingly to the expectations of American society. Due to the forced denial of their innermost emotions, both men struggle with their lives and are, unsurprisingly, not able to find their positions in society. They are neither capable of fulfilling their duties as ‘breadwinners’, nor as husbands, nor as fathers. Due to the capitalistic structures that underlie the Western, patriarchal society the masculine identity is very much associated with paid work – the significance of patriarchy and capitalism in the movie will be an essential aspect in the following section.

Willot and Griffin (2000: 89) call unemployment a major crisis for men as it represents “disempowerment and emasculation“. As a consequence, they further explain, paid work undermines a particular hegemonic form of masculinity (cf. ibid: 89). It stabilizes the “traditional masculine identity constructed around the discourses such as bringing home wages” (ibid: 81). Although initially, Jack and Ennis both come from a poor financial background Jack seems to be better situated and generally less concerned about money throughout the movie. In financial matters Jack and Ennis develop differently: while Jack luckily gains financial security as he marries Lureen, we never see Ennis at regular work, but only in part time jobs to make ends meet. Ennis’ struggle for money is shown in the movie in his living standard: the first house, where he lives on rent with Alma and the children looks poor and degenerated. As Alma suggests moving away from there Ennis replies that rent in town was too high – when they finally move to town, Alma has to start working to support the family financially. After the divorce from Alma his living standard decreases dramatically, due to alimony payments, until he finally ends up in a trailer park. Stacy (cf. 2007: 40) comments that although Ennis does the best he can, he is at no stage in his life able to gain financial security for his family, not even for himself.

Jack on the other hand has no such financial worries, which is especially portrayed in the way he dresses, through his cars or the interior decoration of his house. However,
the movie clearly shows that Jack cannot take credits for his wealth: beside the fact that money comes from L.D. Newsome’s prosperous farming business, we hardly see Jack doing any work at the family business. It is Lureen who sits behind her adding machine, constantly checking the bills (cf. Stacey 2007: 39). Jack does not want to conform to the capitalistic ideal of masculinity, as he criticizes: “All I’m saying is, what’s the point of makin’ it? If taxes don’t get it, inflation will eat it all up. You should see Lureen, punchin’ numbers in her adding machine, huntin’ for extra zeros. Her eyes are getting smaller and smaller, it’s like watchin’ a rabbit tryin’ to squeeze into a snake hole, with a coyote on its tail […] For what it’s worth?” (Lee, *Brokeback Mountain*: 1,29,15). All in all, Jack and Ennis are, in completely different ways, not able to meet the expectations of the traditional male breadwinner.

Jack’s and Ennis’ version of masculinity also differs from conventional expressions when it comes to their role as husbands and lovers. Although Ennis’ marriage with Alma is long planned he is overburden with the situation: Stacy (cf. 2007: 35) describes that the wedding procedure seems to be a neutral process to Ennis, a societal role he has to fulfill, rather than a romantic moment. Later, when they go sledding Ennis obviously feels uncomfortable and behaves more like a friend than her husband and at home he talks to her like a roommate. Generally, their relationship seems to be functional instead of emotional: the only sex scene with Ennis and Alma shows Ennis violently turning Alma around and making love to her from behind, the typical sex position for gay men. From the painful expression of her face we could assume that he even penetrates her anally. Alma constantly retreats emotionally from Ennis, even before she finds out about Jack – at first he is not able to fulfill her needs concerning living standard, later sexual desires and in participation in childcare (cf. ibid: 37). Finally, we see Ennis’ ultimate failure in being a husband as Alma is the one who files the divorce.

Jack on the other hand is not doing any better: although he stays married until his violent death, his relationship with Lureen is as unemotional and cold as Ennis’. Except the first date, we do not see them performing any sexual activities, not even kissing. In addition to that, Lureen does not only run the business, but without her activity the relationship probably would not exist at all (cf. Lee, *Brokeback Mountain*: 55,45): *she* walks over to him in the bar, *she* starts the conversation, *she* initiates sex in her car and finally *she* is on top and makes love to him – in every situation Lureen is the subject and Jack the object (cf. Tsika 2007: 174). Jack becomes more and more
uninteresting for Lureen, as he does not stand up to her father, who constantly undermines Jack’s authority and obviously questions his manliness. In this way, Arellano (2007: 59) even speaks of “Jack’s impotence”.

Finally, Jack and Ennis disrupt traditional American masculinity also in their roles as fathers. Their performance as fathers is often connected to their roles as breadwinner and husband, as it refers to family life. The movie does not give us a lot of explicit information about their fatherhood, especially not for Jack (cf. ibid: 65). He barely appears on screen together with his son, but as we know from the previous chapters, the omission of a topic often says more than images can show: as L.D. highly questions Jack’s qualities as a man he obviously feels chosen to educate his grandson). He does not only overrule Jack, but even tries to replace him as a father: when L.D. sees his grandson for the first time, he insists that he looks like him (cf. Lee, *Brokeback Mountain*: 59,48). At thanksgiving, when the fight for parental authority escalates, he tries to set standards what is good for his grandson (cf. ibid: 1,22,40). From a traditional point of view, being a father means first of all being a role model, a source of identification for a son. Beside the fact that Jack loves another man, he lacks power and control as he subordinates to his wife, and accepts the permanent teasing of his father-in-law. All this makes him the absolute anti-role model for conventional masculinity.

