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Gender and Work Identity among Canadian Cowboys

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Abstract

The overall aim of this thesis is to understand the implications of gender in the work identity of cowboys within the framework of working and living on a contemporary Canadian cattle ranch. The study seeks to contribute to gender studies by applying established theories to a new field. A theoretical framework drawing from, on the one hand, gender theory originating from feminism and masculinity studies, and on the other hand, the history of the cowboy of the west is applied to the study. This research investigates the importance of gender in the division of labour at the Ranch and the significance of work identity for cowboys, while looking at how gender plays a part in this work identity. To collect data, fieldwork including participant observation and semi-structured interviews has been conducted. Using a thematic analysis of the information gathered, the study found that gender was a guiding principle in the division of labour at the Ranch, and that the work identity had an enormous importance for research participants. Furthermore, it revealed that gender played an important part in their work identity in different ways because ideals revolving around a heteronormative masculinity and those related to being a cowboy went hand in hand, whereas the idea of the feminine gender was presented as being in conflict with the idea of the cowboy. Interestingly, old traditions of the cowboy trade are still important to contemporary cowboys, who seek to balance the romantic picture of the cowboy life painted in fiction with the reality of hard, never-ending work. Moreover, similarities are found between cowboys who participated in this study and Swedish teenage girls studied by Ambjörnsson (2004), in terms of how they create a group identity based on the construction of gender.

Key words: Anthropology, gender, masculinity, work identity, cowboy

Résumé

L'objectif général de ce mémoire est de comprendre l'impact du genre sur l'identité de travail des cowboys, dans leur milieu de travail et de vie dans un ranch du Canada. Cette étude vise à contribuer aux études sur le genre en utilisant des théories existantes pour les appliquer à un nouveau champ. Sur la base d'une approche théorique fondée dans le féminisme et les études sur la masculinité, en utilisant aussi l'histoire des cowboys de l'Ouest, cette étude se penche sur la question de l'importance du genre dans la division du travail dans le ranch, celle de l'identité de travail des cowboys et sur la façon dont le genre affecte cette identité. La collecte des données s'est faite par l'observation participante et des entrevues semi-structurées. En utilisant une analyse thématique des données, l'étude conclut que le genre est un principe important dans la division du travail dans le ranch et que l'identité de travail est d'une extrême importance pour les cowboys. En outre, l'étude démontre que le genre joue de différentes façons dans l'identité de travail, l'hétéronormativité et les idéaux du cowboy allant dans le même sens, alors que la féminité s'oppose à cet idéal. Les traditions sont encore importantes pour les cowboys contemporains, mais en même temps, ceux-ci mentionnent la réalité du travail éreintant et sans fin comme contrepois à l'image romantique de la vie des cowboys. Enfin, il y a des similitudes entre les cowboys de cette étude et les adolescentes suédoises étudiées par Ambjörnsson (2004) dans la façon dont le groupe se crée une identité sur la base du genre.

Mots clés: Anthropologie, genre, masculinité, identité du travail, cowboy

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Coming home to my apartment in Montreal after fieldwork, my flatmate explained to a guest that I was studying cowboys. He turned to me with interest and asked: "Oh, really? How interesting! When was that, the last cowboy?" His expression turned into slight confusion when I told him I had last seen a few yesterday...

In recent years, the cowboy trend has intensified, and fashion accessories such as cowboy hats and boots associated with this persona, as well as western-style horse riding are becoming increasingly popular hobbies. However, the reality of the cowboy on the range seems, for a lot of people, far away in time and space. At the same time, his image is so present among us that we might think we know him. We know his personality, his attitude in regards to laws, Native Americans and women. But where does the image end and the reality begin? Where does history end and the present begin? It all begins, as usual, here and now, with open eyes and an open mind.

Many myths and stories have been spun about the stereotype of the cowboy and his lifestyle, based on his macho ways, his hard work and his freedom (see for example Jaquine et Royot, 1993; Savage, 1979). A lot has been written about the singing cowboy, the lonesome cowboy, the history of cattle ranching, and the adventures of the drover (see for example Stanfield, 2002; Slotkin, 1998; Friedman, 1985). Rodeo cowboys are frequently interviewed and written about, and tales are told about the violence of the old Wild West and the towns on the Frontier (see for example Ohlsson, 2008; Friedman, 1985). However, literature on the daily life of contemporary cattle workers is lacking, and even more so, the gendered aspect of this work. Cattle ranches and cow camps have not exactly been overrun with anthropologists throughout the years, although historians have often looked their way to retrieve stories about the old days. This thesis will explore the importance of gender in the work identity of working cowboys

at a Canadian cattle ranch. In the west of Canada, in many ways some cattle ranches still function as they always have, with a crew living at the homestead, sometimes following the cattle, setting camps throughout the summer, and the cowboys working on horseback. This study takes place on such a ranch where the author joined the cowboy crew during the calving season in the spring of 2009.

The cowboy, and the society surrounding him, has often been seen as holding ultimate masculine qualities. His image is often used to describe these characteristics, even far away from the country setting. The descendant of the roots of this image, the contemporary cowboy and his lifestyle, is still often perceived from afar as the archetype of macho culture, and thus makes for an interesting object of study for gender research. Gender is becoming more and more important as an aspect of research, and as an issue of identity and equality in society and at work. The supposed ideal setting of machismo and masculinity, is thus an interesting place to study the gender aspect of work identity, and to see to what degree this work identity is guiding the lifestyle of the contemporary cowboy.

One might think, having heard the numerous stories, that the conclusion of the gender roles in the cowboy subculture should be obvious, but having briefly visited a Canadian cattle ranch and an Australian cattle station; I was surprised by the different ways of perceiving men and women in relation to their work, and the different ways of creating groups as social categories. There seem to be unwritten rules and practices managing the way that gender roles are used, underlined or ignored, varying according to the situation in which they are applied. Thus, I believe the study to be pertinent because it helps to better understand the reality of the working cowboy today, and to give new input to the broader field of gender studies. I draw from a theoretical framework that touches upon the perception of gender as a concept that is couched within a rural setting, where cowboys work, in the history of the employed cowboy, and their contemporary image. This study sets out to answer the questions below

using the tools of thematically analysed data collected through participant observation and semi structured interviews.

1.2 Objective

The overall aim of this study is to understand the implications of gender in the work identity of cowboys within the framework of working and living on a contemporary Canadian cattle ranch. The study seeks to contribute to gender studies by applying established theories to a new field. The key questions guiding my research are:

- In what way is gender present in the division of labour at the ranch?
- How important is work identity for cowboys?
- In what way does gender play a part in shaping the cowboys' work identity?

1.3 Disposition of the thesis

After the introduction, Chapter 2 describes the methodology of the study, including the different stages of the research process. Chapter 3 provides a theoretical framework for the thesis, outlining relevant previous research and clarifying key concepts. In the following four chapters I present, analyze and discuss the collected data. An introduction to the Ranch, that is the site where fieldwork was conducted, is presented in Chapter 4, as well as a description of the division of labour and the geological challenges that determine most of the daily routine. In Chapters 5 and 6 an in-depth analysis is provided, whereas Chapter 7 discusses findings while also looking beyond the borders of the Ranch. The final chapter looks back at the information drawn out in previous chapters, answering the initial research questions and presenting some conclusions.

2. Methodology

Literary sources will be primarily used to build up the theoretical framework of this study. Literature on feminist theory and masculinity studies is abundant, but when it comes to the cowboy subculture, it seems to be more limited. Much has been written about the history, myths and legends, and also about the cowboy as a symbol of masculinity in different medias. However research on the lived reality of actual working cowboys today is very limited. For empirical data, I thus rely on a field study consisting of two months of participant observation and semi-structured interviews with fourteen ranch workers, both men and women. This field study took place during the spring of 2009 on a professional cattle ranch in British Columbia, where the cattle work is still done on horseback. The interviews were recorded and notes were taken during the whole period of fieldwork. Since I am limited to one ranch in my fieldwork, I treat the research as a *case study* and a *nomothetic* study, or a study of the particular and not of a universal rule (Bernard 2006). However, it might be interesting to refer to differences and similarities on certain points with another ranch in British Columbia, as well as a cattle station in Australia where I have visited previously. A case study is, in my view in accordance with Denzin et al. (1994) and Stake (1994), more a choice of the object to be studied than a method to study them. It is an object of study that will give information about the nature of the case, its relation to a context and about its informants.

2.1 The informants

On the ranch, there are three large groups of workers – the cowboys, the farmers and the irrigators. There is also the manager, the manager's wife, the cooks, the yard worker, and the secretary. Although I came in contact with all groups throughout my fieldwork, I chose to conduct interviews with only a selected group of people. As my research focuses on the work and gender identity of a cowboy society, I chose to interview all the cowboys on the ranch; there were no women in this group. To get the women's point of view as well, I interviewed all

the women living on the ranch. It was sometimes hard to get detailed answers about their work from informants, because it is so obvious for them what they do and how things work. On numerous occasions, follow-up questions were necessary to get more information.

2.1.1 Farmers and Irrigators

These groups of workers were not the people I was going to study. Although they worked on the same ranch, I did not conduct interviews with them. However, I spent days with each working group to get an idea of what they were doing, and to hear more about how they talk about the cowboys and the women at work.

2.1.2 The cooks, the “manager’s wife”, the yard worker, and the mom.

These informants were interviewed specifically because they were women. Since the targeted group of cowboys consisted of men, it was important to become acquainted with the women’s views as well. As much as possible women participants were asked the same questions as the cowboys. Sometimes however, the same questions were presented differently because they were being interpreted from a different perspective. They were also asked questions about the group of cowboys and their work in order to highlight the gendered patterns of thinking about different topics.

2.1.3 The cowboys

There were eight cowboys working at the ranch during my stay, although one came just after I arrived, and another left right before. During the interviews, everybody got asked the same questions, although the structure of the interviews varied from case to case, as is often the case with semi-structured interviews. At times the answers varied depending on how long they had been on the ranch, and how long they had been working with cows in general. The length of the answers also varied greatly as did their analytical character. It became obvious that some were capable of verbalizing their experiences more

than others. Some of the cowboys reflected more on the content of my questions, while for others it seemed to be a new topic. Similarly, people who had come into direct contact with what they perceived to be gender-based conflicts or non-conflicts often had more to say about the topic of gender in the workplace. The manager, who had worked as a cowboy for many years and continued to do a lot of cowboy work on the ranch, recognised the themes of my questions in the situation on the ranch. In his case, it was obvious that he had thought about these issues and had also read a lot on cowboy history. A mom who did not work at the moment, but had previously worked as a cowgirl at the ranch, also had a very articulate way of describing her experiences. It was clear that she had reflected on and analyzed her experiences long before I came along. It should also be noted that there is always a possibility that people have more thoughts on a subject than they are prepared to tell the researcher. However, I did get the impression that I had the informants' confidence on this matter, and that they would not be afraid to state their point of view or reflections on the topics I asked about, although I could sometimes tell that they were carefully choosing their words, and that I will treat the answers to my questions as open and honest.

2.2 Choosing the group

The targeted informants, the cowboys and the women living at the Ranch, were chosen for different reasons. Since cowboys, as a group, are the topic of this study, it was natural to focus on them. The limited scope of the research does not permit a comparative study, and thus the groups of irrigators and farmers on the ranch were merely studied as part of the setting and as sources of information about cowboys. However, because of the focus on gender, the women living on the ranch were explicitly chosen to give a depth to the analysis of the heteronormative imperative. The ranch itself was also chosen for a number of reasons. First, there is a limited number of working cattle ranches in Canada that still employ full time working cowboys. The "dude ranches" became more and more popular; the ranch has a small-scale production and operates a tourist

facility where visitors come and ride with the crew to see how they work. This, however, did not interest me, because that type of ranch would be set up to satisfy tourists more than to operate as a cattle ranch. On tourist-oriented ranches, the daily schedule was organized in such a way so that “dudes” tag along with visitors. The staff’s behaviour would probably be adjusted so as to reflect and live up to the dreams of the customers. In this kind of research site, the object of study would necessarily have to be different from that of the working cowboy. It would surely be an interesting study, telling a lot about why the myth of the cowboy is so appealing to many city folks, but it is not what I set out to do. Once a working cattle ranch is identified, it is not so easy to get access to the group of cowboys on an everyday basis if you are not a qualified cowboy, which I am not. However, a cowboss on another well-known ranch where I stayed briefly some years ago while working on a field report, recommended me and assured the manager of the Ranch that I knew enough to be able to be of use, and to not to be in the way or get into trouble. I was kindly allowed to join the work force during the calving season. In exchange for working full-time at the Ranch, I was given food, accommodation and an insight into the every day life of cowboys.

2.3 Collecting the data in the field

The way in which empirical data is analysed and interpreted is determined by the theoretical framework used. As many researchers point out (ex. Kincheloe and McLaren 1994, Huberman and Miles 1994), no empirical data can be treated as a set of simple, irrefutable facts, since there are always hidden assumptions that the researcher must look for. The focus of the study and the questions asked already filter what is noticed by the researcher and what is not; the data collected is always the researcher’s perception of what he or she sees. The intersubjectivity between researcher and informant is also an important issue to address when considering the nature of the result (Olesen 1994). The relation between the researcher and the informant is important in order to reach the degree of intersubjectivity needed to correctly interpret, or to know the limits of

interpretations, answers, reactions or observations. It is not uncommon that the researcher and informant don't have the same social status during the fieldwork, whether it is because of age, background, skill or contacts, and this could alter the nature of the data collected. During interviews, however, this inequality in status is often set aside, if possible; and the character of the conversation is not typical for the relation otherwise maintained (Fontana and Frey 1994). When it comes to gender, Fontana and Frey (1994, p. 396) emphasize that "the sex of the interviewer and of the respondent does make a difference, as the interview takes place within the cultural boundaries of a paternalistic social system in which masculine identities are differentiated from feminine ones." Margaret Mead and others have also emphasized this, underlining that there are at least two crucial matters to address when it comes to anthropological research and gender: being a man or a woman might limit access to certain fields of study, and being a man or a woman influences how we perceive others (Bernard 2006). When the researcher is there to study gendered identities, it is quite possible that the cross-gendered relationship of researcher and informant does indeed make a significant difference. One of the solutions to the possible problem of access to the field, they point out, is to treat the female researcher as androgyne or grant her "honorary male status" for the duration of the stay (Fontana and Frey 1994). By making exceptions to gender roles in order to let a researcher in on a certain activity, one is altering what is being studied. However, by making clear that it is indeed an exception for a certain kind of situation – the research – it can be accepted as an exception that does not have to threaten the ordinary way of things, and the situation can be treated as invisible in the sense that it need not affect normal life outside of the appointed time span. Any reactivity towards being observed, however, is likely to diminish over time with participant observation, as informants get used to having a nosy anthropologist around and become less self-conscious.

Being a young Swedish woman, without any comparable experience of cattle work of course, had an impact on the group I was studying. I was clearly seen as

an outsider; prior to my arrival my intentions were being doubted, I learned some time after. My person would also have affected the answers provided to my questions, not least the ones about gender. I did not specifically hide information about me from informants, nor did I speak about myself a lot except when asked to do so. Furthermore, being a young Swedish woman with a strong interest in, but limited experience of, cattle work as well as gender influences the research itself. To some extent it determines what group I chose to study, what questions I ask, and what I notice during my observations, and my understanding and interpretation of a situation or an answer. This is, however, impossible to escape, but by acknowledging it and by having it in mind while analyzing the data I hope to be able to give as adequate a picture as possible. However, I trust the reader to recognize that the reality I describe is the reality seen through a very specific set of eyes, and that that reality might have looked differently had those eyes not been there. That being said, I believe that there is interesting and important information to be collected through this method that cannot be collected otherwise, because all qualitative information is, to some extent, interpreted.

Throughout the duration of the fieldwork, notes were taken in my little notebook during the day and at my desk at night. Hundreds of photos were taken and hours of footage were videotaped. Some of the photos will serve as illustrations but most of them, along with the videos, are treated as visual notes taken in the field. Participant observation turned out to be a very useful method among the cowboys since their actions and their way of treating each other and the animals revealed information that interviews would never expose. Since their description of their working day, when asked, was very brief, it would have been impossible to get any kind of understanding about what their lives were like without being a part of it for some time. The participant part of the observation was crucial for mainly two reasons. Since cowboy work is done on horseback throughout a vast and sometimes inaccessible landscape, there is no way to observe it other than to ride along. There is also a consensus among the

cowboys that their work is tough and that it is a lot less glamorous than what people who have never tried it, think. It thus became clear that by doing the work with them, learning as I went, I was able to prove to them that I was serious about my desire to find out more, that I was willing to make an effort and was genuinely interested in learning about their way of life from the inside, instead of listening to rumours, trusting western movies, and cowboy literature. Getting up before sunrise each morning, taking part in different tasks without complaining, and not taking more days off than anybody else, allowed continuity in my observations. This helped me understand the conversation and interaction around me, and also helped me develop a rapport with my temporary colleagues because they saw that I would work to the best of my ability and not break down with the workload, harsh conditions, and the sometimes cold shoulders. From the first day, I was open with my intentions as a researcher and my interests in gender. However, although some asked me what the details of the research were, and above all, why I was doing it, most of the cowboys seemed uninterested in my work or life outside of the ranch. Sometimes the role of the anthropologist in fieldwork gets entangled with other relations that build up during the visit in somebody else's reality. The scale of participation in an observation used by Adler and Adler (1994) stretches from complete-member-researcher through active-member researcher, and to the peripheral -member-researcher. On this scale I would situate myself in the middle, as an active-member researcher, and thus as a participating observer rather than an observing participant or an observant only (Bernard 2006). I was not a complete member of the group I was observing, but I was always among them, in the middle of things, actively doing the same job that they were doing. This came quite naturally because the period of my stay, six weeks, was far too short to be totally accepted into the group. Also, my skills in cattle work, or "cowboying" – a verb that applies to both men and women performing the cowboy profession, fall too short for me to be considered an equal at work. Although I learned many of the activities and was able to be of use, I was never assigned the most challenging tasks or the wildest horses. Furthermore, the majority of cowboys only very rarely socialized outside

of work. These factors taken together ensured that I never really had to worry about getting different kinds of relationships mixed up such as being a friend and researcher, or getting trusted with too intimate information, or revealing too much information about myself. Occasionally I was asked to not write about a certain topic, and on those occasions it was always a very clear and acceptable agreement. These requests usually came from individuals who were not cowboys.

The fact that I was going to stay only a couple of months at the Ranch clearly limited the potential for building trusting relationships. I was seen as someone who was popping in for a bit to learn about their way of life, and my frequent questions and photographing was a constant reminder of that. There had been quite a few cowboys come and go during that time and it was clear that everybody's endurance was tested before being completely worthy of trust and respect. I am convinced that if I could have stayed longer, it would have been easier to become part of the group and thus get more opportunities to join the rare occasions in which people socialized outside of work. It would also have been a more flexible research time-line, and I would have had more occasions to witness different aspects of their lives. However, this was not a possibility because I was limited by timeframe of my graduate program and by the demands of the ranch in terms of when it was convenient for them to host me. Instead of seeing the time restriction as a deficiency, I focused on what it says about the group I chose to study. The fact that it takes some time to become integrated into a group and that you are not let in unconditionally, is interesting data in itself that I incorporated into my research.

