

Dominic Schmiedl

**Crisis and Masculinity on Contemporary
Cable Television: Tracing the Western Hero
in "Breaking Bad", "The Walking Dead" and
"Hell on Wheels"**

Doctoral Thesis / Dissertation

YOUR KNOWLEDGE HAS VALUE



- We will publish your bachelor's and master's thesis, essays and papers
- Your own eBook and book - sold worldwide in all relevant shops
- Earn money with each sale

Upload your text at www.GRIN.com
and publish for free



Bibliographic information published by the German National Library:

The German National Library lists this publication in the National Bibliography; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de> .

This book is copyright material and must not be copied, reproduced, transferred, distributed, leased, licensed or publicly performed or used in any way except as specifically permitted in writing by the publishers, as allowed under the terms and conditions under which it was purchased or as strictly permitted by applicable copyright law. Any unauthorized distribution or use of this text may be a direct infringement of the author s and publisher s rights and those responsible may be liable in law accordingly.

Imprint:

Copyright © 2014 GRIN Verlag
ISBN: 9783668042018

This book at GRIN:

<https://www.grin.com/document/305559>

Dominic Schmiedl

**Crisis and Masculinity on Contemporary Cable Television:
Tracing the Western Hero in "Breaking Bad", "The
Walking Dead" and "Hell on Wheels"**

GRIN - Your knowledge has value

Since its foundation in 1998, GRIN has specialized in publishing academic texts by students, college teachers and other academics as e-book and printed book. The website www.grin.com is an ideal platform for presenting term papers, final papers, scientific essays, dissertations and specialist books.

Visit us on the internet:

<http://www.grin.com/>

<http://www.facebook.com/grincom>

http://www.twitter.com/grin_com

**Crisis and Masculinity on Contemporary Cable
Television: Tracing the Western Hero in
Breaking Bad, The Walking Dead and *Hell on
Wheels*.**

Dissertation
zur Erlangung des Grades doctor philosophiae (Dr. phil.)
an der
Fakultät für Sprach-, Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften
der
Technischen Universität Dresden

Vorgelegt von: Dominic Schmiedl, geb. am 8. April 1985 in Elsterwerda
Verteidigt am: 26.01.2015

Betreuer: Prof. Dr. Brigitte Georgi-Findlay

Gutachter: 1. Prof. Dr. Brigitte Georgi-Findlay, TU Dresden
2. Prof. Dr. Katja Kanzler, TU Dresden
3. Prof. Dr. Evelyne Keitel, TU Chemnitz

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Masculinity, Crisis and the West	18
2.1. <i>Gender and Men's Studies</i>	19
2.2. <i>Manhood in America and Crisis Tendencies</i>	22
2.3. <i>The Mythic West and (Revisionist) Westerns</i>	27
2.4. <i>The 'Crisis' of Masculinity</i>	36
3. “I Am the Danger”: Crisis and Masculinity in <i>Breaking Bad</i>	42
3.1. <i>Locating Breaking Bad</i>	46
3.2. <i>“Like Keith Richards with a Glass of Warm Milk”</i>	53
3.3. <i>Psychological Wounds</i>	68
3.4. <i>Narcissism and (Frontier) Masculinity</i>	80
3.5. <i>Physical Wounds and the Becoming of Man in the West</i>	90
3.6. <i>Male Sacrifice and the Good Provider</i>	93
3.7. <i>Malignant Man: Cancer, Capitalism and Violence</i>	104
3.8. <i>“I'm your hostage”: Women in Breaking Bad</i>	115
4. Gunfighter Revival in an Apocalyptic Setting	124
4.1. <i>Reanimated Corpses and Reaffirmed Masculinity</i>	125
4.2. <i>From “Officer Friendly” to Will Kane</i>	137
4.3. <i>The Apocalypse as State of Exception</i>	152
5. Violence as Language: Trauma and Liminality in <i>Hell on Wheels</i> and <i>Banshee</i>	168
5.1. <i>“Ain't much fun killing them, but they seem to need it”</i>	168
5.2. <i>“A Man Who Hates His Sins Can Be Redeemed for It”</i>	187
5.3. <i>Lions and Zebras</i>	192
5.4. <i>Myths and Money</i>	199
5.5. <i>Look Sharp and Fight Hard</i>	204
6. Conclusion	228
7. Appendix: Episode Guide	242
8. Works Cited	248

Lennard: “You've been working on string theory for the last 20 years and you're not closer to proving it than when you started!”

Sheldon: “Yeah? Well, I've had a lot on my plate. We happen to live in a golden age of television!”
(*The Big Bang Theory* S07E20).

*

You were never a man
in the television sense of the word
(Fuhrman, 50)

1. Introduction

“Like America itself, television has always existed in a state of transformation, being continually reshaped and occasionally reinvented by a wide assortment of technological, commercial, and social factors” (Edgerton, 2).

“[T]he Western is a universal frame within which it is possible to comment on today” (Sam Peckinpah qtd. in: Parkinson & Jeavons, 182).

“The two most successful creations of American movies are the gangster and the Western: men with guns” (Dashiell Hammett, qtd. in: Weidinger, 97).

What do we expect men to be like? And what do men expect themselves to be like? When we watch a Western that we know nothing about beforehand, we inevitably expect to encounter a male main character and, to some degree, we just know what he is going to look like and how he is going to behave – the strong, silent type with a towering presence in the world, who might do bad things but who can eventually be counted on.

Similarly, expectations concerning men surface in commonplace statements such as “boys don't cry” or “a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do.” These statements can be understood as expectations that shape narratives – the narratives of our lives and of fiction. Imagine a Western that does not conform to these expectations, a Western that features a hero who does cry and who does not do what he has got to, for example seek revenge for the wrongful murder of a friend. Would this be considered a 'real' Western or rather a parody?

Expectations about manhood seem to have generic implications. Lee Clark Mitchell convincingly argues in his study *Westerns. Making the Man in Fiction and Film* (1996) that the Western is “deeply haunted by the problem of becoming a man” (4). However, Western-type conceptions of masculinity not only have a place in the Western, but in narratives of other genres or genre hybrids as well.

