

**Dress Up For Big Boys:  
Cowboy Culture of the Urban Rodeo**

by  
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## **Abstract**

Billed as *The Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth*, the Calgary Stampede is one of the West's most celebrated events with visitors, from near and far, partaking and reveling in Southern Alberta's Western heritage. This event is a celebration of Alberta's western past and, as such, the Stampede has continually encouraged its attendees to dress up in Western (cowboy) attire in order to (re)capture the Western spirit. The cowboy has unremittingly been held up as an exceptional model of hegemonic masculinity, which, in turn, is celebrated and reinforced each year during the Stampede's live action performances. A study was then conducted on this form of masculinity by interviewing local males who use the attire to construct a short-term dominant masculine identity for the ten days in direct contrast to their daily normal lives.

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

*He wasn't a good man, he wasn't a bad man, but Lord, he was a man<sup>1</sup>*  
(*The Ballad of Cable Hogue*)

The cowboy is a predominant figure in the West and the term immediately connects one to the wide-open range and romanticised frontier; however, rarely is the cowboy seen as someone herding cattle. 'He' is either a heroic gunfighter, hunter, gambler, rancher, sheriff, outlaw, or scout (Smith, 1948, Savage, 1976, Slotkin, 1992, Tompkins, 1993, Huxley, 2018). Whether this figure is seen as good or bad depends on one's perspective. Regardless, the 'cowboy' is "defined by his strength, honour, and independence, his wilderness identity, not by his job" (Wright, 2001, p.6). This hero has "no bosses, no time clocks to punch, and no rigid work schedule to follow" (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007, p.397). To many, he is an independent labourer positioned against the working stiff and symbolises liberty, individuality, and a command of nature, which is often a mere fantasy (Mitchell, 2003; Wright, 2001; Grisby, 1980, Herbst et, al., 2014). 'He' is an inspiring hero.

Cowboys are easily recognizable. The hat, the embroidered plaid shirts, and the boots are telltale signs. When one sees this dress, it immediately brings to mind cowboys and their culture regardless of the context. The visual element is important as the clothing has symbolic meaning beyond just the need to cover the body. For instance, In Canada the cowboy and his clothing are intimately associated with Alberta, and the Western frontier. This, in turn, has arguably produced a 'unique' Albertan culture and identity based on the idea that the West is inherently different (Western exceptionalism). Particularly, Western Canada's "values, political system and history...are unique and worthy of universal admiration" (Walt, 2011, n.p), which is revered and celebrated each year during the annual Calgary Stampede. Although the attire is meant to represent the historical cattle handler, ranch-related tasks, and the ranching industry, the clothing is also synonymous with manliness because the cowboy has represented—and as I will argue still does-- an 'ideal' concept of manhood in the West – a brave, hardworking man

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from the 1970 film *Ballad of Cable Hogue*, as noted in Jane Tompkins (1993), *West of Everything: the inner life of westerns*.

who stood up for his rights (cultural and social), defended his family (patriarchy), and country (nationalism) (Nájera-Ramirez, 1994; Vargas 2010).

The Calgary Stampede is one of Canada's most popular events. First staged in 1912 and then annually since 1923 (Wetherell, 2008), it is also one of Canada's longest running celebrations<sup>2</sup>. In 2019, the event drew an estimated 1.27 million visitors during the ten days of festivities (Hudes, 2019), with many attending the fairgrounds more than once. On the surface, the Stampede is a host for food trucks, rides, games, and of course the rodeo; however, it is also known for its 'party' atmosphere. As such, it attracts an abundance of partygoers. Although, many attend for the former well-known reasons, more often they attend for the revelries which have become almost intrinsic to the festival spirit. In conjunction with these festivities, attendees are encouraged to dress up in cowboy attire, namely cowboy hats, boots, plaid shirts, belt buckles and of course denim. As the Stampede's mission is to "preserve and promote Western heritage and values" (Kelm, 2014, p.712), the attire is based on theme of the 'rodeo', with the rural male 'cowboy' seen as the genuine Westerner (Seiler, 1998).

The Calgary Stampede has continually celebrated the West's heritage and values, which includes the people, the animals, and the land – the unique spirit of the West. As such, the connection between the Stampede and Calgary is immeasurable, especially in relation to both the immediate and long-term economy. In 2019, the 10-day festival generated an estimated \$250 million in economic benefits, with \$407 million in related tax revenue for the city (Hudes, 2019). As a result, the City of Calgary does its utmost to cater to the people attending and its communities. For instance, although the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission had previously only allowed private events to serve alcohol early in the day, the provincial authority now allows bars, restaurants, and lounges to start serving to the general public at 8:00 a.m. However, on 'parade day' (the opening day of the Stampede) some establishments are permitted to start serving at 7 a.m. (Gilligan, 2014). Needless to say, the revenue generated from the early morning activities was enough for the AGLC to change its rules.

In relation to the long-term economic benefits, the Stampede has also become an important showcase in attracting foreign investment and international workers and is

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<sup>2</sup> In 2019 the economic impact of the Stampede and associated activities within the Calgary community was roughly \$540 million (Barnes, 2019).

considered a 'mecca' for networking (Hudes, 2019). In fact, each year the Stampede Park hosts over 1,200 business, tourism, sporting, hospitality, and community events which contribute an estimated \$540 million annually (Barnes, 2019). Not only do these events contribute to the economy, it undeniably adds to the sense of community spirit. In fact, this connection is also firmly entrenched within individual communities, as local businesses and charities across the city host pancake breakfasts for their (potential) customers, employees, and, of course, the general public.

Unsurprisingly, there is an enormous sense of spirit found within the actual Stampede. The not-for profit organisation, which is supported by over 2,500 volunteers, has year-round events, programs, and initiatives dedicated to investing in agricultural, youth, and western culture (Barnes, 2019). The Stampede heavily invests in Calgary and its communities, and in turn, these people and communities heavily invest in the Stampede. The relationship is reciprocal. People are encouraged to participate, and both the CS and the city encourage and welcome this in return. In fact, one could almost argue it is expected.

## **1.1. On the Research Question and Thesis**

As Calgary is a vibrant, multicultural city, with a mixture of social and economic classes situated within numerous suburban communities<sup>3</sup>, I do not understand the continued modern appeal of this culture. To me, the cowboy is a relic that represents an appalling bygone era: an era full of white dominant, hegemonic, masculine heteronormative males who view anything outside their domain with disdain and contempt. This figure is someone who seems, to me, completely out of place in a modern city. To understand the continued appeal of the cowboy and his culture, I decided to interview local males between the ages of 18-45. As many of the males who attend each year dress in part, I had hoped that many maintained this cultural tradition and dressed in cowboy attire out of respect for Alberta's heritage; however, as 'cowboy' culture is still synonymous with manliness and the ideal concept of manhood, I believe

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<sup>3</sup> The Statistics Canada 2016 Census shows that, 29.4% of Calgary's population are immigrants. 33.7% of the population are visible minorities, and the city has over 240 ethnic origins. The total population at this time was 1,392,609.

the clothing may also embody a particular masculine identity, at least for ten days out of the year.

## **1.2. My Interest**

My interest for this project comes from two distinct areas: one personal and the other academic.

### **1.2.1. Personal**

I was on the train heading to work one Friday<sup>4</sup> when I noticed two young Japanese women dressed in full cowboy gear. Both were wearing cowboy hats, denim vests, belt-buckles, denim pants, and cowboy boots. I was perplexed and found it odd. When I arrived at work, I mentioned this to a few people and they just shrugged, 'It's Stampede Week'. At the time I had no idea what they meant, especially as I had just moved to Calgary. A few days later a young male employee 'strutted' into the lunchroom just prior to his shift wearing a cowboy hat, a massive belt-buckle, and cowboy boots. On a normal summer day, it would be a t-shirt and shorts, chosen without purpose; however, on this day he walked in with cause. I laughed, still not being familiar with Calgary's 'custom', but over the next few days I noted his demeanour had changed. He was no longer an insecure young kid; he was a man with a purpose. As he walked, he moved with an air of confidence, assured that he was in control of himself and his surroundings. He was committed. Over the course of the week, as I travelled around the city, I met similar 'men' dressed in similar gear and similarly committed; The way they talked, walked, and interacted with each other also seemed different from the usual. To me, this was no longer a costume, but a statement. What kind of statement, however, remained unclear.

### **1.2.2. Academic**

My academic interest stems from research and literature which indicates white masculinity is in crisis (Ferber, 2000; Capdevila, 2016). As men have often benefitted the most from the conventional definitions of gender, many have responded with fear, anger,

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<sup>4</sup> The Calgary Stampede officially starts on a Friday in July. The date is tentative.

and feelings of loss to equality movements that are often perceived as having threatened and marginalized the white heterosexual normative man. This has especially been the case since the second wave of feminism. Taking this into consideration, could the appeal for the masculine cowboy culture and his attire be based on the desire, both conscious and unconscious, to maintain the status quo? Do Calgary men feel threatened by the changes in society, and is the fondness for a masculine male-dominated western culture a way to reach to the past when things were, in their minds, simpler?

### **1.3. Research Design**

This research draws primarily from qualitative observation fieldwork conducted around the period of the annual Calgary Stampede and consists of interviews with nine males who attended the events dressed in cowboy attire. The interviews were necessary in order to understand the continued modern appeal. My personal observations and opinions were also used to expand on certain interviews and themes. In addition, thematic historical literature related to Wild West shows, rodeos, clothing, and biographies were also integrated into the research.

The interviews were conducted, following the Stampede, (face-to-face) using a semi-structured approach to ensure the questions remained consistent and on topic. This approach not only provided flexibility, but also allowed for the exploration of emerging and unexpected themes. This process also allowed the interviewees the freedom to express their thoughts comfortably, and to respectfully decline answering any particular questions. As I was interested in capturing 'their' voice this would also increase the likelihood that respondents would fully express their thoughts, ideas, and attitudes, and be more active in the research process. Most of the respondents were either recruited from outside the Stampede's gates or from one of the local pancake breakfasts<sup>5</sup>. Additional respondents were identified through personal acquaintances who had access to men who fit my criteria. One individual was recruited personally as I knew he dressed up and attended multiple Stampede events. In total nine interviews were

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<sup>5</sup> The pancake breakfasts are community events where volunteers cook large quantities of food for the general public. They are often free; however, donations are accepted if it is a fundraiser. Some businesses also hold luncheons.

conducted. One was conducted at the respondent's place of work, two were conducted in local coffee shops, and the remainder were conducted at my place of work. In relation to the actual interview questions, respondents were asked general questions about themselves along with questions in relation to the Stampede, and its cowboy culture.<sup>6</sup> Although my research is largely based on masculinity research, at no time during the interviews was this mentioned. I had made a conscious decision to not mention anything specifically masculinity related as I did not want to influence anyone's opinion, especially in relation to the cowboy and its culture.

## **1.4. Thesis Structure**

As previously indicated, this project is an attempt to understand the continued modern appeal of the cowboy, 'his' culture, and the cowboy attire which is both formally and informally linked to the Calgary Stampede. To explore the cultural dynamics between the cowboy, the culture, the clothing, and why men continue to dress in cowboy attire, the thesis is broken down into sections identified as chapters.

### Chapter 1

This section introduces the overall theme of the paper and includes my personal and academic reasons for the research and indicate what I hope to achieve. I detail how the research was conducted and provide information on the structure of the interviews. It will also briefly introduce the main research in relation to the overall theme of the thesis.

### Chapter 2

This chapter discusses the concept of sex and gender, along with the some of the most relevant discourse in relation to gender development and differentiation. This is followed with a discussion on masculinity research as it pertains to my thesis.

### Chapter 3

In this chapter, I look at the historical roots of the traditional cowboy and how 'he' came to be within both the American and Canadian contexts. As the cowboy and 'his'

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<sup>6</sup> The average interview lasted around thirty minutes. As many of the questions were directed towards their personal experience with the Stampede and its culture, their responses can be considered authentic expressions of participants in that culture. For interview schedule and further information see Appendix A.

culture are heavily integrated into the Stampede, it is important to understand why 'he' is considered an important icon in regard to Southern Alberta's heritage.

#### Chapter 4

This chapter looks at the creation of the mythical cowboy, which is important as there is a considerable difference between the traditional cowboy and the more common cowboy stereotype (fact vs. fiction). The section traces the creation of the heroic cowboy, from dime novels to Wild west shows and rodeos. These dime novels created a romanticised frontier with the heroic cowboy 'driving' Western expansion, which was (re)created within both of the later visual forms of entertainment. This is significant as the Stampede has managed to preserve many of the cultural traditions in association with the cowboy's origins - both real and fictional.

#### Chapter 5

In this section I discuss the highly gendered clothing. As many men not connected to the culture use the attire to construct themselves as 'heroic' cowboys during the period of the Stampede, it is important to understand how this clothing came to represent and reinforce a manly ideal. This is significant as the clothing moved from utilitarian to aggrandizement furthering accenting masculinity identity and expression and is still used to model a certain form of masculinity.

#### Chapter 6

In this chapter I discuss the data in relation to my thesis, which will indicate that some men use the attire to construct a short-term masculine identity, which can also lead to other forms of masculine behavior. This chapter will draw together the central argument of the thesis.

#### Chapter 7

This final section summarizes my research, discussing its limitations and noting areas for potential future research.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

Today, gender is one of the most important aspects of person's identity and can affect one's appearance, mannerisms, interest, activities, career choices, friendships, and interpersonal styles (Miller, 2016; Milam & Nye, 2015; Capous-Desyllas & Johnson-Rhodes, 2018; Stanley, 2012). It is complex, salient, and constantly in flux (Connell, 2000). Historically, at least in the North American context, the terms 'gender' and 'sex' were used interchangeably. These terms are no longer synonymous, so it is important to understand the difference between the two. Gender refers to an individual's concept of themselves, their identity, or it speaks to the social, cultural, and psychological traits attributed to men and women which are frequently divided between masculinity and femininity (Lorber, 2000, Connell, 2005). Sex refers to the biological characteristics of males, females, and intersexes, such as genitalia and genetic differences (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Gender makes one either masculine or feminine, and sex makes one male or female<sup>7</sup>. As there are a different set of norms, roles, and cultural expectations applied to both based on these terms, a fair number of theories were developed to explain gender development and differentiation (Marchbank & Letherby, 2014). In the following I address several influential theories and theorists regarding gender.

### 2.1. Sex Role Theory

Proponents of the Sex Role Theory hold that, due to the biological differences between the two sexes, men and women are inherently suited for different roles and tasks. Accordingly, these theorists insist that there is one designated role for men and one for women (Campbell & Bell, 2009). One of the significant ideas of this argument is that the roles are separated into expressive and instrumental (Parsons, 1951). As women were considered to have a more nurturing instinct they were linked to more expressive (feminine) roles within the family sphere. Men, deemed to be more competitive and aggressive, were allocated an instrumental (masculine) role as providers (Marchbank & Letherby, 2014). As these norms were considered expected behaviour, men and

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, there are identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine and fall outside the standard gendered binary. For instance, non-binary is one term used to describe genders that do not fall into the standard male or female categories.

women, both as children and into adulthood, learned their appropriate roles through socialisation (Connell, 2000); however, these expectations reached beyond the family sphere and into greater society. For instance, science and technology, seen through this ideology was culturally defined as a masculine realm (Milam & Nye, 2015).

## **2.2. Social Learning Theory**

Social Learning Theory, when applied to gender refers to a person's tendency to learn "vicariously by observing other people engag[ing] in gender-type behaviour and witnessing the responses" (Miller, 2016, p.3). Through this process one learns what roles are characteristic of each gender and the consequences associated with engaging in either suitably gendered behaviour, or 'other' behaviour. People are rewarded for appropriate activities and punished for conduct considered inappropriate. In this way, roles acquired through observation and imitation become personal references and reinforce the gendered binary (Busey & Bandura, 1999). This is especially the case when one set of examples is strongly provided for males and another set for females. For example, as a child I always wanted an E-Z Bake Oven for my birthday and was told by both of my older brothers baking is for 'girls'. Needless to say, the message was received.

The most obvious counter arguments to these theories are the rapid social changes in society in the last few decades. For instance, behaviours that were once considered to belong in one gendered category are now in both. Men increasingly embrace roles that were once stereotypically assigned to women, such as child-rearing and homemaking; women have become more active in social and occupation roles typically associate with men (Oláh, et al. 2014). As noted by Zhu & Chang (2019), this clearly indicates previous social and behavioural dispositions which resulted in gender roles and gender inequalities are not fixed.

