Buddy Films and Gender Identity: Representing the Bonds of Masculinity

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Abstract

The study examines the buddy film genre and the representation of masculinity in relation to the homosocial and the homoerotic. As a genre, the buddy films focus on male relationships, thematically seeking to mediate the boundaries surrounding the homosocial continuum and the intimacy and eroticism implicit in male bonding. Theories of genre, gender and identity are used to analyze the construction of masculine identity within the films. By providing a qualitative analysis of films from the 1960s to contemporary times, the research establishes a relationship between social changes, attitudes toward men and depictions of men. The buddy films adapt to address changes in the representation of masculinity, embodied in the difference between the male couple in the films. The early films of the 1960s served as templates that deconstructed traditional representations of male identity through articulating the tension within homosocial relationships. However, in the later films this tension became a reflexive convention, acting to undermine the eroticism onto a displaced Other. The buddy film genre highlights the tension inherent to the male masquerade. This tension is situated in the need to represent the protagonist's homosocial relationship, while disavowing the eroticism that surrounds homosocial bonding. The structure of the buddy film genre, which focuses on the exploration of masculinity and representing the bonds of homosocial intimacy, makes these films a significant site for investigating the cultural construction of masculine identities.
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In my thesis I examine the cinematic representations of masculinity within the buddy film genre and how these depictions relate to issues of the homosocial and the homoerotic. As a genre, the buddy film initially focuses on male relationships, thematically seeking to mediate the boundaries surrounding the homosocial continuum and the intimacy and eroticism implicit in male bonding. The homosocial continuum represents a range of men’s interests, bonds, and sexual desires towards other men. By analyzing a series of films in the genre over a period of time, I hope to establish a relationship between social changes, attitudes toward men and depictions of men. Theories of genre, gender and identity will be used to examine the buddy films, uncovering the construction of the relationships within the films, and locating these relationships within a larger social framework. The films recreate an ideological position that can be seen as reinforcing hegemonic structures; however, many of the films negotiate this conservatism through a series of ambiguities surrounding issues of male identity and the homoerotic. The ideological domestication enacted upon the homosocial bonds of the buddy film serves only to further emphasize homoerotic tension. Ultimately, the homosocial spaces explored within the buddy genre offer an eroticism that subverts ideological containment.

In the past, theoretical examination on the ideals of the homosocial and homoerotic has focused on canonical works in literature. In D.H. Lawrence’s writing on the *Leatherstocking Tales* and Leslie Fiedler’s work on *Huckleberry Finn*, the theorists explore the significance of the homosocial bonds that are at the center of these narratives. In these canonical texts, the characters and their archetypal conflicts negotiate similar
issues of race, class and sexuality that are present in contemporary popular films. The coupling of the men is used to explore ideas about conquest and race, a significant theme in contemporary buddy films. The relationships between the men in buddy films frequently re-enact this theme, reinforcing an Othering based upon varying positions of power accessed by the divergent construction of masculinity. These past readings of buddy texts helped to form the basis of my analysis of popular buddy films by offer perspectives which challenge the way masculinity is frequently neutralized.

While feminist theory has often sought to explore images of women and their relationships within films, the study of masculine identity remains an area in which a limited number of films have been re-explored. Frequently, film studies has focused on traditionally masculine genres, such as westerns or action films; however, it is important to apply analysis to a broader cross-section of popular texts. Recent work in queer studies has sought expand the field of film studies in relation to masculinity. Contemporary work by queer theorists such as Alexander Doty, Steven Cohan, and Michael DeAnglis have helped to address an imbalance in gender studies, by further developing concepts that emerged in response to the work of early feminist theorists. The work of these theorists creates a dialogue that breaks down the heterosexist assumptions that restricted earlier theoretical frameworks for examining representations of gender and further exploring the fluidity of spectatorship.

Buddy films create a thematic focus on intersecting masculine identities that the films attempt to negotiate and resolve. The buddy film genre provides texts that offer fluid positions, and in doing so presents the spectator with an opportunity to participate in the creation of meaning. For example, in one scene in the film Baseketball (1998), the
two male protagonists embrace and kiss. When I watched this scene with one group of men, they all cheered and applauded, enjoying the articulation of the previously unexpressed desire between the men on-screen. Yet another man I spoke to felt that this scene was lampooning any queerness that the film may contain. The two opposite responses represent the divergent possible interpretations audiences may take up in buddy films. The ambiguities articulated in masculine identities within these films point not only to the limitations in examining masculinity as a concept defined by a single meaning, but the inability of the films to maintain the illusion of gender stability.

In order to examine the films within a social and historical milieu, the chapters of this thesis are organized chronologically, thereby clearly establishing the conventions of the genre and their evolution in popular filmic discourse in relation to cultural changes located within distinct historical moments. The parameters of my study are from the 1960s through to the present, since this timeframe is notable for the rapid reformation of traditional gender roles. This transformation of gender identity is evidenced in images of men in film and elsewhere in popular culture. By locating the films within this time period, I will be able to draw correlations between social and historical shifts and the changing representations of male identity. This parallels the structure in David Laderman’s Driving Visions, which examines the genre of road films during the same time period. An in-depth textual reading of the films, along with shifts in image culture and social discourses, provides the basis of my interpretations and conclusions on the buddy film genre.

In order to conduct an examination of masculinity within the buddy films, my definition of the buddy genre will be restricted to films that focus on two male
protagonists. The need to restrict film selection, as within most other genres, arises out of the broad scope and breadth of the buddy film. Although the genre includes diverse representations of men and their relationships, the films that feature two male leads offer a distinct image of the contradictions articulated in the construction of male relationships within films. One of the main areas of analysis will be the relationship between masculinity, the homosocial and the homoerotic; these films offer a chance to examine the negotiation of queer moments within films. While there are other types of buddy films that are unaccounted for within my definition, such as women buddy films (*Thelma & Louise* [1991], *Romy and Michelle’s High School Reunion* [1997]), bestial buddy films (*Beethoven* [1992], *K-9* [1989]), child and adult films (*Big Daddy* [1999], *Curly Sue* [1991]), group films (*Animal House* [1978], *Foxfire* [1996]), and various combinations of each (*Bad News Bears* [1976], *The Mighty Ducks* [1992]), they are not as clearly centered on masculinity and homoerotism.