The interviews complemented well the participant observation, since they provided an opportunity to ask informants questions that didn't come up naturally in our daily interactions, or that might be delicate or awkward to answer. When asking questions on a one on one basis, it is easier to avoid running the risk of receiving answers influenced by group expectations. At the beginning of fieldwork, and to some extent throughout it, conversations

resembling informal interviews occurred. Informal, that is, in that they were casual, non-scheduled conversations at or in between work hours that spontaneously turned into short interviews (Bernard 2006). The informants knew at all times, though, that I was there as a researcher and that I was studying certain aspects of their lives. On the one hand, unstructured interviews normally call for more than one interview with the same person, or at least a long enough interview period allowing the researcher to find answers to all the specific questions, while on the other hand, during structured interviews the researcher might run the risk of losing some spontaneous thoughts on the issue. In this study, semi-structured interviews were used.

2.4 Analysing the data

All interviews were recorded and later listened to numerous times, and transcribed. These texts were then analysed thematically according to Malterud's (1998, p. 91) detailed description of Giorgi's method of analyzing qualitative data. Based in phenomenological thinking, the purpose of this method is to develop knowledge about the informants' life and experiences within a certain field (Malterud 1998, p. 90). First, the whole material is read through in order to get a general impression. Themes that stand out are noted, but theory and previous experiences should not affect the choice of themes. Once this is done, the material is systematically codified into categories that contain information about one or more of the themes previously identified. During this process there is still room to further modify the themes. For example it is possible to narrow them down, separate one theme into two, or add a theme depending on what we find in the codification. A chart is made to keep track of the sources of each theme, and to be able to go back and look for details later, if necessary. When all the relevant pieces of text are codified, the individual groups of codes are condensed into a short text representative of the meaning of the findings. Subcategories can be organized if necessary, and each group is developed into an abstract description that takes root in the data. Throughout the process, research questions are kept in mind while keeping an eye out to see

what the data can tell researchers about these questions. In the last phase of the analysis, the pieces are put together again and the knowledge drawn out of them are summarised in a way that is reflected in the discourse of the informants. The information that individual pieces of analysed text have yielded is now looked at in comparison to the original context in which it was produced. Different sections are titled, and quotes may be chosen to illustrate or exemplify the. Finally the original material is retrieved once again and re-read systematically in order to validate and recontextualise the final analysis in relation to the original material. To test the results, pieces of information that contradict the analysis are sought out and, if found, used to adjust the analysis or added as an exception to it. Lastly, a connection is made with the initial working idea and also with existing research and literature.

The same kind of thematic analysis is conducted with field notes, based on Bernard's (2006) approach, where the material is scanned, piled, reshuffled, and reread according to the themes. However, naturally, more attention is given to data that is not verbal, such as moods, glances, in which way tasks are performed, grouping of people, habits, etc.

2.5 Writing

By mixing information and analysis with examples and descriptions of situations from the everyday life of cowboys, I hope to give the reader a sense of the context in which the information presents itself in order to better understand the results. The photos included are also meant to illustrate the setting of the study as well as to provide information about the visual impression of cattle work today. Since much of the information was gathered during interactions with informants, not acknowledging my presence in the research setting might compromise the accuracy of the data, and thus I decided to be present as a writer and a researcher in the text being produced with the data.

The names of the informants have been changed in order to preserve their anonymity, and I have simply named the ranch itself as "the Ranch".

3. Theory

3.1 Gender

Gender is now a well established term in research and it has been brought into the language used to describe cultural beliefs about differences between sexes (Ambjörnsson 2004). The term was used to separate biology from culture in order to underline the importance of looking at the relation between the sexes as something that is created within a social and cultural context.

Some thinkers believe that people act the way they do because of who they are, others hold the view that people are who they are because of how they act (Ambjörnsson 2004). In the latter view, gender does not exist outside of our daily actions, and our gender identities are constantly in the process of being created. Gender is thus the outcome of our actions and not primarily their cause. Influencing this process of constantly becoming gendered are ideals and beliefs about sexuality and the sexes. These ideals are often connected to what is believed to be normal, and normality has come to mean both what is most frequently found and what is worth striving for; thus, normality is not merely descriptive but also regulatory.

Gender matters in social life. Researchers do not agree how gendered characteristics are acquired and in what way they become parts of a person, but they do agree that gender matters to the conception of the self, and that it influences behaviour and the way we interact and also how we see others (Wharton 2005). In virtually every culture, gender is a central way for people to identify themselves as persons, understand relations and organise modern life (ibid). Gender is one of the most fundamental divisions of society and gives a distinctive feature to social situations (West and Zimmerman 2002). Gender differences are also important to symbolise natural and social events and processes (Wharton 2005). The study of gender issues in all sorts of contexts has expanded throughout recent decades. Traditionally, gender research has mainly

been concerned with and developed by women, stemming from contemporary feminism (Kimmel, Hearn and Connell 2005). Men and masculinity have been treated as more of an unexamined norm in a variety of fields and have thus not been the object of study. This is true even for anthropology, and as Gutman (2007a: 18) puts it, “[a]nthropology has always involved men talking to men about men”, but only recently has it become common to examine men as men. Ever since Aristotle claimed that women were naturally inferior to men in terms their reasoning capabilities, the tradition that ensued from this line of thinking treated masculinity as invisible and normative, and often still does (Kegan Gardiner 2005, Thomas 2001, Ambjörnsson 2004, Smith 1996). This is exemplified by the many subcategories of research fields that includes “women” in their titles, and the many subcategories referring to women and femininity while labelled “gender” (Wharton 2005, Flood et al. 2007) This has been called the “god-trick” – men are omnipresent yet unnoticed (Campbell, Bell and Finney 2006: 8). It is, according to Brod (2002: 166), exactly this “unmarkedness of the superordinate” that is key to their dominance throughout history. It is because of this dominance, he explains, that men can “go with the flow”, acting in their own interest, and the “social currents” already flowing only make it easier, whereas women have to swim upstream to do the same thing (ibid: 170).

However, from the fifties on, writers started to see men as men, and the specificity of different masculinities is now recognised (Campbell, Bell and Finney 2006, Kimmel, Hearn and Connell 2005, Kegan Gardiner 2002a). Masculinity is now also treated as a gender (Kegan Gardiner 2002a, Wharton 2005). *Masculinity studies* seeks to help deconstruct the static binaries that have long prevailed in gender theory, such as victims/oppressors, different/dominant or hegemonic/alternative (Kegan Gardiner 2002a). It looks at gendered relationships, often combined with other epithets such as location, profession, race or age, and not seldom focuses on the social structure of gender as opposed to the individual as the explanation for gender differences or power inequalities (Kegan Gardiner 2002a, Wharton 2005). Kegan Gardiner (2002a) argues that

masculinity is a nostalgic formation of a simpler time that never existed and that feminism, in contrast, is a utopian discourse of an ideal future that will probably never come, and that masculinity studies within feminist theory could be a way of understanding the relation between these two struggles and their impact on men and women. She holds that feminism “needs to engage masculinity studies now, because feminism can produce only partial explanations of society if it does not understand how men are shaped by masculinity” (ibid:9). Masculinity studies are sometimes perceived to be positioned within feminist studies, and sometimes as a complement to it; but in any case, studies of masculinity and femininity are both parts of gender studies (Wiegman 2002). Thomas points out that masculinity seems as equally gendered as femininity, in the line of the development of politically neutralized gender studies, where the assumption is that men and women are “equally installed into symmetrically gendered positions” (but not equally perceived in society) (Thomas 2002: 60f). Avoiding to see masculinity as the neutral norm and focusing on men as well as women in gender studies is not a betrayal to the feminist project (Thomas 2002). Critical masculinity studies often strive to underline the effect of masculinity construction on women (ibid). Brod (2002) claims that gender is a relational category as opposed to attributes of individuals. That is to say that the lives of men and women should not be studied as separate spheres because gender is a socially constructed category formed in and through the interplay of different genders (ibid). Without differences between self and other, the self does not exist (Ambjörnsson 2004).

Although both femininity and masculinity will be used as analytical tools in this thesis, I will focus more on the concept of masculinity since the target group consists of men who are surrounded by a masculine myth. However, this does not rule out the notion of femininity and since women are also part of the life on the ranch, the concept of femininity will also be important for the analyses.

Moreover, it is important to mention that gender is not perceived in the same way across different cultures and times. On the contrary, gender – and gendered

places - are socially constructed, historically situated and multiple (Barlett 2006, Lobao 2006, Kegan Gardiner 2002a). There is now a consensus that gender is not static, but a process, and the result of multiple processes and relationships yield “various results for different individuals, groups, institutions and societies” (Kegan Gardiner 2002:11). Multiple masculinities have come to signify the diverse and shifting character of men’s power culture and identity in contemporary organisations of society (Collinson and Hearn 2005, Hearn and Morgan, 1990). Multiple femininities similarly refer to the different characters of femininity (Wharton 2005). There are diverse cultural representations and reproductions of masculinity throughout the world (Smith, 1996). This also includes female masculinities (Halberstam 2002). The ways in which these femininities incorporate masculinities relate to or interact with different institutions in society also vary. The wide spectrum of different sexualities has been explored in queer theory, which has grown as a field in the last ten years (Kulik 2005). Adrienne Rich (1980) introduced the term compulsory heterosexuality that in turn has inspired the concept of heteronormativity. Ambjörnsson (2004) uses the term heteronormativity to point out that social expectations of gendered relations are heterosexual and homosocial, that is partnership with people of the opposite sex and friendship with people of the same sex. Together, these constitute what she calls the “heteronormative market of desire” (ibid: 106, 307). In her study of gender processes among two groups of Swedish teenage girls, heteronormativity turns out to be omnipresent and imperative. The power relation and privileges between different men and masculinities thus vary too, for example, in combination with class, race, nation, sexual preferences, etc., but Smith argues that there are no men who are completely outside of the global power imbalance towards women (Smith 1996). Social hierarchies thus always need to be taken into account when articulating gender differences or inequalities (Kegan Gardiner 2002a, Wiegman 2002). Throughout the past twenty years, gender studies have been informed by the investigation of structures, dynamics and origins of both femininity and masculinity (Kimmel, Hearn and Connell 2005). Very often, both these adjacent

academic fields what adjacent academic fields – you only mention ‘gender studies’ in previous sentence are preoccupied with gender equality. Men and masculinity studies underline the importance of recognising men and masculinities as explicitly gendered rather than non-gendered, produced and reproduced rather than being the natural norm (Kimmel, Hearn and Connell 2005). Some researchers view men as a problem in the inequality equation between genders while others position men as *having* problems, experiencing identity problems in a changing society (Campbell, Bell and Finney 2006). For the first group of thinkers the study of masculinity complements feminist analysis of gendered power, whereas the second group consider men as “co-victims” of the gender structures of society. Both approaches, however, made the man visible as a man (ibid). The concept of *hegemonic masculinity* is useful when approaching masculinities as a social construction. It is a concept used within masculinity studies and feminist analysis to understand gendered power relations in situations where masculinity is perceived as the legitimate, “natural”, and unquestionable form of masculinity in a particular set of gender relations (Campbell, Bell and Finney, 2006).

Although the term gender is commonly used, there is no common definition of its meaning (Wharton 2005). Generally, it refers to a “system of social practices that constitute women and men as different and unequal” (ibid: 23). One definition that captures the relationship between sex and gender, developed by Rubin and underlined by Wiegman, is: “the system by which chromosomal sex is turned into, and processed as, cultural gender” (Wiegman 2002: 39). Thus gender is the “social apparatus that produces and maintains various kinds of sexual division” and provides us with the conceptual framework and the ideological structure for letting the body determine our social place (Wiegman 2002: 45). Gender has also been called a “system of power”(Brod 2002: 162), or the “psychological, social, and cultural aspects of maleness and femaleness” (Kessler and McKenna 1978:7). It is now commonly agreed upon that the biological and social aspects of gender cannot be cleanly separated (ibid). It has

also been argued that gender is not based on the biological differences of sex, but rather that it is the base of distinctions based on biological sex (Wharton 2005). Gender is often seen as something we *do*, rather than a property of individuals; it is an active act, or the way we act, intermingled with our everyday actions (Hearn and Morgan 1990, West and Zimmerman, 2002). It is a “continuous and ongoing performance and display” to some extent determined by the structures of society (Hearn and Morgan 1990: 193). In this study, I will borrow from Wharton’s approach whereby gender, seen as a process in a bigger system of social practices that creates differences, is less limited than when it is interpreted as a set of individual traits and behavioural dispositions (Wharton 2005). To do gender is not necessarily to live up to the social expectations of social roles, but to “engage in behaviour *at the risk of gender assessment*” (Fenstermaker and Zimmerman 2002:13). Gender, on the other hand, “is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative connection of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category” (West and Zimmerman 2002: 5f). Gender roles are “situated identities” (ibid). Gender is often perceived as a natural feature of everyday life, and engaging in it is its own reward as refraining from it is more noticeable than its presence (Fenstermaker, West and Zimmerman 2002). Even if the production of gendered conduct is not the goal or focus of activities or interactions, it is almost inevitably one of the outcomes (ibid : 37).

A definition of masculinity proposed by Barlett (2006) earlier defined by Peter et al. (1996), is: “the behaviour, practices, and conversations deemed appropriate for men” (Barlett, 2006, p. 49). Among the traits and adjectives often associated with masculinity are aggression, violence, competitiveness, risk taking, physical strength, rational thinking, self-made achievement, economically supportive, authoritarian , domineering, defensive, competence, independence, leadership abilities, ambition, etc. (Kegan Gardiner 2002a, Wharton 2005, Barash 2005, Richards 1990, Glick and Fiske 2007). On the contrary, behaviours and traits commonly associated with femininity are warmth, crying, empathy,

caretaking, childcare, nurturing, purity, submissiveness, domesticity, dependence, niceness, ability to get along, passivity, self-effacement, irrationality, impulsivity, sentimentality, spontaneity, intimacy, nurture, sensitivity, sensuality, etc. (Wharton 2005, Richards 1990, Glick and Fiske 2007, Gregory 2003). Specifically, work related prejudices against women include, according to Gregory (2003), ideas such as: women do not want to work, they are less committed to their careers than men, they are generally unable or unwilling to work long or unusual hours, they are too emotional, they are not sufficiently aggressive and are unwilling to take decisions. When these expected traits are not fulfilled, a person could risk being perceived as a failure or stigmatised not only in the field in question, but also as a man or a woman (Wharton 2005). A man is also defined not only as opposed to women, but also as opposed to boys (Kegan Gardiner 2002b). However, no behavioural characteristic of either femininity or masculinity can always identify gender, and many traits can be common to both men and women (Wharton 2005, Hearn and Morgan 1990). It is interesting to note that often when listing characteristics of femininity and masculinity, stereotypes of women are often more favourable than stereotypes of men, even though they are the ones most commonly discriminated against (Glick and Fiske 2007, Richards, 1990).

Finally, it is important to point out that even though masculinity studies have a particular focus, there are a wide number of perspectives present in the literature (e.g. positivism, cultural relativism, psychoanalysis, critical theory, neomarxism, various forms of feminism, modernism or postcolonialism) (Kimmel, Hearn and Connell 2005).

3.2 Gender and work

Work has been central to constructions of North American masculinity, and idle men, or men who rely on their wives' incomes, have been viewed as irresponsible, weak, or childlike. Work is thus associated with manliness and adulthood (Carrol 2003: 498).

The “Gender division of labour”, that is the way that work is socially organised according to the sexes, is very much present throughout the western world (Collinson and Hearn 2005: 290). Structures, definitions and understandings of work are, both in every day life and in research, according to Collinson and Hearn ideological and gendered. It is commonly argued that there is a tendency in many societies for men to do more strenuous, dangerous and manual work than women. However, what is characterized in some societies as “men’s work” is defined in other societies as “women’s work”, for instance in the case of domestic work and agriculture (Collinson and Hearn 2005: 290). There are also many examples where work traditionally associated with masculinity has now shifted towards becoming feminine work, for example during wartimes (Wharton 2005). Collinson and Hearn (2005) argue that the gender division and distribution of labour have strong effects on women and men in society, for instance when it comes to status and equality. For instance they point out that societies in which the public and the domestic spheres were only slightly differentiated tend to give women the highest status. Societies in which men participate in the domestic sphere are the most egalitarian. Feminist organizational studies have underlined the importance of paid work as a “central source of men’s identity, status and power”, thus demonstrating how a lot of organizations hold masculine values (Collinson and Hearn 2005: 294). Furthermore, studies have shown examples of how manual workers construct subcultures and working class masculine identities from distinguishing themselves from the “others” such as management, office workers and women. Between these workers, the informal interaction at work was identified as deeply masculine: often highly aggressive, sexist and derogatory, “humorous yet insulting”, and “playful but degrading” (ibid). The choice of clothing - down to the colour and pattern of shirts and trousers - is often a very useful and used marker revealing membership of a group at work, sometimes reflecting a hegemony (Collinson and Hearn 2005: 297). However, to use gender as a totalising explanation and see it as decisive even where there might be other factors playing, can lead to a misconception of relations (ibid). It is useful to bear

in mind however that a lot of differences in attitudes and work values attributed to gender might disappear when income, education and occupational level are controlled (Wharton 2005). Theories about the origin of the gendered division of labour are likely to include men's physical strength and women's responsibility for child care, and the intertwined relationship between work and family life. Perhaps what is more interesting to look at now is not how gender structures came to be, but how and why they are reproduced and maintained in contemporary societies (Wharton 2005). In fact, a study by Reskin and Roos (1990) concluded that the sex composition of occupations and jobs are not dependent on sex-specific tasks, but has more to do with the supply and demand for female and male workers as well as the social forces changing the desirability of jobs and occupations (Wharton 2005). Associating certain traits with a certain sex will assume that one group is better suited to accomplish a specific kind of work, and the fact that one group continues to do a certain kind of work maintains the belief that this group is the bearer of certain traits (ibid.). However, most jobs require a variety of characteristics in that that they could be deemed appropriate for either women or men, depending on how we look at it (ibid.). Wharton underlines the importance of *emotional labour*, a concept developed by Arlie Hochschild (1983), to the association of femininity with a job (Wharton 2005: 183). It does not involve physical or mental effort, but a way of being and interacting with others. It is based on a worker's subjectivity, her sense of self, and her ability to display personal qualities to others, such as friendliness or deference towards customers. Jobs where emotional labour is required are often labelled as female (ibid.). However, when emotions include dignity and authority, jobs are more likely to be labelled masculine. In any case, work that encompasses emotional labour is most certainly gendered. I would argue that jobs that require a lack of emotional labour, for instance in work that requires the use of violence, are often labelled "men's work". The old cliché that men are more unfeeling than women and not as sensitive to emotions would help construct such a view (Duroche 1990). An interpretation suggested by Fenstermaker, West and Zimmerman (2002) is that men engage in what is seen

as masculine work not because it demands the qualities and virtues commonly associated with men, but in doing so they “appropriate the occasion and its resources to demonstrate and establish manliness.” (p. 38). While doing work and doing gender can be theoretically separated, their actions are in reality intertwined. Gender discrimination or prejudice in a workplace has shown to be a highly contextual matter. Authorities and peers have a big influence on the workers’ thinking and behaviour, especially when authority is trusted and the peer group is similar to the worker himself (Glick and Fiske 2007). The reaction of people who discover that they experienced gender discrimination is often quite different from their reaction toward other forms of discrimination (for example racism), and is often dealt with through humour rather than with guilt or self-doubt (ibid). Both women and men engage in gender stereotyping that may lead to discrimination in the workplace. This gender stereotyping is often not only descriptive but also prescriptive because “efficient social functioning requires individuals (...) to possess the traits required for successful performance of their group’s role” (ibid:156ff). Sometimes the mere presence of women in a male-dominated occupation violates the gender prescriptions (Glick and Fiske 2007). For example, Cascio (2007) describes the difficulties some women face when entering the “masculine” profession of firefighting. Included in these stereotypes is “benevolent sexism”, that is the paternalistic notion that women are “wonderful but fragile” and need help with certain things (Glick and Fiske 2007: 162). Gender prescriptions for men in these types of jobs are often congruent with their work roles, whereas for women the prescriptions can create a conflict of work and gender roles (ibid). Work places where women are relegated to subordinate or service-oriented roles cultivate a masculine culture. Should women attempt to “invade” the male domain, they might be met with resistance as they upset the comfortable, homogenous norms that dominate. Finally this may result in different treatment of the sexes in hiring, job assignments, promotion and dismissal (Ridgeway and England 2007: 190).