## **2.3. Social Construction of Gender**

At present, the most relevant theory in relation to gender is social construction. The theory asserts that gender is not fixed, innate, or a natural identity, but rather gendered labels are (re)created through social interactions and sociocultural influences (Connell, 2005). As this labelling categorises and divides men and women, there are

separate sets of general scripts designed for men (masculine) and women (feminine). Accordingly, people are compelled to adhere to the gender normative roles as set within their culture (Lorber, 1994). For instance, the labelling of sex (it is a boy or a girl) often starts with an assignment to a category before birth, and this compels society to treat a child in one category much different than those in the 'other' category (West & Zimmerman, 1987). As these gendered categories become internalised through further socialisation, people (often as children) begin to behave and act differently in order to re-create the stereotypical gendered roles. Thus, we learn, internalise, and then recreate the gender roles through socialisation (Marchbank & Letherby, 2007).

As gender often requires adhering to gendered norms and being rendered either masculine or feminine (Peterson & Runyan, 1993), gender is an achieved status which is "created and re-created out of human interactions, out of social life, and is the texture and order of that social life" (Lorber, 1994, p.13). This view is also supported by Connell (2005), who notes that gender "is a way in which social practice is ordered" (p.71). However, when we categorise people based on their appearance and behavioural cues, gender can also produce systemic, identity-based discrimination and segregation in a culture where, for example, the construction of gender places men and masculinity above women and femininity in social sorting. For instance, where the social construction and ranking of gender upholds a system of masculine power by favouring those "institutions and practices that are male dominated, and/or representative of masculine traits and styles" (Peterson & Runyan, 1993, p.18), it can cause individuals to behave differently in order to achieve the idealised expectations, thereby leaving those who challenge the power differentials to face the consequences of non-conformance.

Although all levels of society are expected to act in accordance with these defined roles, this paper will focus solely on the romanticised masculine institution of the West and the 'highly' gendered cowboy as 'he' has been unremittingly held up as an idealised version of manhood. Many may reject the masculine cowboy, and ultimately challenge the overall gendered binary; however, some individuals will conflate their own identity in order to abide by the cultural norms as dictated by society. This is especially the case during the period of the Stampede. As opposed to discussing all the intricacies of masculinity, which would far exceed the scope of this paper, the following section will discuss the most relevant discourse in relation to my research on gender and performance within the confines of the Calgary Stampede.

## 2.4. What does it mean to be a man?

What does it mean to be a man? Is 'being a man' something we (as men) personally ascribe to or something we are expected to behave according to? In reality, it is, in most cases, both; however, there is no single correct or concrete definition of what it means to be a man. It is contentious. However, there are concepts associated with men which deserve further discussion, namely the concept of masculinity and the common themes and stereotypes associated with it; specifically, dominance, power, control, independence, athleticism, etc. All have been used to describe men in a positive way; however, in broader social discourse, these same words can be and often are used in a negative way. Why are these words important, and why are they constantly ascribed to men? More importantly, why do men ascribe to them? What makes a man (or boy) look to these terms and their associated characteristic and traits for some sort of value? Why is masculinity synonymous with being a man?<sup>8</sup>

## 2.5. Masculinity Studies

The interdisciplinary field of masculinity studies aims at analysis that incorporates insights from cultural, social, historical or political scholarship which examines masculinity within individuals and communities. It is relatively new in the field of gender inquiry<sup>9</sup>, and is an offshoot and counterweight to feminist theory which undeniably adds significant value in relation to understanding the complexities between gender and power. This field of study is particularly relevant in the way it studies not the actions of men but how their role as gendered beings in society shapes these attitudes and actions.

## 2.6. Difficult to define

Because masculinity, or masculinities, can be difficult to define, as noted by Clatterbough (1998) and again by Hearn (1996), the terms are used in inconsistent ways

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<sup>8</sup> Although masculinity can be ascribed to female bodies and is often expressed in a similar manner to males, this study focuses exclusively on cis boys and men, as they are often linked to patriarchal power and privilege.

<sup>9</sup> For an excellent summary on the history of gender studies see Chapter 1, in Marchbank & Letherby's (2014)

by different authors and researchers. Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994) are supportive of this as they reject a fixed masculine essence, noting multiple masculinities and ambiguous meanings that can alter depending on the context. Connell (2001), in her aptly titled, *Understanding Men*, also reiterates this point, noting the terms “are often used in ways that imply a simplified and static notion of identity, or rest on a simplified and unrealistic notion of difference between men” (Connell, 2001, p.20). Due to the lack of concrete definitions, the terms are arguably open to interpretations which are dependent on the researchers’ analysis and perspective. Furthermore, the terms masculinity, manhood, and manly, are all used interchangeably to describe or define men (or women). For instance, numerous articles<sup>10</sup> use the words in both historical and modern context without differentiating between particular historically imbedded meanings.

There are writers who disagree with the generic use of these labels in discussions that range across different historical periods and point to the differences between meanings over time. For instance, Gail Bederman (1995) in *Manliness and Civilisation*, illustrates how the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the Western concept of ‘manliness’, encompassed a moral dimension. In this regard, manliness referred more to character or conduct worthy of man and assumed standard Victorian norms, such as self-restraint, a powerful will, and a strong moral character. However, Bederman also specifically contends that masculinity during this period was “devoid of moral or emotional meaning” and instead referred to any characteristics that all men ostensibly had (p. 18). All men were considered, virtually by definition, masculine. Bederman does acknowledge that, by the mid-twentieth century, ‘masculinity’ had developed into the mix of ideal traits, with which we are more familiar today, including modern western ideals, such as aggressiveness, athleticism, stoicism, and independence. Kimmel (1994a), in *Consuming Manhood: The Feminisation of American Culture and the Recreation of the Male Body*, equates manhood with masculinity, stating that manhood, since the 1830s, has been based on proving one’s own masculinity.

Kimmel (1994b), using a contemporary model called ‘marketplace masculinity’, argues that masculinity is based on proving one’s manhood through the accumulation of

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<sup>10</sup> The media often uses the terms without differentiating between the imbedded meanings. For instance, see M.I. Blacks (2018) op ed., *The Boys Are Not Alright*, or D.B. Wilson’s (1990) article, *Manhood, Manliness, Masculinity*.

wealth in the sphere of economic competition. As the western ideal of manhood demands self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and self-control (Brod, 2018), the accumulation of goods (wealth, power, and capital) is considered a true sign of success; manhood is thereby validated.

With no clear definition of what it means to be a man and, arguably, no concrete definition of masculinity, both terms remain ambiguous. Masculinity, in general, refers to the social roles, behaviours, characteristics and meanings ascribed, and by extension prescribed, to men in any society at any one time (Beynon, 2010). In this regard, masculinity can be viewed as a set of social practices and cultural representations typically associated with being a man.<sup>11</sup>

## **2.7. Masculinity and Culture**

As noted by Bederman (1995) and Kimmel (1996), masculinity is never free from cultural influences. Culture shapes and expresses masculinity “differently at different times in different circumstances in different places by individuals and groups” (Beynon, 2010, p.2). This is also supported by Connell (2005) who considers masculinity to be a configuration of practice that may follow different trajectories and is “always liable to internal contradiction[s] and historical disruption[s] (p.73). As masculinity varies both historically and culturally, this suggests that there is not a single type of masculinity, but rather many masculinities, each with its own specific characteristics and features that can be adapted to meet the different objectives of the culture (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Morrell, 1998). As such, masculinity can be socially constructed to fit an individual’s, or society’s needs and, as those circumstances change, the practices can be contested and (re)constructed. It is neither static, timeless, nor fixed.

However, as cultures present their own idealised version of masculinity depending on the ‘particular situations’, not all masculinities are equal; some are dominant, some are complicit, and some are progressive, while others are subordinated or marginalised (Courtenay, 2000). Although there are definite social relations among

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<sup>11</sup> These understandings of the masculine are often formed in relation to understandings of the feminine as these concepts interact with and inform one another.

the variants (Connell, 2005), the patterns of conduct in western society often promote the hegemonic form over the others. This hegemonic form often dictates what is culturally appropriate, which in turn is reproduced as the culturally appropriate way to think, act and interact. In fact, this hegemonic form of masculinity currently embodies the most honoured way of being a man and requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it (Donaldson, 1993; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

## 2.8. Hegemonic Masculinity

The concept of hegemony derives from Antonio Gramsci's analysis of class relations and refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life through mobilisation and demobilisation (Connell, 2005). In his writings, Gramsci called this complex process 'hegemony', which, in basic terms, is a means of maintaining class domination through persuasion. This is done partially by convincing a greater part of the population that the ruling class's ideas are just common sense. The concept of hegemony then helps to understand the "position of dominance attained through relative consensus rather than regular force, even if underpinned by force" (Jewkes, et. al, 2015, p. 113).

The literature on hegemonic masculinity is quite extensive, and the concept has been widely used, debated, and refined (Hearn 2004; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Regardless, it has generally been theorised as a legitimate, protected, normative form of elite masculinity, which is "always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women" (Connell, 1987, p.183), ensuring that gender relations are (re)produced through actions and behaviours. In this regard, hegemonic masculinity is a belief system imposed by the ruling class as a set of societal norms, which are then perceived as beneficial to society, when it is only beneficial to the ruling class, as is it helps maintain the status quo. As the hegemonic definition of manhood is "a man *in* power, a man *with* power, and a man *of* power"<sup>12</sup> (Kimmel, 1994b, p.124), it identifies and delineates the attitudes and practices men use to perpetuate this inequality, between men, and between men and women. It is important to note, however, that although hegemonic masculinity has been defined as the culturally idealised form (Donaldson, 1993), only a few actually achieve it. In this regard, it is largely aspirational.

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<sup>12</sup> Italics his.

Despite this, the research in this area can be essential as the hegemonic form of masculinity is valued above all other expressions and must, for this reason, be clearly analysed and understood. This is especially the case during the period of the Stampede, where men celebrate and aspire to reach the dominant form of masculinity which becomes, in this instance, the cowboy.

## 2.9. Hegemonic Masculinity and Race

As hegemonic masculinity legitimises men's dominant social position and justifies the subordination of other men, the normative standards can also be used to measure against other forms of masculinity in a cross-cultural comparison (Connell, 2005). In this regard, it can cause people from a dominant group to associate different traits of masculinity with different racial groups in order to uphold their own 'normative' form while ensuring the subordination of 'others' (Ferber, 2000). For instance, the dominant image of the African American male in Western<sup>13</sup> civilisation used to be ugly, violent, and hyper-sexual in contrast with the 'true' account of Western manliness (Shaw & Tan, 2014). The purpose of this stereotype, besides racial demonization, was to provide a contrast in relation to the white, western image of hegemonic masculinity. As a result, this research can also lead to a better understanding of the interaction between race and hegemonic masculinity.

## 2.10. Performance and Hegemony

As previously discussed, masculinity can be constructed to fit the needs of society by dictating what is culturally appropriate and which traits are considered the pinnacle of manhood. Masculine traits are the result of learning and do not inherently reside in men. Instead, they are developed through the ongoing and repetitive practice of dialogue and actions (Sheerin and Linehan, 2018). In *Masculine Style: The American West and Literary Modernism* (2011), Worden supports this view, observing that the "commands to walk, talk, act, and take it like a man, make it clear that masculinity does not reside in a male body but instead in a series of performance gestures and public presentations" (p.1). This is also one of the central tenets of Butler (1988), who asserts

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<sup>13</sup> The term Western here is in reference to Western (European) civilisation and culture not the Western frontier.

that gender performativity is a “stylised repetition of acts, an imitation or miming of the dominant conventions of gender” (Fitzgerald & Grossman, 2018, p.40). In fact, Butler (1988) argues “the act that one does, that act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that’s been going on before one arrived on the scene” (p.526).

However, these gender performative ‘acts’ also produces a series of effects. This means that these acts of performativity can also change social and cultural expectations. In this regard, acting in a certain way can change how an individual is perceived. For instance, if someone walks, talks, and dresses in a more masculine manner, they will (can) be viewed as more masculine. Butler also notes that an important aspect in relation to this performativity is the repetitiveness of the acts, comparing it to “a ritualised production” (Butler, 2011, p.60). Butler notes (2011) that if specific acts are repeated over and over, in time our view of what is normal will change. Thus, the performative, repetitive acts then help (re)enforce the societal norms. As masculinity and masculine traits do not reside in men, gender is a process which comes into being as a consequence of performativity. Masculinity is literally a performance constituted of speech and silence, of action and inaction.

## **2.11. Hegemonic Masculinity in Practice**

Gender is constructed through performance, which, in turn, is influenced by the dominant conventions of gender. Culture thereby serves as a cause and effect of this type of behaviour. Because the western vision of masculinity equates manhood with power, wherein “masculine power is valued over the feminine” (Kivel & Johnson, 2009, p.111), hegemonic masculinity secures and maintains this dominance (Connell, 2005; Donaldson, 1993). Men’s expression of this ‘dominant’ masculine identity through their body, personality, and culture (Kivel & Johnson, 2009), continually (re)produces inequality and societal stereotypes, while ensuring gender roles remain intact. For instance, Sheerin and Linehan in *Gender performativity and hegemonic masculinity in investment management* (2018), argue that a masculine culture is reproduced daily and, within the investment management environment, “women are expected to perform in a confident, aggressive, ruthless and performance-driven manner to survive” <sup>14</sup> (p.7). This, however, is still not enough to ensure a woman’s success because the ‘traditional men’

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<sup>14</sup> Common terms associated with masculinity.

who dominate the field only promote men who resemble themselves. In fact, women who act in what is deemed the appropriate manner are often criticised or labelled as difficult to deal with.

## **2.12. The Importance of Hegemony and Masculinity**

Placing hegemonic masculinity in a historical moment and cultural context allows researchers to examine how, at that moment, in that culture and particular social setting, the construction of masculinity sets boundaries (Johnson 2008; Butler, 1988; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Although “the actual personalities of the majority of men may show little correspondence with the cultural ideals of masculinity” (Mackinnon, 2003 p.9), men “often feel obligated, consciously or unconsciously, to perform masculinity in specific ways that are dependent upon the current cultural climate” (Johnson, 2008, p.386). For instance, as “femininity stands for a society in which social gender roles overlap, where both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life” (Hofstede, 2001, p.297), the rejection of anything feminine through the repetitive practice of dialogue and actions not only regulates social behaviour but also constrains it (Butler, 1988). In addition, as pervasive images of masculinity communicate that ‘real men’ are physically strong, aggressive and in control (Brod & Kaufman, 1987), or that ‘real men’ are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success (Hofstede, 1981), it can also condition men to act in a certain way in order to live up to those expectations, even though most will never achieve that goal. However, as one of the precepts of masculinity is that some men are inherently considered more manly than other men (Kimmel, 1994), men can, through performative gestures, (re)position themselves within the masculine society. For instance, during the period of the Stampede, it is possible that some men use the attire to (re)position themselves as the ‘hegemonic’ man. As such, research into the dominant form of masculinity in particular contexts, like the Stampede, is essential<sup>15</sup> in order to reveal how that dominant form creates a hierarchical social structure that can then result in profound effects on all levels of society.

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<sup>15</sup> However, this does not discount other forms of masculinity as they are just as essential in research.

## 2.13. Masculine Traits

One of the principle concepts in relation to masculinity are the traits assigned to men. Research also indicates that there is no one single character trait or universal characteristic to define manhood, manliness, or masculinity. In fact, as noted by Beynon (2002) there are “multiple characteristics/traits associated with men, and diverse ways for men to operate within the gender order” (p.2). In the numerous journals, articles, chapters, and books dedicated to manhood, manliness, or masculinity, there are an assortment of character traits, or forms of domination and collective male practices associated with men.

The following chart offers a loose assortment of terms which are commonly associated with men in masculinity studies.<sup>16</sup> This table was created by the author from terms commonly used to describe men. The original sources are in the footnotes.

**Table 1: Traits Associated with Masculinity**

Aggressive	Alpha male	Athletic	Ambitious	Analytical
Assertive	Breadwinner	Calm	Capable	Collected
Competitive	Confident	Control/ling	Courage	Directed
Dominant	Easy-going	Effective	Focused	Forceful
Hard	Heterosexual	Heteronormative	Honourable	In control
Independent	Inexpressive	Invulnerable	Machismo	Materialistic
Patriarchal	Physical	Pioneer	Power/ful	Predator
Privilege	Protective	Promiscuous	Risk-Taker	Ruling Class
Self-restrained	Self-sufficient	Sexual	Smart	Stoic/ism
Straight	Strong	Success/ful	Tough	Violent

To be associated with the Western vision of manhood a man must possess at least a few of the attributes detailed in Table 1. In fact, the more attributes the better because society places higher value on men who hold and maintain the dominant cultural standards. Not all men buy into these stereotypes, nor do the actual personalities of the majority of men correspond with these cultural ideals (Connell,

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<sup>16</sup> For instance, in regard to my research, the following researchers use the terms in some form to describe men: Beynon, (2010); Brod & Kaufman, 1994; Connell, 2005; Courtenay, 2000; De Visser & Smith, 2006; Donaldson, 1993; Giaccardi, et al., 2017, Herbst, et al. 2014; Hinote & Webber, 2012; Hofstede, 2001; Kimmel, 1996; Jackson, 1991; Morrell, 1998; Pascoe, 2011; Sheerin & Linehan, 2018; Worden, 2011. This list is virtually endless.