In examining this topic, several issues emerge in terms of structure and methodology that need to be addressed. Since my thesis is a genre study, the predominant methodology will be qualitative, relying on a broad textual analysis. An inevitable methodological issue that arises when initiating a genre study is the need to account for the methodology determining the selection of the films to be studied. According to Andrew Tudor, this issue is problematic, since there is the initial necessity to define the characteristics of the genre, only then to limit the selection to those illustrating the defined characteristics (Tudor 5). Having outlined the parameters of the buddy films that I will use within my analysis, I have selected films that are significant to their particular period, either as popular or critical successes, to establish a connection to
widely disseminated discourses of the periods, locating the films in their social and historical setting. Like theorist Will Wright, when selecting the films from each period I consider factors such as box office and awards as indicators of the film’s popularity. I plan to establish a relationship between the popular images of men in film, social attitudes and changes that emerge as a result of specific social and historical events. The Vietnam War and the social activism that emerged as a response in the 1960s, the recession of the 1970s and the end of the Cold War in the 1980s, all had an impact on representations of masculinity. Therefore, I have restricted the films that I have chosen to those that originated from and were widely distributed within the United States.

In the first chapter I outline the various theoretical positions surrounding the issues of genre, gender and identity, which will provide the framework of my thesis. Genre theory is significant to my argument since it is necessary to establish that these films conform to the standards of genre. To show that these films form a genre, I will also explore how genre functions and to what effect. Further, an examination of genre theory allows for the relationship between genre and gender to be explored. Genre and representations of gender function through the use of shared symbols and repetition to create conventions. Within this chapter I will also outline various theoretical concepts which will prove of importance in the arguments developed in following chapters. These theories include those that explore gender and audience positioning, such as Laura Mulvey’s theory of the gaze, and Mary Ann Doane, Steven Heath and Chris Holmlund’s concept of the male masquerade. These theories on the performance of gender are of particular importance to the study of buddy films since they provide entry points for examining representations of gender in relation to positioning and power. I will also
examine the work of gender theorists Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick and Alexander Doty, who deal more explicitly with issues of homoerotism, the homosocial and queer theory. Queer theory allows for an opening of spectator positioning by building on the work of earlier feminist theory to posit a more fluid identification. Situating the relationships of the protagonists in a homosocial continuum provides a structure to interpret the thematization of homoerotism within the films. The outlining and defining of the various assertions held and terminology used by these different theorists establishes a critical groundwork that I build upon through counter arguments, expansion and analysis in the following chapters of my thesis.

Chapter Two begins the chronological study of the buddy genre. In this chapter I establish the social and historical context of the films from the 1960s, the period which marks the emergence of the buddy film. Robin Wood has noted that buddy films have often been seen as a “reaction to the women’s movement” (227). Aside from the misogynist backlash the genre represents, Wood suggests that another significance of the marginalized role women play in these narratives is that it allows for a shift away from thematic concerns that women often symbolize in the narrative, like “marriage, family, home” (227). The shift in theme re-articulates the center around which the male relationships within the narratives are structured. Timothy Corrigan notes that the films of the ‘60s were marked by an “ambivalent impulse and possibilities for films and their audiences” (17). This ambivalence, on the part of the filmmakers and audiences, altered the representation of the masculine masquerade. The traditional hero associated with the western, whose role is often one of sacrifice through conquest and rescue, underwent a radical transformation during this period. The political rebellion of the time found an
outlet in the outlaw of the buddy films, shown freed from the constraints of domestic relationships and social responsibility. Ultimately, the heroes of this time are cynical, unable to save themselves or anyone else. The films I have selected from this period—Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid (1969), Midnight Cowboy (1969) and Easy Rider (1969)—are pertinent within the scope of my argument since they played an important role as precursors within the buddy film genre, establishing its iconography and conventions. The films will be analyzed within the theoretical framework outlined in the initial chapter, providing a close examination that uncovers the basic generic elements that link these films.

Subsequently, Chapter Three consists of a combined examination of the buddy films from the 1970s and 1980s. The chapter locates the films within a historical and social context in order to engage in a dialogue on the impact of the social on image culture. Unlike the representations of masculinity found in the films of the 1960s, which emphasized a displacement from the traditional symbols of male identity, the films of the 1970s and 1980s seem to embrace a return to a more conservative structuring of male relationships and the male body. The films I have selected from this period—Scarecrow (1973), Thunderbolt and Lightfoot (1974), 48 HRS (1982), Trading Places (1983), Planes, Trains and Automobiles (1987) and Tango and Cash (1989)—reintroduce the thematic elements of the earlier films while appropriating other genre conventions. Again, each film is significant within the time period in terms of critical and popular response. The films are linked by their ability to represent changing social and historical attitudes towards masculinity, working to address the tensions surrounding male identity symbolically. The films of the 1970s and 1980s specifically address the construction of
masculinity; however, unlike the earlier films of the 1960s which attempt to reveal the façade of authority, these films frequently reinforce traditional masculinity by affirming hierarchical constructions. The homosocial relationships of the 1960s that were foregrounded within the narratives are in these films subsumed through an elaboration of narrative and stylistic devices that act to erase the homoerotic significance of the male friendship. Yet, while the buddies' relationship is downplayed, their bodies become a site of excess representing a paranoid articulation of hyper-masculinity, subverting the conservative reconstruction of masculinity.

In Chapter Four I explore films from the 1990s until the present. The films I have chosen from contemporary times—Basekethall (2000), Bulletproof (1996), Dirty Work (1998), Independence Day (1996) and Dude, Where's My Car? (2001)—reflect a realignment of the buddy film genre. During the 1970s and 1980s the films reference the classical conventions of the genre, while the more contemporary films manipulate generic conventions to the point of parody to negotiate the homosocial and homoerotic tensions within the narrative. Earlier films contained moments of humour to mediate homoerotic elements, while these films foreground the humorous and homoerotic elements, forming a postmodern aesthetic. The potential of queerness is diffused by humour, desexualizing the erotic elements within the films, creating a doubleness within the text whereby the homoerotism is acknowledged only to be dismissed. The films represent a change in the authoritative performance of masculinity, in contrast to films of earlier decades; however, this shifting attitude acts as a predecessor to the movement towards the hyper-masculine seen in the 1980s. This representation allows for an address of the problematic construction of masculinity, even while it bolsters a hegemonic male identity.
In my conclusion I present a summary of my theoretical framework, re-examining the structuring of genre and gender construction, relying on the film analyses to support the arguments of my thesis. The codes that circulate in the buddy films explore the relationship between issues of homoerotism and the homosocial. In buddy films the meaning of these two issues in terms of masculine identity are continually re-addressed as an area of contention. The conclusion also includes an elaboration of my findings and their relevance to contemporary culture. Gender and genre studies create a theoretical framework for examining a broad body of popular texts in order to understand the functions and messages that are permitted to operate in popular culture at the level of a naturalized narrative. This examination of masculinity within the buddy genre will illustrate how the films function to reproduce and support a masculine ideal which, while rooted in the traditional male masquerade, undergoes a series of changes in response to a variety of social and historical influences. The need arises to challenge the dissemination of normative conventions that work to reinforce constraining gender positions, and such deconstruction as this thesis offers opens a space for a discussion around the construction of masculinity.