Gender roles dominating the choice and opportunity of work are not always conscious, either by employers, employees, society or by the worker him/herself. Jencks (1992) identifies different types of discrimination processes, of which two are worker-driven and statistical discrimination; Wharton (2005) applies gender to these processes to analyse how assumptions about gender by different actors affect the choice and opportunity of work. Worker-driven discrimination is based on the belief that colleagues will be dissatisfied if members of a certain group are hired. What Jencks calls statistical discrimination is based on stereotypes that have shown to be accurate in a large number of cases. I argue that the strength of these notions when being applied to gender, as Wharton does, will then determine what implications gender has for the work identity. Wharton also introduces institutionalized barriers to the picture, arguing that practices and policies in a workplace that might once have been based on prejudices or are by-products of rules and procedures established for other reasons, might take a life of their own in the sense that they require little effort to maintain and are left unquestioned by tradition (Wharton 2005, Bergman 2007). Rules, structure, and institutional arrangements and procedures become instruments of discrimination if they implicitly take on gender stereotyping characteristics (Ridgeway and England 2007). These practices might even propel individuals who are not prone to act in a discriminatory way, to act in contradiction to these stereotypes, and become active agents of themselves.

The similarity-attraction theory claims that people prefer to work with others who are like themselves in order to feel comfortable (Wharton 2005). This homosocial reproduction helps maintain the gender structure of working groups (Ridgeway and England 2007). If a working group contains only men or women, that composition alone would be a reason for not adding colleagues of the opposite sex to the mix. Should that happen anyway, then the newcomer to the group or the whole group might feel uncomfortable, threatened, and less committed (Wharton 2005). This could come from the fact that group norms are

then questioned, patterns of communication need to be renegotiated, etc. (ibid). Should sex become a salient part of the work identity, gendered jokes, interests and comments may become common, which in turn strengthens the importance of gender in the group and the likeliness of homosocial reproduction (Ridgeway and England 2007). However, this might be different in a male group with a female newcomer than in a female group with a male newcomer. A study shows that males who seek “female professions” are often more successful and are rewarded for their different gender characteristics, whereas the opposite is the case for women in “male professions” (Wharton 2005:180). The study argues that one explanation for this is that maleness is more highly valued than femaleness, and thus women in men’s professions have to struggle to fit in and to prove their competency, while men in female professions don’t have to do this (ibid: 179). This might be a sign of a masculinisation of women, in order to be accepted in the work group (Thomas 1990: 143). However, there does not seem to be a correspondent feminization of men in the workplace (ibid).

3.3 Rural masculinity

It has been argued that the contemporary hegemonic picture of masculinity and all masculinities in general draw from the ideas, images and representations of rural men. One can find references of what is considered this type of “real men” in commercial ads, political representation, and ideals that shape peoples’ chances of success in life (Campbell, Bell and Finney 2006). This image rules the world and does not only affect men, but has a great influence on both men and women’s lives as an ideology and a social practice (ibid). According to Campbell, Bell and Finney, rural masculinities “shape people’s employment chances, their recreation choices, their buying habits, their voting preferences and their daily interactions with women and men” (2006: 3). “A “good” (male) farmer is one who has tamed the elements to produce crops and manage livestock, overcoming nature’s vagaries and uncertainties” (Little 2006: 189). This “taming of nature” reoccurs in various models of masculinity (Boris 2007, Forsyth and Thompson 2007).

Country work has many elements associated with the masculine, such as outdoor work, strenuous physical labour, and the handling of large animals and heavy machinery (Barlett 2006). Even if all these tasks can be performed by women too, the association of these activities with masculinity often makes it harder for women to get these kinds of jobs. Barlett presents two perspectives on masculine values in farming life: the agrarian and the industrial definitions of success. The agrarian definition values farm life, family partnership, and continuity on the land, whereas the industrial definition treats farming as a means to gain a desired living standard, business opportunities, and a lifestyle in which the husband is the provider and the wife the homemaker. Agrarian values include the respect of farming as a way of life, the connection with nature, the autonomy and independence of the daily farm work as opposed to the industrial values where financial success and good investments are stressed, treating farming as any kind of job (ibid). Erikson (2008) analyses the work situation of fire fighters and finds a masculinity tied to the closeness to the wilderness and the risks. She also finds bonding rituals in the form of “shit talk” and aggressive teasing and drinking. The need to create a group, she argues, is connected to the longing for the social space that emerges around a particular set of skills and knowledge.

What Rooks (2003) labels “cowboy mentality” addresses the occupational commitment found among union organisers of US politician John E. Sweeney’s “new labour movement”. This includes long working hours, social isolation because of travel, unpredictability, and lack of free time. The workers are expected to devote their life to their work and it becomes more than a job for them. It is a mentality that encourages the homogenisation of the group and the view that their kind of work is superior to any other (ibid).

3.4 Gender and cowboys

As mentioned in the introduction, myths and stories have been told about the stereotype of the cowboy, the singers, and the rodeo stars, but there is not much

written about the everyday life of today's cowboys and even less about the gender perspective of their work. Anthropological studies are not common on this subject. In order to define the label of a *cowboy*, I will draw from an explanation given to me by a friend who lived and worked on a cattle ranch. He told me there are four types of cowboys: singing cowboys, rodeo cowboys, working cowboys, and cowboy wannabes. Singing cowboys is the name commonly given to country singers that sing about the cowboy way of life. They might or might not be working cowboys. Rodeo cowboys ride horses or bulls at rodeo shows, and they may or may not also be working cowboys. The cowboy wannabes are people who adopt the clothes and attitudes commonly attributed to cowboys, wanting to be part of the tradition but actually don't work as cowboys and they don't fit in any of the other cowboy definitions cited above. This study only addresses working cowboys, that is, people who in the American tradition handle cattle in their daily work. Other definitions include outdoor workers who handle horses and other large animals, such as shepherders, but these individuals are not represented in my research data.

For some reason, it seems as though a large portion of the small body of literature that exists on cowboys and gender (with the exception of the rodeo world and historic accounts about it) mainly explores the theme of homosexuality (Bell 2006). As Floyd (2001) points out, the cowboy has become a symbol of the traditional heteronormativity and the western context in which he is couched provides a well established setting for making a contrast in literature or film that portrays homosexuality.

The cowboy seems to be a masculine stereotype still used to describe a "real" man (Clark 2007). The word cowboy is associated with being tough, independent, physically fit, wild and hard working, though it is often evoked in reference to people who have never gotten close to a cow or perhaps even a horse during their daily lives (Rooks 2003, Floyd 2001). Central to the myth is the lone man on his horse, a man with a rough exterior and few social attachments (Forsyth and Thompson 2007). He is regarded in history as being a

half-savage with high virtues and terrible vices (Savage 1993). Contemporary rodeo cowboys share some of that image and reproduce the portrait of a hegemonic masculinity where women take a backseat, though these cowboys are nevertheless highly dependent on the support of their surroundings, including the women, to keep up their lifestyle (Forsyth and Thompson 2007). However, history does not credit rodeo cowboys for being prime actors in the development of western civilisation and the Frontier, even if the image of the every day life of the working cowboy rubbed off on them (Savage 1993). The cowboys of the old American Frontier played such a big part in the creation of the new American man that their most recognizable symbol –the cowboy hat - is still used during campaigns for US elections (Campbell, Bell and Finney 2006, Boris 2007, Kintz, 1996, Savage 1993). The cowboy has been used as a political rhetoric and his image was invoked by Reagan and W. Bush to legitimize the moral authority of violent action in the name of the American nation (Carroll 2003). In addition there has been doubts whether Nixon, who did not ride horses, possesses “real” masculinity (Boris 2007). The important role that the cowboy played in constructing the North American image of the Man also applies for Canada although masculinity in eastern Canada and especially in Québec is more influenced by the image of *les coureurs de bois*, or the woodsmen (Martin 2007).

It seems that the values, traits, and lifestyle we associate with cowboys are more closely attached to the popular definition of “cowboy” than to the original meaning of their work so much that cows don’t even have to be included in the picture anymore. Even in the controversial movie “Brokeback Mountain” about “cowboy homosexuality”, the main characters were herding sheep. Even though there were only a few rodeo bulls but no cows on site throughout the movie, there was no doubt that the main characters were cowboys. However, they challenged the hegemonic, heteronormative masculinity and paid a price for going against it in a way that shows the viewer how pivotal this definition of masculinity was in their society.

3.4.1 Cowboying History

Out of all the heroes of history on the American continent, it is the working cowboy that has become *the* Mythical American Hero (Savage 1993). Rodeo cowboys, who came later, borrowed some of his mystical status but they are not accredited for having paved the way of western civilisation at the Frontier. The glorious and romantic picture of the cowboy with his admired character and skills (that later on also included his despised vices) has its roots in the life and work of the cowboy of the later half of the eighteenth century. He was a hired hand, and his task was to tend to cattle on the range or on the trail, which meant living a lifestyle completely determined by his work. He was thus distinct from the cattleman, who was the owner of the beasts and who invested the capital and collected the profit. "The work was more tiring than heroic, more boring than romantic" writes Savage (1993) in his foreword to the new edition of a collection of accounts told about the life on the trail. Writing at the turn of the last century, Lewis states that women, cards, and rum were not to be found in cow camp as "[t]he ranches and the boys themselves banish the two latter; and the first won't come" (ibid : 158). Savage goes on to say that: "The cattle business and the cowboy life were hardly the stuff of which legends are made, but they did produce America's most potent myth; and it is from this circumstance that the cowboy derives his significance. The cowboy is a symbol for many things – courage, honour, chivalry, individualism - few of which have much foundation in fact." The cowboy's importance today, he believes, is more due to what he is thought to have been rather for than what he really was. However, the tales told by other voices in the same book praise cowboys for these very same traits, once these writers spent some time with them. The trail was seen as no place for a woman, and even in the stories she was portrayed as being romantic and dependent, and the men's interaction with women demonstrated their gentlemen-like characters (ibid). Today's cowboy sees himself as "the latest rider in an unbroken procession of mounted herdsmen, links himself to the historical cowboy to have an individual sense of belonging to something, to some

valid tradition.” (Savage 1993: 159). In his book, Savage presents an excerpt from an old text from the late 1800s in which the author explains that some individuals owned tens of thousands head of cattle that roamed freely over the plains and that these were looked after by “a few men and a crowd of Mexican boys from eight to twenty years of age” (ibid : 33). When Texas joined the United States, the big drives from that area were accompanied by so many of these boys that all the herders were commonly called “Texas cow-boys”. As the cattle business spread all over the west, including the north the young Mexican boys were replaced by full-grown white men, the term “cowboy” stuck and has been used ever since to name all herders of cattle on the American continent (ibid). Two styles of “cowboying”, developed – Cowboys and Buckaroos – and each have their particular clothing fashion and styles of riding and roping (O’Byrne 2005).

Dee Garceau (2001) explores the history of gendered ranch work. From the 1860s through 1980s the American cowboys worked on the open range as drovers, trailing cattle across the Great Plains. These cowboys were not married because they accepted lower wages, were free to travel for long periods of time, and could also bunk together in single-sex housing. To have women work and live among these single men on the road was unthinkable at the time, since they would have required separate living quarters. This group of workers were seen as morally suspect, primitive and uncivilised, socially crude, and at the margins of society. However, they were always respected for their hard work and lifestyle and the fellowship among cowboys was celebrated. After the hard winter of 1886-87, at a time when many ranchers lost large quantities of cattle, the nomadic lifestyle of cattle work became more sedentary, with a ranch and land to grow winter food and to keep animals under closer surveillance throughout the winter. Family ranches became the norm and in that context women working on the ranch became part of every day life. At first, the gender divide continued whereby the women did household work as the men laboured outdoors, but later women came to plough, dig ditches, bale hay, and herd sheep.

However, cattle work was restricted to men and the odd tales of women participating indicate that there were exceptions to the rule of “no women in camp”. The women who transgressed this rule were often treated as “one of the boys”, because there was no analytical space allowing for the concept of *cowgirls*. These women were incorporated into cow camp as “quasi-men and not accepted as women” (Garceau 2001: 151). Theresa Jordan (1992) notices that the visibility of women in the west has increased since the early eighties when the first edition of her book “Cowgirls” came out. Her interviews with a large number of women, mostly rodeo riders and owners of family businesses, revealed that they were often content with the silence that surrounded them since it was their invisibility that allowed them to continue leading the life not “meant” for their kind, and to avoid being seen as rebels or renegades, which they were not.

3.4.2 Masculinity of cattle work

Gee Garceau (2001) attributes the masculinisation of cattle work in part to the emergence of the cowboy myth. By the beginning of the twentieth century, as the open-range cattle work transformed into home ranches, travelling shows and best-selling novels popularized the myth of the cowboy, and continue to do so, with the help of Buffalo Bill, John Wayne and the Marlboro Man (Garceau 2001, Carroll 2003, Martin 2007, Mitchell 2007). Previously seen as marginal workers with a dodgy reputation, cowboys now saw their stereotype becoming a masculine ideal in popular culture. Although cowboys found in literature and in shows rarely did cattle work, the symbols of “honour, physical prowess and rugged individualism” stuck with the real cowboys (Garceau 2001: 152). They would be described as “brave, hospitable, hardy and adventurous” and be respected for having prepared the way for civilization (ibid :163). However, the cowboy has often been criticised for his role in western colonial expansion, his violence, his massacre of Native Americans, and his insensibility towards gender issues, but at the same time celebrated for his courage, confidence, manhood and action, and for being a fearless loner (Gutman 2007b, Savage 1993). In the

popularisation of the cowboy myth, cowboys were often pictured in opposition to Native Americans who were portrayed as the “savage other” (Stecopoulos 2007). The cowboys’ autonomy and mobility was admired, which allowed them to live a life “free from urban-industrial concerns, emotional attachments and the feminizing influences of civilization” (Carroll 2003 :115). The cowboy life has often been seen as the heart of machismo, and indeed, the advent of the Mexican machismo came with the *vaquero*, or Mexican cowboy (Gutman 2007b, Martin 2007).

Garceau describes how a cowboy who lived and worked through that transition could clearly perceive the difference in looks he got when walking through the town in his cowboy outfit before and after the popularisation of the myth. The myth of the cowboy clearly reinforced the masculine working identity of cattle work. As the family ranch lifestyle replaced the drovers, cowboys owning land went from working class to middle class citizens. The transition of the cowboy way of life clearly had two sides. With the change, the cowboy culture gradually gained the respectable image of a family rancher, but it had to give up the masculine image of an-all male nomadic work force. Garceau suggests that the will to keep a share in the legendary identity of the masculine drovers of the past, and be a part of the present myth of the cowboy, was an incentive to keep women out of the cattle work even when the cowboys on the ranch could have used an extra farmhand. This gender boundary was the element that was left to save the masculine occupational identity of the domesticated cowboys, and to legitimise their part in the cowboy myth.

Cowboy’s work is sometimes brutal and can even include cruel elements (Merill 2002). Brutal work tends to bring out the aggressive side in people. The men associated with this trade were also associated with a certain masculinity and the cowboy helped to articulate idealized masculine traits of vigour and raw virility. Merrill points out that ranchers’ relationship with the cattle is dual, as they take care of them as their guardian, but also hurt them in the process and send them off to slaughter. However, they are not to express any sympathy for

pain as to avoid sentimentality is necessary for both the business and for the masculine image (ibid). The violence in western ideals tests the masculine body and the masculine virtues of restraint, taciturnity, composure and endurance and thus makes “real men out of biological men” (Mitchell 2007: 631). In order to demonstrate the ability to maintain composure under the pressure of vivid sensation it takes, ironically, a situation or stories of excessive sensation (ibid). The mythical west with its strenuous work, dangerous situations, and social isolation seems to be a perfect setting to demonstrate this composure.

4. The Ranch

Two hours away from the nearest town lies a cattle ranch with the reputation for being the toughest in the country. The ranch is one of the biggest in Canada and is situated in British Columbia. It covers just under a million acres and is home to approximately 5000 head of cattle, depending on the season. The landscape is rather rough and the cows need a vast territory to feed on. One of the most common plants is sagebrush that at times grows stirrup high. The otherwise sandy and stony terrain has many small canyons where the rivers run and the rocks vary in color from yellow, orange and red to green, blue and purple. The spring comes around late May and covers the hills in green, although the dry climate leaves a lot of dirt. This dry climate around the home ranch is in part due to its location, as rain and thunderstorms often circle above the ranch without reaching it. The further up that one goes in the hills that surround the home ranch where the cows venture, the more rain or snow is to be expected. The temperature varies from 34 degrees Celsius during the hot summer months down to - 40 during mid-winter, although there are stories about the odd -50 hitting the backcountry. The pastures and fields closest to the home ranch are used in the winter and spring through calving time for keeping cows, and in the summer for growing hay. Often the supply of hay is enough for the ranch to be self-sufficient, but in difficult years when there is a low yield, hay is bought.

The home ranch consists of a cookhouse with a kitchen and dining room downstairs and rooms for the crew on the second floor, an apartment building a further away, the manager's house, a workshop for vehicles, the horse barn, and the calving barn. There are also a few houses five minutes away from the cookhouse. A big log house that used to be used as living quarters but is now used for parties and special occasions is a half-hour drive away. Further away from the home ranch and further up in the mountains there are a few camps that are used during the summertime and throughout the fall up to Christmas when cows are moved around a large area for grazing. These camps vary in size and

style. Some are just a set of corrals for the cows and horses, with a place to put up tents and sometimes, a cooking trailer. Others consist of permanent cabins or trailers for sleeping and eating, and one of them has a generator bigger than the one at the home ranch. This camp is also used by loggers, and the camp cook would then cater for all of them.