2005). However, research indicates men and boys are often compelled to endorse these gendered societal prescriptions (Beynon, 2002). Since masculinity is socially constructed rather than innate and men and boys are also active agents in (re)constructing the dominant norms (Butler, 1988; Courtney, 2000), there is social pressure to conform (Kimmel, 1994), especially as society quickly labels and reprimands (Pascoe, 2011) those who do not conform.

**Note:** Although this paper refers to hegemonic masculinity and the/its variants of masculinities, it by no mean assumes or suggests that all men necessarily ascribe to the views and traits described. In addition, although a range of other masculinities exist (inclusive, hybrid, subordinate, complicit, etc.), this thesis will focus primarily on the hegemonic form. Furthermore, I will use the terms manhood, masculinity, and manly interchangeably as all have been used to describe the heroic cowboy or define men in a historical and modern context.

## **Chapter 3. The Authentic Cowboy**

### **3.1. Historical Roots of the Cowboy**

The historical roots of the cowboy reach back to the Mexican cattle herder, the vaquero, who had toiled on Spanish colonial ranches supplying the farmsteads with daily agricultural support (breeding and branding of cattle), which also included the maintenance of the ranches (Malone, 1971). In the early 1700s, as cattle ranching spread north into what is now Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico, the vaquero followed, eventually settling in the American Southwest (Ramirez, 1979). In 1769, when the livestock industry spread to California via the Franciscan missions, the industry began to flourish (Ramirez, 1979). However, as very few markets existed for the end products (cattle, meat, hides, and tallow), long trains of pack mules would transport the products to Mexico City (Casto, 2017). It was not until the early 1880s that American ships began to service Californian ports, thus creating a local market for the Missions, necessitating large scale roundups to collect cattle. As the 'hard-riding' vaqueros were known for their expert horsemanship and roping skills, controlling the chaos with ease (Casto, 2017), many were employed to collect and bring the cattle to market. In fact, the vaqueros were said to "only dismount for a chance to dance with pretty girls" (Casto, 2017, n.p).

After the United States of America's annexation of Texas in 1845, the cattle industry increased about 30 percent annually, causing an equivalent increase in the number of cattle handlers (Fishwick, 1952). Accordingly, many of the vaqueros went to work on the new Anglo-American ranches, teaching the Anglos how to handle cattle and imparting much of their folklore and ranching savvy (Slatta, 2008). Despite this, there was still no recognizable 'cowboy' stereotype; this would come at a much later time.

### **3.2. The 'Golden Age' – American**

Although the cattle industry and popular interest in the early 'cowboy' type had increased during the evolution of the vaquero, this ended abruptly with the start of the US Civil War in 1861, as many southern ranchers left their farms to fight for the Confederate Army. Ranching was further affected by Lincoln's declaration of a blockade on southern ports, thus prohibiting all commercial dealings with the South and putting an

immediate halt to the industry (Fishwick, 1952). Over the course of the war, the Union Army had used up the large supply of beef in the North. As a result, at the end of the Civil War in 1865, the cattle industry quickly revitalized and, by 1866, cattle were being rounded up in the South by the millions and 'driven' towards the railroad depots and markets (MacLachlan, 2006). This was the initial impetus that stimulated the southern cattle industry, with Texas becoming one of the leading suppliers of beef (Moore, 2014). However, it was actually the American expansion into the west, which resulted in a cattle boom that "staggered the imagination" (Fishwick, 1952, p.80). It is estimated that, following the early expansion west, the number of cattle increased from 11,000 to 520,000 in Wyoming; 26,000 to 430,000 in Montana; and 71,000 to 791,000 in Colorado by the 1870s (Fishwick, 1952). As the cattle industry increased, there was increased demand for labour, and many ex-confederates, African-Americans, Native Americans, vaqueros, and Anglos rushed in to fill the relatively new and expanding occupation of a 'cowboy' (Durham, 1955; Bernstein, 2007).<sup>17</sup> Because the vaqueros and their skills were an essential component of the industry, many of the new rural workers adopted their horsemanship, their technology, and their social and economic structure. However, with a significant number of English-speaking traders and settlers also migrating, the vaquero began themselves to transform their lifestyle, clothing and languages, as they began merging with standard English<sup>18</sup> cultural traditions. It was ultimately this fusion that produced the traditional American 'cowboy' (Malone, 1971). During this period of expansion, 'the golden years'<sup>19</sup>, the traditional figure of the American cowboy emerged as a distinctive form of frontier white rural worker.

### **3.3. End of the American 'Golden Age' of Cowboydom.**

In the 'golden age', the American cowboy was essentially a product of post-war demographics and economics (Seiler & Seiler, 1998; Dempsey, 1995), and his job was dependent on a vibrant cattle industry. However, when the economic boom ended quite suddenly in the late 1880s, it brought an end to the open-range and the cattle industry,

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<sup>17</sup> It is estimated the cattle industry created jobs for 35,000 - 40,000 'cowboys' and kept millions of workers in the East and Midwest busy processing meat products, which was substantial considering the relatively short time the industry flourished (Seiler & Seiler, 1998; Frank, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> English in this context refers to the American traders.

<sup>19</sup> Roughly from the 1860-1880s.

which unfortunately impacted the traditional cowboy's livelihood. For instance, poor range management often led to overgrazing, which put downward pressure on agricultural productivity (Felske & Rasporich, 2004). Conversely, mismanagement also caused overproduction, which, in turn affected cattle prices (Wcykoff, 1999). Consequently, many ranches failed, forcing cowboys to move on or find other means of support. The Panic of 1873, an economic crisis which gripped the nation until 1879 (Panic of 1873, 1891), also impacted the industry. When the investors who had previously backed American projects, began to sell their interests, banks failed, factories closed, and thousands lost their jobs (VanderCreek, n.d). As the cattle industry was closely linked to Eastern financial interests; cattle prices plummeted and continued to fall through 1885 (Webb, 1931), resulting in an extended period of very little profit.

As the prices continued to fall, the disastrous blizzard of 1886-87, 'The Big Die-Up', resulted in the deaths of thousands of cattle as the temperature reached fifty below zero in some parts of the West. Although the total losses were difficult to report, it was estimated that up to 90 percent of the herds in the open range were destroyed (Wheeler, 1991). As a result, many small ranches went out of business (Briggs, 1934), with a few of the large cattle companies declaring bankruptcy.

A last, and perhaps one of the most pervasive factors to affect cowboy life and put an end to the open range was the massive influx of migrants who had moved into the plains to settle (Webb, 1931). Although the Homestead Act of 1862 encouraged western settlement by providing 160 acres of 'unoccupied'<sup>20</sup> land to settlers, migration was initially slow. In the post-war years, however, as the west opened, thousands moved into the advancing frontier in order to lay claim to the free land.<sup>21</sup> Small farming operations became the norm as settlers moved in, and the land became more privatised and centralized,<sup>22</sup> which was partially due to the invention of barbed wire which kept the cattle from running free. This allowed many of the homesteaders to take over the functions previously performed by the cowboy (Webb; 1931; Dessain, 1970; Mclean,

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<sup>20</sup> The land was hardly unoccupied as the Indigenous population were still free to roam.

<sup>21</sup> In the end, 1.6 million individual claims were approved, which accounted for roughly 420,000 miles of territory (Becoming Us, n.d.)

<sup>22</sup> Centralised in this context, means the land was often controlled under one single authority.

1982). As the barbed wire also kept unwanted steers off their lands, it eventually brought an end to the 'open-range', and the authentic cowboys who had inhabited it.

### **3.4. The 'Golden Age' – Canadian**

Despite the overwhelming impression of the 'cowboy' being an American cultural icon, which it undeniably is, Canada had its own 'golden age' of cowboydom<sup>23</sup>, which also resulted in a Canadian rendition of this iconic figure, although to a much more confined degree. The Canadian 'cowboy' occupied a fairly small region which included the Columbia basin and the southern interior plateau of British Columbia, southwestern Alberta, and southwestern Saskatchewan (Seiler & Seiler, 1998). In terms of ranching technology, the frontier was an extension of its southern counterparts (Washington, Montana, Dakota Territories) (MacLachlan, 2006); however, the physical conditions of the ranching areas worked against the 'open-range' in favour of a more mixed operation free-range. In this regard, the cattle were enclosed within a ranging area that was typically leased as opposed to roaming freely regardless of land ownership. As a result, Canadian ranching community and the cattle industry were somewhat distinct from their American counterparts.

Although the cattle industry in Canada developed during essentially the same period as in Wyoming and Montana, the industry remained initially quite small (Jennings, 2015; MacLachlan, 2006) because it was not able to develop at the same rate. The West's Indigenous population was still free to occupy their own land, and the cattle herds often competed with the buffalo when grazing, so it was initially impractical to consider ranching on a grander scale (Dempsey, 1995). However, as all available land became Crown land after the removal of the Indigenous population onto reserves, and the buffalo herds were practically extinct<sup>24</sup> by the late 1870s, many felt the prairie lands were far too rich to lie fallow and government surveyors began travelling throughout the countryside marking township lines and railway lines, readying the land for exploitation (Dempsey, 1995).

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<sup>23</sup> Roughly 1880-1910.

<sup>24</sup> There was never any form of progressive extermination of the Buffalo in Canada, unlike its American counterpart, however, the Canadian government did nothing to preserve the herds (Roe, 1934).

In 1881, the federal government recognised the importance of land in relation to the cattle industry and passed legislation by order-in-council which stipulated a person or company could lease up to one hundred thousand acres of grazing land with the only requirement being one head of cattle for every ten acres (Johnston & MacKinnon, 1982). Thus, for an investor to lease the full amount of land, a herd of ten thousand cattle was needed. By the late 1880s, Canadians, from the east, and Britons with the right credentials<sup>25</sup> dominated the industry (Jennings, 2015; Seiler & Seiler, 1988). Collectively, they had placed over 4.4 million acres under lease, with sixteen ranches reaching the maximum 100,000 acres (Foran, 2003). As the leasing regulations encouraged large-scale ranching, they also required the importation of cattle. As a result, the Canadian herds were purchased south of the border, and American cowboys were hired as the ‘drovers’ (McLean, 1988; Dempsey, 1995; MacLachlan, 2006). In 1880, roughly one-thousand head were imported, with six thousand arriving the following year, and sixteen thousand the next (Dempsey, 1995). By the early 1900s, the Albertan cattle population reached about 325,000 through importing and subsequent breeding (Johnston & Mackinnon 1982).

At its formation, the ranching community was overwhelmingly Anglo-Canadian and British (McLean, 1982; Jennings, 2015), and British mores and values were deemed the most acceptable (Dempsey, 1995). However, after the American ‘drovers’ arrived, many opted to stay, and, by the early 1890s, the ranching community had changed (McLean, 1982; Seiler & Seiler 1998). While still overwhelmingly Anglo-Canadian, with roughly 80% coming from eastern Canada, 17% of the community were Americans who were indistinguishable from their Canadian counterparts (Jennings, 2015). Although many of the Americans maintained their customs and traditions during the ‘golden age’, they also absorbed some of the unique qualities of the Canadian west, creating a new standard of man – the Canadian cowboy (Dempsey, 1995).

In contrast to the free-ranging ideals of the American cowboy, many of the Canadian ranches were the “product of government initiative and development within a well-established legal framework” (Felske & Rasporich, 2005, p.162) and ultimately controlled and supervised by middle and upper-class easterners, (Jennings, 2015). This external control then led to an ethos in the community and the cowboys of the Canadian

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<sup>25</sup> Friends of the Conservative government (Seiler and Seiler, 1998).

West that was deeply conservative<sup>26</sup> (Felske & Rasporich, 2005). Throughout, the basic dress and lingo remained utilitarian.

### **3.5. End of the Canadian 'Golden Age' of Cowboydom.**

Similar to its southern counterpart, the Canadian cowboy was also a by-product of economics (MacLachlan, 2006; Mclean, 1982; Johnston & Mackinnon 1982), and a sequence of events that began in the late 1880s brought an end to this form of ranching and the aforementioned 'cowboys', putting an end the Canadian 'golden age' (Foran, 1988; Seiler & Seiler, 1998, Dempsey, 1995). For instance, the blizzard of 1886-87 was just as severe in Alberta. The average loss of cattle was approximately 25% in Calgary, and about 50% percent in the surrounding areas. (Jennings, 2015). As a result, the community suffered significant losses; a few shareholders lost their entire investment, and several companies were forced into bankruptcy (Johnston & Mackinnon 1982). The ranges could have been replenished with more cattle 'driven' north, but, due to Canadian import duties then coming into effect, it was not economically feasible (Jennings, 2015). In addition, because of the crippling losses, many of the American migrants returned home as cattle prices continued to drop (MacLachlan, 2006). A second factor which influenced the end of the industry was the influx of homesteaders (Johnston & Mackinnon, 1982). While the original leasing system had barred settlement on Crown Lands, the federal government changed the system in 1886, allowing settlements on lands not under the previous twenty-one-year leases. Although the changing policy had little impact on the larger ranges, the federal government cancelled the larger leases in 1896, and the ranchers could only purchase 10% of their original leaseholds. As only the more affluent ranches purchased the maximum amount and were successful in leasing the remainder, there was nothing to stop settlers from encroaching on the land and settling (Johnston & Mackinnon, 1982; Dempsey, 1995). Plus, with the introduction of barbed wire, fences began to appear throughout the ranges sectioning off new land for homesteaders (Webb, 1931; Mclean, 1982)

In 1902, a second cattle boom took place; there were small ranches located just across the US border, and larger ranches moved further into the Dominion territory.

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<sup>26</sup> Many of the early ranchers were also retired Mounted Police, which added both stability and tone to the community (Jennings, 2015).

However, in 1905 the new Minister of the Interior, Frank Oliver, who described the ranchers as pampered, tightened lease regulations by inserting a two-year cancellation clause (Dempsey, 1995; Jennings, 2015). In response, the industry moved into areas where it was not in direct competition with homestead interests, but, according to Foran (2003), these regulations promulgated by an unsympathetic government represented the “death knell” (Foran as quoted in Jennings, 2015 p. 232) for the industry.

Although, in the second ‘boom’, the number of cattle doubled reaching an estimated 1.5 million, another disastrous winter (1906-07) essentially finished the “devastation that homesteaders, depressed prices, and leasing regulations had begun” (Dempsey, 1995, p. 144). By 1910, it was all over, and the ‘golden age’ of Canadian ranching and the cowboy who toiled alongside it, became a “cherished way of life, not an economic system” (Jennings, 2015, p.232).

Cowboys emerged from a distinctive form of frontier agricultural work during the colonial expansion<sup>27</sup> of North America, and their skills as a ‘drover’ or ‘ranch hand’ were indispensable. Despite this, none of the comforts of a civilised life were made available to them (Dessain, 1970). Cowboys often lived outdoors for extended periods of time, enduring all types of weather and natural disasters while wrangling with range-wars, robbers, squatters, hunters, predators, and the Indigenous people who often resisted colonial expansion (Roosevelt & Remington, 1888; Webb, 1931; McLean, 1982; Johnston & Mackinnon, 1982; Gondola, 2016). In addition, the transportation of cattle was often difficult as herds were frequently lost in the range and died. As well, there were always risks of stampedes (Dempsey, 1995). In addition to this, many ranchers lived lonely lives and worked long hours for little pay. They also ate poorly, slept very little, and often died at a young age (Dempsey 1995). As noted by William Savage Jr., (1976), the historical cowboy was “a hired man, a rugged individual without capital in the employ of an enterprising individual with capital” (As quoted in Felske & Rasporich, 2005, p.157). Life was lonely, repetitive, and physically demanding.

When the traditional era of ranching ended, the traditional cowboy’s job also ended; however, society continued to celebrate the drover and ranch hand. As the

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<sup>27</sup>Despite using the term expansion in regard to the colonial acquisition of land, which often posits the cowboy as an agent of change, this thesis will use the language of that narrative even though I am fully aware of the violence this masks.

cowboy was an important component of Western expansion, the immediate public sentiment romanticising the cowboy was not surprising. Why, however, does the image still resonate with people today? Why has 'his' image persisted? The answer is simple: It's the Masculinity, Stupid!<sup>28</sup> (Katz, 2010).

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<sup>28</sup> Katz (2010) uses this quote in relation the media and the presidency; however, it is fitting in my context. Numerous have donned the cowboy hat in an effort to present themselves as more western and authentic. For example, Madeline Albright, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, the majority of Albertan politicians, and practically every Prime Minister from Ottawa who has visited the Albertan West.