I argue that contemporary cable television series such as *Breaking Bad* (2008 – 2013), *The Walking Dead* (2010 – present) or *Justified* (2010 – present), amongst others, are heavily informed by the Western and its representation of masculinity. How do these series construct the masculinity of their male main characters? Does a contemporary Western series like *Hell on Wheels* (2011 – present) still adhere to century-old conceptions of masculinity and the West as a space for regeneration? Why do we find so many Western-type constructions of masculinity in narratives mostly set in our day and

age, more than a century after the American frontier experience? Do these constructions of masculinity fulfill our expectations or is this recourse to an arguably outmoded model of manhood used for different ends? The following pages seek to find answers to these concerns and place them within a context of America in crisis.

The influential HBO drama series *The Sopranos* (1999 – 2007) is very much concerned with masculinity and crisis tendencies. It has also paved the way for the series under investigation in this project. The male main character, Tony Soprano, is both a Mafia boss and a suburban family man trying to navigate the demands of an all male business environment and his assumed responsibilities as a family man. This is not an easy task as he is suffering panic attacks for which he seeks treatment in psychotherapy. It can be argued that it is his expectation of what a man should be like that drives him to therapy – more than once he wonders “whatever happened to Gary Cooper, the strong, silent type?” (S01E01). The reference is of course not Gary Cooper as a person, but the actor who starred in many Westerns such as *High Noon* (1952) or *Man of the West* (1958). The demands of family life are seemingly incommensurable to his expectations about manhood and arguably construct one on-going crisis for this man. His own son, Anthony, Jr., does not conform to his father's idea of how a man should behave. Thus, when Anthony, Jr. is heartbroken after his fiancé left him, we see that boys in fact cry and in this particular case, a lot and openly. His father advises him to go out and “get a blowjob.” There is, after all, plenty of fish in the sea and Anthony, Jr. has, according to his father, much to offer: “You are handsome, and smart, and a hard worker, and... lets be honest: *white*. that's a huge plus nowadays” (S06E17).

Anthony Jr. should feel lucky, his father tells him: being a white male in America carries certain privileges. Being a male-sexed person in itself however does not provide the best benefits. Being white *and* heterosexual *and* male seems to be the ideal prerequisite to success. Nevertheless, like Tony Soprano, white middle class men on television are increasingly shown to turn to crime to uphold a privileged status.

The 'Other', that is women as well as ethnic and sexual 'minorities', has voiced its appetite for a fair share of the pie. This circumstance has its ramifications. Civil rights groups' pleas for equality however surface as a crisis: the crisis of (white) masculinity.

Looking at how the crisis discourse is held and how men are presented on the television series I investigate here, one might infer that clinging to white male privilege is what a “man's gotta do.” Thus, one of the main concerns of this project is to look at

the representational patterns at work in these series – how they relate to the aforementioned crisis discourse and whether they communicate to social, political and cultural issues at work in the contemporary USA. I argue that dramas airing on the basic cable channels AMC and FX are influenced by the economic crisis that erupted in 2007 and/or wrestle with the ramifications of 9/11. Broadly asking, how do the televisual constructions of masculinity resonate with these issues? Does the resurgence of an old ideal of masculinity on some cable channels communicate to crisis tendencies in America? In answering these question, I will look at how these televisual narratives construct masculinity and whether these constructions can be traced in a historical lineage of representations of American manhood.

Masculinity itself has been said to be “in crisis” for quite some time now and it could be argued that the return of older forms of masculinity on television has something to do with this crisis discourse. The crisis of masculinity has been a widely discussed subject throughout various academic fields and will be elaborated on in more detail in the first chapter. This discourse has also been an anchor to various investigations into popular culture, most notably film, theater, and performance art. Kaja Silverman's *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (1992) looked at the films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder and how the marginal masculinities there undercut what she terms the dominant ideology. Sally Robinson's *Marked Men* (2000) more explicitly looks at how the marking of the white male was responsible for crisis announcements by enabling investigations into white male hegemony. The narratives she investigates deal with how these crisis announcements are used to reclaim patriarchal privilege. Pivotal to her and following inquiries into white masculinity was Richard Dyer's *White* (1997), a critical investigation into how “the equation of being white with being human secured a position of power” (9). Hamilton Carroll's *Affirmative Reaction* (2011) and Claire Sisco King's *Washed in Blood* (2012) follow a similar approach as Robinson, while Fintan Walsh's *Performing Male Trouble* (2010) focusses on the performance aspects of both crisis and masculinity. Most of the scholars I have just mentioned base their analyses on Judith Butler's groundbreaking understanding of gender as performative in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and R. W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity in *Masculinities* (1995).

Even though it is recognized that there are various forms of masculinity competing simultaneously for hegemony, these investigations often focus on a masculinity

perceived as hegemonic, a masculinity, moreover, that announces a moment of crisis in order to reclaim patriarchal privilege perceived as lost. Similar in tackling representations of masculinity in light of this perceived crisis, this project seeks to sidestep discussing a more generalized, Western white masculinity as the hegemonic form of manhood in the USA and in the Western Hemisphere: the masculinities under investigation in Walsh's *Performing Male Trouble* or Silverman's *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* are not analyzed by both as expressions of or diversions from a culturally specific expression of manhood, but more of a universal, that is Western, expression thereof. Even though idealized conceptions of masculinity are somewhat similar throughout the Western hemisphere, they do differ among nations and regions – just consider how differently obedience figures in American and German conceptions of manhood and national identity throughout history.

Such considerations made it necessary to dive into an understanding of the American Adam and his primary representational realm. The serial narratives under investigation, I argue, are informed by a culturally specific, American branch of idealized manhood – one that has its roots in the American frontier experience. At first glance, the frontier seems to be a historical and regional concern. Yet, as O'Connor and Rollins maintain, “[t]hroughout our cultural history, Americans have been in awe of their frontier experience, and it has been rendered to comment on vital national issues, which it actually may have helped shape [...] the West was a training ground for national character” (4-5). The American Adam can thus be understood as bound to ideas connected to the frontier and nationhood and is referred to as cowboy or frontier hero throughout this work.¹ Since this project deals with representations of masculinity in popular culture and these in turn are informed by an idealization constructed through popular culture – dime novels, television and Hollywood Westerns² as well as paintings and advertising – these terms reference these representations and not the empirical cowboy, scout, trapper or frontier town sheriff. Even though much of my reading

1 “Frontier hero” can be understood as an umbrella term for trapper, scout and cowboy, the latter of which has come have the greatest resonance: “The image of the frontier hero took shape in America in the late eighteenth century through the popular stories of Daniel Boone. [...] The first western heroes were mountain men or scouts, and the cowboy appeared in the late 1880s in popular dime novels. He soon became the definitive hero, the symbolic frontier individualist” (Wright, 6).