The Ranch is owned by a Sheik from Saudi Arabia who comes to visit maybe once a year, but is run by a general manager who lives on the ranch. He in turn delegates responsibilities to a cowboss, a farm boss, and the head of irrigation. The cooks, secretary, and yard worker work quite independently.



4.1 Working at the Ranch

The division of tasks on the Ranch is straightforward. Everybody knows what is included in his or her work description and there is some sort of routine for the different working groups even though the tasks change according to the seasons. There are, as described in the methodology chapter, three working groups on the ranch, and a number of people working individually. The working groups consist of the cowboys, the farmers, and the irrigators. There are also the manager, the manager's wife, the cooks, the yard worker, and the secretary. The

secretary, Caroline, works in the office in the manager's house on a hill overlooking the homestead. She comes down to the cookhouse for lunch, but has breakfast and supper at home. The farm where she stays and where she grew up is only a forty minutes drive away and she is the only one working on the Ranch who does not live there. Apart from the manager and the manager's wife, she doesn't interact with the crew during work. During the lunch hour, though, after having lunch with the crew and her boyfriend Mathieu, she runs the little store selling snacks, toiletries, clothes, etc. to the workers and the tourists in the summer. The yard worker, Tracy, takes care of the lawns around the cookhouse and the flowerbeds around the ranch. She works independently, receives directions from the manager and his wife and uses some of the big farm vehicles to get her tasks done. She lives in a trailer close to the apartment buildings, about a five minutes walk from the cookhouse, and is the only single woman on the Ranch. The main cook, Rose, takes care of all the meals and snacks during the weekdays. She creates the menus herself and orders what she needs from Jack the Manager and his wife Sue when they go to town once a week. Between the meals – cooked breakfast, lunch and supper, there are always leftovers, cakes and cookies to snack on should someone be hungry and get the opportunity to stop by the cookhouse. Rose lives in one of the log houses with her husband Pete, the farm boss, situated three minutes away by car. Felicia, the weekend cook, takes care of the meals during the weekends but stays at home during the week, running the home she shares with Richard, her husband from the cowboy crew. She is also the camp cook, and goes with the cowboy crew to camp for some six months out of the year to cook for them seven days a week, except for her days off, which would be the same as the cowboys. The “manager's wife”, which seems to be a job title as well as a social description, lives with her manager husband Jack in a big log house generously decorated with hunting trophies and an exceptional view. Sue does all sorts of odd tasks, such as helping with the paperwork, talking to the owner of the Ranch, helping spot lost cattle, keeping track of who is doing what, grocery shopping, driving people to the hospital if needed, hiring staff, and giving directives to certain employees. She

has her meals up in the house and rarely mixes with the other people on the ranch unless it's a special occasion. On weekends, she and Jack often go to their own little ranch, some hours drive away, to check in with the lady who runs it for them and to do whatever work is necessary. Jack is in charge of making the Ranch run smoothly, coordinating the different workers, keeping track of the movement of the cows and the flow of money, and the hiring of staff.

The irrigators are seasonal workers and come to stay and work at the Ranch from around May throughout the summer. Their number varies from only a few in the early season to around ten at their peak. Their job is to set up the pipelines that water the fields and to move them around, to make sure they are working, and to dismantle them in the fall. The irrigation boss stays in a caravan close to the cooks' houses, and the others stay on top of the cookhouse in single rooms. Apart from the boss, an older man, the crew consists of young men or teenagers.

The farm crew is made up of four people, the farm boss Pete and three other men. They are in charge of feeding the cattle during the winter period when they stay close to the home ranch, and growing and harvesting hay in the summer. They also take care of the machinery and other practical matters on the ranch. The three single men on the crew each have their own apartment in the apartment building.

There were eight cowboys at the time of fieldwork, including Dave the cowboss. Their number varies at times and the turnover is rather high. The two married cowboys stay in log houses with their wives. The single ones with most seniority stay in the apartment building and the rest have a room on top of the cookhouse. Dave the cowboss has a wife, Kate, and two young children, Emma and Marvin, aged five and two. Kate and her children are the only ones living on the Ranch who do not work there. There is no daycare facility close enough, and Kate stays home and takes care of the kids. Before she had kids, she used to cowboy with her husband at the Ranch. The cowboy crew looks after moving, calving, weaning and branding the cattle as well as the fencing and taking care of the

horses. During the winter they live at the home ranch, but from May through to December they move around from camp to camp, following the cows to new grazing areas.

During the time when everybody stays on the home ranch, everybody has the same working hours – breakfast at six thirty and supper at five thirty with a lunch break at noon. The cowboys, of course, have to get their horses ready before breakfast, and sometimes shoe them after supper.

Apart from coordinating certain tasks, there is little or no intermingling of the different groups during work hours. For instance, the cowboys move the cattle and communicate with the farmers, who put out the feed, or the cowboss lets the cook know if they will be there for supper. But the tasks themselves are handled by the working groups separately. Most of the crew meets for meals, but only a few of them would hang out in the evenings on a regular basis. Felicia commented that *“[t]here isn’t a lot of situations on the ranch where they work closely together, but of course they have to cooperate no matter what their job is, they are all part of this small community. Workers try to be there for mealtime, and I try to understand if they’re late. They try to keep the cookhouse clean.”*

At the time of the fieldwork, there was no working group containing both men and women. Thus, men and women didn’t work together at all. There had been, I was told, the occasional female irrigator or cowboy for a short period, or a male cook, but not anymore. When asking about men and women working together I got answers such as: *“Women do women things and men do men things. The heavier tasks are left to the men.”* Or: *“Not generally no. Special occasions maybe. At brandings women would give vaccination, tag, once in a while a lady will come out and ride.”*

Tracy’s outdoor work, which was otherwise reserved for men was explained by one of the cooks: *“For her it is a bit of an exception. My tasks here are strictly cooking, no tractor driving or driving. I do other things too, but Tracy, when she’s*

out working in the yard, she hauls stuff with the tractor. Her job, tasks, could be explained to be more farmer related, what farmers do.”

To summarise, the three working groups consisting of men do different types of outdoor work. The individual indoor workers are all women, except for the manager who does a bit of both indoor and outdoor work. Tracy works outdoors and is seen as an exception to the rule, because the heavier tasks involving big machinery are left to the men. The crew don't really mix during working hours outside of the respective working groups even if they do communicate in order to coordinate their tasks.



4.2 Living on the Ranch

In most cases working on the Ranch means living on the Ranch. Since she lives very close to the Ranch, Caroline goes home after work to her parent's farm where she grew up. For most of the crew that would be impossible because the Ranch is so far from the nearest towns, and they have long and irregular working hours. Caroline is also the only ones who works regular business hours and only she and the weekday cook have every weekend off. For the others, the schedule varies throughout the year depending on the workload but generally,

when they stay at the home ranch they work for ten days and then get two days off. Going in to the nearest town is a two-hour drive on treacherous roads, so commuting to the Ranch is out of the question. Visiting friends, girlfriends and family is reserved for days off, and so is shopping and going to bars or cafés. In other words, if you live on the Ranch, the Ranch is pretty much where you spend your days. Every time someone on the crew went to town, he or she would ask colleagues if they needed anything, and most of the time the answer was beer or *Copenhagen* – a certain kind of tobacco snuff popular among the cowboys. The single employees all have their food and accommodation accounted for, and they receive a salary on top of that. The families get a nicer place to stay and get their meat, eggs and honey from the ranch, but buy the rest of their groceries themselves and have their supper at home. The starting salaries are generally the same for everyone, but can soon change according to experience and responsibility. A normal salary for a cowboy is 1500 to 2000 dollars a month. Some of the indoor workers work shorter hours, but generally have a salary comparable to the outdoor workers.

The fact that the Ranch is so remote means that there is a long distance to travel in order to haul the cattle to where they are sold. It also means that you have to plan ahead for what you might need and make sure you don't forget anything coming on your way back from town. On many occasions, people on the crew assured me that you have to like the countryside if you wanted to work at the Ranch, and they seemed proud of the fact that they did not have the urge to go to town other than for doing some groceries or to meet a girlfriend. Many stories circulated about new employees who "couldn't handle it" and left because it was too far out in the middle of nowhere. Life, apart from work, was rather quiet for most of the workers. Apart from families with children, evenings was the time to relax and to get ready for another work day. The cowboys might practice roping, shoe a horse or break in a colt, but otherwise they would either have a beer and watch a movie or enjoy the privacy of their own living space. During the rodeo season, however, weekends were spent travelling to competitions, often with a

team of colleagues competing in the ranch rodeos across British Columbia and Alberta. The ranch rodeo has categories similar to the normal rodeo, but it is adapted to reflect the daily activities of a ranch. For example instead of “team roping” you would have “two man doctoring”, with slightly different rules and judgements.

4.3 Life in cow camp

Once the cowboys go to camp their life changes quite dramatically. From May to December they only come back to the ranch on days off, either to do laundry and to have a shower, or to pass through on their way to see girlfriends, friends, family or a trip into town. In late April, the cows are moved towards the first camp, while the younger calves are trucked there with their mothers in order to save them the long walk. From there, they are moved in a big arch across the land and they come back to the home ranch just before Christmas. The cowboys, who direct and push the cows from horseback, move with the animals from camp to camp along the trail. In some of the camping places, there are trailers to live and cook in and in others there are only the tents that the crew bring with them. One of the camps even has a generator, water and kitchen facilities. During some years, a cooking trailer with a gas stove is hauled to some of the camping places, while during others the cooking and baking take place in a tent. The tents are normally equipped with stoves for keeping warming because the temperature can fall to -40 degrees Celsius before the camping season is over. During the peak of the summer time, however, 35 degrees Celsius is normal temperature, which explains why cowboys start their workday so early. In the fall, two or three guys take some 500 cows and continue up into the mountains while the rest of the group continues the trail further down. Up there they live in huts and come down together once every two or three weeks or so to get groceries and mail, and to shower. Up in the mountains the cowboys cook for themselves and work in their own way. In the camp down below the cowboss oversees the work and the camp cook provides breakfast and supper. Tasks to be accomplished each day are delegated after breakfast and days off are

determined from month to month. Even the move from one camp to another may be a last minute decision, since it depends on the weather and how the grass is growing.

The typical camp day starts with breakfast at three thirty in the morning. Felicia arrives to work an hour earlier to get the eggs and bacon ready for the group of between six to nine cowboys, while the cowboys prepare their horses for the day before breakfast. Felicia would have the dishes done around five thirty and then, since she doesn't have to prepare lunch in camp, she has time to go for a walk, a ride, or do some baking until two or three o'clock when she starts preparing supper. The guys ride out for ten to twelve hours a day, sometimes longer, pushing cows, looking for cows, pairing them up or separating them. They don't come back for lunch, and supper is served around five o'clock. There are at times things to finish in the evenings like shoeing, after which everybody is tired. Going to bed around eight o'clock is not uncommon. Sometimes there would be a campfire and they would all hang out together, but most of the time people want their privacy, and the thought of anybody bringing musical instruments to camp seemed to evoke irritation more than anything else.

Two of the major events of the year during the camping period are the branding and the weaning of cows. In June it is branding time. This is often an occasion to have neighbours and friends come to help out and to have a get-together. From horseback the calf is roped by the heels. Sometimes another cowboy ropes the calf by the neck first to control its movement. A fork - a metal frame tied to a rubber band stuck to the ground - is put over his head and the calf is kept still by keeping the rope tight around its heels. In a matter of a minute, the different people in charge of vaccinating, branding, castrating, and possibly cutting budding horns off have done their job and moved on to the next calf. It can be quite a sight, with the fire in the middle heating up the branding irons, the herd of cows and calves bawling, the swishing ropes of the mounted cowboys and the intense activity on the ground. The scene is completed by blood, cow dung and the stench of burnt skin, accompanied by the yells, cheers and laughter of the

crew and other onlookers. In the fall, when the calves have grown up, it is time for weaning, which entails separating the calves from the cows. This is a noisy task and once it is done the two generations go their separate ways to continue grazing.

The division of labour between men and women is accepted by everybody on the ranch, because it is how “it has always been”. No one seems to be opposed to it, even if a number of them say they wouldn’t mind a change and that there has been some exceptions throughout the years. Even Kate, who used to cowboy before she had kids, can understand that there are no women on the cowboy crew, although she regrets that all the failed attempts had burned the bridges for other women for whom it actually could work out, like herself. There had been male cooks before, and the cowboys who go up in the mountains cook for themselves. George even said he liked cooking, and would cook “*shit....Steak and vegetables, out of a can of course. Most outfits have good cooks. Keeps the crew happy.*” All the cowboys agreed that the cook was important. The first rule of any ranch, I learned, is to not make the cook angry. From the manager’s point of view the cook is of great importance, because a good one will keep the crew happy and will make them stay. All the cowboys from British Columbia knew which ranches had a good cook. A good cook was thus greatly respected, and in almost all cases, they were women. The division of labor between men and women was perceived as being based on the distinction between outdoor and indoor work, physically demanding and less demanding work, and uncomfortable versus more comfortable working conditions, according to tradition.

5. “Cowboy up!”

5.1 Creating a group...

All the cowboys, with one exception, grew up on ranches or farms of some sort and always knew they wanted to work with horses and cows. The lifestyle in which they grew up included a lot of outdoor activities, the countryside, animals, and a lot of work. When asked how they decided to become cowboys, I received answers such as: *“I don’t know that there was ever a decision really. I guess there was, but.... Both sides of my family were farmers”*; *“It wasn’t really a decision, it’s just the way I was raised. Grew up and fell into it”*; *“It’s all I ever knew, grew up on a ranch, started lots of horses with my neighbor. Never had a lot of interest for anything else. When everybody else played sports after school, I rode my horse.”*

The majority of them always wanted to be cowboys and all of them agreed wholeheartedly that being a cowboy is a big part of who they were and *to cowboy* – a verb used for both men and women - is a big part of their life. *“It pretty much is my life”*, Dan said, *“it’s kinda’ all I thought about too.”* When I asked Brad if being a cowboy was a big part of who he was he confirmed that *“yeah, it is what I am, I guess.”* The pay was clearly not what attracted them to the job: *“It’s not a job you do for the money, you gotta like what you do to do this job or you’d be miserable.”* Almost all of the cowboys mentioned at one point or another that the large portion of the money they make goes to buying riding gear. *“You pretty much put all your money in it”*, Mathew contemplated. To have nice and functional gear is a point of pride and there always seems to be new things on the wish list to acquire, improve or repair. Many cowboys make their own reins, spurs and bridles, and if they make more than they need, they can use these items for “cowboy trading”, an institution that can take place whenever two cowboys meet, where they exchange things they no longer need for other pieces of equipment. This involves cowboys only, and with only very few exceptions are others allowed to observe this process. The commitment of spending so much time and money on work gear speaks of the importance of the work itself.

The cowboy job is defined by the countryside and the fact that work revolves around the needs of the individual ranch rather than the keeping of business hours. Brad concluded that *“it’s a lifestyle more than a job, I guess. You live it. Gear and everything, a point of pride.”* All the cowboys agreed that being a cowboy is not only a job but also a lifestyle. No one could imagine a city job, and not even a different job on the ranch as long as they were healthy enough to ride. *“No, not if I had a choice,”* the cowboss said, *“maybe farming if I had to, but I’d have to be in a pretty bad wreck to not be able to ride.”* Some stretched their imagination and stated that they could mix riding with some farming and maybe some other duties if they had a small place of their own, but when it came to the working groups on the ranch, cowboying was the only acceptable one. Being outdoors was one of the things highly valued among the cowboys. The fact that it was hard manual labour with serious physical risks was often underlined in different situations, but it was never mentioned as something negative, only as something “most guys” wouldn’t want to do, and thus, like with Cascio’s (2007) fire fighters, a collective work reference that binds the group together.

5.1.1...by surviving

“The first year everybody was getting bucked off in the morning. That was fun!”, Mathew exclaimed thinking about his first year at the Ranch. Accidents are laughed off, too many mistakes are met with critique, and respect and a place in the group are earned through hard work and by not quitting. It is a group culture that does not accept strangers right away. It does not mean that they are rude to them but cold shoulders are to be expected. This was confirmed by their attitude towards the new cowboys that arrived during my fieldwork, the way in which they treated me with suspicion and by the comments of other workers about how it takes a couple of months before cowboys start trusting somebody.

On the Ranch, there is a natural division between the different kinds of workers in that they work together within their group and only very rarely work with other groups. However, this division was largely maintained even outside of

work. If the cowboys were to hang out in the evenings or on weekends, it would be with other cowboys. Everybody would talk to everybody however, during mealtimes or if meeting somebody in the cookhouse, but it was easy to get an “us” and “them” feeling in larger group settings. To be part of the “us” group of the cowboys, looking like a cowboy and riding a horse would appear to be a necessary but not a sufficient criteria. It is a question of being the right kind of cowboy too. The rodeo cowboys are despised for not doing the “real thing”. They are seen as weekend warriors who are attracted to the western ideals but who only do it for fun on their time off. The cowboys on the Ranch did not want to be associated with this group. There were also stories about how singing cowboys, or cowboy poets had visited the Ranch for inspiration and, *“thinking they could do the job”*, participated in a working day, only to end up with frozen toes, a sore butt and no respect from the crew. The general cowboy wannabes were also looked down upon as people who didn’t know what they were talking about and who tried to be something they were not. To be part of the cowboy “us”, you need to be a full-time working cowboy and not complain about hard work or brag about your talents, and preferably have a lot of skills with cows and horses. The impression from the talk on this subject is that the “us” is a select group of people that have the qualities and are tough enough to be and do what others want to but cannot. Even if you came as far as becoming a part of the crew on the Ranch, it is up to you to prove that you can do the job and that you are, in fact, a cowboy worthy of the title. This particular group of cowboys prided themselves on being employed at a ranch with the reputation of being the toughest place in Canada. *“It’s tough country, cattle aren’t too bad, but you got tough horses - you gonna toughen up or you’re not gonna make it, kind of a deal,”* someone said. The reputation is not unfounded: the area over which the cattle are spread out is huge, which means many long hours on horseback as well as harsh living conditions, with “bronky” horses and a tough climate. It is also a tough ranch to manage because of the hard surface roads, water constraints, difficult access to town and facilities, and the difficulty of shipping cattle. The bears, wolves, bald eagles, coyotes, and mountain lions also put up a challenge in keeping livestock

alive. As the manager exclaimed, *“You name it – if there’s a problem with ranching, we have it.”* Will describes his first day on the crew: *“Dave said ‘are you ready to work?’ I said ‘yeah’ he said ‘good, cause if you can make it here you’ll make it anywhere.’ And after the third day I kinda’ realized it first hand, I guess.”* We will come back to his third day incident at the end of the chapter.

Many cowboys had come and left the Ranch, some already the next day, some within a week or a month, most of them realising themselves that it was not going to work out. One cowboy that had been around for a while assured me that *“[i]f I had a dollar for every guy who left this place I’d be pretty rich... They leave because they can’t handle it. Tough work. Work three weeks without a day off...”* Speculations about how long a new guy was going to last hung in the air and his motives for coming were questioned. Far too many people, I was told, were seduced by the romantic picture painted by the stories about the idyllic cowboy life – closeness to the land, working from horse back and imagined campfires – but, as Rose put it:

“The romance of it, the history and the looks of it and the sunny days wear pretty thin when it’s 40 below and they have to move cattle, or they’ve got to ride around the field, they got to go and cook their own supper on a wood stove or they got to be up all night calving... it’s months on end and they still have to work through it.”