## Chapter 4. Creation of the Mythical Cowboy

### 4.1. Early Literature

*He was a youth of an age somewhere between sixteen and twenty, trim and compactly built, with a preponderance of muscular development and animal spirits; broad and deep of chest, with square, ironcast shoulders; limbs small yet like bars of steel, and a grace of position in the saddle rarely equalled...<sup>29</sup>*

*(Edward Wheeler)*

Traditional cowboys were an integral element within the cattle industry, and, without their skills and expertise, it is possible the industry may not have progressed as it did. As a result, there is a considerable amount of research illustrating the importance of the cowboy to economic development (Seiler & Seiler, 1998; Dempsey, 1995; Mclean, 1982; MacLachlan, 2006). There is also, however, a fair amount of research which places no real value on the cowboy. In fact, when he appeared in early public prints and writings, he was often referred to as someone “rough, uncouth, shaggy, and dirty, whose behaviour was violent, barbarous, and rowdy” (Kimmel, 2005, p.29): in other words, not very appealing.

In the late 1800s, when the cowboy first started to appear in Western dime novels, writers began to portray him as a “noble descendent of chivalric knights and crusaders” (Kimmel, 2006, p. 152) rather than writing realistically about a poor transient worker endlessly herding cattle.

The cowboy transformed from ‘hired hand’ to ‘hero’ though this medium and accounts of his activities quickly spread, transforming the cowboy into one of the most prominent figures in the mythology of the Western frontier, a definitive western hero. Although the dime novels were regarded as a cheap, sensationalist form of literature, they became an early source of information on cowboys and Western life (Moon & Ogle, 2013). The common characteristics attributed to the cowboy in literature came to define the cowboy and ‘his’ form of rural masculinity. He was a nascent model of manhood.

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<sup>29</sup> From Woodside’s (2016) *The Nineteenth-Century Dime Western, Boyhood, and Empowered Adolescence* (p.11). It was used to describe Deadwood Dick a dime novel protagonist.

The following chart offers a loose assortment of terms which are commonly associated with the cowboy.<sup>30</sup> This table was created by the author from terms commonly used to describe the heroic cowboy. The original sources are in the footnotes.

**Table 2: Traits Associated with the Cowboy**

Adventurous	Brave	Calm	Courageous	Confident
Heroic	Honourable	Independent	Individualistic	In control
Iron-nerved	Modest	Pioneer	Rough & tumble	Self-reliant
Steel-thewed	Strong	Tough	Truthful	Violent

The new lands provided endless opportunities for conflicts, both real and perceived, with stories depicted in exaggerated detail that allowed audiences to follow the adventures of the ‘pioneers’ and cheer for their heroes as their actions were deemed necessary (Fishwick, 1952; White 1981). As fiction has long been the means for people to escape their everyday lives<sup>31</sup> (Peñaloza, 2001), the cowboy went from literary obscurity to completely dominating a new market within a few short years, helped along by the fact that these stories glorified Western expansion and depicted a romanticised version of frontier life (Huxley, 2018; Jones, 1970).

The dime novels certainly had an effect on the American psyche and one of the early advocates to reinforce this myth through non-fiction was Theodore Roosevelt. In 1888, after spending a few years on his ranch in Dakota Territory<sup>32</sup> (1884-1886), Roosevelt wrote a book on his experience in the ‘bad lands’ (1888). Although he met and chronicled an assortment of characters during this time, it was the cowboy that made a strong impression as he described the heroic cowboy figure as “the grim pioneer of our race”, who “prepare[d] the way for civilisation” (Fishwick, 1952, p.83). This further instilled the cowboy as a ‘heroic’ figure; with Roosevelt himself becoming a fine model of

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<sup>30</sup> For instance, in regard to my research the following researchers use the terms in some form to describe the cowboy: Fishwick, 1952; Gibson, 2016; Gondola, 2016; Huxley, 2018, Jones, 1970; Macauley, 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Although initially the fictional world of the Wild West was quite small in Canada, this changed by the end of the nineteenth century, as the cowboy’s influence reached across the border (Seiler & Seiler, 1998).

<sup>32</sup> Now known as North and South Dakota.

American cowboy masculinity (Woodside, 2016) telling prolific tales of cattle drives, punching a drunk in a bar, and tracking down three outlaws (Smith, 2016).

Although Roosevelt's supposed first-hand experience reinforced the masculine stereotype of the early cowboy, similar passages were duplicated in dozens of books creating a more generalised picture (Fishwick, 1952). The same stories were produced over and over, and, as audience demand increased, prolific writers continued to subscribe to the concept and reproduced a "mythical lifestyle that revolved around a horse, open space, white privilege and country values (Baker, 2014, p.7), in order to continually appeal to the market. In this regard, all other facets of the frontier (race, gender, the vaquero, African Americans, Indigenous people) were ignored or pushed aside while instilling and upholding the "Western norms which had become defined as American" (Mitchell, 2003, p.148). However, there was no specific hero, but rather a generalised stock form of 'cowboy' and his values.

With countless books dedicated to the 'cowboy' one might expect that the need for more variety might generate some inclusive literature; this was not the case. The literature specifically targeted, championed, and reinforced white male superiority (Fishwick 1952; Martin, 1966; Mitchell, 2003; Baker, 2014), while ignoring factual evidence. Many have questioned the non-inclusion, especially as multiple ethnicities<sup>33</sup> contributed to the development of the industry and the making of the West (Durham, 1955; Bernstein, 2007). Walter P. Webb, in his book, *The Great Plains*, (1931) offers a brilliant insight into this matter. Webb, who asked several Western story editors about their reasons for the continuing stereotype found that,

"it is by us, and should be understood by everyone, that we are dealing with the popularity of Western stories as concerns readers who are white...the white race has always been noted for being hard-drinking, hard-fighting, fearless, fair and square. The heroes of Western stories have these characteristics" (p.467)

As a result, although multi-ethnic cowboys may have participated in reality, in fiction they were "confronted with a colour line over which [they] could not ride" (Durham, 1955, p. 291).

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<sup>33</sup> It is estimated 25 percent of an approximate 35,000-40,000 cowboys were African American (Frank, 2019).

Certain stock character traits appear in virtually every story. In many of the tales<sup>34</sup> the cowboy normally starts out alone. Eventually he comes across some form of community and, even though he is an outsider, he ends up pitching in when needed. He is *chivalrous*<sup>35</sup> and not afraid of *hard work* (Huxley, 2018). Despite this, he maintains his *freedom* in direct contrast to outside influences (Herbst et al., 2014). The hero is also fiercely *independent* (Wright, 2001). He has no boss and no rigid schedule. He can choose his own path and ultimately answers only to himself. The hero is also *tough* and *stoic* (Basso, McCall & Garceau, 2013). Whether he's valiantly *conquering* a wild animal or *conquering* the bad lands and its inhabitants, he brings peace and *progress* (Roosevelt & Remington, 1888). The heroic cowboy can handle any situation and refrains from expressing pain even in the direst circumstances. He's always *in control* (Szreniawksa, 2012). He is "rough and ready" (Seiler & Seiler, 1998, p. 302), one on hand and the "epitome of honesty, freedom, and hard work" (Dempsey, 1995, p.32) on the other. In addition to these traits the cowboy is also prone to *violence*, but only as a means of justice and social control or to preserve social harmony (Moore, 2014). He knows the difference between right and wrong and is not afraid to set someone *straight*, especially when defending his *honour* (White, 1981). He is a *good* man to have with you, and a *fiend* when is against you (Fishwick, 1952). With these type of characteristics and a 'spirit' unlike anyone else, the cowboy is as "wholesome as a glass of Grade A pasteurised milk. A man's man with a virile code and outlook" (Fishwick, 1952, p.92).

I had the pleasure of reading a few of the reprinted dime novels<sup>36</sup> from the 1860s to the early 1900s, and, although they followed a rather predictable pattern, they were quite entertaining, so it easy to understand their popularity during that period. The romanticised version of frontier life depicted was extremely appealing and exciting.

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<sup>34</sup> Rather than offering my own overall analysis on the classic cowboy stories, I would direct the reader to Will Wrights (2001), *The Wild West: The Mythical Cowboy and Social Theory*.

<sup>35</sup> I intentionally chose to italicize certain words (traits) in this section, in order to highlight how the traits applied to the standard heroic cowboy in each story can also attributed to the standard man and masculinity.

<sup>36</sup> For an excellent expose into the lives of the heroic cowboy, I would suggest reading Clay Reynolds (2011) *The Hero of a Hundred Fights: Collected Stories from the Dime Novel King, from Buffalo Bill to Wild Bill Hickok*, or a few of the reprinted stories in Stanford University's Library (n.d) dime novels and penny dreadfuls collection.

Cowboys were brave and free and did what was necessary in order to survive. He is indeed an exceptional hero.

## 4.2. Cultural Meanings in Dime Novels

As previously discussed, men often learn their appropriate gender roles according to masculine expectations as set by society, and these stories are one way to articulate what is culturally appropriate. In the late nineteenth century when the cowboy first appeared in the dime novels, a shift in the concept of masculinity was taking place. As Victorian rectitude gave way to physical prowess and manliness, conveniently linked to the great outdoors (Roosevelt & Remington, 1888; McCall, 2001), the new frontier mythology helped to reinforce gender roles. For instance, in many of the narratives, the standard frontier woman adhered to Victorian norms of chastity, sedentarism, and domestic work, which was also a romanticised misrepresentation as women were largely active within the frontier (Macauley, 2010), while only the itinerant working cowboys were assumed to have the strength, endurance, and stoic individualism to civilise the frontier (Basso, McCall & Garceau, 2013). The dime novels and overall mythology offered instructive models of appropriate social actions (Wright, 2001), and reinforced the idealised standards of western masculinity. Therefore, it is no real surprise that the stories were endlessly reproduced and thereby endlessly reinforced the mythical cowboy and his frontier exploits.

## 4.3. Western Films

*The Western is secular, materialist, and antifeminist; it focuses on conflict in the public space, is obsessed by death, and worships the phallus.<sup>37</sup>*  
(Jane Tompkins)

Dime novels offered a mental image of masculinity, generally directed by a few illustrations and largely constructed in the imagination of the reader. In the early twentieth century, pop culture continued to celebrate the mythic 'hero' through another persuasive purveyor of cowboy mythology, Western films. From the silent film onwards (even until to present day), as noted by Fishwick, (1952), "an army writers, film executives, and directors have dedicated themselves" to reinforcing the myth ensuring

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<sup>37</sup> From Tompkins (1993), *The West of everything: the inner life of westerns*.

the “old cowboy tales and deeds do not die, nor even slightly fade away” (Fishwick, 1952, p.81). In fact, Fishwick argues “if anything, they have added to the glamour, glory, and guts of the historical cowboy” (p.81). This perspective is compelling as audiences could now see their hero in action valiantly conquering the West.

Western films have long been a staple in the Hollywood film industry. Examples range from Paramount Pictures’ *The Covered Wagon* (1923), a film about a group of pioneers travelling across the West and fending off an Indigenous attack, through 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox’s *My Darling Clementine* (1946), in which Henry Fonda’s character Wyatt transforms from a small time cattle roper (authentic) to a law enforcing powerful (mythical) figure in a town filled with chaos, to Touchstones Pictures’ modern *Open Range* (2003), which depicts vigilante justice in an intense gun battle. These Western films reaffirmed tales of Western expansion and the cowboy’s cultural codes of behaviour (Seiler & Seiler, 1998). As a result, there is a significant amount of research already dedicated to this filmography,<sup>38</sup> which is important to understanding the continued appeal. Live performances also used the dime novel template and created a live-action visual event which allowed the audiences to be in close proximity to the action, and, at least to some extent, to participate. In this way the live shows became more important as reinforcers of the heroic masculinity so deeply associated with the cowboy.

#### 4.4. Wild West Shows

*Fear not, fair maid! By heavens you are safe at last with Wild Bill, who is ever ready to risk his life and die, if need be, in defense of weak and defenseless womanhood.*

*(Wild Bill Hickock)*

In addition to the popularity of the dime novels, and Western films, another medium which further glorified the western hero was the travelling vaudeville Wild West shows. Dare-devil bareback riding, trick marksmen, and ‘authentic’ historical pageants depicted the west (re)conquered. As the shows travelled, these visual performances continually romanticised the frontier and aided in the construction of the masculine cowboy (Peñaloza, 2001; Warren, 2003; Forsyth & Thompson, 2007). Although a

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<sup>38</sup> For an excellent expose into the Western film genre I would suggest reading Jane Tompkins (1993) the *West of everything: the inner life of westerns*.

number of wild west shows were developed over time one of the most famous characters who was representative of the productions was 'Buffalo Bill' Cody. Although Cody was not a cowboy per se, he used his celebrity dime novel status<sup>39</sup> to quickly reposition himself into one of the West's own celebrated heroes (Martin, 1996; Worden, 2011; Huxley, 2018) and a hallmark of American masculinity.

In 1883, Cody recognized the nostalgic impulses in Americans and their affinity for these types of performances and organised a travelling show called *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, incorporating the dime novels themes into a more grandiose exhibition (Slotkin, 1992). As one of Cody's goals was to present the 'real' West, he hired cowboys, Native Americans, and Mexican Vaqueros to perform along with bucking horses, buffalo, stagecoaches, and emigrant wagons (Bernstein, 2007). As there was already an audience for these types of shows, Cody's 'authentic' performances were an immediate success, and fans would pack the stands with hopes of seeing their dime-novel hero in action (Martin, 1996).

In order to further enhance his own version of the frontier, Cody consciously refused to label his exhibitions a 'show' and instead referred to them as 'object lessons'<sup>40</sup> and 'object teachers'. Although Cody's series of "original, genuine, and instructive lessons" (Martin, 1996, p.93) were an attempt to authorise his own specific version of westward progress, the claims of authenticity and edification were continually reinforced in the public mind by similar pronouncements in the press. In fact, the *New York Dramatic Mirror*, called the shows "a living lesson to the youth of the land" (Martin, 1996, p.11). As a result, Cody's pageants not only helped transform the dime novel cowboy into a definitive western hero, he also convinced millions that the heroic masculine cowboy set the tone and pace of the West.

For instance, in the third act of Cody's 1886 *Drama of Civilisation*, an aptly titled performance piece named *Attack on the Settler's Cabin*, depicted the pioneer farmer exploiting the natural wealth of the West. The scene quickly turns towards an Indigenous attack, and as movingly put by the *New York Times*, "just as the most exciting part of the

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<sup>39</sup> In 1869, Ned Buntline incorporated the famous buffalo hunter into one of his stories, and other authors quickly followed suit. Eventually 557 stories were dedicated to Buffalo Bill, and he became one of the most popular protagonists in dime novel Westerns (Russell, 1976)

<sup>40</sup> Cody often advertised his 'Indian' subjects as object lessons (Carter, 2018)

massacre, a troop of cowboys arrive and the noble red men are sent to the happy hunting grounds in a body” (New York Times, as noted by Martin 1996, p.105). As the shows continued to travel, this type of event, in some form or variation, became a regular part of the exhibition with the attackers always being drive off by heroic Buffalo Bill and his cowboy entourage (Warren, 2003). In fact, two additional stagings, *Attack on an Emigrant Train by Indians, and Repulse by the Cowboys*, and *Capture of the Deadwood Mail Coach by the Indians*, featured similar conclusions. During the emigrant train performance, Cody and his cowboys arrive just in time to rescue the poor captured maiden, and the infamous Deadwood mail coach is rescued by the cowboys who ensure the coach and its inhabitants arrive without harm. As each scenario ends in a similar manner, Cody’s message is almost impossible to misinterpret. As noted by Bernstein (2007), Cody’s romanticised versions were “very easy to understand, exciting, and the message was unmistakable” (p.29). The heroic white cowboys were always shown prevailing, as they “dominated horses and cattle, used their guns to run off toughs, always triumphed over Indians, and won fair damsels” (Etulain, 2004, p.269).

In the later years, when Cody introduced the *Congress of the Rough Riders* segment to illustrate the methods and accomplishments of cowboys worldwide in comparison with the American version, the message was, once again, quite clear. Although Cody had invited the Mexican vaquero, Native American, South American Gaucho, the Cossack, and the Ruffian Arab to participate (Martin, 1996), the men were often described as peculiar, strange, or savage, while the North American cowboy was presented as the norm (Rogers & Seefeldt, n.d). Although all delegates were praised for their physical prowess and proficiency, the idealisation of the American Rough Rider over the other nationalities further exemplified white American cowboy manliness in an international arena. This idealisation also reinforced the hegemonic form of masculinity, against the lesser ‘subordinate’ masculine men (Ferber, 2000). This was also the case during Cody’s vivid reproduction of the *Charge Up San Juan Hill*.<sup>41</sup> Newspaper coverage on the spectacle stated the cowboy “had lost none of its potent masculinity since the days of the frontier” (Rogers & Seefeldt, n.d.)

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<sup>41</sup> Part of the decisive battle in the Spanish-American war, where the Rough Riders, who had been forced to leave their horses behind, led the charge up the hills (The Battle of San Juan Hill, n.d).