2 The Western as a genre is of particular importance in American cultural production within Hollywood. This is largely due to its setting: referring to social and political conflicts at the hand of and analogous to new frontiers is ingrained in the genre's DNA (see Wolfrum, 116). Moreover, “Hollywood Westerns explore in a large mythic framework (where mythic self-consciousness is an attempt at a form of collective self-knowledge) representations and enactments of the political psychology characteristic of a distinctly American imaginary, and [...] this imaginary both concerns and is itself central to the nature of the political in the American experience” (Pippin, 102)

references the frontier experience, this is not to imply that the narratives analyzed here are necessarily Westerns: because the frontier is “so steadfast and ingrained in American culture that it can effortlessly and endlessly [be] recycled in other genres and genre-hybrids, even a century after the 'West' as an unsettled space” (Jacobs, 60). In fact, this project is not about the Western as a genre. The term frontier hero bears, like his setting, the frontier, a mythic connotation. Concepts such as gender, manhood, the cowboy hero, the frontier and myth will all be defined and contextualized in the first chapter of this project.

Moreover, the aim of this project is not to look solely at the crisis of masculinity and how patriarchal privilege may be reclaimed through narrative strategies, but at how masculinity and the perceived crisis thereof can be connected to crisis tendencies in America. This means that this project is based on the assumption that political, social and cultural events leave their mark on culturally produced texts. This follows an understanding of the nation as an imagined community that finds a common identity in the stories the community tells about itself:

it is now conventional to define the nation as a mapping of an imagined community with a secure and shared identity and sense of belonging, on to a carefully demarcated geo-political space. The nation, from this perspective, is first forged and then maintained as a bounded public sphere. That is to say, it is public debate that gives the nation meaning, and media systems with a particular geographical reach that give it shape. [...] National identity is, in this sense, about the experience of belonging to such a community, being steeped in its traditions, its rituals and its characteristic mode of discourse (Andrew Higson qtd. in: Hinterkeuser, 26).

The analysis of popular culture narratives therefore is a productive means to draw inferences about the respective culture's condition at the time of their production. How do concepts of masculinity encountered in contemporary television interact with the fictional worlds created around them? How do these interactions resonate with political, social and cultural developments outside of their texts? Furthermore, how can we assess these interactions in light of a historical lineage of cultural production in the USA? Considering that idealized frontier masculinity was implicated in American imperialism, the crisis of masculinity and representations of the American middle class in crisis bear a post-empire connotation. The American empire built by heroic men is perceived as crumbling.³

3 This is of course purely speculative and it should be noted that similar sentiments have been voiced before. That the USA had lost its hegemony was already declared four decades ago: “For many American scholars, it seemed no accident that the decline of order in the world economy and its financial system coincided in the mid-1970s with a time of weakness and humiliation in the conduct of United States foreign policy and, as many of them came to think, of American power” (Strange, 555). This is an interesting point since the proclaimed crisis of US hegemony was followed by a return to old strengths personified by one of Hollywood's cowboy heroes cum president: Ronald Reagan. Such

This is not to say the American empire is really in its death rattle – the USA still has the most powerful economy and military industry in the world: 9/11 and subsequent wars have not changed this. The crisis atmosphere permeating the narratives discussed in this project as well as recent headlines concerning the imminent-but-averted bankruptcy of the USA (resulting in a federal government shut down on October 1 2013) as well as concerns regarding an ever-increasing intelligence apparatus have a lot to do with what we might call a disenchantment with the American Dream after 9/11 and subsequent policies, most notably the Patriot Act. In *Breaking Bad*, for example, the self-made man in pursuit of his dreams is a villain. *Hell on Wheels* similarly looks at the construction of the transcontinental railroad as a ruthless capitalist enterprise – not necessarily a new sentiment given revisionist Westerns with the same *sujet*, yet relatively new in television, a medium long perceived as pacifying – a vehicle to sell consumerism. The latter remark, then, brings us to another critical term I will discuss for the remainder of this introduction: television.

Ever since the first broadcasts in the 1930s, television has historically not been a darling of scholarship. As “the central element in the media-based public sphere in the last half of the twentieth century,” it did however trigger many responses (Gripsrud, 3); yet these were largely negative – Adorno, who actually did not write much about television, dismissed it as “a medium of undreamed of psychological control” (Adorno, 476). A couple of decades after Adorno, Neil Postman's bestseller *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985) continued to excoriate TV. The alleged dumbing down of the masses by an increasingly fragmented, present-centered flow of images was Postman's main concern: everything turns into mindless spectacle on the television screen. Politics, religion and education have become showbusiness vehicles. Drawing on Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931) and comparing television to the drug soma, Postman claims television exerts control by ways of mindless amusement (7-12). The written word loses its importance as people indulge in a fragmented experience of passively sitting in front of their television sets (124). Such sentiments are probably the reason why intellectuals love to proclaim they do not even own a television set. If we leap to today, however, this proclamation has become virtually pointless.

Watching TV and owning a television set do not require one another anymore.⁴ The

shifts find expression in texts of cultural production (see following chapter).

4 See, for example Gripsrud: “The TV set has long since become a multipurpose screen for audio-visual texts – first we had VCRs and video cameras, now also DVD players, gaming machinery, computers

times have changed and so has TV – not only as a technology, but also the narrative forms whose primary medium used to be the television set. Amanda Lotz's *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* (2007) and the reader *Television after TV. Essays on a Medium in Transition* (2004, edited by Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson) chronicle how television has significantly changed as an institution, industry, and cultural form. Both books proclaim that the medium has entered a new phase of existence with the new millennium: “if TV refers to the technologies, industrial formations, government policies, and practices of looking that were associated with the medium in its classical public service and three-network age, it appears that we are now entering a new phase of television – the phase that comes after 'TV'” (Spigel, 2). These changes have had their ramifications for the act of watching television:

We may continue to watch television, but the new technologies available to us require new rituals of use. Not so long ago, television use typically involved walking into a room, turning on the set, and either turning to specific content or channel surfing. Today, viewers with digital video recorders (DVRs) such as TiVo may elect to circumvent scheduling constraints and commercials. Owners of portable viewing devices download the latest episodes of their favorite shows and watch them outside the conventional setting of the living room. Still others rent television shows on DVD, or download them through legal and illegal sources online. And this doesn't even begin to touch upon the viewer-created television that appears on video aggregators such as YouTube or social networking sites. As a result of these changing technologies and modes of viewing, the nature of television has become increasingly complicated, deliberate, and individualized. Television as we knew it – understood as a mass medium capable of reaching a broad, heterogeneous audience and speaking to the culture as a whole – is no longer the norm in the United States (Lotz, 2).