5.1.2...with language

This hard, manual outdoor work so characteristic of a cowboy’s job is at the heart of their working identity. Collinson and Hearn (2005) describe a tendency of manual, male working groups to construct sub-cultures to distinguish themselves from “others” such as management, office workers and women. They define the informal interaction at work as deeply masculine, characterised by aggressiveness, sexism and derogation, but also humour and playfulness. The daily language and communication between the cowboys at the Ranch encompassed these attributes. Swear words were commonly used and insults

were often exchanged, although mostly with a smile or a tone of voice that revealed that it was rather a proof of acceptance than an attempt to put somebody down. The language used when telling stories was also often aggressive and stories about escapades with women were rarely told in a respectful way. This corresponds to Ambörnson's (2004) finding in her study of gender processes among teenage girls in two different school classes that in order for the teenage girls she studied to secure their belonging to a group, they had to master the expected kind of language. Furthermore, words and phrases used to encourage cows to move were a lot of the time derogatory. A few of the cowboys had a more laidback attitude towards the cows, but the majority used sexist insults when a group of cows wouldn't move fast enough. Interestingly, cowboys and other interviewees seemed to be well aware of the way their language was perceived by others. Many of them mentioned that it would be hard to have a woman on the crew since they then would have to watch their mouths and be polite. This reveals something about the expected behaviour of women, but also about the consequences of introducing an outsider into the group. It was clear that if a girl wanted to be on the cowboy crew, she would have to be prepared to take part in the jargon, not be offended by the roughness of the communication, and to crack some jokes herself. The reluctance to abandon the jargon is thus a sign of the aggressive but humorous communication that is important in the construction of the "us" of the group. Since it was believed that it was harder for a woman to participate in this jargon than a man, it can be defined as a perceived masculinity, in accordance with Collinson and Hearn's description of manual working groups.

5.1.3 ...and by dressing the part

Stepping off the Greyhound bus I was crossing my fingers that everything would work out. Two weeks before I had been talking with the manager of the Ranch and he assured me that Dave, the cowboss, would pick me up at the bus station on Sunday afternoon. People trickled away until there was no one left but me, and so I made myself comfortable on my bag and waited, suspiciously eyeing

every car that slowed down. After ten long minutes a dark red pick up truck pulled in. There was a bit of hay and bale string in the back and mud up to the windows. Out stepped a young man in jeans, blue shirt, gray vest, red wild rag, black cowboy hat, a big moustache, and a lower lip full of snuff. There was no mistake that was my ride had arrived.

Colinson and Hearn (2005) point out that clothing is a common and effective way to mark membership of a certain group. This quote is an example of this: *"I wear my hat, because that's who I am."* If wearing a certain type of hat is who one is, then presumably it is a clear symbol for something that one identifies strongly with. Ambjörnsson (2004) also notes the tendency to dress according to the fashion of the group in her study. And indeed, they could have sent anyone from the cowboy crew to pick me up and there would have been no doubt in my mind where he came from or what his occupation was. The colours varied from guy to guy and from day to day, but the format was invariably the same. What is more is that no one of the other outdoor workers wore remotely the same clothing. Before getting on the horse in the morning, the cowboys would all add chaps or chinks to their clothing and, when on the ranch, round weal spurs to their boots. It was thus easy, even from far, to tell who was a cowboy and who was not.

Every piece of clothing had, if you asked the cowboys, an important function for their work. The boots are tall to keep the warmth in and the mud out, they have a heel on their boot so that they won't slide too far into the stirrups and get caught up if they fall off, and the heels have a "shelf" to keep the spur in place. The spurs are used to better communicate with the horse with less movement. Jeans are the only type of pants that won't rip in the brush and bushes they have to ride through, and the chaps or chinks are there to further save the pants and legs from sharp objects, and from rain, snow and cold. The long sleeve shirt keep you warm in the winter and out of the sun in the summer and the vest on top adds an additional layer of warmth that can be substituted for a lighter one in the summer. The wild rag, mostly out of pure silk, also keeps you warm in the winter and cool in the summer. The hat keeps you out of the sun, rain, snow or

hail and warms you in the winter. It was quite common to have one summer hat and one winter hat, and when I showed up with what was apparently a summer hat made out of white straw I was almost immediately offered a brown felt hat that someone didn't use anymore. During the calving season, the period of my fieldwork, it was on average of -15 outside and we wore woollen sweaters and thick jackets on top of the typical cowboy clothing. Woollen socks and undergarments were added when necessary. One of the guys told me that only three months out of the year did he not wear his thick socks, and another one assured, jokingly, that *"no real man takes off his long johns before June"*.

The manager, on the other hand, had a slightly different opinion of some of the pieces of clothing. Having worked with many cowboy crews throughout the years he seemed to have a lot of reflections about the nature of the work, the workers and the picture they painted of themselves and that others painted of them. According to him, this style of clothing dates back to the early days of cowboying and some of the items are no longer useful because of new development in the techniques, although they are still worn. The vest, for example, was worn in the old days when none of the other clothing had pockets. In the pockets of the vest, important everyday items were stored like tobacco, pencil and pad, etc. When changing a shirt, everything you needed was still in your vest and in easy reach at all times while on horseback. Nowadays, trousers and shirts have pockets, and saddlebags are frequently used. The vest is still very much present. The same thing could be said about the leather cuffs that are tied on top of the shirt at the wrists. These were invented at a time when all shirts were white and when washing was more work than what it is today. In order to keep the shirts clean longer, these cuffs were used to protect the sleeves from dirt, excrements and blood. Jack was sure that if *"[y]ou ask these guys why you wear cuffs, and they'll probably say for protection. But half of the time they have a coat overtop. I think that part of the reason for wearing cuffs was to keep your shirt clean. From blood and dirt."* Furthermore, he explained that *"if people say protection from fencing, well in the old times they never fenced, so.... Or ropes,*

but I never hurt myself here....and then you'd wear gloves..." His conclusion was thus that it was a tradition held on by cowboys who wanted to identify with the history of their trade. Nostalgia about the old-time cowboy and an idealised history can be traced here, a phenomenon that Keagan Gardiner (2002a) associates with the ideals of masculinity.

5.1.4 ...in fashion

One sunny day in May, Dan and I were moving pairs from the Rosette up the hill to Hog Lake. A big herd of cows and calves – pairs – lived at that time in a field close to the calving barn. Our task was to seek out pairs composed of calves old enough to identify their mother and to follow her around. A good sign to look for is a calf sucking milk from the cow; generally, a calf younger than two days old does not travel well. On horseback, as always, we separated fifteen pairs from the herd and had them walk together towards the fence. Once they were all there we pushed them – that is, walked behind them, following their movements with each step of the horse to direct them exactly where we wanted them to go, which is through the gate. Keeping them together we slowly climbed the sandy hill and once we got up they all sped up to run down the other side towards the water. A bit of zigzagging with the horses and a bit of yelling got them out of the water and on the trail again and soon we could direct them through the gate to the other pasture, their new home for the time being. Before letting them go we paired them off again – making sure that every cow and calf that belonged together walked off together – because if not, they might have lost each other on the road. A lost calf will starve to death if the mother can't find it because no other cow will let it drink her milk, and so we double check the number on the ear tags before we left to get a new bunch. After a few trips Dan wanted to take a break, one of the very rare ones during working hours. He decided it was time for me to learn how to tie a square knot on my wild rag. Apparently, there are many different knots to use in order to be fashionable, but the square one was popular and quite complicated. The colour, pattern and size of the neck scarf was also important and, I learned, nothing is chosen haphazardly. Often the rags

have strong shades of orange, red, blue, purple or green. The cut, colour and decorations of the chaps are also a matter of taste and style, as well as the choice of boots. Boots that were almost knee high and in different shades of blue, yellow and brown with a wide range of patterns decorated the restaurant hall during mealtimes. On every heel there were spurs of different styles. The size and the shape of the rowels varied greatly, and the sound they made when the person was walking indicated who was approaching. Of course, the shaping of the hat is important, and the kind of hat you wear could potentially reveal something about who you are. Never did I see a cowboy outdoors without a hat. And never did I see a cowboy on a horse without chaps.



The classic outfit of the cowboy seems to be such an integral part of their working identity that it is always present at work, and only rarely abandoned by the workers. Jack had noticed this too: *“Some of the young guys dress the part*

when they go to town, and that's fine, but sometimes it goes a bit over the top with cuffs and two wild rags, all your gear to town. I've seen them wearing their spurs to town." But there are also exceptions that make the others' strive for belonging even clearer:

"[Jake] was probably the best [cowboy] anywhere. When he rode, he wore good chaps, good boots, a good hat, good gear, but when he went to town he wore lace shoes and a baseball cap. You would not know he worked on a ranch. What bothers me sometimes is that those people are forgotten. You go to these cowboy festivals and they dress in (a) scarf, flat hat and high boots – they dress the part – but they are probably not half as good as they were."



The will to explicitly associate oneself with and be a part of this working identity is reinforced by the fidelity with which fashion dictates are followed. Wearing the “right” clothes goes apparently unnoticed, but as soon as something else was worn, it was noticed and commented on. The same phenomenon was noticed by Fenstermaker, West and Zimmerman (2002) who concluded that social markers

and behaviour that fitted the expected gender patterns was rewarded with no particular attention, whereas deviations were immediately identified and pointed out.

There are in fact two major styles of working and dressing as a riding cow herder according to the traditions of the Buckaroo or the Cowboy. Buckaroo is the term used for a cattle worker on horseback who follows the tradition of the old Spanish-influenced cowboys in the Great Basin area. Buckaroo is an Americanised version of the Spanish word “vaquero”, meaning cow herder. Their style of clothing, the gear including the ropes and saddles, differ from that of those that came to be called cowboys. On the Ranch, however, even the guys embracing the buckaroo style called themselves cowboys (O’Byrne 2005).

5.2 “You gotta’ have pride” and “Ride for the brand!”

Pride was one of the common denominators for the cowboys. They all said they were proud to be cowboys. There was no doubt that the most efficient way to gain respect and admiration among these people was to be one of them and to do their job well. Interest for the world away from cowboying was almost non-existent, but there was a hunger for anything that touched upon their lifestyle – different ways of fabricating gear, new combinations of equipment, riding tips, news about other ranches and stories of bucking horses, angry bulls or other tricky situations. Cowboying seemed to be the only thing worthy of attention. The guys were also proud to be doing something that they wanted to do, even though it was hard and even though they had to give up things like easy communication with the surrounding world, comfort, holidays and city life. They were proud to have the values they did – wanting to be outdoors, to get up early, the independence from the world of technology, the closeness to the land and the animals, similar to what Barlett (2006) calls *agrarian values*. George was sure that the kids growing up on a ranch “*get a better outlook on life. Don’t have to see all that trash and shit. They get some morals in their life. No fast food and computers and shit. Learn a lot more.*”

It was also pointed out to me that pride is important for being able to do the job itself. You have to be proud of what you do in order to care for it and do it right. You don't have to care about the manager or the cowboss, but you have to do your best for the ranch and the cows, hence the common expression "*Ride for the brand!*" The crew generally agreed that cowboying was not rocket science; it could be taught and learned. However, you have to start young to be good and good skills with horse and cattle were greatly admired and something to be proud of, as was the skill to be able to read the herd correctly since, for example, the calf running after the cow might not actually be hers but simply confused. To be proud of your skills and at the same time want to learn more was important for the crew. Jack explained that:

"The good guys, the horse is kinda' part of them. If a cow wants to go out, the horse is in the gate and the cow is stopped, it just happens. Inexperienced guys have to think and react, think about it, and the cow is gone. You shouldn't have to think about the process, it should come natural."

Considering all the stories told, all the social markers that were worn and used in speech to differentiate themselves collectively, and all the time and money spent on their work, there was no doubt that these guys were extremely proud to be cowboys.

5.3 The lingering Myth

The myths that have shaped our modern understanding of the cowboy still attract many western enthusiasts. The myth emerged from the old time cowboy and his ways but in a slightly glorified version. Traditionally, as described by Garceau (2001), the group of cowboys working on the droves around the turn of the 19th century were seen as morally suspect, primitive and uncivilized. They were at the margins of society, unsophisticated and rough, yet respected for their hard work and lifestyle. Moreover, the camaraderie among the cowboys was admired as they lived and worked together in tight groups, their difference from others underlining their belonging together. This myth, as well as the old

ways of the actual cowboy, was appealing to the cowboys at the Ranch, which confirms the importance of their work identity. By wanting to be part of this tradition, they cling to the slowly declining cowboy profession. As the image of the cowboy is often heavily drawn from the old ways of the trade, wanting to be part of it could be interpreted as seeking to be associated with this image. When asked how they chose to come here, Dan explained that, "*I always heard stories about the Ranch. It's as close to the old times you kinda' gonna get anymore.*"

The kind of language used among the cowboys and when addressing the cows indicates that these people are not afraid to come across as unsophisticated and rough. The fact that they are enthusiastic about doing things as they were done "in the old days" speaks of a longing for the more primitive ways of living and working. Furthermore, constantly underlining the hardships of this kind of work and their working conditions tells us that this is something they expect to be appreciated for. While it was clear that most cowboys appreciated their privacy at the end of the day, and even though their working methods might vary a bit, there was no doubt that in many ways they saw themselves as the "same kind of people".

The negative, but also admired, qualities of the mythical cowboy are still very present. As we shall see in more detail in a later chapter, aggressiveness plays a part in the cowboy's everyday life, even beyond language. The language noted above is present as a symbol of this aggressiveness. The risks taken in their daily work and the willingness to put yourself in positions of possible danger are characteristics from the myth associated with the word "cowboy". Examples of this can be found all over the world where the word is used to describe someone who might never have seen a horse or a cow in their whole life. O'Byrne's defines the negative reference of the word cowboy as describing, "a person or action that's reckless or rough-edged in nature." (2005: 9). Bravery, and a tendency to have luck help you get out of tricky situations are other connotations related to this word. These meanings create an image that at times takes some effort to maintain. The insistence on hard work and the risks, the love for the primitive

camps, the language and jokes, the attitude towards pain, and the fidelity to cowboy clothing styles are all attributes of this image, and references that bear witness to how cowboys identify with it.

When I asked what it takes to be a good cowboy, answers like, “*you have to love what you do*”, or, “*you have to try*”, or again, “*you have to want to learn*”, were common. Experience, pride, being observant and caring about what you do also came up often. Kate, the former cowgirl, assured me that “sometimes you need a bit of that wild streak, you can’t be too soft. Some of the guys are not that wild now, but at one point they were...” In other words, you have to want to keep up the image of the cowboy in order to do well.

On his third day on the cowboy crew, as mentioned above, Will got a taste of the reputation of the Ranch when his horse started bucking. As he tried to hang on, the other cowboys yelled at him to “kick him (the horse) in the guts”. Caught up in the explosion of the horse’s energy, Will didn’t think and planted his heels in the horse’s sides. Of course, the horse blew up even more, to the amusement of the other cowboys, and bucking hard, ran towards the ravine ahead. Once he reached the edge of the ravine the horse was still out of control and gave no sign of slowing down, so Will bailed off and threw himself to the ground. In the end the horse did stop, but Will ended up with painful head injuries. He was rushed to the hospital, two hours drive away, to get patched up and then they sent him home with a bandaged forehead and some painkillers. The next morning he had to “cowboy up” – quit complaining, get up, get going and get the job done. Since this was the kind of opportunity to show what you’re made of, and since the pressure is always on, Will wouldn’t call it a day until the job was done although he was still throwing up from the head injury a couple of days later. What more was, his experience was turned into made a great song that helped pass the nightshift in the calving barn! All of these events fall in line with the perfect image of the mythical cowboy.

Jack, the manager, explained the irony he sometimes saw in the quest of being a good cowboy:

"...(L)ike these guys now rope a lot just in treating sick animal. So they probably rope more now, and some of these guys are probably better ropers than the old guys they want to be like. I'm glad that these guys are interested and want to be better, but I think that in their mind they're chasing this image that really wasn't all that great. Most of the men now are probably better than the old guys, and I know they are better than the last generation."

In the end, being a cowboy is important, as illustrated by Jack's observation:

"Sometime it gets to the extremes. Some of the young guys dress the part when they go to town, and that's fine, but sometimes it goes a bit over the top with cuffs and two wild rags, all your gear to town. I've seen them wearing their spurs to town...You can pay them a hundred dollars a month and put them on a horse and have an irrigator and pay him a thousand dollars a month and the cowboy will still think he's better than that irrigator! Because he's on a horse, he's a cowboy!"



By dressing like a cowboy in full work gear he shows the world who he is. Add to that the expected attitude and a full time cowboy job and he becomes a part of the symbol of the old cowboy myth that has helped shape our picture of the cowboy. This image seems to be valuable to the cowboys because of the connection and feeling of belonging to the group. These people are, above all, cowboys. By their own comments and by the way they act and dress, there is no doubt that being a cowboy is of great importance to the cowboys on the Ranch. The rhetoric question from Kyle, the young cowboy, summarizes it pretty well: *"Who doesn't want to be a cowboy?!"*

6. Gender and work identity

6.1 Not being a boy

Never once during my stay at the Ranch did I see a cowboy being late for work; late for meals, yes, though rarely, but never late for work. And although there were hints of glorification for being a rebel, for not conforming and for possessing a wild streak, as mentioned earlier, these attributes did not seem to be part of their work ethics. On the contrary, stories were told with disgust about this or that guy who would be late every morning, and not take enough care of his animals and gear. This indicates that work related responsibility is valued. As Carrol (2003) points out, working is often seen as a sign of adulthood. Furthermore, one of the guys explained to me that if you want to be a cowboy you cannot cry every time something goes wrong or when you get hurt, and many of them mentioned that it was also desirable to have experience and to be able to work independently. The general consensus was that having a full time job as a cowboy was a necessary criteria for being a cowboy, but it was not always enough. One night at the calving barn a conversation with one of the newest recruits on the crew turned towards the process of becoming a cowboy. Even though he was technically a cowboy, he said, he would “*need more miles, ride more horses, work with more cows*” to really call himself a cowboy. Taken together, these details points to the importance of having the qualities of an adult, *to be a man as opposed to a boy*. As Gardiner (2002b) points out, this is an important distinction in gender identity – to *not be a woman* is not enough to be a man, you also have to be *not a boy*. And being a cowboy is apparently not - and in spite of the word - compatible with being a boy.