During the thirty-three years that Cody and his show travelled, he convinced many of his audiences<sup>42</sup> that the reality of the West matched the romanticised version (Warren, 2003). As the shows offered an exciting, albeit mythical, version of westward progress, the cultural response is not surprising, especially as his stories capitalised on the popular fascination with the cowboy and rugged frontier masculinity. With stock characters, stories, and presentations, Cody's dramatic image of the Wild West made the cowboy one of the world's most identifiable figures and helped transform the dime novel protagonist into a living, breathing, deified hero. The cowboy, re-imagined, had become the perfect model of American manhood.

## 4.5. The Rodeos

*There's a hundred years of history and a hundred before that  
All gathered in the thinkin' goin' on beneath his hat.  
And back behind his eyeballs and pumpin' through his veins  
Is the ghost of every cowboy that ever held the reins.*<sup>43</sup>

*(Baxter Black)*

A second organised visual form of entertainment which also glorified the cowboy, one almost designed for that specific purpose, was the rodeo. Although Cody and his fellow vaudeville performers and promoters may have begged to differ, it is likely that the rodeo has done more to present cowboys passing as heroes than any other imaginable spectacle (Forsyth & Thompson. 2007). This argument is also supported by Dempsey (1995) and again by Peñaloza (2001), both of whom posit that the rodeo stage also helped (re)create and glorify the cowboy by incorporating myths, images, and artifacts that preserve the 'wild' frontier (Forsyth & Thompson. 2007). Although it is difficult to determine when the first public rodeos were held, most sources agree that two of the earliest on record were in Pecos, Texas (1883), and Prescott, Arizona (1888) (Stoeltje, 1989; Pearson & Haney, 1999).

Many of the rodeo events are anchored in vaquero history and feature the particular skills of the range, such as riding, roping, racing, droving, and branding (Stoeltje, 1989; Pearson & Haney, 1999), which had developed from early cowboy

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<sup>42</sup> The cultural reception was immense with kings, Queen Victoria, the Prince of Wales, and Pope Leo XIII, all captivated by the 'rip roaring circus-like show'. In fact, in London alone 300 performances were held with more than 2.5 million tickets sold (Wrobel, 2017).

<sup>43</sup> Taken from Baxter Black's poem *Legacy of the Rodeo Man* (Black, 1986).

customs<sup>44</sup> (Peñaloza, 2001). As the range men were often competitive, the vaqueros and the Anglos would regularly gather on haciendas and large ranches for contests based on their working skills to see who was best. These informal competitions were either held between the cowboys themselves or against larger ranches, while other cowboys, ranches, and friends cheered them on (Stoeltje, 1989; Bernstein, 2007). Interest in the competitions spread into small towns and communities, becoming more popular and progressively larger, and the rodeos then moved from the range into specialised arenas where newly created organisations turned what were once low-keys event into more impressive public spectacles (Stoeltje, 1989). All the while, the humble roots still allowed communities to endow the rodeos with historical and patriotic meaning beyond its entertainment value (Wetherhell, 2008). With defined formats and rules to now govern the competitions, the traditional customs developed into more of an exhibition, and the rodeos began to incorporate increased competition and danger. This was especially the case after the introduction of steer wrestling and bare-back bronc riding, and bronco busting<sup>45</sup> (Bernstein, 2007).

Although the competitive performances emerged out of a period of grandiose theatrics, rodeos, in a similar fashion to the Wild West performances were also imbued with symbolic meaning. As only the heroic cowboy had the grit and determination to civilise the land's savage forces, the rodeo as a ritual re-enacts and sanctifies this myth and thus the events symbolise the land's conquest (Furniss, 1999; Lawrence, 1982). In this regard, the bronc, steers, and calves represent the wild forces of nature and the cowboy represents the taming force of western civilisation (Allen, 1988). The rodeo cowboy, attempting to tame the wild, is acting out the myth. The performance of the imagined west through the rodeo has, in many ways, become a performance of Western manliness, and the rodeo cowboy reinforces this concept by his participation. This accords with scholarship by Lawrence (1982), who asserts that, in acting out the frontier the performers fully adopt the traits and values of the historic cowboy. As gender is a process which comes into being through performance (Butler, 1988), the rodeo then reaffirms the historic notion of manliness through the acts, by quite literally showing off bodily strength and skills of horsemanship (Hicks, 2002)

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<sup>44</sup> In the modern era they are modified for dramatic effect (Peñaloza, 2001).

<sup>45</sup> For definitions, refer to Appendix B.

As many of the audiences no longer had firsthand experience in regard to the frontier, the audiences were receptive to these performances, and rodeos have been held in small towns, communities, and cities since the late 1880s (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007; Peñaloza, 2001). Although the rodeos provided cowboys with large-scale performance opportunities, they also helped cultivate the general public's fascination with the cowboy. As noted by Stoeljte (1989), these events "contribut[ed] significantly to the definition of the cowboy as a folk hero" (p.249), for they could now see a somewhat recent, somewhat real, living example of the last frontiersman enacted within their own community.

#### 4.6. Cultural Meaning of Shows

*The band would play the anthem,  
The clowns fell down in jest,  
All the people saw again  
The winning of the West...*<sup>46</sup>

*(Ian Tyson)*

Masculinity is constructed through repetitive dialogue and actions (Sheerin & Linehan, 2018). Dime novels, with their repetitive characters, dialogues, stories and events, generated mental images of cowboy masculinity; Wild West shows, and rodeos reinforced the ideal concept of masculinity through live action. As "hegemony is a terrain of struggle, a process by which elites must labour to convince those beneath them that the dominant conception of the world is natural" (Martin, 1996, p.106), the visual displays not only convinced audiences that this noble being, the cowboy, was the dominant elite but also helped legitimise his exploits (Moses, 1991; Warren, 2003; Etulain, 2004). In this regard, the shows formed a coherent narrative, one that traced and dramatised the civilisation of the west placing the heroic cowboy above all else (Martin, 1996). In fact, even those who could not read some of the show's programmes were often given an explanation prior to each act to further accelerate the message (Kelm, 2009). The message was clear: the cowboy was top.

Both forms of popular culture (re)produced an uber masculine trope (Kimmel, 1996; Peñaloza, 2001), and audiences willingly bought into it. Why was the average person enthralled by cowboy culture? Part of the fascination can be attributed to

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<sup>46</sup> An excerpt from Ian Tyson's song Old Cheyenne (Tyson, 1987).

nostalgic reverence for the era (Errington, 1990; Dempsey, 1995; Seiler, 1998), dime novels (Huxley, 2018; Wright, 2001; Kimmel, 2006), Western films (Hoffman, 2003; Tompkins, 1993), and the media coverage which idealised the mythical being. However, research indicates these shows might have been received so well for other reasons. At the end of the nineteenth century, when the masculine power structure was slowly being stripped by the women's rights movement, rapid urbanisation, industrialisation, and a competitive individualistic economic system (Jones, 1970; Tompkins, 1993; Beynon, 2010, Rogers & Seefeldt, n.d) it is possible the shows gave some sense of self-gratification as they championed and reinforced masculine superiority. Audiences could vicariously experience the ongoing battle between civilisation and savagery, and both the stories and performances could function to reaffirm one's own sense of importance and authority over 'others'. 'Others', in this case being anyone who does not fit society's definition of hegemonic masculinity.

In addition to reaffirming their own sense of importance, it is possible that the shows may have offered a sense of escapism. As the cowboy came to symbolise freedom, individuality, and independence (Dempsey, 1995; Wright, 2001; Mitchell, 2003; Herbst et, al., 2014), the shows allowed men to revel in their masculine cowboy forebears who, as previously suggested, tamed the frontier (Errington, 1990). As detailed by Martin (1996), the exciting displays filled urban audiences with intense sensations that allegedly made up daily life on the frontier, allowing them to imagine themselves as part of the struggle. Fishwick (1952) posits that cowboys are an intangible safety valve for the mechanised and urbanised, noting that, when things get difficult one can vicariously hit the trail leaving their tedious world behind and enter a realm where "men could be free from the barriers of society and live under their own rules" (Macauley, 2010, p.35).

#### **4.7. The Role of 'Others'**

The role and image of women as a helpmate has permeated western culture since the frontier days, despite research which indicated women participated in previous male-dominated roles "assert[ing] a measure of independence from the rigid norms of 19<sup>th</sup> century society" (Moon & Ogle, 2013, p.110). The ideal wife for a cowboy in many of the narratives was a woman who would take care of the home, the ranch, and the children, and do whatever was necessary to support her man and family, an all-around

helpmate (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007; Stoeltje, 1975). As the frontier was constructed as a masculine arena, it is not surprising that the forms of entertainment followed suit. Certainly, there were woman performers who often performed the same feats as men, frequently getting top billing (LeCompte, 1990). However, women were either forced to abide by the gendered norms or were eventually pushed out of the performances entirely.

In relation to the Wild West shows, women in many of the acts were often posited as the helpless victim<sup>47</sup>; however, a few also had roles in the arena where they “unashamedly display[ed] their athleticism and physical prowess” (Macauley, 2010, p.29). Although these women often performed the same feats as men, in order to ensure the gender roles remained constant, the shows continually emphasised female dependence<sup>48</sup> on men as vital. As noted by Macauley (2010), the acts they were performing were essentially the same as the classic frontier women, “they helped on the homestead, got their hands dirty, and, alongside men, built the community from scratch” (p.39); however, promoters had to be careful in how they were presented.

For instance, one of the most famous performers in the Wild West exhibitions was Annie Oakley a renowned markswoman, who had travelled with Buffalo Bill Cody for approximately sixteen years, wielding a rifle, the “highly resonant symbol of manhood and masculinity” (Martin, 1996, p.114). Despite, Oakley’s prominence in the arena where she pushed the boundaries of expected gender roles (Canslar, 2014), she also continually reaffirmed Victorian expectations for “true womanhood” (Macuauley 2010, p.40), by emphasising her femininity during her performances. As noted by Julie Williams (2017), she “projected an image so feminine, ladylike, Victorian, and appealing that most people could see little harm in cowgirls” (p.28). As hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to women, ensuring gender relations are continually (re)produced through actions and behaviour (Messerschmidt & Messner, 2018), the response to Oakley is somewhat expected. It was okay for women to be active and supportive, but let’s not forgot your domestic obligations or proper gendered behaviour (Macauley, 2010). As a result of this public persona, it undoubtedly assuaged men’s

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<sup>47</sup> The same could also be said for the majority of Western films.

<sup>48</sup> Even though Cody believed women should have the same liberty and privileges men have in society, his shows did not reflect this view (Martin, 1996).

fears of possible changes in the gender order by ensuring the roles remained somewhat fixed, but more importantly it reaffirmed men were still in charge. This is especially true as the rest of the dangerous and violent performances were completely dominated by the masculine male.

From their inception, rodeos were largely inclusive. Although women only played a minor role in the early days, by the 1920s and 1930s they were performing in approximately one third of all contests, often competing against men in bronc-riding and steer roping<sup>49</sup> (LeCompte, 1990). As the 'cowgirls' continued to present an image of the Western woman as physically and mentally fit (Scofield, 2019), audiences were receptive especially as the events continued to promote an 'authentic' frontier. In fact, many were praised as real cowboys who "demonstrate[ed] skill and pluck...without a drop of blood being shed" (Kelm, 2009.p.720). Despite this, they were eventually excluded from the main competitions and the rodeo became more of an exclusive male domain (Kelm, 2009). Women could still compete, but to a much lesser degree.

As noted, gender comes into being through performance and is sustained through dialogue and actions. As the rodeo women were considered "independent, assertive, and athletic" (LeCompte, 1990, p.320) and performed masculine tasks associated with frontier men, this undoubtably threatened gender norms and the respectability of the iconic male cowboy. By removing women from the major competitions and allowing men to continually perform the overtly masculine acts this effectively bolsters the claims of cowboy masculinity and authenticity, thereby granting legitimacy through performance. This removal of women also reinforces the western notion of dependence. Since the frontier was constructed as a masculine arena where it was assumed dependence on men was vital, the removal reinforces this belief. For instance, even though Lucille Mulhall, one of the first female performers to successfully defeat men in major competitions noted "cowboys treat cowgirls like one of themselves (LeCompte, 1990, p.319), her exceptional performance threatened the iconic view of western women as dependent. As the performance of the imagined west has in many ways become a performance of masculinity, the removal of women reaffirms the mythical masculine frontier.

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<sup>49</sup> For definitions refer to Appendix B.

Since the early rodeos grew out of unorganised ranch-hand competitions that represented the cowboy's skills within the 'authentic' west, the performers in these rodeos were quite diverse (Bernstein, 2007). There was no real animosity between competitors along the lines of race, and everyone was free to compete and perform. Vaqueros would perform their roping skills, African Americans headlined shows, and Indigenous competitors could be crowned champion of the whole event (Scofield, 2019; Kelm; 2009). It was a diverse and eclectic mix of talents, skills, and backgrounds. However, when the rodeo slowly became organised and transformed from informal performance into a regulated festival of sport that further exemplified masculinity within the arenas, race became an increasingly prevalent factor. As the rodeo began to exemplify the (re)conquest of the 'mythic' west by the heroic white cowboy, it was important to maintain this illusion across the events. In fact, in one instance Tom Three Persons, an exceptional Indigenous competitor, was offered money to purposefully lose in a rodeo so that local white riders could win (Kelm, 2009). As the competitions increased and became even more regulated, with the rodeo growing into a multimillion-dollar entertainment industry (Scofield, 2019), the image of the white cowboy prevailed while fewer and fewer people of colour found a place within the main rodeo associations<sup>50</sup> (Kelm, 2009). As hegemonic masculinity justifies the subordination of other men considered inferior, this exclusion not only helps (re)enforce the heteronormative standards of the white cowboy, it also (re)enforces the myth of this figure.

#### **4.8. Weadick and the Calgary Stampede**

As discussed, the cattle industry was vibrant throughout southwestern Alberta, with grazing lands extending from the border. After the arrival of the railway in 1883, Calgary became the main shipping point for livestock essentially becoming the "capital of [the] conservative Cattle kingdom" (Seiler & Seiler, 1998). As the growth of the city was closely linked to the cattle industry it is not surprising the nickname 'Cowtown' was assigned to it. Although the closing of the range paved the way for the widespread adoption of modern ranching, and the influx of immigrants and settlers changed the city's dynamics (Dempsey, 1995), the 'Cowtown' name persists. In fact, even a hundred years

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<sup>50</sup> For further information in regard to the Indigenous and the rodeos in Canada, I would suggest reading Mary-Ellen Kelm's. *A Wilder West: Rodeo in Western Canada* (2009).

or so after the 'Golden Age' the connection to cowboys still remains relevant. Of course, neither cowboys nor ranches have disappeared completely, nor has the industry. The cattle industry is still vibrant and continues to be promoted; however, why is there still a connection to the traditional cowboy? The answer is simple, the Calgary Stampede. Billed as the 'greatest outdoor show on earth', it is a "festive celebratory tribute to a bygone era" (Foran, 1988, p.2).

In a similar manner to the Wild West shows, the rodeos also had their own promotional agents, and one of the most famous, at least from a Canadian perspective, was Guy Weadick (Pannekoek, 2008). Weadick, as noted by Foran (2008), set the precedent for frontier authority when he brought together the "greatest gathering of men" (p.7), who had laid the foundation for Western development, to participate in one of the first of the Calgary stampedes.

In a similar manner to Cody, Weadick's story is also interesting. Guy Weadick was born in 1885, at the end of the American golden age, in Rochester New York, a relatively modern city at the time (Kelm, 2009); however as Weadick was captivated by the cowboy way of life through pop culture<sup>51</sup> (Seskus, 2017), and regaled with first-hand stories of the 'Wild West' by his uncles, he headed out West as a teenager and found work on ranches ranging from Montana to the Mexican border (Foran, 2009). In his late teens, when Weadick began to promote various Wild West shows throughout the country (Wetherell, 2008), he accordingly became acquainted with hundreds of cowboys and their stories. However, due to the inauthenticities of the Wild West show's accounts, he envisaged an event which depicted a more accurate cowboy lifestyle as opposed to staged exaggerations (Foran, 2009; Mikkelsen, 2008). Of course, Weadick was still interested in the mystique of the West and wanted his shows to be wildly entertaining and exciting, similar to Buffalo Bills (Russell, as noted in Foran, 2009).