The increasingly individualized practice of watching television has implications for the content created for television. Different shows and channels target different audience groups – a significant change considering the early stages of television in the USA when ABC, CBS, NBC and their local affiliates comprised all of television: “popularity was defined in terms of brute ratings and ruled by 'lowest common denominator' or 'least objectionable' programming philosophies” (Rogers et al., 43). In Brian L. Ott's estimation, these rules still apply to broadcast network television today when he uses terms such as “risk-adverse” and “conservative [...] in an aesthetic sense” to describe their programming. Broadcast television still offers security and comfort, Ott argues, “by its predictability and reproduction of prevailing cultural norms and values.” In short, it “pacifies and placates, rather than shocks and unsettles” (97-98). This has a lot to do with television's characteristic mode of representation: “Television realism places the viewer in the position of a unified subject 'interpellated' with, or folded into, the

and more. We could perhaps propose to change its name to [...] 'the AV set' (10). Television sets are now also sold as smart TVs that can be connected to the internet and used for browsing the web and streaming video content.

discourses of a dominant ideology, subjected [...] to a version of reality in which he or she misrecognises himself or herself” (Bignell, 191; see also Fiske 1987, 39). As mentioned, times have changed and the big networks, to which we can add Fox (launched in 1986), have lost their firm grip on audiences with each successive phase of television history, which can be divided into three periods:

First, the 'network era' (from approximately 1952 through the mid-1980s) governed industry operations and allowed for a certain experience with television that characterizes much of the medium's history. The norms of the network era have persisted in the minds of many as distinctive of television, despite the significant changes that have developed over the past twenty years. I therefore identify the period of the mid-1980s through the mid-2000s as that of the 'multi-channel transition.' [...] The final period, the 'post-network era,' begins in the mid-2000s [...]. What separates the post-network era from the multi-channel transition is that the changes in competitive norms and operations of the industry have become too pronounced for old practices to be preserved; different industrial practices are becoming dominant and replacing those of the network era (Lotz, 7).

Since this project solely deals with narratives of the post-network era⁵ (all series discussed here in detail began airing after 2007), I will now shift my attention to a phenomenon brought about by the changes that Amanda Lotz amongst others describe in more detail: 'quality TV'. I do so because most, if not all, narratives at the center of this project can be regarded as what is considered 'quality TV'.

None of the selected TV series air on HBO, a premium cable channel largely responsible for the emergence of 'quality TV' – not only due to its 'quality' programming but also because of its court battles with the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) (“the HBO aftereffect” [Ritzer, 12]).⁶ HBO started out as a subscription channel for first-run movies and sports events, most notably boxing such as the “Thriller in Manila” in 1975 (Edgerton, 2). Yet with the technological developments already outlined above, subscribing to a channel for movies and occasional sports events lost its persuasiveness in the era of DVDs, TiVo, and the internet. Already existing during the multi-channel transition, HBO changed its programming structure and thereby – at least in terms of content – also helped to bring about the 'quality TV' that is so characteristic

5 There does not seem to be a real consensus as to how this current stage of television should be termed. Rogers et al. for example refer to this period as “the age of brand marketing” (48). Writing in 2008, media scholar Marc Leverette also takes issue with the phrase post-network era: “even though cable passed network TV in total numbers of viewers back in 2002, with television no longer being TV as we know it, the phrase post-network is becoming increasingly impotent. With the rise of YouTube, the iPhone, iTunes downloading of shows, DVDs, and On demand services, television is increasingly less like television, existing in no singular time, place, or technology” (147).

6 In terms of programming, HBO's court case against the FCC in 1977 is crucial: “One of the most significant outcomes of HBO's court battle with the FCC was that the Court of Appeals declared cable, which is purchased as opposed to 'freely distributed' like radio and broadcast television, to be more akin to newspaper publishing, which is offered protection under the First Amendment. This ruling would have a profound impact on the content of HBO's programming, which could incorporate nudity, violence, and vulgarity in ways that the networks could not. As a result, almost all of HBO's original series, from the dramas to the sitcoms, contain material that could not be included on network TV” (Santo, 25).

of television's current era. In 1996, HBO launched a marketing campaign with the slogan "It's not TV. It's HBO." Through this slogan, HBO distanced itself from the norms of the network era. Since these norms were, as we have seen, most of the time evaluated negatively, HBO establishes its brand as something better for the simple fact that it claims not to be TV. The new slogan was accompanied by a new programming strategy as the channel increasingly invested in original programming, i.e. films and series that are produced to air on HBO:

HBO transformed the creative landscape of television during the first decade (1995-2004) of TV's current digital era. It pursued the unusual and atypical strategy for television of investing more money in program development (from \$2 million to \$4 million per prime-time hour), limiting output (thirteen episodes per series each year instead of the usual twenty-two to twenty-six), and producing only the highest-quality series, miniseries, made-for-pay-TV movies, documentaries, and specials that it could (Edgerton, 8).

From 1996 on, 'quality TV' became the new catch phrase and for the first time in television history, quality does not refer to quality demographics (the desired 18-49 years audience segment) but to actual production values (see Santo, 31). And thus we now find phrases such as "boutique programming" (John Caldwell qtd. in: Leverette 2008, 141) or an "Aristocracy of Culture in American Television" (Christopher Anderson in his essay of the same title) when reading about HBO and the series it has been producing since 1997. In recent publications such as *It's Not TV. Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era* (2008, edited by Marc Leverette, Brian L. Ott and Cara Louise Buckley), *The Essential HBO Reader* (2008, edited by Gary R. Edgerton and Jeffrey Jones), *'quality TV'. Contemporary American Television and Beyond* (2007, edited by Janet McCabe and Kim Akass) and the *Reading* series published via I.B. Tauris (for the most part edited by Janet McCabe and Kim Akass), television and its pleasures are examined in a manner distinctly different in tone from earlier eras.