6.2 Premises of comfort and strength

During conversations about the division of labour at the Ranch, it became obvious that there were certain premises that came up when talking about being a man or a woman. As Wharton (2005) notes, gendered stereotypes, sometimes

based on statistical experiences, determine in what way men and women relate to one another in the workplace. "*Women like showers and all that, and we don't have that at camp*", was one of the answers to my question about whether or not a woman could work on the crew. This quote is characteristic of the views of the cowboys and women living on the Ranch, and was presented as something that was rather self-evident. Hence, generally included in the idea of a woman is the idea that she likes showers. If she went to camp that did not have showers and where the cowboy crew spent at least half of the year she would be uncomfortable. There were plenty of other examples given which stated that discomfort is not desirable for women. The cowboys would explain that they would be living in tents for extended periods of time, over six months out of the year, where there is not much comfort. It is hot and dirty and there is no running water. Even in the camps with trailers, it is pretty rustic and there would be little or no privacy. At camp there would be even fewer people to talk to than at the ranch and since everybody works together all day, most guys like to keep to themselves in the short evenings before going to bed. The need for social interaction can thus be seen as a problem for the cowboy lifestyle. However, most workers agreed that "*women like to talk*", as one lady put it. Thus the conclusion was that going to camp is not desirable for women. A man, on the other hand, is not associated with the attachment to showers, cleanliness and social needs and thus there is no problem for him to go to camp. Taking it one step further, a guy that would be bothered about not being able to shower in camp is considered to be feminine and thus defined as being incompatible with the living conditions that the work requires. Not having the qualities associated with women is, in this case, important for the job. As Gregory (2003) discusses, ideas about men's and women's preferences have not only often directed the gendered choice of employees, as well as often directing the choice of work, because to fail to live up to expected preferences could mean to fail to be a "real" man or woman. Very seldom were female characteristics presented as being positive, and when they were, they were portrayed as not being desirable for cowboys. The belief that women have traits that are not suitable for the job was

often underlined. This represents an important reference for keeping the work identity intact.

The fact that women in general are not as strong as men was also important for the men and women on the ranch. The lesser strength and size of women came up in almost all the conversations about the division of labour, and was clearly seen as a constraint for cowboying, a point I shall discuss further on in the chapter. Heavy gates to open, wild horses to manage, big calves to wrestle, cows to lay down or heavy equipment to build fences are examples of tasks that were perceived as being harder for women. Although exceptions were often mentioned or anticipated, it was clearly an issue that came to mind straight away when thinking about women at work. It was also mentioned that there were men who weren't fit enough to do the job, but that lack of strength, endurance or size was, interestingly, not attributed to their gender in the way that it was for women.

The cowboy job at the Ranch was seen as being difficult to combine with raising a family. Only two of the cowboys were married and only one of them, the cowboss, had a family. Both him and his wife told me it was hard sometimes, him being away from the house so much and being tired after work. The kids were too small to come up and stay overnight at the camp, so the family could only be together on when he was off on some weekends or during day visits when the family would come up to camp. At times the camps were rather remote and travelling back and forth was kept to a minimum. Since there is no possibility of having someone look after the kids during the day at the Ranch, Kate would stay at home to raise them. All the other cowboys were single, though most had girlfriends in towns a few hours or away more. Most of the cowboys were convinced that on ranches where the crew didn't stay in camps as much, or on smaller family ranches, it would be easier to raise a family and still work as a cowboy. However, it would still be necessary for the mother to stop working in order to take care of the kids for some time. The desire to have kids and a family life was associated more with women than with men, and since the lifestyle of a

cowboy wasn't seen as being favourable to that, cowboys concluded once again, that the occupation was not desirable for most women. Whereas it could be possible to have kids and find a woman that wanted to stay at home and take care of them, the idea of finding a man who would stay at home while the mom went cowboying made people smile, and even if some claimed they would stay at home with the kids if they "had to", it was clearly stated as being hypothetical. The idea of women wanting a family more than having a job did not seem controversial to most informants, and one cowboy explicitly thought that *"[w]omen are supposed to have kids, look after the kids and the home"*.

The long working days that come with the trade – from nine hours in the winter to twelve or sometimes even sixteen during the summer – were also presented as something that women do not appreciate. The fact that ten out of these hours would often be spent on horseback was expected to discourage women from the job. Not wanting to work, being less committed to their career, the unwillingness of working long and unusual hours are some of the characteristics that Gregory (2003) mentions as often being associated with women, and we can clearly see that it is true for this case as well. Most of the cowboys expressed or implied that the opposite attributes are needed in order to be a cowboy at the Ranch. Hence, having the opposite characteristics of those normally associated with women is in their view important for the work. There is some resemblance to what Glick and Fiske (2007) describe as "benevolent sexism" where women are praised for their "female" characteristics and are at the same time viewed as more delicate and less attracted or suitable for certain types of activities.

6.3 Emotional labour and aggressiveness

The work in the calving barn consists of keeping an eye on "heavy" or expecting cows, to make sure that they are ok, are able to deliver without problems or help them out if the birth becomes complicated. Once the calf is out, it is a matter of making sure the cow and calf, the "pair", stay together and that the calf is being fed properly. There are often some orphan calves to feed and eventually they try

to get match them with a cow who lost her calf. Even if this work involves contact with a lot of blood and other body liquids, close contact with cows and work with heavy gates, it is the part of the job that was associated with caretaking and patience.

Being emotional and not being aggressive are two other work related characteristics often associated with women that Gregory identifies. This view was in general shared by the cowboys and women living on the Ranch. One lady thought that there would not be any use in hiring a girl to become part of the cowboy crew *“if she’s gonna cry as soon as she got sore”*. This is also in accordance with Merrill’s (2002) observation in his study of the history of cattle work, in which he points out that the rancher will not express any sympathy for pain so as to avoid sentimentality, something that is necessary for both the business and for perpetuating the masculine image. The example of Will’s bucking horse is another example of this.



Wharton (2005: 184) uses the term “emotional labour” to describe the kind of work where showing certain emotions is a necessary part of the work, for example in service professions where smiles and welcoming behaviour are

expected, or caretaking professions where employees are expected to show positive emotions towards the patients such as warmth and compassion. For the cowboy crew on the Ranch, taking care of the calving barn is the only activity where emotional labour could be said to take place. Interestingly, a few of the cowboys pointed out that working in the calving barn could be a suitable job for a woman, actually the most suitable place for a cowgirl on the Ranch. Not only would it be possible for her to avoid the uncomfortable living conditions of the camp, but she might also be better at that job than the men due to her feminine qualities. *"I bet some girls will do it better than some guys in the calving barn. Like me, sometimes I get a little bit rough, but a girl won't do that"*, Will stated. Richard thought that *"they are sometimes better in the calving barn, they are more compassionate."* We learn from this that the calving barn is a place where being rough with the animals is a negative thing and women, because of their gender, will naturally avoid this and are hence suited for the job. A couple of examples were also mentioned about women, such as veterinary students, who wanted to come and work in the calving barn, but did not want to ride. It thus seems as if it would not only be suitable, but also a desirable place to work for those women who are interested in cattle work. It is interesting to note that the one specific part of cowboy work that is highlighted as being most suitable for women is also the one activity where certain generally accepted characteristics related to the work (aggressiveness, non emotional) are least present and even seen as being unhelpful. Thus it would seem that the exception of having somebody on the crew who does not possess the general characteristics of a cowboy often applies to those tasks that are less associated with cowboy-related attributes. In this way, the cowboy working identity can include a woman and yet still keep its masculine gender component intact. Demanding that a woman performs tasks associated with the classical characteristics of a cowboy seems to create a cognitive dissonance for her male colleagues: on the one hand they feel that they should treat her like anybody else on the crew, expecting her to do the same job as they do, whilst on the other hand they would have difficulties to not be ready to offer her extra protection and care as defined by their traditional roles and

customs. This cognitive dissonance creates a problem for the crew and for the cowboss and manager who delegate tasks, and often make the situation uncomfortable for everybody.

When talking about women on the crew Will explained that *“[f]or some reason a guy gets a bit more concerned about a girl. Like if he’s watching another guy bucked off, they’ll hoop and holler and when he hits the dirt they’ll be like, ‘oh, haha, dude are you all right’ whether if it’s a girl, typically the response is gonna be ‘oh, my god are you all right!?’”* This description of the guys’ reactions to the invented accident proposes that it is somehow worse if a girl gets bucked off a horse. She is perhaps more fragile, or might be more upset about it than the guy would. This example illustrates that a guy who would not show much sympathy for another guy is both capable of and maybe even expected to do so towards a girl in the same situation. This was also confirmed on my last working day when we were pushing some cows on foot to get them into a trailer. I got too close to a nervous cow and she “cow-kicked” me and I fell to the ground. The two cowboys I was working with did their best to keep the moving herd from trampling me until I got up on my feet; nobody laughed and everyone inquired with worry to see if I was all right. Once the story was told at the lunch table however, everybody seemed quite thrilled about it, laughing at the event. If we generalize these stories and comments it would mean that even when cowboys do show emotion, it is when a girl is involved. The emotion shown is somehow connected to the woman, and not present in homosocial relations. If this is how it happens every time or not is irrelevant; rather, the focus of the story is on the connection between the showing of emotion and the woman, and it reveals a lot about what kind of behaviour is expected between cowboys. So does Will’s next comment that *“you can throw ten guys in a camp and there’s no problem, you throw a girl in there and it almost seems like it gets emotional”*. Again, without telling who is showing what emotion, the focus is on the girl as the instigator of emotions.

To see how aggressiveness plays a part in cattle work, in the next section I describe some common, everyday situations.

The first couple of days when I came to the Ranch, I was sent off with Brad to doctor calves. This was one of the never-ending activities during the calving season in the spring and I was sent to help out from time to time. Wrestling calves was one of the tasks that was mentioned once in a while as something a women had to be “prepared to do” in order to work on the crew. First you have to find the calves that were sick with *scours*, a disease that dehydrates the calf to the point that they may die from it. It is very contagious, which makes it very important to continuously look for calves with signs of the sickness. Yellow excrement, puffy stomachs, feverish eyes, a heavy walk and a tired posture could be indications that a calf needs treatments. Once identified, you ride up to the calf and rope it. Should the calf try to get away, you ride after him, trying not to upset the herd. As soon as the loop goes over the head of the animal you “pull your slack and dally up” – in other words, the rope is pulled tight and tied around the saddle horn. You then get off your horse, grab the rope and walk towards the calf, grab the calf by the neck and the hip and flip him over. It is important to hold on to his bent front leg and make sure the rope is not strangling him. Keep one knee on top of him to make sure he doesn’t wiggle away, and take out the syringe and fill it up. Give him the shot in the neck, mark him with a colour marker and let him go. If it is a small calf this can go pretty smoothly, although you can still get dirty, but a big one might put up a fight.



One morning after saddling our horses as usual just before sunrise, we went to the cook house for eggs and bacon and ate mostly in silence. A few of us were told to bring a lunch because we were going to be away all day, and so we packed our sandwiches before heading out to the horse barn again. Everybody put their chaps or chinks on and led their horses out of the stable. Three of us were ordered to come with the cowboss and we loaded the horses in a truck and drove for forty-five minutes on the back roads. As we sat up, Dave's horse started to buck around and started running down the road with Dave clinging tight to the saddle, one hand on the rope that was tied to it. Eventually the horse calmed down, the rest of us caught up and cheerful comments were exchanged as everybody laughed at the apparently jolly morning event. Off we trotted across the fields, taking turns to get off the horse and open the barbed wire gates that couldn't be opened on horseback. An hour or so later we came to a big slope. Here, we rode off, one in each direction, to gather whatever animals were spread across the plain. Neither Will nor I, who had never been here before, had a clue what the plan was for the herd. We got orders to meet again by the water across the hill with the cattle we found. Slightly worried that I would not find the water I rode up the slope towards my assigned area and started to gather whatever cattle I saw into a group and eventually started to push them in the general direction where Dave had pointed, towards the water. The other three cowboys did the same and as I pushed my cows over the top of the hill I saw two of them entering the valley below me with a big herd of cattle. We joined them and together started pushing the cows and calves as one group, keeping a slow but steady pace, walking behind them and shouting the typical "haap haaap" to encourage them to keep walking. The dog that was with us ran left or right on command, snapping at the cows heading the wrong way. Eventually he would get too close to a calf and have to sprint backwards in order to avoid a head butt from the furious mother. Dave joined us later with yet another bunch of cows and we now had between two to three hundred head. Everything went smoothly until the road started to go up a mountain. Suddenly the cows didn't want to walk anymore. No matter how we hollered and rode back and forth behind

them, they would not move. A calf turned back between the horses and the mother ran after it. In the end we rode right into hind of the animals, swung sticks and our ropes at them, and the cowboys screamed all sorts of obscenities after them. Eventually, they slowly moved up the slope, taking every chance to break away while one of us rode along the slope below the path to stop the animals from escaping. It was so steep that I could touch the ground on one side with my foot from horseback. I was thankful that my horse had done this before. Around two o'clock, after more than six hours of riding and after a long struggle up the mountain and into a big clearing, we let the cattle go and pulled the saddles off our sweaty horses. Lying on the grass we ate our sandwiches before heading back to the truck.



Here, aggressiveness can be found in the way cowboys were riding, hitting the cows with sticks and yelling at them. Should somebody have trouble being aggressive it could, for this gang of cowboys, become a problem. Stories told among the cowboys about aggressive behaviour such as beating up their dog or having to treat cattle brutally were not rare, and the eagerness with which they were told confirms that being aggressive is something that is part of the picture

they want to portray of themselves. These stories often included accidents, action filled events, and aggressive animals. It seems as though the presence of aggressiveness and intense physical incidents helps keep a common focus on the group identity.

The importance of not being too soft and sensitive was demonstrated one afternoon when Shawn and I found a newly dead calf among the herd on a hill. It had been sick for a while and when we observed it in the herd, we could tell that the cow was a good mother. When the medication couldn't save her calf, it was decided that she was to be given another calf to adopt. In order to do that, we brought her down to the calving barn, along with the skin of the dead calf that we put on one of the orphans so that the new mother would accept it as hers and let it drink.



Kneeling in the grass and skinning the dead calf while its mother was watching us from a couple of meters away, mooing, was not a task for the faint of heart. Once it was done, we couldn't get the cow to leave the remains of the calf, so Shawn tied it with his rope to his saddle horn and dragged it behind him so the mother would follow. She did, and when she occasionally looked back, nervous

to leave the herd, Shawn would moo like a calf, and she would run after him again. I rode behind them so that I would be ready to “turn the cow” in case she tried to run back. It was a sight that I am sure would break many hearts, seeing that cow chase after her dead and skinned calf dragging on the ground. At the same time, it was the only way to get her to go bond with the orphan, which would surely have died eventually had he not been matched with a new mother in due time. He was dressed with the hide of the dead calf and after having sniffed him down properly, the cow let him drink. Two days later we took off the hide, and the cow was licking the calf fondly.

6.4 “Hack it” and tradition

One of the most common answers to the question “why don’t more women work as cowgirls on the Ranch” came down to the fact that it had been tried and it did not work. The exact meaning of this explanation varied from person to person. In the next section we will turn to a few scenarios that shed light on this topic.

One lady on the ranch thought that men and women probably could be part of all working groups, *“...but I think maybe ranching is a little bit behind the rest of the world, in some of the philosophy. It is traditionally a man’s world. I think women have to work harder and talk less to impress. I’m not saying that it’s right, but I think that’s probably how it is.”*

The first obvious concern was that few women were able to do the job. The majority of the cowboys said that *“as long as she can do the job they wouldn’t mind having a girl on the crew, but she had to be able to “hack it”*”. There seemed to be an abundance of stories about women who tried to go cowboying, but that in the end couldn’t get the job done. Either they couldn’t shoe their horses, were not able to ride for ten hours straight, couldn’t rope properly or were not strong enough to do the physical tasks, such as fencing or laying down a cow. They would have to have someone help them in the end, or the task was delayed until someone else could do it. One guy on the crew explained that, *“If she always asks for help, why don’t you put someone who can do the job there?”* If the woman is

not pulling her weight, someone else has to work harder to cover for it, and that was clearly not desirable. Even though, as we have seen, exceptions were mentioned and examples of guys who couldn't hack it were also told, the fact that women were not able to do the job was attributed to the fact that they were women. Not to be able to do the job would then be associated with something other than masculine – a boy, as we saw earlier, or a woman.

This seemed to lead to the adoption of measures whereby the manager or the cowboss would take precautions to avoid matching a woman with activities in which she would have trouble doing the work. One cowboy told me that if he was in charge of a crew including a woman, he would make sure that:

“(T)hey’re not gonna get into a big problem where the guy that they’re riding with is depending on someone with a bunch of strength in the end to come through and help them with something, whether it’s putting down a big cow, they’re gonna be able to get the job done. I don’t want them coming home and the man saying that I could have done it except I had that woman along.”

However, the manager explained that this didn't only have to do with the fact that they've had bad experiences in the past. No matter if the woman was well capable of handling the work, the same pattern would appear.

“What happens is, it doesn’t matter how good the lady is, she will always get, whether it’s a man thing or whatever, she will always be given shorter circles, gentler horses, easier jobs, it never fails. Maybe the women can do it, a lot of times they can’t, I’ll say it up front, lots of jobs they just can’t do. In the end, what’ll happen, invariably will happen, is the lady gets the gentler horses, a lot of time she’ll get a man to shoe their horses, it doesn’t have to be that way, but it’s just the way it always has happened. I wouldn’t know that they’ll exactly be(ing) favored, but they get it a little bit easier, and at the end of the year, the one guy will say, well I get paid to do the same job, and I get the bad horses, I get the long circle, I get to pack the power saw, I get to go fencing, you know, something’s wrong, what’s wrong here? If she’s gonna do the same work as me, she better do it or if she’s getting paid the same, she better do the same work.”

We're not really faced with it a lot, because there aren't a lot of women that apply for jobs."

Notably, the same thing was said about one of the older cowboys – once in camp he would get the gentler horses, shorter circles, etc., because of his *age*. This, however, did not seem to be in conflict with anybody's idea of equality. It was argued that he had already done his part of the harder tasks in his youth, and now deserved some slack. Only when it was associated with femininity did it become a sensitive issue:

"In the end, if she was the only lady on the crew, she will still, whether you're aware of it or not, if you're the foreman, you still do the adjustment in your mind. Well, I'm gonna send four guys over there to do this hard physical job, and I still need someone to clean up the yard, so I get the girl to do that."

From these quotes we see that the association between men and hard physical work is so strong that the woman on the crew is automatically excluded from it, even if she seems capable of doing it. This is similar to what Barlett (2006) finds in his study on masculine success on American farms, that country work has many elements associated with the masculine, such as outdoor work, strenuous physical labour, and the handling of large animals and heavy machinery. Furthermore, he concludes that even if all these tasks can be performed by women too, the association of these activities often makes it harder for women to get these kinds of jobs. For the cowboy crew on the Ranch, the suitability of the job is, according to the comments we have seen, strongly associated with what is seen as masculine traits, revealing that gender is important for their working identity.

It is no surprise that these kinds of tasks are often associated with the masculine. It is probably something that most find normal, common, or maybe even natural, since it is not a new phenomenon. It is interesting though to note that a lot of the differences between men and women, as experienced by the cowboys at the

ranch, seemed almost self evident for them, and a product of habit. Tradition, as we are about to see, plays a big part in this.

A common answer to the question “why so few women take part in the cowboy work” was that there were not too many girls that want to do it, and that it was the way it had always been. One of the younger cowboys thought for a while and said:

“Yeah, I guess there could. I know enough women that are handy enough to pull off a full day like we do. But generally there are not enough women to make up a crew. It’s just the nature of it, not a lack of skills. It’s because most women don’t acquire the skills to do it... Just for whatever reason today’s day and age don’t require it. Women can have more comfortable jobs, so can we, but, what we do is what we grew up with.”