Weadick first visited Calgary in 1905, and then again in 1908 with the *Miller Brothers 101 Ranch Wild West Show*, who were hired to perform at Calgary's Dominion Exhibition. As Southern Alberta was changing and becoming more diversified, the cowboy appeared on the Exhibition poster as an emblem of the region's past (Kelm, 2009). Although it would be difficult to connect Weadick's vision to the poster, he

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<sup>51</sup> Assumed to be dime novels and Wild West shows.

certainly did see in Calgary an opportunity to merge the American cowboy myth to Southern Alberta's own history of the range (Kelm, 2009). In 1912, when Weadick returned to Calgary as an experienced promoter and salesman, he approached H.C McMullen, a Canadian Pacific Railway agent, about organising an event to celebrate the region's heritage, promising it would be a tribute to the memory of the cowboy devoid of the old stereotypes (Dempsey, 1995). In fact, he assured it would not be "a circus parade of actors tricked out to tawdry and unauthentic trappings of pseudo-picturesque nature but a real pageant of the plains and a reunion for old-timers" (Kelm, 2009, p.719). McMullen, in return approached four prominent Calgary businessmen<sup>52</sup> with links to ranching, who agreed to finance the show (Foran, 2009). As a result, an early version of the Stampede was born.

Although the Stampede was a one-off event, a tribute to a bygone era (Dempsey, 1995), it left an enduring mark on the city and following the end of the First World War, a Victory Stampede was held with Weadick again in control (Felske, 2008). As the event was once again successful, further cementing Weadick's reputation as an exceptional promoter, in 1923 the Calgary Exhibition manager Ernie Richardson approached Weadick with a proposal to hold 'his' rodeo in conjunction with the annual Exhibition (Foran, 2008). As noted by Kelm (2009), Calgarians readily embraced the reprised Stampede, and attendance figures soared to nearly 140,000, which was surprising as the city's population at the time was just over 60,000 (Fortney, 2012). As the event was all around successful, this led to public calls for its continuance. In fact, Richardson addressing the Exhibition's Board of Directors explicitly stated, "Calgary has found something that people want, something peculiarly appropriate to our environment... Today you will be asked to decide officially if a Stampede is to be annual adjunct of Calgary's exhibition" (Foran, 2009, p, 256). Richardson's suggestion was adopted unanimously on September 26, 1923, with Weadick becoming its "guiding instrument" (Foran, 2009).

As indicated by the attendance, most Calgarians accepted the Stampede; however, the acceptance can also be attributed to Weadick's brilliant promotional skills and salesmanship (Pannekoek, 2008). His influence reached far beyond the Exhibitions Board. For instance, in order to commodify the cowboy past, he proclaimed it was a

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<sup>52</sup> Commonly referred to as the Big Four: Pat Burns, George Lane, A.E Cross, and A.J Mclean.

genuine competitive annual tournament with only genuine Westerners participating. He also claimed, “if you live in Calgary – you are a Westerner – it does not matter how long you have been here” (Kelm, 2009, p.729-730). Beyond this, however, was also a need to market this ‘Westernness’. It was one thing to proclaim it was an ‘authentic’ Western event, held in an ‘authentic’ Western city, with ‘authentic’ Westerners participating, but the remaking had to be visible.

In order to hasten the Western theme, Weadick explicitly stated that in order to compete “one must be attired in regulation cowboy costume... this is a Western celebration by Westerners... [so] wear your big hats and other badges of stock country” (Kelm, 2009, pp.729). As a result, participants dressed in regulation attire; however, this message spread into the communities and Calgarians not directly connected to the event started to participate. To further perpetuate Western heritage, Weadick also encouraged the community to decorate the streets and storefronts of downtown Calgary with planks and other pioneer materials (Wetherell, 2008; Kelm, 2009). As noted by Foran (2009), these off-site events and the Old West themes helped turn a “staid Exhibition into a statement about cowboys and corrals, a place where memory and nostalgia mixed freely” (p. 255). At present, this practice still exists, and it would be difficult to travel anywhere in the city during the period of the Stampede, or leading up to it, without seeing any form of Western motifs, which naturally includes the cowboy. As Weadick, with his exceptional skills and salesmanship, effectively crafted a community based on Western traditions, the Stampede and its host city, which, at least from his perspective, offered Western authenticity to all. (Kelm, 2009).

Since 1923, the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede has been held annually, and from its inception, has continually “revitalised the western spirit to such an extent that public [will] not let the Old West die and, in doing so, have continually perpetuated the image of the Canadian cowboy” (Dempsey, 1995, p.150). The Western theme still reaches beyond the Stampede.

## Chapter 5. Clothing, Masculinity, and Identity Construction.

*Cowboy boots with a suit? You're a rough tough businessman. Chaps with a bow tie? You're in the rough, tough man business*<sup>53</sup>

(Dana Gould)

As previously noted, cowboys are easily recognizable. The hat, the embroidered plaid shirts, and the boots are telltales signs, and when one sees this type of clothing, regardless of whether it is being worn, it immediately connects to cowboys and cowboy culture.<sup>54</sup> The visual element is important as the clothing has symbolic meaning, beyond just the need to cover the body. With clothing being an integral part of cowboy culture in contemporary times a brief history is needed for two reasons. It will illustrate how the traditional cowboy's 'outfit' has continually adapted since their inception, moving away from being practical to a more grandiose ensemble, and it will illustrate why these changes were deemed necessary.

In the 'golden age' of cowboydom the basic dress consisted of a tasseled jacket, a Victorian style pullover flannel shirt, denim or corduroy britches covered in angora chaps, a neckerchief, sombrero, and leather riding boots with high heels and spurs (Dempsey, 1995). Despite being an eclectic mix, drawing from diverse backgrounds,<sup>55</sup> every part of the outfit was chosen for specific use (Dempsey, 1995). As cowboys performed repetitive and physically demanding tasks, clothes that were readily available and affordable were more practical as opposed to the homogenous standard<sup>56</sup> in later years.

In the 'golden-years' as the cowboy advanced across the West, the standards of manhood started to shift as society began to associate the importance of physical prowess and manliness with the 'great outdoors', and the cowboy came to represent this

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<sup>53</sup> This quote is attributed to the comedian David Gold. Unfortunately, I could not find the original source.

<sup>54</sup> In fact, I would argue the clothing on its own represents cowboy culture without almost any thought.

<sup>55</sup> The clothing drew from Native American, English, French, and the Spanish-Mexican styles of dress.

<sup>56</sup> By this, I mean the clothing was utilitarian as opposed to the standard uniform characteristics in the later years.

'uber masculine' ideal, as only 'he' had the strength, endurance, and stoic individualism required to survive and dominate in the 'wild and woolly' west (Roosevelt & Remington, 1888; Basso, McCall & Garceau, 2013; McCall, 2001). On account of these views, many sought to emulate their style and as a major part of their culture is found within the visual element, 'the look', and in order to embody the spirit many started to 'dress the part'. For instance, almost immediately following the cowboy's expansion into the Northern plains, some local residents, 'greenhorns',<sup>57</sup> began to emulate the cowboy's style and dress and accordingly paraded around the towns, swaggering through the streets and into bars pretending to be authentic (Dempsey, 1995). As noted by Dempsey, (1995), although many of these 'greenhorns' may have worked on a ranch, it was most likely a menial job for a short duration. Thus, the connection to genuine cowboys and actual cowboy culture was almost non-existent.

After the golden years, as the early cowboy myth began to take hold, the emulation continued, especially with the shift towards the more romanticised heroic cowboy (Dempsey, 1995; Lindmeier and Mount, 1996; Enns, 2006). This was especially the case after the mid-1880s, when the painter Frederic Remington was commissioned by *Harpers Weekly* to cover the war against the Apache resistance leader Geronimo. As noted by Gibson (2016), in his submissions, Remington painted romanticised images of male cowboys in action (bucking horses, taming beasts, and shooting the Indigenous population) wearing chaps, spurs, wide-brimmed hats, tasselled leather jackets, and bandanas. Although these images bore some resemblance to actual working cowboys, given the popularity of the journals, these depictions became the moral, visual, and sartorial template for manliness, which, in turn, led to further aggrandizement. This was especially true in Alberta, where it was quite common for young Englishmen to "bedeck themselves in all the finery of a western cowman" (Dempsey, 1995, p.26) and have their pictures taken to impress or amuse the families back home. In fact, as the early mythic cowboy began to take foothold, which often depicted an uncontrolled West (Forsyth and Thompson, 2007; Huxley, 2018), it was quite common to have your picture taken with guns blazing (Dempsey, 1995).

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<sup>57</sup> Also known as "dudes, fakes, phonies, tenderfoots, T-Eaton cowboys, and drugstore cowboys," (Dempsey 1995), or as eloquently put to me by an old-school rodeo performer, 'fucking idiots'. Sadly, this was the only quote he would give me for the project.

In the early 1900s, with the increased demand from urban audiences, especially after they bought into the canonized depictions of the frontier from Wild West shows, the show performers took on the Remington template,<sup>58</sup> with increasing embellishment and exaggeration (Gibson, 2016), creating a more grandiose masculine cowboy. By adding dazzling embroidered shirts and chaps, larger cowboy hats, and taller, flashier and more heavily stitched and underslung-heeled boots, the clothing evolved into a more masculine 'look' befitting the standards of manhood as outlined in the rodeo's mythic stories (Mitchell, 2003; Gondola, 2016; Macauley, 2010). The heeled boots would further emphasise height, the embroidered shirts would flatter the pectoral muscles and broad shoulders, and the hats would frame strong cheekbones and chiseled jaws (Gibson, 2016). As noted by Gibson (2016), as the clothing design evolved, it enabled the development of an archetypal visual template for masculinity, establishing the cowboy as one of the most enduring masculine figures in the frontier.

By the turn of the century, as the new mediums silent film and the talkies gained in popularity (Wright, 2001; Hoffman, 2003; Smith 2016; Tompkins, 1993), the performers continued to add and enhance, perfecting and disseminating the masculine image by tailoring the clothing to fit the body (Gibson; 2016). Most performers sewed the costumes themselves; however, with clothing in such a high demand, a fashion-cultural industry was created, which allowed expert tailors to produce even more ostentatious clothing often emphasizing "broad shoulders and beefy upper bodies" (Gibson, 2016, p.743) further reinforcing the masculine identity. By the 1940s, the 'look' settled with highly ornate embroidered snap shirts, chaps, denim jeans, boots, and hats becoming the norm (Gibson, 2016). As the Western film genre grew exponentially (Hoffman, 2003), constantly strengthening the masculine cowboy identity, the fashion industry began to manufacture 'authentic' cowboy gear in the 1950s specifically targeting the urban audiences. As many urbanites wanted to emulate their mythic heroes and accordingly embody the spirit of the west (Fishwick, 1952; Dempsey, 1995; Stoeltje, 2012), they began to purchase the 'authentic' clothing. In this regard, the clothing became more about an identity, and less of a utility – albeit a manufactured one.

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<sup>58</sup> Remington's template was also used later in dime novels, postcards, paintings, and children's stories.

As noted by Gibson (2016), from the 1950s to the 1970s, the embellishment continued; however, in order to further amplify masculinity and sex appeal, the clothing shifted towards more form-fitting and flattering shapes meant to highlight a slim physique as opposed to the earlier beefy clothes. This was especially the case in the late 1970s, when Western-wear styles moved into mainstream fashion following John Travolta's film *Urban Cowboy* (1978). Blue jeans for men (and women) "became painfully tight" (Gibson, 2016 p.15) in order to further sexualise and highlight the posterior. In addition, a six-snap (shotgun) cuff was added, which gave the impression of strong wrists and forearms, and distinctive stylized front yokes were introduced, further emphasising pectoral muscles and broad shoulders (Gibson, 2016). While these developments were still somewhat orthodox, when the Vietnam war began to undermine American's confidence in their classic cowboy narratives, particularly that of the Anglo-American aggressor who always triumphs (Roosevelt & Remington, 1888; Etulain, 2004), this challenge led to "new subversions of the dominant cowboy figure in film and popular culture" (Gibson, 2016, p.746). As the clothing was still a vital part of the cowboy's construction, shirt embroidery began to incorporate western motifs, such as cacti, boots, bucking horses, and wagon wheels, to recapture the western spirit (Gibson, 2016).

As the authentic origins began to fade away in the mid-1980s, and the clothing reverted to a more relaxed fit allowing anyone to purchase and wear the garments. The overall style since this period has generally remained the same (Gibson, 2016), and accordingly many urbanites continue to buy a considerable amount of western gear. This is not surprising, as the clothing has always been an important element within the culture and has continually evolved to represent the culture.

As indicated, the cowboy has relentlessly been held up as an exceptional model of masculinity regardless of the timeline. Having addressed the history of the cowboy and his place in the masculine arena, I will now turn to an analysis of my interviews conducted with some of those men who still choose to wear cowboy attire today.

## Chapter 6. Interview Analysis

*We have a sense that we should be like the mythical cowboy... able to take on and conquer anything and live in the world without the need for other people<sup>59</sup>*

*(Morrie Schwartz)*

*I would say that guys are trying to look as cowboy as they can (#4).<sup>60</sup>*

As an attempt to understand the continued appeal for cowboy culture in cultural history, it is important to understand in the context of the Stampede, whether men dress up in cowboy attire out of respect for Alberta's heritage, or if the attire is used to construct a short-term masculine identity, either consciously or subconsciously. After researching, interviewing, and reviewing here are my results.

### 6.1. Lack of Knowledge

One of the main questions asked in regard to the actual Stampede was about its history. Prior to the interviews I had assumed most would know about its history and how it came to be, especially as the Stampede is so ingrained in Calgary's culture. However, I found that historical knowledge was almost non-existent even though many had attended multiple times over the years. In fact, although one had mentioned the Stampede was "definitely a part of my life" (#1), he had no historical knowledge of how it came to be. Needless to say, I was disappointed. Due to this lack of background knowledge, I would say that most men in the modern era do not dress up in order to preserve and promote Calgary's Western heritage. In this regard, the clothing has less to do with respecting and acknowledging the historic cattle industry and more to do with recreation, participation and performance.

### 6.2. Imagery and Character

A second important question was in relation to the cowboy and 'his' image. A rather simple question, but since the visual representation is central to the gendering process, and the cowboy imagery is basically the same regardless of the medium, it was

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<sup>59</sup> From Abom's (1997), *Tuesdays with Morrie: An old man, a young man, & life's greatest lesson*.

<sup>60</sup> Direct quote from one of my interviewees.

important to find out what image came to mind when asked to describe the cowboy. As expected, the imagery was fairly standard from each interviewee, for instance I#4 describe him as,

Uhh, he's wearing boots, like beat up boots, dirty jeans, he's riding in, like the hills. uhh, he's got a hat on, a plaid shirt. Uhh, chewing something. Maybe its tobacco, or gum. (I#5)

In retrospect, I should have asked a question in relation to race as the classic cowboy is often portrayed as 'white'. However, the inclusion of such questions might have changed the dynamic of the interviews, though perhaps a question at the end of each interview may have been informative. It is interesting to note, however, when asked to describe the cowboy not one respondent mentioned ethnicity, which could indicate that they assumed the white cowboy as the default.

Another question in relation to the cowboy was in regard to his character. Again, not a complicated question, though, as historically the heroic cowboy's personality and traits have continuously represented and reinforced a masculine ideal, I wanted to see if anything had changed. Was 'he' still associated with greatness? As expected, the terms used to describe him were largely standard from each interviewee. He was described as 'tough', 'strong', 'serious', 'hardworking', someone who work from 'sunup to sundown' (I#5), or someone who would 'bust his ass from 9-5... for you know your family and stuff like that' (I#1); however, he was also described as 'chivalrous' (I#2), 'genuine' (I#4), and a 'common fantasy image for woman' (I#6). Pretty standard cowboy fare. Similar matter to the visual imagery, the descriptive terms found in the interviews were unsurprising, as the cowboy's personality and traits are standard.

Judging by the terms used to describe the cowboy, understandings of him have not really changed. He is still seen as someone to admire and respect and represents a masculine ideal. In fact, one of the interviewees referred to the modern cowboys as "men, amongst boys" (I#7). The image remains stable and static.

### **6.3. I feel manly. Oh, so manly...**

Gender is one of the most salient aspects of one's identity and ultimately affects all aspects of life, which includes one's appearance. This means one can choose to dress and style themselves as they see fit, but it can also cause people to conform to the

dominant norms (dress codes) as set by society. For instance, the suit, which became a symbol of the stereotypical masculine role in the early twentieth century (Honeyman, 2002), is still one of the most culturally accepted forms of respectable and conformist attire for men today (Barry, 2002). It still represents a distinct identity. As the cowboy slowly became an enduring icon of frontier masculinity bordering on superhero status, the attire also became an enduring symbol in relation to this form of masculinity. It was a vital part of 'his' construction (Dempsey, 1995; Peñaloza; 2001).

As masculinity is socially constructed through everyday actions and behaviours, and research indicates men often feel on display (Kimmel, 2006; Robb & Ruxton, 2019) especially during the period of Stampede where there can be social pressure to conform, attire is an important component. The cowboy clothing is a visible and conscious marker of the Stampede, but also a conscious marker of the hegemonic cowboy.