Pointing out that developments in technology and new marketing strategies have fundamentally changed the face of television, some contributors also suggest that 'quality TV' be rather understood as a generic distinction within television than one of value per se. Sarah Cardwell's description of quality-TV focusses on styles and themes:

American quality television programmes tend to exhibit high production values, naturalistic performance styles, recognised and esteemed actors, a sense of visual style created through careful, even innovative, camerawork and editing, and a sense of aural style created through the judicious use of appropriate, even original music. This moves beyond a 'glossiness' of style. Generally, there is a sense of stylistic integrity, in which themes and style are intertwined in an expressive and impressive way. Further, the programmes are likely to explore 'serious' themes, rather than representing the superficial events of life; they are likely to suggest that the viewers will be rewarded for seeking out greater symbolic or emotional resonance within the details of the programme. American quality television also tends to focus on the present, offering reflections on contemporary society, and crystallising these reflections within smaller examples and instances. The 'everyday incidents' that are the

stuff of more straightforward, nonquality soap operas and sitcoms are here transformed by a suggestion that they may be read symbolically, reflexively or obliquely in order that broader truths about life or society might be found (26).

McCabe and Akass add that HBO's and other cable channels' stressing of authorial vision behind their shows also contributes to the air of exclusiveness and artistic distinction as this kind of authorship – the dependence on an author's artistic *vision* – places the productions in a highbrow neighborhood of theater, art cinema and literature (87).

The difference in programming between broadcast network television and the cable variety is to a large degree due to their differing revenue systems: “Once [network] broadcasters realized programs that evoked disturbing emotions in the audience or triggered thoughts that challenged deep-seated cultural assumptions could result in a loss of advertising revenue, they inevitably came to terms with the need to create relatively 'safe' programming” (Kelso, 47). Cable programming executives do not have to worry about disturbing content as the viewer pays directly for the content (also because of their status outside of FCC regulations) and since original programming is integral to the channel as marketable brand, disturbing emotions can be part of the sought-after experience of watching a channel like HBO. As Marc Leverette remarks, “HBO, as a premium brand, offers its consumers a place where it's okay to be transgressive with regard to mainstream television” (144). Basic cable channels like AMC and FX share similarities with both network television and premium cable in their revenue system: “basic cable channels aren't governed by the FCC, but they do have deals with their advertisers and in some cases with the cable companies that carry them – that leaves certain words off the table [...] no one could ever say 'fuck'” (Sepinwall, 149).

Quality series are often looked at as a visual equivalent to the 19th century serial novel (see Mittell 2006, 30; Lavik, 81-83). They are not dependent on televisual flow anymore as they can be watched when, where and how the viewer wants. Like books, they can be purchased as DVD box sets and be watched again and again (one can also pause, stop, jump to specific scenes or watch each episode with the director's or creator's commentary). Consider, for example, which conclusions Erlend Lavik draws from investigating David Simon's *The Wire* (HBO, 2002 – 2008):

The Wire's non-redundancy and lack of episodic self-sufficiency might be ill-suited to television's ephemeral flow. However, on DVD it exists as a material object, like a book, and can be watched in the manner that its complexity warrants: repeatedly and without interruptions. Thus, by returning to allegedly outmoded and analogue literary predecessors, David Simon et al. may have hit upon the narrative format of the digital future (86).

Like any art that is being sold, 'quality TV', too, is a profit-oriented business, but the business model has changed from network practices insofar as the quality of the product is marketed to the customer and *not* the popularity of a product to advertisers (although network shows such as ABC's *Lost* (2004 – 2010) and Fox's *24* (2001 – 2010) were also successful as box sets, an indication that 'quality TV' has also migrated to non-premium cable channels).

The large budget invested in the production and the creative freedom given to the creators⁷ attract big names such as Alan Ball, who won the Oscar for Best Original Script for *American Beauty* (1999) and went on to create, write and produce the critically acclaimed drama series *Six Feet Under* (2001 – 2005) and *True Blood* (2008 – 2014) for HBO. The fact that esteemed writers, directors and actors are involved in producing these shows and that an air of selectivity surrounds them, influenced the way television is now understood and talked about. Here we also find another link to Rogers et al.'s term of 'the age of brandmarketing':

If TV feminizes all who watch it, and feminization is linked to a loss of power and status brought about through the act of consumption, then HBO's brand offers to 're-mark' subscribers as 'masculine,' thus repositioning its audience as powerful bearers of cultural capital that is free from the commercial trappings of regular television (Santo, 34).

As this quotation by Avi Santo indicates, broadcast network television and narrowcast cable television to some degree are dressed in a language that resembles that of the binary gender opposition of masculine and feminine. The act of passive consumption seen by critics as characteristic of the first two periods of television history is marked as feminine, compulsive and powerless. Quality programming into which, as Sarah Cardwell described earlier, 'broader truth' can be read, calls for active engagement with the text. And as 'quality TV' to a large degree is divorced from television flow that includes commercial breaks and trailers for upcoming shows, it is seen as less commercial.⁸ Consequently, the implied binary opposition of 'regular TV' and 'quality TV' also confers status upon those who prefer the latter – an observation Charlotte

7 *The Sopranos* creator David Chase ties this among other things to the use of language: "Instead of saying 'scumbag', you have to say 'dirtbag'. And it makes you feel dirty that you're doing that, that you're not being true to the English language, not being true to humanity. It's a human, human life, you know, as it's really lived" (qtd. in: Lawson, 214).

8 Such an assessment is problematic and is hardly applicable to basic cable programming. If we consider Matthew Weiner's *Mad Men* (2007 – present), arguably one of the more critically acclaimed 'quality TV' series, we see that 'quality TV', too, is a commercial enterprise first and foremost. Airing on the basic cable channel AMC, this drama series is in fact interrupted by commercial breaks. Moreover, as it chronicles the goings-on in a New Yorker advertising agency, it is well-suited for product placement. Thus, brands such as Lucky Strike and Heineken were featured prominently in the series. The legendary Lucky Strike slogan "It's toasted" is for example attributed to the series's male main character Don Draper.

Brunsdon delivers with a hint of irony:

Addiction, a metaphor prominent in the twentieth century in relation to soap-opera viewers, and particularly 'housewives', condenses judgments about television fiction and its viewers. It proposes an involuntary, non-cerebral relation to the medium, an out-of-control habit. [...] This new, good television, in contrast to old, bad, addictive television is not broadcast network television, but television which one either pays to see, or watches on DVD. Instead of being associated with housebound women, this new television is young, smart, and on the move, downloaded or purchased to watch at will (65).