The exploration of masculinity in media is of special significance to contemporary times. The recent proliferation of texts targeting a predominantly male audience, evident in radio and television, such as *Mojo Radio* (2002) and *The Man Show* (1998), suggests the need to ask what is understood by masculinity and how the discourse surrounding male identity is circulated. Representation of male identity as bound to conservative notions of gender stereotypes continues to play an active role within popular culture, including film. *Movies For Guys*, a specialty channel segment that showcases
action and adventure films, acts as a celebration of gender constraints: enforcing the concept that action films and other dramas with male heroes address male audiences exclusively. The monolithic gender identity inherent within this positing of audiences acts to reinforce a simplistic notion of gender, reducing the potential for multiple subject positions. However, simplifying gender roles can also be seen as a reaction to or backlash against changing definitions of male identity, suggesting that the boundaries of gender are no longer stable and instead are in flux. When attempting to account for my goals with this thesis, the answer inevitably echoes the responses offered by previous theorists that analyses of films are a form of dialogue which engages in critical theory to broaden definitions of gender. As Eve Sedgwick states, when “modern Western culture has placed what it calls sexuality in a more and more distinctively privileged relation to our most prized constructs of individual identity, truth, and knowledge, it becomes truer and truer that the language of sexuality not only intersects with but transforms the other languages and relations by which we know” (Sedgwick, Epistemology 3). Analyzing the construction of gender in cultural texts becomes a way to look at the impact of culture on concepts of identity and perhaps open them up to other possibilities.

The buddy film genre, then, affords an opportunity to examine the changing representation of masculinity in media. It is postulated on conventions that endorse traditional concepts of male identity, while highlighting the homoerotic and the homosocial. One of the issues raised through exploring representations of male friendship is the effect of homosocial bonds in terms of the gaze, identification and desire. This question discloses a contradiction that is at the center of the dynamic of the buddy films. The balance between the eroticism and the disavowal of the erotic marks
the relationship between the protagonists in the films, yet the films fail to open a dialogue that addresses the presence of the social erotic. Instead, the erotic moment is deflected and the issues that these moments stand for in terms of the homosocial experience remain largely unexplored.
Endnotes for Introduction

1 The success of the films I selected is demonstrated by either critical awards, box office reception or cult status attained. For statistical information, see Appendices A and B.
Chapter One: Theories of Genre and Gender

Defining the 'buddy' genre is problematic since it spans several other genres—action, western, comedy, road film—and often creates hybrid films that frequently combine several sets of generic elements. Yet while the buddy film can be seen as intersecting various genres, this is not to imply that it is without clearly coded iconography and conventions of its own. In order to delineate the buddy film as distinct and separate from other genres, despite its hybrid nature, I will first examine how genre operates. The analysis of the buddy genre will include an examination of genre theory in general in an attempt to understand the function of generic conventions.

The work of early theorists can be seen as attempting to define the scope of genres. The classification process at work in genre theory arises from a tradition of literary studies (Bordwell 150). However, genre classification represents a more complex discourse, developing out of an ongoing exchange between filmmakers, audiences and critical theory. As this dialogue indicates, these labels impart as much information about the discourse surrounding a genre as they do about the genre itself. Genre production is often generated out of the response from critics and audiences, and so a positive response can lead to the proliferation of work in a particular genre, resulting in cycles (Bordwell 152). Resurgence in the popularity of a genre reveals not only the taste of audiences as subject to a social and historical framing, but also the process of interpolation between critics, production, and audience. Genre theory is significant to the study of buddy films since understanding how and what is studied reveals popular and critical attitudes.

Genre films create a language of symbols, functioning to balance the known along
with innovation. To function as a language, these symbols that create the iconography of the genre films must be accepted within a shared community of filmmakers, critics and audiences. While the iconography of genre films often arises out of advertising and marketing strategies, it is also related to a public discourse that can be established independently from production. Theorists such as Tzvetan Todorov, in attempting to establish the boundaries of genre through iconography and narrative, conceived of genre as evolutionary, from development to elaboration to parody. Genre was understood in terms of a linear evolution that reinforces the stable identities of succinct and separate genres. However, later theorists such as Rick Altman and Christine Gledhill rejected the emphasis on fixed categorization which preoccupied preceding genre theory by arguing that “genres are not discrete phenomena, contained within mutually exclusive boundaries, but deal rather in a shared and changing pool of plot mechanisms, icons, and discourses” (Gledhill 224). Genres can be seen as engaging in ongoing cycles of appropriation, continually relying on the known codes and conventions at work within public memory to create new meanings. Films can occupy various genre categories, since the boundaries remain ambiguous, although the audiences, critics, and producers may attempt to solidify and therefore control their meanings.

However, despite the polyvalent designation of texts which work to destabilize genre boundaries, the communal signification at work within genre films succeeds only when it is recognized and re-articulated. In the buddy film genre this process of recognition is complicated by the inclusion of conventions from other genres, while the films maintain a set of conventions and iconography specific to the buddy genre. As Rick Altman states, if a genre is “not defined by the industry and recognized by the mass
audience, then it cannot be a genre, because film genres are by definition not just scientifically derived or theoretically constructed categories, but are always industrially certified and publicly shared” (16). The genre of buddy films is recognized publicly and critically, yet due to the adaptable narrative of the genre the films are often defined by appropriated iconographic conventions. Buddy films are based on a shared iconography; however, for the films to maintain a role within public memory they must draw on iconography that reinforces public expectations of the buddy genre. Barry Grant says that simply because genre films relate “familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations, it by no means follows that they do so in ways that are completely familiar” (“Introduction” xvii-xviii). The buddy film genre is shaped by this reconfiguration, continually adapting to register changing notions of masculinity. In her discussion of the horror genre, Carol Clover maintains that genre is comprised of “the free exchange of themes and motifs, the archetypal characters and situations, the accumulation of sequels, remakes, imitations. This is a field in which there is in some sense no original, no real or right text, but only variants; a world in which, therefore, the meaning of the individual example lies outside itself” (11). The ongoing exchange of iconography and film citations within genre films creates an interconnection between films, establishing a common set of references derived from generic films. As Bordwell states, “[a]lthough genre pictures bear the traces of the cultural conversation, they are also talking among themselves” (153). The meaning of genre films relies not only on simple narrative structure and audience reception, but also on the discourse of the genre and other genres. Examining genre discourse is important for buddy films, since the films are reflexive and employ conventions from a broad range of masculine genres.
Each genre film relies on specific conventions, yet rather than simply duplicating a set formula the films are always changing and engaging with those conventions. Genres are formed through appropriation, and they continue to evolve due to their “heavy use of intertextual references” (Altman 25). The shared intertextuality of genre films reflects the need to engage with a communal text that is located in past films and other popular texts. Altman argues that genre boundaries are continually negotiated: “a genre is not one thing serving one purpose, but multiple things serving multiple purposes for multiple groups, it remains a permanently contested site” (195). A relationship is founded between producers, audiences and critics who circulate the various notions of the genre. As Gledhill states, “In producing trends, cycles, and local genres the film industry provides material for the wider process of genre-making, conceived as a process of cultural identity or social imaginary formation in which a range of different agents participate” (239). The interaction between the boundaries of various genres is where identity and therefore ideology are actively transgressed (Gledhill 222). The transgressive quality of genre conventions and its relationship to gender are significant when examining buddy films, since genre iconography has broader implications for what becomes a naturalized code and what remains unacknowledged within it. While buddy films are frequently discussed in terms of appropriated iconography, such as the conventions of the western, road film, the cop or action film, they are rarely examined in terms of their cohesive iconography, which draws upon the social construction of masculine identity.