Ennis on the other hand is father to three girls, which reduces the burden of being an identification figure (cf. ibid: 65). As a father he also seems not capable of the situation, as we can see in one scene when he ‘parks’ the kids at Alma’s workplace like they were toys (cf. Lee, *Brokeback Mountain*: 57,45). Ennis accepts his family duties but despite the fact that he obviously loves his daughters, the relationship to them is distant and cold (cf. Jones 2007: 25). In some situations he even seems socially underdeveloped (cf. Lee, *Brokeback Mountain*: 1,11,05): Alma leaves for work, although Ennis is against it. The girls play outside on a swing. He looks at them with an irritated expression and angrily mumbles, “Do you need a push or somethin’?” (cf. ibid: 1,11,40), before he walks on without waiting for an answer. Despite the fact that Ennis is not able to color his role as father with the warmth, security and emotions, his daughters seem to love him anyway (cf. Stacy 2007: 39). All in all, Jack and Ennis fail to conform to conventional American masculinity due to their incapability of adapting to the existing social norms, and their inability to become active subjects within their fundamental masculine roles as caretakers, husbands and fathers.
7 Conclusion

Movies are more than entertainment they are cultural goods. Movies are a mirror of society as they show, which contents are popular, dominant or subordinate. However, movies are not scientific papers, although both contain and transmit cultural information: scientific work is exact, neutral, sometimes dry, reflects every step it takes and explains every single thought. Science uses hypotheses, approaches and studies as a language to communicate – movies use settings, scenery, iconography, dialogues and facial expressions to explain their perspectives. Quality movies bring these theoretic skeletal structures to life, as they put them into a story, in a sequence of events: what we read about social constructionism, hegemony, power relations, factors and principles in academic research, we see in Brokeback Mountain when Ennis explains with an appalled face, “I ain’t queer” after his first homosexual experience, and when Jack is beaten to death by a group of men in. Quality movies reflect reality, and reality simply exists: it does not explain itself, but only shows a result, the status quo. Quality movies leave it to us, the spectators, to recognize correlations and to draw conclusions.

What does Brokeback Mountain tell us about masculinity? Religious hardliners in the US would say: nothing at all. Most people in Western society would probably agree to them. However, the truth is that Brokeback Mountain is more than beneficial for our debate about masculinity, as it refers to the complex academic field of masculinity studies in many ways. Firstly, there is the story itself, the content that presents an alternate, controversial image of men. In this way, it implicitly reflects on the key elements in academic research about masculinity we have investigated in this thesis: the argumentative basis for the definition of masculinity, society’s underlying principles that establish and maintain the dominant version, and the effects of these power relations. Secondly, style and mode of production identify Brokeback Mountain’s controversial plot clearly as oppressed side issue of society. In addition to that, the decision to cast protagonists who are white, young and attractive (which is a major difference to Annie Proulx’s novel), and to degrade them to objects of visual pleasure indicates the unconventional version of masculinity that will be further enfolded in the movie.
Brokeback Mountain exemplifies that the opinion about men in Western culture does not have a fundamental naturalistic basis: masculinity is neither predetermined in a man’s DNA, nor in his brain, nor in unconscious psychological mechanisms. What a man is supposed to be, how he is supposed to look, act, walk, dress, talk, think or feel is also not a direct result of his early childhood experience, or an imitation of male role models. Masculinity is not at all a stable, natural essence – on the contrary – it is a flexible cultural script that fluctuates over time and varies from one culture to another. The tragic story of Jack and Ennis shows that patriarchy, capitalism and tradition are the main factors in society that form a dominant version of masculinity. Both do not only suffer from this subordination, but also experience dangerous and harmful situations, which makes it impossible for Jack and Ennis to find acceptance in their environment, not even for themselves.

Brokeback Mountain is definitely more than an ideal example to demonstrate the social construction of masculinity, and the driving forces that establish and maintain this process. The huge media interest, the countless debates and the enormous box-office takings emphasize that the movie cannot be reduced to an academic issue. Brokeback Mountain is disruptive of and offensive to traditional masculinity, as it consequently avoids stereotypes and clichés. Jack and Ennis are in love with each other, but they are not ‘typically’ homosexual: they are not loud, shrill and swishy – on the contrary – except their sexual desires, they are like every other young American man. In this way, Brokeback Mountain highly questions and challenges pre-assembled societal categories. It also makes clear that the movie is not about homosexuality, queerness or otherness, but about the concept of masculinity itself.

Brokeback Mountain leaves many questions unanswered. Probably the most important question for us is: Where do we go from here? It is a human attitude to look for explanations as orientation – especially in today’s ‘high speed lifestyle’ everybody demands answers instead of questions, fast access to information, and reduction to the essentials. As a consequence, we could also follow this trend and hastily reduce Brokeback Mountain to a simple ‘message’, such as: ‘Brokeback Mountain demands more tolerance’, or ‘love does not know any boundaries’. However, the question is does Brokeback Mountain aim at a simple conclusion? Does an ambitious movie that deals with one of the most complex and controversial topics in Western society, with a total length of 120 minutes want to be reduced to a short moral lesson? Is there always a good reason, a detailed explanation or a clear answer for the things that
happen in real life? Traditional Hollywood movies try to make us believe this: they make a ‘clear’ and ‘simple’ distinction between black and white, good and bad, right and wrong. However, life is not a Hollywood movie.

If we want to conclude on Brokeback Mountain we need a broader, more moderate perspective that avoids snap judgments: it seems naïve to belief that academic work means finding clear answers and presenting scientific results. Some topics do not allow eternal, universal answers, as Brokeback Mountain and the social construction of masculinity show. This means that true knowledge and cognition manifests itself in the awareness of a problem area: being aware of the complexity, facing the ambiguity, comparing the multiple perspectives, asking questions, researching the backgrounds and realizing correlations. Brokeback Mountain does not assume the right to determine what masculinity is, or recommend what gay men should do. The movie simply makes us aware of a complex question; it draws our attention to a problematic topic in our society and thus keeps the discourse about masculinity alive.
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