As mentioned, my interest from this project is partially due to my observations of men and perceived changes in their conduct during the ten days of festivities. The clothing, at least in my observations, made some of the men act differently. As an iconic display of the Stampede, the clothing represents a distinct form of hegemonic masculinity. Given this role, it is then possible the clothing could make men feel and act differently? Is there a connection between the clothing and changes in men's behaviour?

Although a majority of my interviewees answered 'no' there was no change in the way they felt and one admitted he felt 'awkward and embarrassed' (I#5) as his friends were not used to seeing him dressed in cowboy attire, a few of the interviewees acknowledged the clothing had made them feel differently. For instance, one noted how the clothing made him feel,

...kinda more manly to be honest, you kinda feel, kinda feel tough, cause you're almost like a cowboy... when I say cowboy, in my mind a cowboy is, either the ones you see on tv, which are wild wild west crazy stuff .... but I also see the other side of it where you got the guys bull riding... they're toughest guys I've probably ever met... so when you throw your cowboy boots on, your kinda almost re-living, like, uhh, what they're doing without actually doing it...' (I#2)

And another mentioned the attire had put him in a better mood,

'Umm, (pause), I think, I think, I am a happier person, and I'm not saying I'm an unhappy person... So, I think my mood changes, it

definitely goes up. Um, you know I think I'm a little more patient as well, when I get that stuff on. I mean I stood in a line for four and a half hours<sup>61</sup> and didn't get in.' (I#1)

As the clothing was specifically designed to represent and reinforce a masculine ideal, I would expect one to feel more 'manly' and 'powerful'. I also anticipated a certain degree of happiness as a majority of the interviewees look forward to the event and dressing up; however, I was not expecting clothing to have a calming effect, this was surprising.

Another thing I was not expecting was a small increase in aggressive behaviour. For instance, I#2 also mentioned in one of his outings he had smashed a beer can on his head<sup>62</sup>. When asked if this was normal practice something you would do in flip-flops in your friend's backyard, he stated

I have to say, I have not smashed a beer on my head in a long, long time and the stampede is when, when I did it, so... (laughter) (I#2).

In this instance, there is a direct correlation between the clothing and behavioural changes, as he readily admitted the clothing caused this change. The clothing made him feel 'a little more amped up,' and he consequently acted out in a more spirited manner. Thus, the clothing, while changing his outward appearance, also led to an increase in the kind of risk-taking behavior that is commonly associated with masculinity. Although smashing a beer can on your head is not necessarily harmful, the increase in risk-taking behaviour can be a concern.

Although only a few admitted the clothing had made them feel different, I asked the interviewees if they thought the clothing could make someone feel different about themselves. By that I meant, do you think the clothing could temporarily change one's character? Using a simple scenario – a 'city guy' who works in IT,<sup>63</sup> I asked if the clothing could temporarily change this man's demeanour. A few responded with no, or dressing up is just the thing to do, or men dress up because 'everyone does it' (I#3, I#7), however a few felt that it was possible.

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<sup>61</sup> Referring to one of the bars on the Stampede Grounds. The line-up is immense, and people tend to stand for hours in line to get in. The average waiting time for my interviewees was three hours.

<sup>62</sup> The common practice is to either open the can by smashing on your heading and quickly drinking it or crushing a can after its empty.

<sup>63</sup> I used the IT scenario as social perceptions and stereotypes based on someone who works in IT is generally perceived as nerdy.

For instance, even though one interviewee's initial response to someone dressing up was 'everyone's got to have something to look forward to', at a later point in the interview when we discussed the continued appeal for the tradition, he mentioned it was due to cowboy's sex appeal. Then, using my IT scenario he stated how the attire could make some feel more confident even though it might only be temporary,

...you look at even that IT guy who has low self-esteem, say he has low self-esteem and he puts on those cowboy boots and goes out there and puts on that attire and goes out there and he's more confident than he's ever been. (I#8).

Something similar was also noted in another interview (I#6) in regard to the hypothetical man who works in IT,

wants to feel like a pioneer and feel tough, you know – yes. Toughness is a big part of it. Cowboys are tough, right... yeah, they're strong, they're tough, you know, out in the sun all day. I mean definitely, uhm, there's a lot of woman out there who romanticize you know cowboys. Is the man riding a horse with his shirt off, you know (laughter). That's a common fantasy image for woman, right. So, there's a lot of that (I#6).

Although research indicates clothing choices can affect others' behaviour towards the individual (Johnson, et al., 2008), the clothing we wear can also affect our cognitive process, when there is a strong cultural association with it. In this regard, by wearing certain clothes and assuming the identity associated with it, it can elicit corresponding behaviours from the wearer. For instance, when a person emulates the dress code of someone considered powerful, it is possible they could feel infused with those qualities as well. Thus, the clothing has a variety of values. What we choose to wear has power not only over others but also over ourselves.

As previously noted, as the cowboy came to represent a mythic ideal and embodied characteristics which were esteemed and valued, the attire of the cowboy also became associated with these norms. As a result, there is symbolic meaning attached to the attire (Kelm, 2014; Peñaloza, 2001). As the clothing became one way to embody the cowboy's identity without actually participating in the work of ranching (Dempsey, 1995), and, in the later years, was specifically designed to represent and reinforce manliness, the clothing has become essential to the expression of this identity. The visual component of the cowboy attire then allows men, who may not regularly possess the physical, mental, or emotional qualities of this idealized masculine form, to express a

more dominant identity through performance (Butler, 1998). By donning the clothing, not only can it make you feel better about yourself, it can also hide your un-masculine qualities. It allows the wearer to adhere, or at least come as close as possible, to the masculine ideas of power and strength (trim, toned, tall, and perfectly able physiques), hiding their lack of cowboyness and transforming themselves into real men (Nodelman, 2001).

## 6.4. Cock of the Walk

One of the things I first noted during my initial observations of the pseudo cowboy was the exaggerated walk. In fact, one of the main reasons I approached a potential interviewee was because of the way he walked. Of course, he was not the only one as many walked in similar manner. However, what stood out with this individual was that it was not really a walk, it was more like a presentation saying; look at me, I am here. Thankfully he agreed to an interview and when this observation was brought up, his response was,

It's the cowboy boot strut. It's the force. It almost makes you – you don't have the bowleg, but you do, uh, have everything that comes with it (laughter) (I#9)

This response is interesting. Even though he indicated it was the boots that made him walk in a certain way, he also stated he had everything that came along with the strut. As he associated himself with the mythic hero, he was more composed, self-aware, and confident as he walked. The boots helped reinforce this image.

I am not denying that the boots may make it difficult to walk and can physically change your gait, especially if you are not used to wearing them, in fact another interviewee also mentioned the 'strut' noting boots 'kinda make you walk in a certain way' (I#4). However, in my observations the over exaggerated walk has an overtly assertive manner. It gives an impression of an imposing figure, someone not to be reckoned with. It recalls Dempsey's (1995) remarks on fake cowboys swaggering into the towns and bars in an effort to be authentic. It is almost like they walk with purpose. Beyond my personal observations, this was also noted by another interviewee,

Yeah, and they have a walk to theme. They walk a certain way...It's, it's like, they almost like walk like, they almost like kick their legs out more,

they just like, I don't even know how to explain it... But all the guys I know at \_\_\_\_\_, I swear to god they all walk the same way. Maybe it's something, maybe it's because of whatever they do on ranches and stuff like they gotta do things a certain way or it's just the boots. I don't know (I#3).

The response here is also interesting. Although he states the walk might be connected to their work on ranches, however, as most of the attendees are suburbanites, the 'walk to theme' is more likely the cause of the strut. For instance, as men often feel obligated to perform masculinity in specific ways which are dependent upon a cultural climate (Kivel & Johnson, 2009), and the Stampede is masculine arena, it is possible some men choose to alter their gait to fit into this climate. As men are active agents in the construction of their own identity, I believe they are actively choosing to express a more dominant masculine identity through their walk to influence the social perceptions of others. Research indicates people tend to categorise individuals who walk in a more masculine manner as men and those who walk in more feminine manner as women (Johnson & Tassinari, 2005), or classify men who walk in gender-typical fashion as straight and those who walk in atypical fashion as gay (Johnson et. al, 2007). As a result, the exaggerated gait becomes a way to express a more masculine dominant identity. As the cowboy was often a "tall, sinewy figure" (Fishwick, 1952. P.81), who walked with an aura of confidence (Wright, 2001), there is symbolic meaning in the walk. It becomes a statement about who you are. As opposed to strolling across the plains, you can 'strut' your stuff across the midway.

## **6.5. I drink therefore, I'm man**

One of the main reasons people attend the Stampede is for the party atmosphere. Parties are intrinsic to the festival spirit and reach far beyond the actual grounds and into tents erected around the city at bars, restaurants, and businesses. Although these events are not directly related to the Calgary Stampede, as Weadick encouraged the masses to embrace the event not as riotous entertainment and "recognise it as their own history spread out before them" (Kelm, 2014, p. 719), the Stampede and the parties are informally linked. I have been to a few of these events over the years and, although they are fun and great for networking, the degree of 'celebration' can be excessive. In fact, two interviewees referred to the ten days as a

'bender'<sup>64</sup> (I#4, I#7), one mentioned how it was used as an excuse to 'party' (I#5), and another mentioned how it was a justification for getting 'drunk all week' (I#7).

Tents are erected around the city; however, one of the largest tents, *Cowboys*, is conveniently located just outside the grounds where an estimated 20,000 attend each day to drink and take in live music (Izzo, 2003). As opposed to offering my own opinion on the venue and its atmosphere, an interviewee who worked as a stage crew hand after hours offered a much better illustration,

Oh, it was horrible. Some of the shit you see man. Like you see like panties on the floor, there's vomit everywhere, you smell piss everywhere and stuff, right. There's like food – trying to take down some, uhh, you know some mikes, umm, something, some gear – there's like food strung all over the place. Some chicken wings and shit. It's just fucked up (laughter). Every time I go in, I'm like my god you people are animals, right. (I#6).

Although the conduct in this venue is more extreme than some of the other venues, the level of drinking can be found in other events connected to the Stampede when other men are involved. I have been to a few of these events and the pressure to drink can be overwhelming<sup>65</sup>. It is almost expected. Of course, men themselves are often the culprits and do not need any pressure. In fact, one of my interviewees who went to a 'boot stomping' breakfast stated he was not going to pass up 'early morning beers' (I#8). Although a few early morning beers too many is not that risky, the potential increase in risk-taking behaviour associated with alcohol consumption and the Stampede is problematic.

Although heavy alcohol consumption is not necessarily a trait of masculinity, there is a connection between hegemonic masculinity and risk-taking behaviour. As men endorse and aspire to the dominant cultural principles, which in this instance are the qualities of the cowboy, who is often characterised by his physical and emotional toughness and the ability to handle any situation, this (re)positioning demands particular patterns of behaviour, that can be understood as a means of constructing or demonstrating gender (Courtenay, 2000). Since men take an active role in the construction of their own identity, and some men are considered more manly than

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<sup>64</sup> An informal term for a wild alcohol drinking spree.

<sup>65</sup> I have attended a few Stampede luncheons and was immediately handed a beer as I walked in. Needless to say, I did not pass this up.

others, men (or male peers) can contribute to upholding the norms by challenging each other verbally and physically (Hinote & Webber, 2012), which can lead to risk-taking behaviours and practices (Connell, 2000). In this regard, men (and boys), in order to be perceived that they are 'man enough', can publicly display their masculinity to reinforce these social perceptions.

As the endorsement of traditional masculine ideology has been associated with high rates of alcohol use (Kim, 2017), and some men view heavy drinking as masculine behaviour (Hinote & Webber, 2012), it is possible that some men who are insecure about their masculine identity may use alcohol consumption to demonstrate masculine competence (De Visser & Smith, 2007). As (heavy) drinking is understood to be a form of 'macho' behaviour (Peralta, 2007), and can be associated with strength, ability, and power (Giaccardi et. al, 2017), public drinking can serve as a context in which to further display masculinity, especially when it is consumed in front of peers. As social drinking can be viewed as a cultural symbol of manliness, or a social expectation, and confirms a man's acceptance among his male peers, heavier drinking can symbolise greater masculinity, and the "more a man can tolerate, the more manly he is deemed" (Lemle & Mishkind, 1989, p. 214). As men may feel societal pressure to follow certain standards and rules to achieve the ideal image of manliness, and it is important for them to be considered masculine, it may influence their drinking behaviour.

As the Stampede is a masculine event, where traditional notions of hegemonic masculinity are valued and performed (strength, physical toughness, and ability), and some men endorse and aspire to reach these hegemonic standards, attendees who want to be perceived as more masculine, may be more likely to engage in heavy drinking. For instance, even though the two individuals (I#3, I#6) who referred to the Stampede as a 'bender' stated their behaviour had not changed from their everyday lives, considering both had attended multiple times dressed in cowboy attire and used the Stampede as an excuse to drink all week, I am going suggest their behaviour had changed. Of course, not all men aspire to reach the hegemonic standards, and sometimes a beer is just a beer.

## 6.6. Cowboy up!

As I walked around the various events, one thing I had noticed was a fair number of children were dressed up in cowboy gear, especially at the Stampede breakfasts. It was mainly cowboy hats and plaid shirts; however, the occasional child was wearing boots. Considering how young some of the children are it is highly unlikely they choose to dress up on their own accord, though some of the older children (8-10) may have chosen their own attire. Although only a few interviewees had children, most noted they would in fact dress their kids in cowboy attire. For example, one of the interviewees mentioned how he would lightly persuade his children to dress up,

Probably encourage them 'oh hey look at this hat' – put that hat on you know (pause) cause that's always the best part, throw a cowboy hat on cause you don't wear a cowboy hat all year (I#2)

Now, I will admit seeing a small child in cowboy attire is cute and innocent, and one my interviewees also mentioned something similar (I#7). Really it is no different to cultural response to the early Wild West shows where parents were running out and buying western toys for their children to play with (Fishwick, 1952). Its harmless. However, there are elements of policing gender, coinciding with the promotion of masculinity, which can be problematic. For instance, one of the interviewees mentioned that his oldest boy (11) was at first apprehensive about wearing boots; however, after some light encouragement he had convinced his son to put them on.

I mean if you want to wear boots, wear boots, if you don't, then don't, but we are all wearing them so it's up to you... Wear don't wear, I don't care, but mom's gonna take them back and get her money back (I#8).

The gender policing may not be obvious; however, as he considers 'cowboy' culture a part of his family's life,<sup>66</sup> and one of the best ways to teach appropriate gendered conduct, this policing ensures his son adheres to the hegemonic social norms which as a parent he believes is important. Plus, as he considers this boy a 'city' kid as opposed the other two 'country' boys, this encouragement can also help ensure his son conforms to the same pattern as his 'country' siblings.

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<sup>66</sup> He believes there to be a core value to cowboy culture and sees it as a good way to raise children.

As cowboy culture is overtly masculine and the promotion of masculinity begins early, the attire can be used to diminish non-conforming behaviours and can also encourage more masculine behaviours. As parents may attempt to diminish non-conforming behaviours and encourage more appropriate gender behaviour by ensuring their children adopt an early identity through the clothing, the body becomes gendered. This is especially true as clothing “adorns bodies, buttresses gender norms, sexualise objects, and fulfills social expectations” (Gibson, 2016. p. 748). When I asked if his son still wears them, he said with pride, ‘yeah, absolutely’.

This policing of gender in this case could be problematic, especially if one of his children refuses to abide by the ‘cultural norms’ he deems important. I#8 also made a few other comments I found to be problematic, and to be honest, quite offensive. For instance, when we initially discussed the average person walking around in cowboy attire, he stated he felt more comfortable with a man ‘putting on cowboys boots, plaid shirt and a hat then him prancing around in a dress’, however, he noted his respect for this person would not change if they choose to not wear this attire. In this regard, as long as they maintained some form heteronormative standards it was allowable. When I asked him if there was a manly aspect to it, he agreed, and explicitly stated when I asked if the gear was better than wearing a dress ‘fucking rights it is’.

What is interesting in this scenario, is even though he considers the masculine culture a part of his life, a man imitating his culture in cowboy attire is not seen as a threat; however, a man in a dress is. In fact, at a later point in the interview he reiterated this point,

I’m uh, again I’m biased right because I don’t want them to come here for gay pride parade, but if they come here for the Stampede and they wear western gear, like I said that’s more manly than prancing around in the streets wearing a dress. So, I have more respect for that, than the other one.

As hegemonic masculinity “requires maintaining difference from and dominance over other social groups by constructing these groups as less qualified, valuable, or desirable” (Smirnova, 2018, p.3), and emphasises heterosexual performance and homophobia as normal practice (Donaldson, 1993), he is more willing to accept this temporary form of masculine display as the clothing reinforces the gendered binary and

normative behaviour. There is no threat to his masculine existence (or his culture) in this Western garb, whereas a man in a dress holds a distinct challenge.