The concept of genres as indistinct raises the issue of hybridity and its role in fracturing stable categorizations of genre. Many of the films discussed within my thesis have been critically addressed elsewhere as action films, road films, westerns, parodies,
cop films, and comedies, not only as buddy films. This raises the question of the validity of attempting to describe films in terms of convention, iconography and narrative when the cross-over between various genres indicates a rupture of these categories as independent and distinct. Delineating the process of exchange between genres is important since it indicates the workings of genre discourse. Hybridity allows the categories of genre to be understood as unstable. According to Homi Bhabha, the hybridity of texts creates an agency or a doubleness that allows for the voicing of marginalized positions (198). The hybridity of genre films acts to reiterate the constructed nature of genre, the repetition of conventions creating a space for changes within dominant meaning. The repetition of themes or iconography within genres illustrates an inability to designate fixed meanings and the continual attempt to establish continuity. For Christine Gledhill, “desire is generated at the boundaries, stimulating border crossings as well as provoking cultural anxieties” (237). The pleasure and the fear evoked within the transgression of gender and genre signals a break in the construction of meaning. The process of destabilizing of the boundaries of genre and gender are played out in the construction of buddy films.

Hybridity, applied to genre, is suggestive of some of the concessions at work in mediating gender constructions. Through genre theory a framework of categorization emerges in which conventions and recognizable symbols act to communicate set meanings. In gender theory a similar mediation takes place whereby gender is ritualized and regulated through repetition. In genre films characterized by strong male bonding, like action, western, and cop films, Justin Wyatt argues that there is a male institutional element acting to qualify the bond between the men within the films (52). He further
states that the lack of a clear genre leads to a situation where “the potential for homosocial bonding is not defused by the institutional and generic frameworks” (Wyatt 55). In this case, the hybridity within genre films, as seen in the buddy films which borrow from the action, western and cop films, allows for the collapsing of an ideological framework that bears upon the construction of gender identity. The impact of genre conventions upon gender construction illustrates the potential for variations through a repetition that reveals the performance of both genre and gender. The constant reproduction within genre reflects a need to create a sense of continuity within the conventions. However, genres are subject to changes, the coherence of meanings can destabilize, and this same process can occur in the formation of gender conventions. Genre and gender can be understood as operating on a set of common principles, whereby shared codes and conventions are recognized and repeated. Judith Butler suggests that gender norms “are continually haunted by their own ineffectivity; hence, the anxiously repeated effort to install and augment their jurisdiction” (Bodies 236). In this way, gender conventions offer the same space for subversion that Bhabha discusses in relation to genre convention. Generic codes and narrative positioning often inform gender and performances of gender in popular culture.

When considering masculinity and buddy films, the key issues of gender in relation to spectatorship and the gaze arise. These issues are an important consideration in understanding how critical discourse surrounding traditional masculine positioning of the gaze in cinema shapes the dominant constructions of masculinity in film. The work of theorists Laura Mulvey and Mary Ann Doane is significant to gender studies and the questions raised within my thesis, since they can be seen as having established starting
points for the contemporary examination of gender construction. Mulvey’s gender theory needs to be contextualized within the setting of the classical positions ascribed to early viewers of films. For Mulvey, the cinematic experience was understood as one in which the audience members were involved in an exploration, but it was an experience directed by dominant positioning. Cinematic style functions to create an experience whereby, as Mulvey states, “The male protagonist is free to command the stage, a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action” (“Visual” 310). This voyeuristic world is further described in Freudian terms, in which, according to Mulvey, “the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of their repressed desire onto the performer” (“Visual” 307).

Classical positioning of spectators creates an assumption that aligns mainstream film viewers with a dominant position that is heterosexual and male (Mulvey, “Visual” 310). Yet the authority ascribed to the camera and the narrative in Mulvey’s theory suggests that these devices create a position of identification that is limiting.

Examining the function of the gaze in mainstream film provides a framework for exploring the mechanisms of desire between the audience and the films’ protagonists. According to Mulvey, the spectator undergoes a process of Lacanian identification: “the male movie star’s glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of the gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror” (“Visual” 310). However, male viewers and actors in films are described as unable “to bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like” (Mulvey, “Visual” 310). Further, when the spectator position within dominant cinema practice is conceived of as
male, this position is theoretically constructed as heterosexual. Therefore, for Mulvey, the desire of the male audience member is assumedly directed towards the “female form displayed for his enjoyment (connoting male fantasy) and that of the spectator fascinated with the image of his like set in an illusion of natural space, and through him gaining control and possession of the woman within the diegesis” (“Visual” 310). In either case, identification for male spectators results in desire directed towards the female character on the screen. The fascination with the male image is disconnected from any desire unless it occupies a position of power over the female figure.

While Mulvey’s work represents a movement towards critical examination of gender in film, several positions remained unaccounted for within her theory. In her critique of Mulvey and Doane, Gaylyn Studlar states, “this trans-sex identification is the result of the female’s lack of a spectatorial position of her own other than a masochistic-female/object identification. Neglected are the possibilities of male identification with the female (even as an ideal ego) or his identification with a ‘feminized’ masculine character” (615). Although Studlar’s criticism acts as a starting point for re-examining the limitations of some of the ideas within Mulvey’s theory, such a limited model of spectatorship can be expanded for further alternative positions for female and male viewers because such rigid and essentialist notions of traditional gender roles are restrictive. Even when Mulvey modifies her theory, she maintains that “the female spectator’s phantasy of masculinisation is always to some extent at cross purposes with itself, restless in its transvestite clothes” (Mulvey, “Afterthoughts” 15).