This “young, smart” and therefore “good television” is not passively absorbed in an endless circle of consumption, but binged, which “describes bad television watching ('piggy pleasures'), as opposed to the watching of bad television” (65). Clearly, the distinction between quality and non-quality television is very concerned with marketing an image. Yet Brunsdon also wonders whether “‘bingeability’ [can] also be seen as a textual property” (66). Focussing on crime drama and turning her attention towards the DVD box set, she leans towards 'yes' as “new modes of television production and distribution foster different types of story” (72). Even though this does not solely concern “aesthetic issues, but also interpretative ones,” this does not necessarily imply a distinction of value (73).

Let me summarize here: The fragmentarization of audiences set in during what Amanda Lotz calls the multi-channel transition. With this, television lost some ground as a powerful force of social integration as it became increasingly rarer that a single program gathered the majority of viewers. With digitization, this process of fragmentarization was driven further. Moreover, the medium once perceived as putting the viewer in a passive position more and more made possible active engagement with what was being televised. What is more, televising in itself becomes outmoded: 'screening' (DVD) or 'streaming' (internet services) would be just as applicable to new viewing practices.⁹ Furthermore, channels now market themselves as brands that have a specific image. HBO, for example, could be described as “transgressive” and transmitting “cultural capital” (Santo); attracting an audience that is “educated, middle-class, more or less well-to-do” (Gripsrud, 11). Also, the original programming that HBO started to produce beginning in 1997 was transformative for television narratives on a larger scale as well as for the ways in which television narratives are dealt with (i.e. detailed readings of individual series).¹⁰

Fiske and Hartley once described television as

9 Viewing (network-era television) and using (internet) can be blended into a term such as 'viewsing' (see Lotz, 17).

10 The first quality drama to air on HBO was Tom Fontana's critically acclaimed *Oz* (1997 – 2003). This series is often overlooked as HBO's successive shows *Sex and the City* (1998 – 2004) and *The Sopranos* (1999 – 2007) achieved far greater popularity and drew more academic attention.

a mediator of language, one who composes out of the available linguistic resources of the culture a series of consciously structured messages which serve to communicate to the members of that culture a confirming, reinforcing version of themselves. The traditional bard rendered the central concerns of his day into verse. We must remember that television renders our own everyday perceptions into an equally specialized, but less formal, language system.

Second, the structure of those messages is organized according to the needs of the *culture* for whose ears and eyes they are intended, and not according to the internal demands of the 'text', nor of the individual communicator (85-86).

Considering all of the above, one has to wonder to what extent Fiske's and Hartley's "bardic function" of television is still applicable as "the possibility for building a strong public opinion which can really have an effect on will-formation and decision-making in the political centre is reduced. More importantly, perhaps, it might lead to an erosion of a common ground for debate" (Gripsrud, 13). "Such a premise," Amanda Lotz asserts, "remains relevant in a narrowcast environment, but with the difference that television articulates the main lines of cultural consensus for the particular network and its typical audience member rather than for society in general" (40).

Moreover, topics and themes that surface in one form or another across networks might also indicate relevance to society in general (see *ibid.*, 39). The series selected for this project air primarily on the basic cable channels AMC and FX, yet programming by Showtime, Cinemax and HBO will be mentioned as well. Moreover, a drama series like *Breaking Bad* did extraordinary well with critics, winning a total of ten Primetime Emmy Awards and being named the highest rated TV series of all time by the *Guinness Book of World Records* (see Janela, n. pag.). *The Walking Dead* (2010 – present), on the other hand, has become the most-watched drama series in basic cable history (see Bibel 14 Oct. 2013, n. pag.). Moreover, I selected only texts that have been renewed at least for a second season, an indication that the production of the respective series is profitable, which in turn means they draw consumers' interest. Further text selection criteria were that the series feature male main characters and that the respective series references the Western in its construction of masculinity.

As we have seen further up, 'quality TV' is often considered transgressive. Some go so far as to claim that due to its often 'edgy' content (nudity, cursing, violence) and the fact that they often warrant symbolic readings to gain some broader truth about society, quality series are always left-liberal (see Blanchet, 65). Fiske, however, argued that television usually naturalizes the point of view of those who are in power, namely white, male, middle-class and middle-aged members of society (see 1987, 44). It can be argued that 'quality-TV' series do not subvert this mechanism as most shows do indeed feature

white, middle-aged, middle-class males as their central characters and male behavior often accounts for much of the 'edgy' content (i.e. violence) contained in these series. Narratively constructing characters and worlds along the gender binary, we might wonder to what extent these serial narratives are transgressive beyond their at times very explicit depictions of violence. In terms of gender, we might ask whether these series self-consciously construct gender relations in this way to challenge the normative gender binary or whether they are merely conservative and reaffirming in this regard? A close reading of the selected texts will provide answers to these questions.

In *Fernsehen wider die Tabus* (2011), Ivo Ritzer tackles the very question of transgression and subversion in 'quality TV'. He does so, however, by questioning whether one could consider explicit representations of sex and violence as moments of transgression (such as female ejaculation in Darren Star's *Sex and the City* [HBO, 1998 – 2004] and male frontal nudity in David Milch's *Deadwood* [HBO, 2004 – 2006]) only to dismiss the subversive value of these series in the final third of his book. Drawing on Freud's taboo theory, Ritzer attests these series the potential for a subversive moment by violating aesthetic conventions and thereby articulating the possibility of changing the aesthetic and social status quo (49). Nevertheless, since channels are compelled to market themselves as brands in order to remain competitive, these series' goal is to ensure the channel's survival in the market instead of being grassroots movements challenging the social order. The value of the transgressions unfolding on-screen is, he maintains, therefore purely economic.¹¹ He illustrates this at the hand of the short-lived FX series *Over There* (2005), which was the first television series set in a still-ongoing war. Marketed as “TV's most controversial series,” *Over There* presented a very grim and graphic outlook on proceedings in Iraq. Ritzer takes issue with the fact that this was a deliberate marketing attempt to sell a product instead of voicing dissent – especially because FX is owned by Fox, which in turn is owned by Rupert Murdoch, whom he considers a right-wing conservative. The breaking of taboos is thus institutionalized in a purely economic context (82-84). This leads Ritzer, being influenced by Jean

¹¹ This is a valid argument when we consider the standings of AMC and FX before they invested in original programming. The latter suffered from ratings in the decimals and was therefore in a position to experiment with new forms – they had nothing to lose. (see B. Martin, 215) AMC, too, was on the verge of becoming entirely meaningless: “[AMC CEO Josh Sapan's] point was this: AMC doesn't need worry about ratings at the moment. What AMC needs is a show, a critically acclaimed and audience-craved show that would make us undroppable to cable operators. Because AMC, as a movie network, was mostly second-tier movies or ones you could get anywhere [...] [t]hey were very worried that the likes of Comcast were creating their own movie channels, and that they would be dropped completely off the systems. Josh knew that he had to have something that the public wanted really bad” (Rob Sorcher, qtd. in: Sepinwall 2013, 303).