In his opinion, there are women who are able to do the job, but not enough of them to make up a crew. As we have seen from the examples here above, even in a mixed crew with women who are able to pull off a full day of work, they would probably be given easier tasks by the men, leading to dissatisfaction among the male crew. As another cowboy put it: *“Everywhere we go we are kinda polite, and give the girl the easier job, I think it is everywhere in every job.”* In the example given further above about the different ways of expressing concern depending if it’s a man or a women getting hurt, we also can identify an attitude whereby it’s important to be extra nice to girls. The cowboy ended his story with the comment: *“It’s the way we grew up treating women”*. The intended differentiation between men and women is apparent here too, a differentiation that is similar to that of cowboys and non-cowboys. One of the younger cowboys expressed the same thing the first day we worked together. He wanted to take over the wheel barrel I was pushing because he didn’t want to *“look bad letting a lady do it”*, though he didn’t seem to be offended when I assured him that I was all right.

Since this attitude seems to be deeply rooted and came up in comments in all sorts of contexts, we believe that the differences between men and women, even

if hypothetical, play an important part in the process of establishing gender identity on the Ranch.

Furthermore, the young cowboy's view is that the lack of women with enough skills to do the job is *just the nature of things*. They could acquire the skills, but they just don't. They end up having more comfortable jobs. Again, hard physical work is associated with masculinity, whereas comfort is reserved for women. The men *do what they grew up with*. However, another cowboy concluded that "[i]t's hard to find women that grew up in this kind of work too. They are out there but usually they go into different fields, veterinary..." Whereas it would be *natural* for a guy to continue doing the cowboy work he grew up with, women would not acquire the necessary skills, and even those who did would end up in *more comfortable jobs*. The choice of words by these two informants, as well as the recurrence with which these type of comments occurred, reinforces the tenet proposed by Fenstermaker, West and Zimmerman (2002, p. 28): gender is often perceived as a natural feature of everyday life, and how "*engaging in it is its own reward as refraining from it is more noticeable than its presence*".

At this point, it is pertinent to compare the data with what Garceau (2001) finds when he explored the history of gendered ranch work. In the days of droving, cowboys were traveling for long periods of time, trailing cattle across the Great Plains. When this activity started around 1860, it was unthinkable for women to do this kind of work, to be away from home for so long with a group of men, since unmarried men and women couldn't live together. The general view of these groups was that they were morally suspect, primitive and uncivilized, and for a woman to join them would probably be considered – from a normal perspective – an act of social suicide. When times changed and the droving ended, and was replaced by family ranching, women started taking part in the outdoor activities of farm work. However, the cattle work and the cowboying, was reserved for men, because it was presumably still associated with the masculine culture from which it emerged as part of the droving. On the Ranch, it was a lady who took care of the yard, working outdoors all day and sometimes

running heavy machinery. This did not raise any eyebrows and it seemed a lot less problematic than having a lady in the cowboy crew. Garceau (2001) also makes reference to the emergence of the cowboy myth in connection with the masculinisation of the trade. The travelling shows and best selling novels popularizing the myth about the brave man, hospitable, hardy and adventurous, helped disassociate the negative image of the drovers from the cowboys, who came to symbolize honor, physical prowess, and rugged individualism. Garceau concludes that the emergence of the myth of the cowboy clearly reinforced the masculine working identity of cattle work. It continued to be perceived as something that real men do, and therefore, not women and children, or as one cowboy put it: *“There’s this old fashion view if you believe it, that guys are supposed do be out there and women are supposed to be in the house, but I don’t think too much of that. But that could be part of it, you know (the) old tradition just keeps going...”*

In terms of the nostalgia for olden times and the strive to be a “real cowboy like in the old days”, as we saw in an earlier chapter it is not surprising that even this strive, so present in the historical accounts of Savage’s (1993) and Jordan’s (1992) collections, should be so prevalent among the cowboys on the Ranch.

There are other similarities too, between Garceau’s analysis of the values during ranching history and the attitudes among the workers on the Ranch. For example, housing facilities for men and women who are not married, or who are living on the Ranch but who do not form a steady couple, should be kept separate. This affects the camping situation in particular, because there are more chances of finding separate rooms for men and women at the homestead. This further reinforces the logic by which women’s work in the calving barn is accepted, because it is always situated close to the home ranch. The limited living space in camp was perceived as a major constraint to having women in the crew.

“The other thing is that you’re gonna run into people like George... who believe that there is no place for a woman in camp, period. And he’s not alone, he ‘s just a little older and it’s just the way he is...So again, it boils down to choice. You got two or three men on the crew, older people, capable that you really not wanna lose, and you know that they are old timers, set in their way, chauvinist or whatever you want to call it, and you know that if you hire this lady and put her in camp, those men are gonna be pissed. So rather than risking losing one or two good men, you take a young kid who doesn’t know anything and make a cowboy out of him!”

The tradition of keeping women out of camp is thus so strong that it is more economically sound to hire an inexperienced guy over a fully qualified cowgirl, for the fear of upsetting the crew and losing some of them. This once again signals the importance of gender for the cowboy’s working identity.

6.5 Exceptions, intrigues and burnt bridges

Another similarity between Garceau’s ranchers and the workers on the Ranch is the way in which women are perceived on the cowboy crew. We saw earlier that most cowboys and women on the Ranch said that they wouldn’t mind having a woman on the crew as long as she could do the job. This would seem to be completely reasonable, but is there a hidden requirement that in order to be a member of the crew it is necessary to give up some of the classical feminine characteristics of fragility, softness and comfort seeking? Perhaps we are going too far, but this requirement was definitely present in camp. Brad, who stated that women have no place in the cowboy crew, and definitely not in camp, came up with a few exceptions further along in the interview: *“The camp cook is different, she’s Richard’s wife”*. She would live with him and not have a lot of contact with the cowboy crew. The cowboss’ wife was another exception, she would be living with the cowboss. Brad had already camped with two different cowbosses and their wives, and both times it had worked out fine.

“The cowboss’ wife is a big, big difference. They’ve got their own privacy. And have absolutely no interference with the crew whatsoever. The last cowboss’s wife worked with us a lot. Just like another person, didn’t notice it at all, but she was the cowboss’ wife. She’s an excellent hand, good with horses and knows her stuff.”

“Kate is a very good hand. In my mind she’s just another cowboy, I’d work with her any day. She’s grown up with it.

-Interviewer: -Would you mind having her in camp?

“She’s Dave’s wife, doesn’t matter to me.”

Interviewer: - So she’s an exception?

“Yeah, ‘cause she’s Dave’s wife, she’d be staying with the cowboss, she wouldn’t be staying with the crew. And she is really good. She’d be the only exception, her and another girl in Alberta. She’s really handy, but they weren’t willing to hire women here. She wanted to work here. She’s a nice girl and is really handy and knows her stuff. But, they just had too many problems in the past.”

The problems referred to are of romantic or sexual nature. The most common explanation for not having women in camp, apart from the hard work, was the potential intrigues that it could bring. There were innumerable stories about trouble in the camp caused by a woman’s presence. A cowgirl would come with a cowboy, go to camp with the crew, hook up with another cowboy, and all hell would break loose. All three would leave, the crew would become significantly smaller and the remaining crewmen’s spirit got dampened. Another scenario was a single woman who went cowboying with the crew. The guys would start joking about *“getting into her pants”* and soon there was a competition to see who can do it first. In the end someone would get hurt, angry, pregnant or just leave – outcomes considered to be devastating for the camp.

One of the cooks explained that:

"[i]f you have a single girl with a pile of single guys, something happens there and you have people quitting. A girl dates and they break up and someone has to leave. ...And if you send a single girl with a bunch of guys, they start arguing, and they don't want that, it's hard enough to find people to work as it is without having them arguing. Unless she can keep herself single without having to date the guys she is working with. That's another story."

The cook found that *"...if she was just one of the guys it would be none of my business... But I would have negative feelings if I thought she was only there to have a good time. If she was there to pick up a cowboy or have a flavour of the week sort of thing, I wouldn't like it, because it would disrupt camp."*

What is important to note here is the heteronormativity present on the scene, and the market of desire it implicates. In Ambjörnsson's (2004) doctorate thesis about the construction of gender among teenage girls in a Swedish high school, she addresses heteronormativity and the way in which it plays a big part in determining one's own and another person's gender positions. She describes that there is a small difference between the woman who is too sexual—the stereotypic slut – and the non-sexual, unattractive, unfeminine woman often referred to as the lesbian. Among Ambjörnsson's teenage girls, the aim was to balance themselves between these two extremes in order to be accepted as a "normal" girl. As she discusses, what is seen as normal is highly normative, and being normal requires taking position on the heteronormative market of desire including both heterosexual and homosocial relations. In other words, she is expected to be, and wants to be, attracted to and be attractive for the opposite sex while having close friendships with persons of her own sex. Having friends of the opposite sex can be suspicious, and engaging in sexual games with the same sex is unthinkable. In cow camp, however, the only accepted version of a woman seems to be the second type, the undesirable, unfeminine woman. Not being desirable would in this case refer to the fact that she is unavailable on the market of desire in the same way as a woman who is married and living with her

husband, or that she is unfeminine in that she does not fulfill the expected traits required of femininity such as sensitivity, comfort seeking, not being aggressive, fragility, and in greater need of caretaking. In order to be accepted and treated as an equal and a 'normal' worker in the cowboy crew, a woman has to step into a position that is viewed in other settings as being outside of the normal gender path. Even if the setting in Ambjörnsson's study is completely different, we can see a similarity in that the heteronormative imperative is crucial in affirming gender among the cowboy crew, which means that women would have to step outside their own heteronormative framework in order to be fully accepted, and not only tolerated, by the cowboy crew. Once again this confirms how crucial the masculine element is in the cowboy's work identity. It seems to be hard to sidestep this, even with the best of intentions. We also see that gender can be viewed as what West and Zimmerman (2002) calls "situated identities" – the masculine and the feminine are constructed side by side, and often in contrast to one another. Even though the gender aspect might be more obvious when representatives from both groups are present, to step outside the gendered line, even within a homogenic group, could mean being treated as belonging to the other gender category and possibility being associated with homosexuality, something that was unthinkable in the cowboy crew. A comment from the manager who had been in the cowboy business for over forty years confirmed that: *"It's getting more and more acceptable, before you wouldn't last the year at a ranch, and NEVER on the cowboy crew!"*

A guy who turned out to be homosexual came to work on irrigation, and started hanging around the cowboys. Shawn told me: *"...they kind of tolerated him and then when they found out, that was the end. He would have died. They would have killed him, he'd never had come home, nobody would have helped him. If he had fell off his horse and broken his leg, they would have left him, haha!...Who knows, if anybody out there is gay, he ain't admitting it. George, he'd shoot him, haha!"*

A homosexual man would not last long on the Ranch, and *especially* not in the cowboy crew. Heteronormativity and the prescription for the correct gendered

way of being seems to be stronger for the cowboys than for the other outdoor workers on the Ranch such as farmers and irrigators. So strong in fact, that it is more accepted to have a guy on the crew that is prepared to shoot someone because of a deviance from the expected normative masculine gender, than to hire a guy who does not fit the description of the “normal” masculine gender.

Numerous times when cowboys tried to find examples of good experiences with women on the crew, they spoke about them in terms of someone “*you didn’t have to look after*” or who was “*just another guy on the crew*”. In other words, the ideal woman is someone who lacks at least some of the characteristics they themselves identified as being feminine. Again we see that the absence of characteristics associated with the feminine, some of which are similar to that of a boy, is a strong part of the cowboy working identity.

Kate, who had worked on the cowboy crew before she had kids, also underlined the importance of being just like everybody else: “*I was just one of the guys on the crew... it was good because I fitted in with the guys, I wasn’t any different, we all had the same jobs. I did everything that they did. Shoeing, wrestling calves, roping, tailing cows over. I wasn’t scared to get my hands dirty and so they treated me like an equal. No one ever go do something for me.*”

In these quotes, we learn that the woman was “*just another guy on the crew*”, “*just another cowboy*” or “*just like another person*”. Apart from being able to hack it the trick seems to be to have separate living quarters and to be married to another man in the camp. By having taken herself off the heteronormative market by getting married, an important meeting ground between masculine and feminine is avoided. But that in itself is not enough and there is also another important aspect to it. She blended in and did things the way the others did them. According to a study that corroborates what we found, women who seek “male professions” have to try to adapt to the traditional masculine characteristics to succeed to a much higher degree than is the case for men in traditional “female professions” (Wharton 2005). The explanation, Wharton

suggests, is that maleness is more highly valued than femaleness. In the cowboy line of work, this seems to be true when it comes to the working situation.

Will tried to explain the difference between working with a woman and a man:

"... (I)t would be kinda a mentality thing, you know. And to a certain extent it is a lot different working with women. We were all raised to act respectful among women. You don't cuss and swear and do too many stupid things. But when you are used to that and then a girl comes on a crew, it's that kinda feel out period when it's kinda awkward at first...I've even caught myself a few times when you have been around, you know you go to tell a joke and... you can tell a lot dirtier jokes around guys than you'd want to around the girls, especially if you didn't know the girls."

A former cowgirl confirmed that *"(...) it does maybe take a special type of woman to do it, cause you got to be able to joke at the table, you gotta be able to hear the comments."*

One cowboy with a lot of experience of working in camps assured me that:

"I know that something is gonna happen, one or two men are gonna get mad, or they would be quitting, or you'd feel it, there would be a tension, they won't relax. They wouldn't let down and joking and laughing and the stuff like that, or whatever it is that makes a good camp won't really happen."

The way men and women are expected to behave when they are in their respective groups and when they are together clearly sets the scene here. Only if a woman steps out of the expected behavior role and is not on the heterosexual market of desire is she deemed to be suitable to deal with this work situation.. As in the case Garceau (2001) describes, there is no analytical place for the female gender in cattle work. The women working in cow camp in Garceau's example from a century ago were seen as "quasi-men". Women in camp are perceived as being either trouble, if they maintain qualities seen to be typically

female, or as “one of the guys” if she does not maintain these qualities. In other words, to be accepted she needs to take part in what is in many ways perceived as a normal masculine gender.

Wharton (2005) discusses the similar-attraction theory in which she proposes that people prefer to work with those who are similar to them in order to feel comfortable. In the case of gender, this would mean that in a one-gendered group, people with a different gender would not be particularly welcomed into that group because it would tend to make others less comfortable. This could perhaps be explained by the need of the group to feel like a homogenic “us” that is consistent with their work identity in order for the individual members to be satisfied with the working conditions. In the case of the cowboy crew on the Ranch, this identity embraces a certain type of interaction that includes language. A comment from one of the cooks on the ranch provides a good example demonstrating this:

“Some of them would think that she was encroaching on their space, that they couldn’t say what they wanted to say, and they would have to be polite even though they didn’t want to sometimes. And they couldn’t talk the same to a girl, or most girls, as they could to each other.”

A woman would apparently encroach on the cowboy crew’s space. In this comment and in Will’s explanation stated above, it is clear that in general, men have to be polite and respectful among women. As noted in Chapter 5, the type of language that is an important marker of the cowboys’ group identity is thus also an important marker of homosocial interaction between men. Interestingly, Ambjörnsson (2004) finds the same phenomenon among teenage girls who dramatically change their behavior and language to be more orderly and polite when boys are present. The politeness and respectfulness that the cowboys thought was necessary when women were present are hard to combine with the image of the uncivilized, wild cowboy that lingers from the early days of the trade. The stereotyping of both genders in this situation can be compared to the example given by Erikson (2008) and Cascio (2007) about fire fighters. Glick and

Fiske (2007) argue that stereotypes are not only descriptive, but often prescriptive in that “efficient social functioning requires individuals to be socialize[d] to possess the traits required for successful performance of their groups role” (p. 156). In certain cases, women were seen as being “wonderful but fragile” (ibid), and therefore less suitable for the job. The traits defined as necessary for the job and those qualities prescribed by the definition of the feminine gender are in conflict with the work, but are completely compatible with those for the masculine gender. According to my findings, the same is true for the cowboy profession at the Ranch.

The manager put it quite simply: *“It all boils down to the image again and having a lady on the cowboy crew doesn’t really fit with the image.”*

Another cowboy confirmed it:

“I’ve worked with women where it’s been just fine. But not this kinda’ job.”



7. Cowboys in context

7.1 Cowboys and PC

As mentioned before, the cowboys at the Ranch had comparatively little interest in the world outside cowboying. Perhaps this is why no one seemed bothered by the fact that there was only one telephone for the employees, situated in the cookhouse. The office workers had their own phone and wireless internet, but no one else used computers for communication, and there was no coverage at all for cell phones. However, they seemed to keep good track of what was happening on the other ranches, for example who was working where, who was looking for new crew members, and where the food was good.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, there is a lack in the literature on the contemporary cowboy. In the fictions about the cowboy, he has been glorified for reasons that are not generally accepted by contemporary intellectuals. Cowboys have often been denied attention by the academic world with the exception of history departments, possibly for that reason. Perhaps the reason why this “exotic savage” has not been overrun by anthropologists, apart from the fact that he is hard to get to, is that he is, as Savage (1993:210) puts it, “the personification of everything they deplored: a white man intruding upon indigenous cultures, whacking the tar out of the same, and ignoring gender issues altogether, except when he wanted a little you-know-what.” In other words, the cowboy is utterly politically incorrect and embarrassing to acknowledge. The gender issue, alongside the racial issue, is the strongest reason why he is not considered to be “PC”, or politically correct.

However, outside the academic sphere, the cowboy is gaining popularity in the form of western horse riding competitions, country vacations, fashion and daydreams. Perhaps it is a form of the romantic, “outdoorsy”, “real” experiences we long for, as people who dive into the stories and accounts of the western heroes have always done. Perhaps the ways of expressing this longing have just

multiplied and the intensification of city life has made the collective country dream grow stronger. It seems it is the cowboy setting, more than the actual reality of the cowboy that we are longing for. Being close to nature and far from the city stress, focusing on the here and now, and the feeling of belonging to a place seem more important than the actual non-glamorous and tough work days, the social isolation, and the challenge of being accepted into the cowboy trade. The old dichotomies of man-woman and cowboy-Indian still present in the West are not often celebrated publicly, but the masculinity associated with cowboys has received a lot of praise. The second of these dichotomies deserves further attention.

7.1.1 “Cowboys and Indians”

Once the nomads of the cattle business became sedentary and left the long trails for a permanent homestead, and began grazing their cattle on the range around their home instead of while being on the move, they began to develop relationships with their Native neighbours. The Native peoples in the area around the Ranch started their own horse remudas and cattle herds and set up homesteads. Some also started working as ranch hands and cowboys on nearby ranches. When Rick started cowboying forty-five years ago, he was one of the two “white” people on the cowboy crew. The Natives were seen as skilled horse people, but with a different style of riding. To this day, riding bareback is often called riding “Indian style”. On the Ranch, during the time of my fieldwork, a number of people of Native origin worked on the irrigation crew, cowboy crew and in the kitchen. Sometimes people with darker physical traits would be asked if they had “status”, referring to the identity card given to people who are granted Native status according to Canadian law. Showing this card in a store means that the buyer doesn’t have to pay taxes; since all the cowboys (except for one) who smoked used Copenhagen snuff, this could be interesting information if they wanted to ask a favour.