Doane elaborates on Mulvey’s theory, specifically in relation to the performance of gender as masquerade. The concept of masquerade acts to create a critical distance
from the construction of gender. The feminine masquerade creates a sense of detachment that becomes “a mask which can be worn or removed” (48). Doane says, “for the female spectator there is a certain over-presence of the image—she is the image. Given the closeness of this relationship, the female spectator’s desire can be described only in terms of a kind of narcissism” (45). This closeness creates a dissolution of the distinction of self and image, perpetuating an inability for critical distance between the female spectator and the image. Further, this positioning creates “a tendency to view the female spectator as the site of an oscillation between a feminine position and a masculine position, invoking the metaphor of the transvestite” (48). According to this theory, the image of the transvestite references the range of positioning for the female audience, invoking a duality of gender, which remains a space unavailable to the male spectator.

The transvestitism arises in response to a model of spectator positioning in which the female audience is seen to engage in either a “passive or masochistic position” through identifying with the female character or a “masculinization” through identifying with the male character (Doane 48). The process of identification is structured upon a series of gender negotiations. Doane posits that “masquerade is not recuperable as transvestitism precisely because it constitutes an acknowledgment that it is femininity itself which is constructed as mask—as the decorative layer which conceals a non-identity” (48). According to Doane, the sense of detachment within masquerade “works to effect a separation between the cause of desire and oneself. In Montraly’s words, ‘the woman uses her own body as a disguise’” (49). This theory conceptualized the masquerade of femininity as indicative of a self-reflexivity and distance; however, masculine gender identity is not subject to a parallel performance.
Male masquerade is largely unaccounted for within Doane’s theoretical construct, due to the fact that the performance of male gender is unnecessary. Doane states, “it is not that a man cannot use his body in this way but that he doesn’t have to” (49). Doane’s argument assumes an essentialist position, reinforcing the male masquerade. However, Doane accounts for male desire only in relation to the power to fetishize women within the narrative. Alternative positions of male desire are omitted. When Doane examines the masquerade of gender, it is only in relation to women, since men are “locked into sexual identity,” an identity whereby “male transvestitism is an occasion for laughter” (48). The rigidity of the male masquerade is used to illustrate a lack of critical distance, as opposed to challenging the assumptions of naturalized authority inscribed in the performance of masculinity.

A counter-argument to the unquestioned authority ascribed to within Doane’s construction of masquerade lies in the multiplicity of identification. As John Ellis states, “identification involves both the recognition of self in the image on the screen, a narcissistic identification, and the identification of self with the various positions that are involved in the fictional narration” (43). This shifting identification consequently positions the spectator through a series of simultaneous and often contradictory identifications. If the “voyeuristic looking is marked by the extent to which there is a distance between spectator and spectacle,” for Doane the voyeur is male and the spectacle is female (Neale, “Masculinity as Spectacle” 16). But the simplicity of this equation is its one weakness. The object/subject binary limits the extent to which the masquerade permits distance, since identification is still structured within a confining format. When discussing the transvestite, Doane states, “the idea seems to be this: it is understandable
that women would want to be men, for everyone wants to be elsewhere than in the feminine position. What is not understandable within the given terms is why a woman might flaunt her femininity” (48). Doane fails to ask why the position of the male transvestite is so untenable, and further, if an excess of femininity signals masquerade, then why is it that an excess of masculinity fails to signal an equal masquerade? While Doane’s theory of masquerade suggests a significant method of examining constructions of gender, these questions need to be explored further in order to be fully applicable to the examination of masculinity in film.

The limited position ascribed to male spectatorship in early feminist theory has been revisited in more recent gender theory. Drawing on Joan Rivière’s work, in which she states that “genuine womanliness and the ‘masquerade’” should not be differentiated, that “they are the same thing” (Rivière 38), Stephen Heath expands on the theory of masquerade to encompass the construction of masculinity. Male masquerade is represented as occupying “all the trappings of authority, hierarchy, order, position [that] make the man, his phallic identity” (Heath 56). As Heath states, “the man’s masculinity, his male world, is the assertion of the phallus to support his having it” (55). While the masquerade of femininity is understood as an attempted disavowal of masculinity, the male masquerade is based on an assertion of the phallus. The contradiction lies in the distance or awareness authorized by the performance. In summarizing Heath’s argument, Butler states that “relying on the postulated characterization of libido as masculine, Heath concludes that femininity is the denial of that libido, the ‘dissimulation of a fundamental masculinity’” (Butler, Gender Trouble 68). Unlike the masquerade of femininity, male masquerade is explicitly connected to notions of power. Repeatedly, the arguments that
address the male display or masquerade fail to disassemble the notion of authority that is so closely linked to masculinity, as if to suggest that masculinity is itself a cohesive identity. However, Heath goes on to indicate that the structure of masquerade is limited, since the basis of the psychoanalytical theory “seems to fix things forever in the given, and oppressive, identities, with no connections through to the social-historical realities that it also seems accurately to be describing” (56). That is, the concept of masculine identity as a single ideal is incompatible with the reality of class, race and sexual hierarchies.

While early feminist theorists focused on representations of women, the failure to examine men within a critical framework created a bias within the theoretical structures of their arguments. When masculinity is considered within early feminist theory, it is conceived as the dominant gaze brought to bear on images of women or desexualized when redirected towards representations of men. Masculinity and the authority of the male masquerade remained naturalized. In “Masculinity as Multiple Masquerade” Chris Holmlund points out four areas of exploration that remain unaccounted for within the concept of masquerade established through the early feminist film theorists:

1) masculinity remains the untouched and untouchable ground against which femininity figures as the repressed and or the spoken; 2) the differences between masculine and feminine masquerade and their various connections to power go unexamined; 3) the compulsory heterosexuality organizing masculinity and femininity as complementary if unequal opposites is left unchallenged; and too often, 4) other matrices of masquerade are bypassed altogether (Holmlund 214).

These premises remain unaccounted for within the structure of most early feminist theory, and this lack leads to theoretical structures that in the end reinforce rather than oppose the
gender binaries which feminist theory attempts to deconstruct. By incorporating masculinity as an equally significant construction of gender, the transgressive possibilities of gender theory are reopened.