Baudrillard here, to suggest that US television seeks to establish consensus in dissent by essentially eliminating dissent altogether (88). There is no politicization of art to be found in these series, but an aesthetization of politics, he concludes. Neither their narrative strategies, nor their representation of nudity, sexuality and violence are transgressive, but only capital's mode of operations that overrides all boundaries – be they of taste, aesthetics or legitimation. In this regard, these narratives solely meet the expectations placed on them (110-111).

Writing in 2008 and thus before the “HBO after-effect” had gathered full force, Tony Kelso similarly suggested that “[a] rigorous critical textual analysis would probably indicate that HBO does not systematically challenge capitalist American ideologies or dominant myths regarding race, gender, sexual orientation, or other identity issues” (61). Given that the selected texts feature white male main characters, this seems to be a fair assumption regarding the series discussed here. There have been two recent publications that are documents to this phenomenon's male-centeredness: Brett Martin's *Difficult Men* (2013) and Alan Sepinwall's *The Revolution Was Televised* (2013). Both books are very similar in their approach as they both chronicle the rise of 'quality TV' by giving an overview of preceding series (e.g. David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* [1990 – 1991]) and by detailing a behind-the-scenes history of what Martin calls “the signature American art form of the first decade of the twenty-first century” (11). This is to say that no narrative is analyzed academically but merely looked at from a production context point of view. Reading both books, one comes to the conclusion that not only are these series for the most part about white middle-aged men, but also created by such. Martin attests these series also a particular cultural resonance that, I have to point out, understands the culture at large as white and male: “viewers were willing to be seduced [...] because these were also men in recognizable struggles. They belonged to a species you might call Man Beset or Man Harried – badgered and bothered and thwarted by the modern world” (5).

The terms Martin uses here calls for associations with the crisis of masculinity discourse. Who is meant when he refers to the “Man Beset”? This is a universal claim he does not back up with any research on the matter at hand. Neither is this claim differentiated in any way – what he means is that *white* masculinity is in crisis and not *all* men and their expressions of masculinity. None of the series he mentions in his book feature Asian or Native American men in any significant way. The issue of race is largely sidestepped and when he writes that “middle-aged men predominated because

middle-aged men had the power to create [these series],” we might wonder why they have so much power if they are so beset and harried (13)?

While Martin's book documents how what he calls the “Third Golden Age” of television is both created by and is about difficult men, Sepinwall suggests these shows are – also because they concentrate on troubled main characters – “about the end of the American dream” (112). This however leaves open the question whose American dream is actually ending? Given that the series Sepinwell discusses almost exclusively feature white middle-class males at their center, the American dream seems to be filtered through the perspective of a specific demographic. Since it is such a dominant feature, he, too, addresses the matter of gender:

Because the revolutionary dramas were mostly about men, and male anti-heroes at that, and because viewers tend to bond most with the main character of a show, there was a side effect to the era, where characters who on paper should be the sympathetic ones become hated by viewers for opposing the protagonist. And the greatest vitriol has been unfortunately saved for the wives (359).

This is an observation that will surface in the analysis of the selected texts, especially *Breaking Bad*. It has to be mentioned that neither book was written in an academic context. In this regard, research on masculinity and television is surprisingly sparse.

One of the few comprehensive studies of masculinity on television is Rebecca Feasey's *Masculinity and Popular Television* (2008), which “seeks to examine the representation of men, masculinities and the male role in a wide range of fictional and factual television genres” (4). In her study, she presents brief case studies of British and American representations of masculinity on popular television. She sorts these by genre, ranging from soap operas, to animated series, workplace dramas and reality television as well as advertising. Due to the book's wide scope, her case studies are necessarily short and placed within a larger theoretical framework as she looks at both British and American texts. This means that masculinity figures as Anglo-American masculinity in a more general sense. Moreover, she also includes texts that span a wider time frame than this project does since she also includes series that aired in the 1990s and have already been concluded. However, her book provides a good overview of how masculinity in general is encountered on television during the last two decades. She states that

this examination of masculinities is crucial, not because such representations are an accurate reflection of reality, but rather, because they have the power and scope to foreground culturally accepted social relations, define sexual norms and provide 'common-sense' understanding about male identity for the contemporary audience (4).

Feasey also laments that little work has been done on representations of masculinity as

opposed to those of femininity, which “is due in part to television's status as a domestic medium that was aimed at a female consumer during the early 1950s.” Moreover, feminist television scholars were mostly concerned with representations of femininity “and as such, they chose to overlook the representation of masculinity” (2). Since 'quality TV' is full of troubled men, we can expect this to change in the near future and the following pages are my entry to a body of research that is surely growing at the moment.

2. Masculinity, Crisis and the West

“Even if we now know that there are different masculinities that have always been competing for cultural attention, it is still the case that we must continue to critique, rather than just celebrate, their performance of gender” (Bristow, ix).

“[T]he history of the American frontier is as much the history of an idea as much as it is the history of a place” (Rommel-Ruiz, 105).

“A crisis, like all other news developments, is a creation of the language used to depict it; the appearance of a crisis is a political act, not a recognition of a fact or a situation” (Murray Edelman qtd. in: Hirschbein, 15).

Every male in almost any society is sooner or later faced with the question of what it means to be a 'real man' in his society. The answer to this question, however, is increasingly harder to find. The abounding literature on men and masculinities – from self-help books to academic publications ranging over diverse disciplines such as psychology, sociology, history, political science to film, literature and theater studies – complicates matters even further. The question itself is probably best understood with respect to debates surrounding a proclaimed crisis of masculinity: discourses oscillate between laments of men having gone soft ('feminized') and accusations of men being the root of all evil (hence they need to become 'soft').