As research into masculinity reveals that men face substantive pressure to endorse traditional models of masculinity, and the Stampede encourages a certain form of masculine display, there is social pressure to conform to this masculine ideal. As a result of this pressure it can force men to adhere to these standards and dress like a cowboy even when it goes against their own standards. For instance, I#5, who had to attend a few work-related events stated it was 'highly recommended' to dress up he felt the need to 'comply'. I also came across a similar situation like this during the recruitment stage when two young men mentioned they were only wearing the attire because their employers had forced them.<sup>67</sup> The Stampede situates the masculine cowboy above all else, and men, by bowing to the social pressure and complying, reinforce the hegemonic ideal. Although many men might not believe in or aspire to reach these hegemonic standards, their true values are irrelevant. By avoiding anything which deviates from the norm, men reinforce this masculine cowboy (image) through their engagement with the attire.

## **6.7. It's not you, it's me(n)**

Calgary is a multi-cultural city, and this is evident when walking around the Stampede. Everyone celebrates the Stampede in some form. However, in spite of the city's multicultural character, I immediately noticed that the majority of those dressed in the cowboy attire were white. This was also the case when I attended a few of the festivities downtown and a couple of the pancake breakfasts in the suburbs. Overall, I would estimate<sup>68</sup> about 60% of all attendees were dressed up at the Stampede, about 40% downtown, and roughly 30% at the breakfasts. As the western clothing denotes participation and identification with the western cultural tradition (Foran, 2003; Kelm, 2009), the dressing up is quite expected. During one of my outings, I had noticed a Somali woman in a hijab walking around with her family wearing a cowboy hat. A few of

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<sup>67</sup> Their words not mine. Unfortunately, both declined to be interviewed, but said it would be okay to mention this.

<sup>68</sup> These rough estimates include people of colour and visible minorities, which I would guess is less than 1%. The amount of people dressed in attire from either of this groups is minimal.

her children were also wearing hats. I thought the children were adorable. As the Stampede has attempted to create an image which speaks of the past, but also “resonate[s] with larger and more diverse audiences” (Foran, 2003, p.16) in an effort to be more inclusive this is great, as the family clearly openly embraced the Stampede’s culture.

In order to assess the interviewees’ opinions on the embrace of the culture, I brought this scenario up and most were receptive,

embracing both cultures, I like that. (I#7)

I think it’s great people can get into the spirit and embrace that culture. (I#5)

awesome (laughter) I’m actually that surprised. I kinda wish I would of seen something like that. (I#9)

It’s cool, but it’s bizarre. (I#6)

As indicated by these responses, the majority of attendees are openly receptive when other cultures embrace the Western event; however, one interviewee’s experience with the Stampede, and its culture, indicates there can also be problems.

I#2, a Black man in his mid-20s, worked at a Stampede venue as a bouncer for the ten days. Tall, physically fit, quick-witted and with a calming demeanour, I#2 had all the standard qualities needed in a bouncer (Foley & Dismore, 2014). Even though he has attended the Stampede multiple times in the past and has a few friends who dress up for the occasion, when he talked about his work experience, he felt he was treated differently because of his race. When I asked why, he noted,

because, I’m a black guy working at a country bar. A cowboy bar.

In fact, he thought most of the attendees were racist. When I asked why, he indicated,

...sometimes like when you tell certain people to do something and like, you just get the feeling that they are like I don’t want you telling me what to do...

And also,

The ones that are like dressed like full on cowboys, like middle aged and everything, I don’t know. It’s like the vibe you get. You know like, you

just feel that way from them. Like the way they look at you and the way they talk to you, your just like...

The question is, why was he treated this way? As a hierarchal relationship was established based on the superior qualities of the masculine cowboy against the inferior qualities of all other men, which included race, and I#2's job as a bouncer was to control their behaviour, it is possible this control was deemed offensive to the structure of the heroic white cowboy. As black men are seen as hypermasculine and hypersexual (Pascoe, 2011), it is possible his position and accompanying demeanor could be perceived as a threat. As many men experience of state of tension and anxiety when negotiating their own masculinity against the dominant form, which in this case could be either the heroic cowboy or I#2, it is possible that the attitudes against him or any other person of colour, even if it is subtle (attitude, shortness, looks, etc.) can be used to reaffirm their own masculine identity.

As indicated, I#2 felt (believed) he was treated differently because of his race and when we returned to this theme in a later point in the interview, he stated a few of the event's patrons also had similar experiences with racial slurs (n-word) being directed towards them. As men can also display and project popular notions of masculinity through language, the assertion of one's own masculinity can also be accomplished by emasculating others through direct humiliation (Pascoe, 2011). In this regard, the derogatory terms can be used as a form of harassment when their own normative form of hegemonic masculinity is being challenged.

Humour can also be used as a form of harassment, either direct or indirect. As noted by Weaver, Mora & Morgan (2016), humour can be used to ridicule a 'target', and place that person in an inferior position in relation to the teller and the receptive audience. For instance, one of the interviewees told me a story about one of his peers who had attended the Stampede for the first time, who was returning his boots because of his 'delicate woman feet'. Needless to say, the interviewee was disappointed as his friend did not live up to the visual ideal, but he found the story funny enough to share. As hegemonic masculinity is a relational construct with set boundaries defined through a series of oppositional relationships (Smirnova, 2018, p.3), language is one way to assert authority over others, since without these opposing groups hegemony is meaningless.

As indicated, I#2 felt he was treated differently because of his race and the environment he was working in. It was a cowboy bar filled with men dressed in cowboy attire. Because of the historical association between the heroic white cowboy and racial superiority, is it possible the venue, or even the Stampede in its entirety, and the accompanying atmosphere could/would allow some individuals to be more open and honest with their feelings in regard to race? Would it be the same in a different environment?

When I asked I#2, he had a similar view,

I feel like it would change because I feel like it wouldn't – like they're at a cowboy bar so they, like it's their bar, like their type of thing, so they just are who they are but if they were somebody, somewhere else, where there's so many different people they wouldn't act the same – I don't know

I agree with this statement, and really it is impossible to gauge, unless I could find a few people to interview who would be open and honest with their opinions. However, as the culture is predominantly white and explicitly masculine, and the Stampede is an arena where these notions are celebrated, and people tend to be more comfortable in familiar surroundings, it is quite possible that there is in fact a change in attitudes towards race, or a tendency to be more open when expressing existing biases.

## Chapter 7. Summary and Conclusion

What is it about the heroic cowboy that continues to 'draw' people in? As previously noted, I could not initially understand the appeal for cowboy culture in a modern multicultural city. To me, the cowboy represented an outdated icon. However, as the cowboy has relentlessly been held up as a heroic figure pitted against the savage forces of the Western frontier, regardless of the medium, it is much easier now to understand the continued appeal. If the incessant myths have taught me anything, he truly is an exceptional mythical hero that reaffirms the masculine identity of the frontier. As the Stampede is partially based on this myth, which is celebrated each year, this event undeniably adds to his heroism. The performers are exceptional, and what they do is exhilarating. They truly are 'men amongst boys'.

Clothing, in particular, has always been linked to identity and expression and cowboy clothing is no exception. Research indicates that, regardless of the cowboy's timeline (traditional or mythic), or his preferred choice of clothing (practical or grandiose), there were many who sought to emulate his style. As the cowboy has relentlessly been held up as an exceptional model of hegemonic masculinity, bordering on superhero status, and the clothing is one of the ways to express this identity, this is not unusual. The clothing has symbolic meaning beyond the need to just cover one's body and has been used to emphasise a certain degree on manliness. The clothing represents an ideal.

Although historically, men chose to dress up in the attire out of respect for Alberta's heritage, this no longer seems to be the driving factor, at least in relation to the men I interviewed. Some of these men, from my observations, dressed up for very different reasons. As a result of my initial observations, and then subsequent analysis, I believe the choice to dress up in cowboy attire is highly influenced by individual personality, social situations, and how men feel about themselves, or, rather, see themselves.

As the cowboy, his approach to life, and the way he handles situations, including his interactions against man and beast, seen as an ideal. The clothing, then, becomes one of the easiest ways to emulate his 'style', without actually having to get involved in any heroic activities. He is an easily attainable superhero. However, as the cowboy is a

generic character, he is also relatable. People can easily see themselves in this man, walking tall, shooting straight, highly individualistic, and able to handle any situation, good or bad.

The Stampede is an arena in which the heroic cowboy is celebrated, and as such, men measure themselves against this heroic 'man' every year and watch as he valiantly (re)conquers the 'west'. Although his approach to life and interactions with others, at least in some form, are archaic and slightly out of touch with modern society, he still represents an ideal. A hegemonic masculine ideal. Thus, as the uber masculine ideal is (re) produced each year, men continue to celebrate, revel, and buy in to it, all without fully understanding what exactly it is they are celebrating (or do they understand?). Society has constructed masculinity so that only a small fraction of men and boys can achieve it, and those who do not measure up, do not count. So, you better shape up and try and be like that man. Capture that spirit, and if you cannot, well, at least you can look the part.

## **7.1. Recruitment and Reflection**

Considering the number of men who dress up in cowboy attire at the Stampede, I initially assumed it would be rather easy to find men willing to sit down and talk about their experiences during the festivities. Unfortunately, this was not the case. The recruitment process was probably the most painful experience in my academic career to date; however, I did learn valuable lessons.

After attending numerous pancake breakfasts and luncheons, Stephen Ave, a pedestrian mall in downtown Calgary that is lined with bars, patios, and restaurants all decked out in Western motifs, and about 20 hours outside the Stampede gates, I assumed I was in good stead. I left my contact details with approximately thirty-five people over the course of the recruitment stage; approximately twenty people expressed interest. However, this was not exactly an outright success, considering that I had approached nearly one-hundred and fifty people. Despite indications from most of these people that they would get in touch, the only people that were still receptive a few weeks later were the men who had also left their contacts details with me.

Part of the challenge could easily be rooted in the overall atmosphere. I imagine that the last thing on someone's mind while eating, drinking, and celebrating on their way into the Stampede is a quick chat on their cowboy attire. It is a celebration, not a vindication. However, it is possible my efforts in recruitment were made more difficult by some uniquely personal factors. Although I considered my approach to recruitment unassuming, it is possible that the way I presented myself influenced these results. For instance, I chose to wear a Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies (GSWS) t-shirt during recruitment, and it is possible that some men may have felt threatened by what this discipline represents. My costume, the GSWS t-shirt, makes an implicit political statement beyond simply representing the department and university. It is possible that my academic focus, and the connotations often associated with this area of study, as well as being associated with an academic institution, could have been off-putting to participants. In this way, my personal presentation could have had a distinct impact on my academic process.

Of course, the actual question at the heart of this research, "Why do you dress up in cowboy attire?" may have been its own deterrent. As the cowboy has relentlessly been held up as a hegemonic ideal which is locally epitomized by the Stampede, it is possible that my line of questioning could have been perceived as a challenge to the iconic image of the cowboy, or even seen as a rejection of the participants' own personal display of this image. The men who dress up for the Stampede know about the iconic cowboy and the culture he represents. My questioning their reasoning for representing this ideal through clothing may have been considered threatening. I was another male, but not dressed in cowboy attire, questioning their clothing choices. These tensions may have been compounded by my being an academic from outside the province (culture) who might not (clearly) understand or (properly) respect Alberta's notion of the Western man. I may be a masculine man, but I was not their type of masculine man, the one the Stampede reveres.

I was an anomaly, an outsider, and I stood out. I am generally perceived as a stereotypical hegemonic cis white alpha male. I have the physical attributes that exemplify the type, but I was refusing to participate. As men often feel on display and hyper-aware of other's display, my eschewing of the dress code may have been threatening to their self-images (and to the culture). In this regard, my difficulties generating a large pool of interview subjects might have been a result of both my dress

and the way I presented myself. In retrospect, I should have considered my dress more critically during recruitment and possibly considered wearing more typical Stampede attire.

I knew very little about cowboy culture when I started this research. Most of my opinion centred around a view of the cowboy figure as an outdated American icon. I had no idea about the history of the cowboy, especially in relation to Calgary and Southwestern Alberta. Had I known more about the connection, would I have dressed up? No, unfortunately not. I really do not want to further extend my own masculinity or other's perception of my masculinity, even if it could have made recruitment easier. Further, I would not want to consciously engage in cultural appropriation. I would not want to be a *poseur* or a fraud, and it would have been disrespectful to both the participants and the culture. In this regard, my own expression of masculinity, and its role in my identity and presentation, was actively involved in this process.

As the interviews were conducted in the months following the Stampede, and I had become more familiar with the CS and different forms of cowboys (authentic and heroic), I had a different relationship to the culture I was investigating. I knew more about its origins and history and how the cowboy came to be revered for his masculine characteristics, but I never directly addressed these concepts. Even though I had developed a better understanding of masculinity and its connection to the heroic cowboy at this point, I did not want to change the dynamic of the interview and thereby risk skewing the results. The purpose was to learn about the interviewees' internal understanding of the cowboy and masculine expression, so I endeavoured to leave my opinion and biases out.

The questions were straightforward and based on the subject's own opinion of the cowboy, the attire, and the stampede. The purpose of these simple and direct question was to encourage more authentic expressions. There was nothing they would have been inclined to exaggerate about, except possibly how many times they had attended or how much money they had spent. Since these questions were less directly significant to the culture, there would be little room to skew the results. Away from the sea of cowboys at the Stampede, my attire held less weight. I was a researcher, but no longer an anomalous observer, and I simply wanted to know why men dress in cowboy attire for these 10 days a year.

I believe the participants' answers would have been largely the same regardless who asked the questions. As long as the interviewer was not connected to Stampede culture, I believe the results would not have changed significantly. It undeniably would have changed the dynamics had I let my personal biases in and asked targeted questions such as, "Why do you choose to revere an outdated icon?". I imagine most would have been offended, and the interview would have become more antagonistic. I was open and honest when I approached them and during the interview process. My goal was to understand the appeal of the culture and figure out why men tend to dress in this attire, not to demand that people be confronted by my opinions of said culture and costume.

## **7.2. Limitations and Future Research**

While I believe this study contributes to understanding masculinities in modern Canadian culture, there are some limitations in what I have presented here. If I could undertake this study again, I would like to interview more attendees, particularly I would like to include more people of colour and visible minorities. Discussions with those who travelled from outside Alberta to attend the Stampede would also be essential. In addition, interviews from business owners or managers who gently 'coerce' their staff to dress up would be valuable. Even though only a few interviewees had children who they would dress up, it would be interesting to see if their partners were supportive of these gendered norms. This would be especially interesting because older female attendees tend dress<sup>69</sup> very differently to their male counterparts. I would also like to interview people who experienced forms of racism and prejudice during the ten days of festivities. In regard to future research, I would like to conduct a similar study and interview gay men who dress up in cowboy attire, which would include those from outside the city and province. I also believe further in-depth research into masculinities, clothing, and other subcultures is warranted.

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<sup>69</sup> Women tend to wear plaid shirts, boots, cowboy hats, and daisy duke shorts. Daisy dukes are extremely short denim cut-offs which tend to accentuate the posterior.

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## Appendix A. Interview Schedule

Interview	Date	Age Range	Community	Occupation	Family Ranch Connection	Ranch Work Experience
#1	07.19.18	20s	Chaparral	Student	Minimal	Minimal
#2	07.19.18	20s	Riverbend	Student	Minimal	Minimal
#3	07.20.18	20s	Langdon*	Student	Minimal	Minimal
#4	07.22.18	18	Lake Bonavista	Student	Medium	None
#5	07.26.18	30s	Unknown	Communications & Development	None	None
#6	08.09.18	30s	McKenzie Towne	Musician	None	None
#7	08.20.18	20s	Glamorgan	Student	Minimal	None
#8	09.06.18	30s	Okotoks*	Sales	Medium	Minimal
#9	09.10.18	30s	Panorama	Ops. Manager	Minimal	Minimal

\* These two cities are on the outskirts of Calgary. I would consider them satellite cities.

## Appendix B: Rodeo Definitions

Tie-Down (Steer) Roping	The objective for the rider is to catch a calf by throwing a rope around its neck, then quickly dismount, run to the calf and restrain it by tying its legs together. This event requires accuracy and speed.
Steer Wrestling	The objective is to wrestle a steer to the ground as quickly as possible. It is one of the rodeos most challenging events. This event requires strength, speed, and precision.
Bareback Riding	The objective of this event is to stay on the horse using only a rigger (which resembles a suitcase handle on strap), while the horse bucks and jumps. It is one of the most abusive sports, with riders suffering more significant injuries and long-term damage than most other rodeo cowboys. This event requires strength, skill, balance, and coordination.
Saddle Bronco (Busting) Riding	The objective of this event is a fluid ride, which contrasts with other events. Using only a thick rein attached to the horse's halter, the cowboy tries to stay securely seated in his saddle. This event requires strength, grace, style, and precise timing.