One of the questions raised within the theory of masquerade lies in the doubleness of performance that postulates an existing original beneath the mask, unlike the non-identity implied. If masculine identity is singular and unquestionable, then the surmised notion of the doubleness of femininity seems to belie the construction of a definable gender that dominates the discourse of masculinity within these theories. The presence of an original enforces conservative definitions of ‘authentic’ gender. However, recent critical theory has sought to displace the concept of a genuine gender, exposing gender as an act, as performance. Referring to the origin of gender and sexual identities, Butler states that “if sexuality is culturally constructed within existing power relations, then the postulation of a normative sexuality that is ‘before,’ ‘outside,’ or ‘beyond’ power is a cultural impossibility and a politically impracticable dream, one that postpones the concrete and contemporary task of rethinking subversive possibilities for sexuality and identity within the terms of power itself” (Gender Trouble 40). To dislodge this notion of authentic gender requires a realignment of critical discourse within a cultural framework, reflecting an inclusive reworking of the concept of gender.

Butler establishes that the denial of gender as performance represses the multiplicity of gender; therefore, enforcing the notion of a genuine interior gender beneath the performance of the cultural mechanics fails to question rigid notions of gender. As Butler states, “if the ‘cause’ of desire, gesture, and act can be localized within the ‘self’ of the actor, then the political regulations and disciplinary practices which
produce that ostensibly coherent gender are effectively displaced from view” ([Gender Trouble 173-174]). The belief in an authentic gender functions dually to limit the performance of gender and to obscure the apparatus which naturalizes and, therefore, creates a hierarchy of various gender positions. In contrast, Butler presents the concept of masquerade, whereby there is no original, instead gender is performance predicated on a copy. For Butler, “the replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus, gay is to straight not as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy” ([Gender Trouble 41]).

The artifice of gender construction functions as a mask, functioning to enforce a specific, selective gender role that naturalizes the masquerade. Butler maintains that “the ‘unity’ of gender is the effect of a regulatory practice that seeks to render gender identity uniform through a compulsory heterosexuality. The force of this practice is, through an exclusionary apparatus of production, to restrict the relative meanings of ‘heterosexuality,’ ‘homosexuality,’ and ‘bisexuality’ as well as the subversive sites of their convergence and resignification” ([Gender Trouble 42]). The limitation of gender meanings, as a systemic process, reveals the necessity of reinstating the definition and act of gender. The concept of an original gender and hence an imitation of gender perpetuates binary gender categories. With the defining of an original gender comes the need to situate everything that is not included against an original, limiting the field of meanings. Butler thus argues that “the idea that butch and femme are in some sense ‘replicas’ or ‘copies’ of heterosexual exchange underestimates the erotic significance of these identities as internally dissonant and complex in their resignification of the
hegemonic categories by which they are enabled” (Gender Trouble 157). Butler raises the issue of identification, stating, “a radical refusal to identify with a given position suggests that on some level an identification has already taken place, an identification that is made and disavowed” (Bodies 113). To fail to include an opening for multiple identification suggests a rejection of a position that has previously been occupied, while reinforcing the opaque apparatus that structures gender norms.

Eve Sedgwick explores the construction of gender in relation to the homosocial. She addresses the difference in same-sex relationships between men and women, much like the problems of adapting the idea of masquerade to masculinity. In discussing the inequality of comparing Adrienne Rich’s concept of the lesbian continuum¹ to that of male homosocial bonds, she states that the homosocial bond may be marginalized in relation to male heterosexuality, but that men still occupy a dominant position in contrast to the marginalization of women in the social sphere (Sedgwick, Between Men 47).

The discord in applying the continuum model needs to be bridged through contextualization of social and historical factors. She questions the application of the “lesbian continuum” in relation to same-sex relationships between men, stating that, “however convenient it might be to group together all the bonds that link males to males, and by which males enhance the status of males—usefully symmetrical as it would be, that grouping meets with a prohibitive structural obstacle” (Sedgwick, Between Men 3). Situating the constructs of masculinity within a patriarchal framework locates the disparity in applicability to the continuum model, in differences which arise out of an unequal access to power, yet this access is further complicated by inequality between men and women.
While same-sex bonds are understood as engaging unequally within structures of power, the homosocial continuum also recreates inequality in the power structures of male bonds. In his discussion of Sedgwick’s concept, Jonathan Goldberg asserts that “homosociality suggests a continuum of male-male relations, one capable of being sexualized, though where and how much sexualization occurs cannot be assumed a priori” (23). He comments that this concept of a continuum can be used to present the “slight possibilities of sexuality” (23). However, Sedgwick’s application of the continuum arises from the work of Adrienne Rich, in which lesbianism and women who “otherwise promote the interests of other women” can be linked as “congruent and closely related activities” (Sedgwick, Between Men 3). For Sedgwick, the operation of this continuum on homosocial bonds must take into account the question of “what counts as sexuality” and how this is conditioned by access to power (2). Therefore, the role of sexuality is not discounted; instead, the discourse and role of sexuality is understood as emerging from the construction of ordering processes.

The processes that construct gender and sexuality in relation to eroticism and the homosocial are of significance to exploring the buddy genre, since the films are primarily concerned with negotiating masculinity and the construction of male identity in conflict with male bonds. The films seek to assert and thwart male desires and to domesticate identification. For, as Sedgwick states, “not only must homosexual men be unable to ascertain whether they are to be the objects of ‘random’ homophobic violence, but no man must be able to ascertain that he is not (that his bonds are not) homosexual” (Between Men 88-89). Male paranoia thus emanates from an inability to consolidate an
identity. The performance of the male masquerade acts as a negotiation between contradictory masculine identities. Masculinity and male bonding are contradictory, in that the patriarchal performance of masculinity fails to acknowledge male desire and instead facilitates a paranoid repression of connections to the homosocial. Sedwick says, "for a man to be a man's man is separated only by an invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line from being 'interested in men'" (Between Men 89).

One way to account for the gender tensions within buddy films is through an application of Alexander Doty's notion of "queer reading." Queerness denotes a wide range of impulses and cultural expressions, including space for describing and expressing bisexual, transsexual, and straight queerness. While we acknowledge that homosexuals as well as heterosexuals can operate or mediate from within straight cultural spaces and positions—after all, most of us grew up learning the rules of straight culture—we have paid less attention to the proposition that basically heterocentrist texts can contain queer elements, and basically heterosexual, straight-identifying people can experience queer moments (Doty 2-3).