After outlining how scholars have defined gender and masculinity, my inquiry will turn towards idealized conceptions of masculinity in the USA. Idealized American masculinity, I argue, has its roots in the young nation's frontier experience. The images of masculinity representing the frontier experiences have first and foremost been perpetuated by the Western genre – at first in dime novels and in later years Western cinema and television, but also in advertising (e. g. the Marlboro Man). Since these representations preserved an ideal image of what passes as a 'real man' in America, crisis announcements can be understood in reference to how masculinity is defined in these representations. In the succeeding chapters, cable series are analyzed that construct masculinity along conceptions thereof strikingly analogous to Westerns. This chapter, then, forms the basis for reading these series' constructions of masculinity and embedding them in the larger context of the crisis of masculinity discourse.

2.1. Gender and Men's Studies

Today's primary understanding of sex and gender is that the first is a biological given, whereas the latter is acquired and as such it can be theorized as “the cultural interpretation of sex” (Butler 1990, 7). Looked at this way, “gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one” (ibid., 6). Consequently, “the body is figured as a mere *instrument* or *medium* for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related” (ibid., 8).

Since gender is not biological, but cultural, Judith Butler describes it as performative: “There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results” (ibid., 25). Moreover, this “performance of gender [...] retroactively [produced] the illusion that there was an inner gender core,” which leads Butler to the conclusion that “gender is produced as a ritualized repetition of conventions [...] compelled in part by the force of a compulsory heterosexuality” (1995, 31). Therefore, gender can be understood as an “imitation” of “ideals that are never quite inhabited by anyone” (ibid., 31). With this, Butler's post-structural understanding of gender presents a significant departure from essentialist views that have persisted long into the 20th century.¹²

David S. Gutterman states that “it is useful to conceive words like *boy* not as nouns but rather as adjectives that describe a subject” (59). This means that upon discovering the sex of a newly born male infant, the announcement “it's a boy!” already prescribes a certain set of meanings and expectations on the subject that differ from what would be associated with a female-sexed body. This act of differentiation is called *gendering* and has already been observed in several studies during the 1970s. As an example, consider a study by Rubin, Provenzano, and Luria (1974), who interviewed couples about their newborn children:

The parents were asked to describe their children on a special form. Overall, the girls were judged as gentler, smaller, nicer, less attentive, and more delicate. The boys were judged as firmer, sturdier, more alert, stronger, and better coordinated. Actually the fifteen newborn girls and fifteen boys did not differ in length, weight, or Apgar scores, a test of basic body functions given shortly after birth (Jalmer, 138).

¹² Sandra Lipsitz Bem states that the essentialist position is based on two lenses through which some people look at gender. The first, gender polarization, “superimposes a male/female distinction on virtually every aspect of human experience.” Thus, gender can be seen as being integral to all forms of social interaction. The second lens, androcentrism, “defines males and male experience as a neutral standard or norm and females and female experience as a sex-specific deviation from the norm.” Biological essentialism then “rationalizes and legitimizes both of the other two lenses by treating them as the natural and inevitable consequences of the intrinsic biological natures of women and men” (51).

[...]

Worth mentioning is also the study of Condry and Condry (1976). More than 200 persons saw a short videotape in which a nine-months-old child looked at different objects and reacted to them. From all the objects, the child chose to play with a jack-in-the-box. After a while the child started to cry. The observers were asked to explain why the child reacted in that way. Half of them, who thought they saw a boy, said the reaction was one of anger. The other half, who thought they saw a girl, said that 'she' became afraid (ibid., 139).

These studies evidence that bodies are interpreted according to discourses that, speaking with Foucault, “systematically form the objects of which they speak” (1972, 49). The child is born into these discourses that are always “out there” and is consequently socialized according to these discourses (and also aspires to these idealizations).¹³

Cross-cultural surveys show that “[a]ll societies have cultural accounts of gender, but not all have the concept 'masculinity'” (Connell 1995a., 67). From this, it becomes clear that these accounts of gender must have different purposes in different societies.¹⁴ Since masculinity lacks an “inner core”, expressions of maleness differ across the globe:

David D. Gilmore demonstrated in *Manhood in the Making*, his comprehensive cross-cultural survey of masculine ideals, manliness has been expressed as laboring-class loyalty in Spain, as diligence and discipline in Japan, as dependence on life outside the home in the company of men in Cyprus, as gift-giving among Sikhs, as the restraint of temper and the expression of 'creative energy' among the Gisu of Uganda, and as entirely without significance to the Tahitians. 'Manliness is a symbolic script,' Gilmore concluded, 'a cultural construct, endlessly variable and not always necessary' (Faludi, 15).

Therefore, masculinity can be understood as “a value system set by individual societies” (Sussman, 1). This leads us to an understanding of gender as a structuring element in a society. There is a political dimension to this that anchors K. A. Cuordileone's study *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (2005). In this book, Cuordileone also traces the history of the term 'masculinity' itself and goes on to show how certain values were attached to it in the USA:

the terms 'masculine' and 'masculinity' had only just begun to enter the national idiom in the 1890s. Moreover, these terms were not synonymous with the terms 'manly' and 'manliness,' which were commonly used in the nineteenth century and carried distinct meanings rooted in Victorian ideals of manhood. The term 'manliness' had moral connotations. In contemporary dictionaries the word conveyed 'character or conduct worthy of a man'; it implied possession of the 'proper' manly traits: 'independent in spirit or bearing; strong, brave, large-minded, etc.'; and was equated with the state of being 'honorable, high-minded.' Such a definition of manliness reflected the values that underlay the Victorian male ideal, including those historians have identified as 'sexual self-restraint, a powerful will. A strong character.' On the other hand, the new term 'masculinity' (adapted from the French) was relatively neutral: it generally referred to the possession of any and all male characteristics,

13 This means that subjects are not necessarily passive in that process: “Subjects are constituted discursively, but there are conflicts among discursive systems, contradictions within any one of them, multiple meanings possible for the subjects they deploy. And subjects do have agency. They are not unified autonomous individuals exercising free will, but rather subjects whose agency is created through situations and statuses conferred upon them” (Joan Scott, qtd. in: Gutterman, 61).

14 Judith/Jack Halberstam's book *Gaga Feminism* (2012) provides some examples of different expressions of gender that are not necessarily confined within an exclusive masculine/feminine binary. There are, for example, lady boys in Thailand or women who swear to remain virgins and therefore earn the 'right' to live as men (and be regarded as such) in Albania (75-77).