The cook, Rose, grew up a Shuswap (Sewepemc in her own Native language), and moved away from the reserve when she met her husband who in non-Native. She described the culture shock and the change in her daily life. For example, no longer gathering and hunting all summer to secure the winter supply of food. It took her a while to get used to having food “come to you”, buying everything in the shop, not having to worry about having enough. In the past it was assumed that once you left the reserve there was no coming back, but nowadays it is easier to return, as long as you know the “ways of the Natives”. If not, Rose explained, you wouldn’t know things that even a kid would know – what to pick and where to look out for dangerous animals, etc. It would be hard to get accepted if one did not know their way around. She also mentioned that she sometimes overheard negative comments about Natives from members of the crew, but no one would ever say anything to her and they were always polite. Spending lunch hours in the cookhouse, it was easy to see that everybody appreciated Rose. She was admired for her cooking, her ability to get along with everybody, and her jokes and talk back to the cowboys.

The differences between “whites” and “Natives” – “Cowboys and Indians” – seemed to have little importance on the Ranch, even if negative comments could be heard about the Native’s general ways of keeping animals. The analytical and practical division between men and women seemed more salient. Even the distinctions drawn between cowboys, irrigators and farmers, based on the negative comments made by cowboys about irrigators in particular, seemed more important than the perceived differences based on co-workers’ ethnic origins. Gender and the internal hierarchy of the working groups seemed to be more central than ethnicity.

7.2 Cowboy colleagues

The differentiation of men and women as groups that are present on the Ranch, as we have seen in previous chapters, was not at all present at the cattle station I previously visited in Australia. I was not conducting fieldwork at the time;

however, working on the crew for a couple of months, it became obvious that not many distinctions were made between the men and women on the crew. Although the amount of cattle held at the Station was far bigger than at the Ranch, around 30 000 versus around 5000, the crew at the Australian outfit represented less than a third of the people working the Ranch. This meant that we all did a bit of everything, from cutting grass in the garden, stacking hay bales, washing trucks and moving cattle. Only a part of the time was spent on horseback, and there were two helicopters helping out at the bigger musters, spotting the cattle scattered over the vast, red plains of the outback. Men and women would ride together, the owner of the Station taking the lead to show the herd where to go. The station was owned by a couple who hired individuals or couples travelling through the country. Some were hired on a day-to-day basis for certain tasks, while others worked for the season and stayed in the cement squares in the garden that were used as housing for contractual workers. These station hands called themselves jackaroos and jillaroos, and, apart from the really heavy tasks that were left to the jackaroos and most of the cooking that was assigned to the jillaroos, they both performed the same duties. Here, both men and women work with cattle from horseback, and the housing is co-ed. Only occasionally did workers spend a night away from the homestead, for example when taking cattle to the outer boundaries of the lands or helping out a neighbour. Their horses were let out in a guest paddock, and the “swags” (bed rolls) were rolled out on the ground for the crew, both men and women.

In order to show how important it is for the cowboy crew on the Ranch to keep masculine gender and the perception of “the Cowboy” intertwined, the manager explained:

“Part of it I don’t really understand. It’s an attitude and whether it is this image again that doesn’t allow [women] in a bigger crew. So you get away from the big crew and into a smaller place with one or two people, it’s fine....”

In a smaller place that has fewer people, work roles would be less specialized; instead of having an irrigation crew, a farming crew and a cowboy crew there would be one group of people doing a larger variety of work. It is then likely that their working identity would not be narrowed down to that of the cowboy. Rather, it would hinge upon the larger definition of the ranch worker, which *includes* the cowboy. It could then be easier to accept a wider range of gender characteristics, as we saw in Garceau's (2001) case where the sedentary ranchers worked alongside the women on the ranch, with the exception of cattle work. In the example provided by the manager, the women would be involved in cattle work as well as in other work activities. However, there is a significant difference in the level of accepting gender characteristics that deviate from the masculine stereotype when it comes to general ranch work including cattle work, and when it comes to a specialized crew of cowboys. It appears as though it is cattle work in particular and the fact of being a cowboy crew that determines the level of acceptance towards the feminine gender, and makes the masculine gender crucial for their working identity.

Maybe the common practice of young couples travelling across the country for short-term work has something to do with the division of labour in Australia. But according to the quote above, and other comments from Canadian cowboys who have worked in Australia, the size of the outfit plays a bigger role in this matter. At outfits with a smaller crew, both in Australia and Canada, it is rare to have employees who only do the cowboying part of the ranch work. They don't go to camp, and sleep instead at the home ranch all year round. Because of this, the level of comfort is higher and the risk of intrigues is lower than at ranches where a separate cowboy crew goes to camp. In this way the social isolation found at camp is avoided. Thus a couple of the "constraints" of hiring women are avoided. Furthermore, by mixing up cowboying work with other work, there is a wider variety of tasks to accomplish, including some that are less physically strenuous than the average cowboying. In this case, the perceived need for masculinity to accomplish the work might decrease. In general, the work identity

of a general ranch worker on the outfits with smaller crews is perceived by the cowboy on the Ranch as less gendered than that of the full time cowboy on a cowboy crew at an outfit with a bigger crew.

On the Ranch, especially considering that it is one of the largest ones, it was easy to get the feeling that the cowboys were the central part of the operation, second only to the cows. The cowboys themselves saw it that way, but comments from other employees revealed a hierarchy that placed the mounted workers at the top. This possibly has to do with their closeness to the cows, but their attitudes towards daily tasks suggest that the pride and love for their work and lifestyle plays a big part in it as well. They are seen as a group that does what they really want to do, and are made up of a select few that are able to do it. Even though all tasks at the Ranch were acknowledged as being important, there was no doubt about which group of workers was a central component of the operation, at least from the cowboys' point of view.

Another interesting point is that while the differentiation between genders seemed to have less importance on the Australian cattle station than on the Canadian cattle ranch, the differentiation between ethnic origins (Euro-Australian or Aboriginal) were crucial. In both cases, this process relied on stereotypes that portrayed Aboriginals as being lazy, greedy or at least not trustworthy.

7.3 No cowboy without a challenge

Let us start at the other end, for a second, to see how to best show the characteristics of the cowboy. Historically, as we have seen, physical strength and endurance were associated with the cowboy, as well as solitude, roughness and rebellion against the common social norms. These traits are also associated with a very well known type of masculine ideal. There are not many settings left where it is possible to embody this formula and still be viewed as a hero. Add characteristic of outdoor life and the constant roaming and you are left with even fewer settings, among those the western cattle business. It would be hard

to embody these characteristics as an employee in a finance district in a city, or a suburban hospital. In other words, it takes the right kind of challenge to be the right kind of hero. And as we have seen, the cowboy has for long been a hero in our minds; but he is also a villain, because of his imagined machismo and racism, and therefore, out of place in civilized, politically correct communities. As Mitchell (2007) points out, the West is a place to test and prove masculinity. It is in that context that one can find a lot of the classic masculine challenges along with the opportunity to live a certain kind of dream. As in numerous other outdoor professions, the cowboy trade holds masculinity as the neutral norm in that non-masculine is seen as exceptions and often negative (Thomas 1990, Jordan 1992, Savage 1979). Even when cowgirls are present in bigger groups, they are an exception to the rule. Whereas the men are *expected* to accomplish cowboying tasks, the women are *allowed* to do them. Even today, as we have seen, these exceptions are treated as exceptions, not as challenges to the norm. As long as the norm is followed, it is underlined as being constant and natural. As Wharton (2005) underlines, gender can be seen as a continuous process, and the gendering behaviour reinforces in this case the neutral norm by affirming it when present in the correct way, and treating behaviours that don't correspond to it as exceptions.

Probably because of heteronormativity, along with the strong norm of gender specific expectations regarding work so present in the West, the cowboy life has been a popular setting for literature and film with a gay theme. Contrasting the two imagined analytical extremes provides a backdrop for showing similarities between them. Among the cowboys at the Ranch, the combination of being gay and a cowboy was still unthinkable, thus reinforcing the attraction to a heteronormative masculinity that is traditionally present among them.

7.4 Cowboys and changing gender roles

During the past hundred years, an important shift in gender politics has taken place on the rodeo scene. Starting out with only a few women entering the

competition, the Women's Professional Rodeo Association (previously called The Girls Rodeo Association) has grown much larger, and the rodeo cowgirl has gained popularity. As with many other sports formerly associated with men and the traditional masculine gender, rodeo is now an activity that is also available to women as well. However, men's rodeo is still bigger and more popular, and at many events women only enter the barrel racing and break-away roping competitions (with an open hondo that lets the calf slip away once caught). The development of women's role in amateur and professional rodeo is nonetheless spectacular. Also, when it comes to the "singing cowboy", gender roles have changed and we are now just as likely to hear women sing about the life in the West. Possibly the area where the cowgirl has gained the most ground is as a dude. The recreational western horse riding and cattle herding have become more and more popular, and the number of women taking part in it as organisers and participants has increased as well. Even the number of women working on small family owned farms and ranches with horses and cows has increased. The only place where this trend in the western tradition does not follow the gender curve seems to be in cowboy crews that work on larger cattle ranches. Workers perceived the gendered roles and the gendered working identities among the cowboy crew on the Ranch as being normal, natural and traditional. Most of them thought that this could change in theory and one of them said that it might have to change since more women are already getting into the trade. However, there were not enough women around with the skills and interests to challenge the present order. A few outfits around the Ranch have recently reinforced the rule of not hiring women on the cowboy crew. That could be seen as a clear sign about the importance of gender in their working identity, even though there are sure to be practical reasons behind this decision. The reluctance to overcome the practical challenges of including the heteronormative feminine gender in the cowboy crews in the Canadian far west will make it difficult to change the importance of gender in the cowboys' working identity. It has been tried many times, and each time it failed. The outcome was disastrous for all those involved, leading to pessimism and a

reluctance to try it again. It is likely that the heteronormative masculinity will maintain its importance in the future, and this has been since the birth of the idea of the cowboy.

8. Concluding discussion

This study has examined the gender and work identity among the cowboy crew at a Canadian cattle ranch. Following the analyses of the collected data, it can be concluded that gender is a guiding principle in the division of labour at the Ranch. There were only men on the farming crew, the irrigation crew, and the cowboy crew. Except for the yard worker, all the women worked indoors either in cooking or administration, while the men worked outdoors with heavy machinery or big animals. The manager of the ranch did both outdoor work and administration. Again, with the exception of the garden work, women carried out tasks that were less physically demanding and that allowed them to stay on the home ranch. The classical division of what is traditionally seen as “men’s work” and “women’s work” is maintained on the Ranch: cooking, cleaning and gardening are carried out by women, and cattle work, horse work, as well as operating and repairing heavy machinery, are done by men.

It can also be concluded that work identity is very important to the cowboys at the Ranch. As the study has shown, there are multiple ways in which they expressed pride in their occupation and lifestyle, and their devotion is emphasized by the amount of time and money they spend on their equipments and the development of skills. All of the cowboys clearly believed that being a cowboy was important, often the most important part of who they were. The clothes, the talk, and the social choices underline the desire to be a part of the group, in the same way as Ambjörnsson found in her field study among teenage girls. This is reinforced by the way in which cowboys use identity markers to distinguish themselves and their work identity from others, which falls in line with what Collinson and Hearn (2005) concluded to be typical behaviour for outdoor manual labourers. The ways in which identity was expressed by the cowboys at the Ranch strictly corresponded to what everyone perceived to be typical for cowboys. Comments from informants who were not part of the cowboy crew also confirmed this, as did the cowboy’s polite but critical welcome

of newcomers to the crew. The comments from the cowboys themselves about the lifestyle and the way others see them embraced the idea of the “old time cowboy”, and containing an admiration for the traditions of the trade. At the same time it was often stated that the romantic picture painted in the stories are exaggerated and that in reality a cowboy’s day consists of hard work, long hours, few social pleasures, and a large amount of dirt. The roughness of the work and the lifestyle, including the lack of comfort and leisure, seemed to be a point of pride rather than perceived as a problem. This corresponds with Cascio’s (2007) findings in his study of fire-fighters, for whom working conditions were seen as something that not many could cope with, and thus something that makes the fire-fighters, and in this case the cowboys, rather special.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that gender plays an important part in work identity for the cowboys in different ways. The traditional, heteronormative masculine gender, in opposition to boys and women, was perceived as the norm on the cowboy crew on the Ranch. This confirms Fenstermaker, West and Zimmerman’s (2002) discussion on gender as a natural feature that is noticed only when challenged. Strength, endurance, ability to endure pain and dirt, as well as a general roughness are included in this concept of masculinity. Also, it includes the absence of an overly developed sensitivity and the need for comfort, a social life and caretaking. The cowboys’ own comments on gender made this clear, as it became evident that women were expected to have the opposite traits of those perceived as being masculine. These masculine traits were considered necessary for being a cowboy at the Ranch. The characteristics of what was perceived as the masculine gender, according to others such as Keagan Gardiner (2002a) and Wharton (2005), were seen as a prerequisite for doing a good job on the cowboy crew, and thus for their working identity Garceau (2001), Savage (1993) and Jordan (1992) also underline that this has been a tradition for cowboys throughout history.

The premise of heteronormativity discussed by Ambjörnsson (2004) was clearly displayed in conversations about heterosexual and homosocial relations. The

heterosexual masculinity ascribed to the cowboy crew on the Ranch was clearly revealed in comments on the hypothetical possibility of gay crew members. A strong negative view of masculine homosexuality was claimed to be so intense among cowboys that the manager expressed concern for their safety should they be hired. This view was perceived as being so widely held that it made economic sense not to hire homosexual men, because it would be hard to find enough cowboys who would accept a homosexual man to be a part of the crew. It can thus be concluded that heterosexual masculinity is an important part of the cowboys' work identity. The homosocial dimension of gender also plays an important part in work identity for the cowboys. In daily social interactions between crew members, living and working together in cow camp was seen as unproblematic, and even though disputes occurred, it was not seen to be caused by the homogenic gender group. With women on the crew, however, the possibility of romantic intrigues and disputes was perceived as a significant probability and only in exceptional cases was it worth to hire a woman. This was also seen as a view so widespread that it was judged to be more feasible to train an inexperienced man instead of hiring a qualified woman, thereby emphasising the ways in which homosocial and heterosexual norms play a part in the working identity of the cowboys.

It is interesting to note that the tradition of cowboying is still important to contemporary cowboys, and the traditional division of labour between men and women in cattle work pointed out by Savage (1993), Garceau (2001) and Jordan (1992) still play a part in the work identity among the cowboys at the Ranch. On the one hand they expressed admiration for the old time cowboy who laid the foundation of the mythical hero of the west; on the other, there is a desire to distance themselves from the romantic picture of cowboy life that has spread across the world, and to insist on the unglamorous reality and hard work. The contemporary cowboy identity seems to be a battlefield where past traditions and a mythical concept clash with modern ideas and the realities of the trade.

The importance of the traditional masculine heteronormative gender for the cowboys' working identity also became clear through the many comments they made by about how it would just not be the same with a woman on the crew. A woman's presence means that they would have to change their behaviour and show respect and extra care for her while at the same time they expected her to do the same work as a man. This situation created a cognitive dissonance, which in turn would lead to problems in the group. This reaffirms Wharton's (2005) theory that workers in one-gendered working groups often prefer to keep the group homogenic in order to be comfortable. Comments revealing a perceived incompatibility between the idea of female crew members and the image of the cowboy, as well as a concern with the theoretical possibility of being less competent than a woman also reveal the importance of a specific ideal about the masculine gender among the cowboys. Exceptions were mentioned where it would be acceptable and even positive to have a woman on the cowboy crew, but interestingly they were always underlined as exceptions, thus reassuring the expected normalities. The implication of gender seemed more important for the cowboy working identity than for any other outdoor work on the Ranch. The fact that the Ranch had a rather large, specialised cowboy crew may be perceived as significant for the implications of constructing gender identity. It was seen as less of a problem to have women cowboying on smaller ranches where the cowboys also would do general farm work, and not go to camp. Gender was thus perceived as being more present in the working identity on the specialised cowboy crew on the Ranch than in many other places, underlining the important relation between masculinity and cowboys.

The construction of group identity related to gender is a wide phenomenon, and it is remarkable to see that the Canadian cowboys in this study use much the same methods to do this as the Swedish teenage girls in Ambjörnsson's (2004) research. Although the groups in which they seek belonging differ greatly, the same kind of social markers are used, and the inclusion or exclusion of members of the group decided accordingly. The heteronormative imperative is crucial for

both groups in their construction of groups and gender identity. Furthermore, all of the cowboys and the most orderly group of teenage girls claimed to behave differently when there were members of the opposite gender present, such as watching their language and rowdiness.

From this research new light has been shed, and hopefully further understanding has been developed, for the implications of gender in the work identity of the cowboys in their work and lives on a contemporary Canadian cattle ranch. The findings in this study offer a small but, hopefully, interesting contribution to anthropology and gender studies, by applying an established theoretical framework to a new empirical field.

The research has also revealed challenges in methodology and the assembling of a theoretical framework. Considering that this study was limited in terms of its size and there was no possibility to prolong fieldwork, the perspectives presented by the researcher is the viewpoint of a visitor. Had there been a chance to conduct a longer period of participant observation, the perspective would naturally have changed since the research would have been accepted as a member of the crew, which in turn would have brought an interesting addition to the collection of data. Furthermore, the fact that the research in form of participant observation was carried out by a woman meant that the cowboys were forced to make an exception in having me on the crew for the duration of my stay. The researcher's gender was also one of the reasons why I could not be a part of the daily life in cow camp when the time came to go to camp. It would be interesting to know if a male researcher would have gotten the same results from the study as a woman, and if he would feel different pressures on the job and a different kind of acceptance by his colleagues. However, the fact that the research was carried out by a woman also allowed for first hand observations of numerous situations that a male colleague would not have the opportunity to witness.

However, the study has led to further questions and there are many researches that could be carried out on related subjects. It would be interesting to study cowboys and cowgirls on ranches with crews of different sizes in North America, South America and Australia, in order to compare the importance of gender in their working identity. Furthermore, it would be fascinating to conduct fieldwork among cattle herders and horse people in different countries, such as Mongolian and Ethiopian traditional societies, in order to examine the relations between gender and work with large animals. Another topic that is worthy of attention is the perspective of the cowboy and his lifestyle in areas situated far from the North American West. At the same time, some of the characteristics associated with the image of the cowboy, such as machismo, brutality and racism, are becoming more and more politically incorrect in large parts of the world. Ironically, other aspects of his image are becoming increasingly widespread and being praised more than ever, attested in the use of his characteristic clothing, his riding style and the positive use of the epithet “cowboy”. This becomes clear when looking at the positive use of the epithet “cowboy”, and the appropriation of his clothing and riding style by style. It would be interesting to look at how this dual perspective of the cowboy has developed, and what it says about our modern world.



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