The queer reading allows for an opening in the constraints of gender and sexuality through a pluralistic positioning. Unlike early theoretical attempts to understand identification through audience positioning along gender lines, Doty's approach "suggests that new queer spaces open up (or are revealed) whenever someone moves away from using only one specific sexual identity category—gay, lesbian, bisexual, or straight—to understand and describe mass culture" (Doty xix). The essentialism of identification in terms of binary opposition is broken down, opening both straight and gay culture to identification uninhibited by either gender of sexuality. Further, Doty states that a queer reading "marks a flexible space for the expression of all aspects of non- (anti-, contra-) straight cultural production and reception" (3).
Rather than suggesting that queer readings constitute a reading against the grain of dominant readings, Doty states that queer moments within texts operate as part of dominant readings. The queer readings are in no way limited to existing within straight cultural production since they instead “result from the recognition and articulation of the complex range of queerness that has been in popular culture texts and their audiences all along” (Doty 16). Queer moments are not confined to the level of subtext, since the queerness of the texts exists prior to the reading and is understood as integral to their construction. By examining moments of queer identification, gender construction is broadened to suggest that spectator positioning encompasses a range of identifications. Using this definition of queerness to explore the genre of buddy films broadens the theoretical structures of gender to create a vacillating site of meaning within both the texts and the audiences. When discussing the erasure of sexuality within texts which offer queer readings, Doty argues that they “often seem to offer only hypothetically lesbian surfaces that encourage closeted queer enjoyment” (45). The eroticism of the homosocial is dismissed through an effacing of the apparatus that institutes a heterosexual/homosexual binary, and that excludes the multiple operations of identification.

The rigidity of the masquerade of gender illustrates the construction inherent in performance. However, the façade of masculinity has been theorized as grounded in the notion of authority, creating a paranoid articulation of the fear of displacement from power. An examination of genre theory and its relationship to constructions of gender can be seen to function to continually resurrect and reinforce conventional constructions of gender. However, the conventions of the buddy film genre raise the question of
spectatorship and address in relation to modes of gender construction. In the buddy film, the relationship between the two main male protagonists is invariably fraught with tensions that are manifest in both the literal and figurative masquerade of masculinity. The relationship between the tensions as represented on-screen and as posited by the audience address reinforces the anxiety surrounding masculinity and representations of male relationships. The inability of the buddy films as a genre to sufficiently resolve the relationship and therefore this tension allows for the creation of ideological openings within these texts. Examining the theory surrounding gender identity reveals ideological changes towards gender and suggests that the problems within the theories may be paralleled by a social failure to analyze the basis of gender construction. Within both the masquerade and the homosocial, one common factor uniting the theoretical positions asserted by the theorists examined here is that a social hierarchy, complicated by class, race, and sexuality, creates a disjunction in employing equally the theories of masquerade or the homosocial for both men and women. In order to examine the buddy film genre, it is important to view the characters’ relationships within the context of these social hierarchies, in which the audience through identification participates, mediating the constructed conventions of both genre and gender.
Endnotes for Chapter One

Adrienne Rich defines the Lesbian Continuum “to include a range—through each woman's life ... of woman-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman” (645). In “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.”

Chapter Two: The High Sixties: Images of Hippies, Cowboys and Penises

The buddy film genre encompasses many established genres, united by the common theme of masculinity and male identity. Within the western, martial art film, road movie and the action film, masculine identity is taken up, recreated and reiterated through structure, iconography and intertextual reference. These films are structured around and address conquests in which the heroes are pitted against a series of obstacles. The male world of the films constructs a feat or task for the heroes. An epic structure, designated by the plot trajectory, seen throughout the male genres, represents a larger issue: the feat assigned to the heroes is emblematic of the struggle to establish a masculine identity, and establishes the character’s rebellion against the social world. The iconography associated with these films is symbolic of mobility, authority and power. These characteristics, found in Easy Rider (1969) and Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (1969), are rooted in the conventions of the western. During this period, genre filmmaking, specifically the western, underwent a series of changes resulting in a more reflexive style of filmmaking accompanied by a more critical ideology, deconstructing the traditional hero. Both Easy Rider and Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid parody and revise the traditional western, creating films that act as complicit critiques of the idealization of American values entrenched within the genre. Midnight Cowboy (1969) is another buddy film of the period that deconstructs the ideals embodied in the western by undermining the masquerade of masculinity within the western. In these films western iconography is adopted and resituated in a contemporary context, lending reflexivity to the films that is emphasized through various visual and thematic elements. Masculinity
in these films is a constructed fantasy, denying the tensions surrounding the era's changing male identity that the films embody.

The 1960s are an important period to examine in the context of the buddy film, since during this period the template films *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *Easy Rider* were released. While the buddy film genre predates the 1960s in such films as *The Caddy* (1953), *Pardners* (1956), or predecessors such as *The Odd Couple* (1968), the buddy films examined within this chapter offer a departure from the earlier films. The rapid social change of the 1960s played a significant role in the construction and representation of masculinity. The films *Easy Rider*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, and *Midnight Cowboy* all self-consciously address the construction of masculinity, as a source of anxiety, pleasure and power. The films of the 1960s render a portrait of masculinity that is complicated by changing social conventions, while at the same time consolidating the genre conventions that have continued to have a significant impact.

While situating the films in a social and historical context, this historical relationship is correlative rather than causal. Film production is a time-consuming process and therefore the films should be understood as indicative of general social mores of the period, yet the relationship between history and production is problematic when the analysis is broadly based on the Hollywood model. Acknowledging these criticisms, I will outline some of the important social and historical events that shaped the cultural environment out of which the films of the high 1960s emerged.

The period that I am primarily examining, 1964-1969—or as Arthur Marwick terms it, the high 1960s—is distinguished in terms of an accumulation of events and cinematic practices (528). This period has been marked a golden age of film by Seth
Cagin and Philip Dray, who characterize the late 1960s and early 1970s as a period of growth where new filmmakers addressed a new audience with contemporary themes (xi).

Socially and culturally, the high 1960s can be distinguished as a more cynical and critical period than the pop sensibility of the early 1960s. The assassination of President John Kennedy in 1963 created a questioning within the American consciousness, re-awakening fears and paranoia of the 1950s. The Tet Offensive of 1969 illustrated to American citizens the complications of their involvement in Vietnam (Lev 188). The civil rights movement initiated during the 1950s continued to have a strong impact on the culture of the 1960s, dividing into two schools of thought: that of the NAACP and activists such as Dr. Martin Luther King and the more militant groups such as the Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam. Other important activism during this time was initiated by groups such as the Students for a Democratic Society and the Weathermen, both of which were responsible for creating an outlet for public discontent at this time. The activism initiated by both the civil rights movement and the student protest movement helped to address the issue of women's rights. The organization of the President's Commission on the Status of Women in 1961 and the subsequent Equal Employment Opportunity Commission of 1964 had a significant impact on the role of women. The more grass-roots oriented organization, the National Organization for Women, helped foster an attitude of pro-activism amongst feminists. The assassination of Dr. Luther King in 1969, as well as the student occupation of Columbia University and the violent televised anti-war protests in Chicago, are indicative of a social awareness and an escalating violence of the period. As Lev states, the late 1960s can be seen as a time of sociopolitical conflict in which "many movements of social change were underway: the civil rights movement, feminism, gay
liberation, the environmental movement, the hippie generation. And the various attempts to block these movements, to ‘turn back the clock,’ strongly influenced millions of Americans” (Lev xvii). While the 1960s can be characterized by an increasing social awareness, this was also countered by a strong conservatism, which led to a struggle over cultural capital. The power struggles were often generational, yet during the late 1960s there was an increasing attention afforded to youth culture in film (Lev xvii).

In the late 1960s the earlier genre films that had supported Hollywood filmmaking were experiencing limited success. As Peter Lev states, “In the 1960s and 1970s, the film audience shrank and fragmented, and the verities of the old studio system fell apart. Stars and genres were no longer enough to sell a picture” (Lev xvi). Audience fragmentation can be seen in the diminishing predictability of genre as a mode to attract a wide address and response, as Vincent Canby notes in his discussion surrounding the films The Wild Bunch (1969) and True Grit (1969) (Canby 11). Audiences began attending films that were made on lower budgets, without the need for star recognition, dealing with more socially relevant themes and often produced outside the studio system. As Canby states, “the most exciting thing about Easy Rider is neither content nor style nor statement, but the fact that it was made for less than $500,000 (less than the cost of one set for some super-productions)” (Canby 11). Critics at the time saw films such as Easy Rider as “angry, engaged, bold and financially successful, a crucial factor that almost ensures the continuation of what may become a new movie genre: The Revolutionary film” (Corliss 12). Lev argues that although films of the 1960s have been characterized as visually and ideologically experimental, this new style of filmmaking was initiated in the high 1960s, beginning with Bonnie and Clyde (1967) (Lev 182). Filmmakers of the 1960s, such as
Stanley Kubrick, John Frankenheimer, Mike Nichols, Sidney Lumet and Arthur Penn were interested in a new approach to genre film (Hill 31). *Easy Rider* and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* are both genre films that play with the conventions of the western, employing a critical distance, and reversing genre expectations by, for example, having the characters fleeing instead of fighting, or moving from west to east.

*Easy Rider, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *Midnight Cowboy* follow a similar narrative structure, while approaching the subject matter differently. In *Easy Rider* the main characters Wyatt/Captain America (Peter Fonda) and Billy/Billy Bike (Dennis Hopper) set off, freed from the constraints of everyday life by the money accrued through a drug deal, to wander the country on their motorcycles. They travel across the desert to New Orleans, meeting different people along the road. *Midnight Cowboy* also explores the life of characters whose positions are marginal. Like Wyatt and Billy, Joe Buck (Jon Voight) has difficulty staking a claim. He drifts from prison to a job at a greasy spoon, and then decides to move from Texas to New York to become a hustler. His aspirations for easy money in the big city dwindle, and Ratso Rizzo (Dustin Hoffman), who first steals from him then eventually becomes his manager, tries to help him become a high-class escort. They strive to survive together despite their poverty. Unlike these two films, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* is set in the old West. While the other films invoke references to the West, frequently to critique the ideals embodied within the genre’s iconography, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* uses the setting of the West as an exploration of nostalgia. The film begins with Butch and the Kid robbing trains as part of the Hole-in-the-Wall Gang. Unfortunately, a posse is assembled that follows them constantly, and they are forced to hide out with Etta, the
Kid's girlfriend. They spend all their money and decide to rob banks in Bolivia. In all three narratives, despite their differences, the common factors are the bonds the men create between each other and the support they offer each other in an effort to survive outside dominant society.

It is only within the boundaries of the male genres such as the western that the intimacy of the male bond can be domesticated. The buddy film can be seen to appropriate the conventions of other male genres as well as incorporating the themes of the female melodrama. Haskell recognizes the feminine melodrama within the buddy film genre as characterized by "the love and loyalty, the yearning and spirituality, the eroticism sublimated in action and banter, the futility and fatalism, the willingness to die for someone" (Haskell 187-188). The articulation of emotions, something frequently suppressed in representations of masculinity, is one of the distinguishing elements of the buddy films of this period. Unlike the heroes of earlier films, the protagonists give voice to their affection verbally and visually. They are continually shown together, and when apart they talk about, remember or gaze off in apparent reverie for their other half. Even their daydreams, such as Rizzo's fantasy of his life of success in Florida with Joe Buck, are dreams about being together. But the dream of unity for the male couples comes at a high price, for in the buddy films of the 1960s, the relationships between the men are doomed. This doom, signaled by the separation of the men through death, articulates a general anxiety surrounding the integration of new and traditional male roles. It is Butch and the Kid who are united together until the end, rather than the Kid and Etta, who leaves instead of watching them die. The films speak to the angst in abandoning the traditional male masquerade for love, fidelity, loyalty and intimacy, which traditionally
have been so strongly aligned with the feminine, and further suggest a fear of the feminine in the need for the homosocial security implicit in the all-male relationship. In contrast, the Western traditionally represents the male fantasy of dominion over land or people, a mythic representation of the American Dream that stands as a counter to the fatalism of the melodrama. By revisiting the western, these films rewrite the history of the West, while permitting a link back to one of the most traditional representations of masculine identity. The conflict between conquest and submission embodied in the fusion of the western and the melodrama is emblematic of the social tensions in America during this period and their impact on masculine identity.

The safety offered, through the repression of male sexuality characteristic of the western serves to contain the deep emotional bonding that occurs between the men in these narratives. By focusing on possession of land or exchange of women, male sexuality is sublimated. Patrick Fuery sees the western as reinforcing a restrictive gender positioning (Fuery 165). Fuery states that the western hero undergoes a process of moral seduction to oppose normative social order, using violence to obtain control over territory, paralleling attempts to control the femme fatale in film noir (165-166).

Similarly, in the buddy film of the 1960s, the protagonists struggle against the dominant social order, represented by the two heroes’ interior journey rather than the externalized struggle over land and women. Ultimately, the buddy films offer a departure from the traditional western since the lack of closure and inability of the protagonists to reintegrate into the dominant social hierarchy stems from the solace that the men seek in each other. While the western process of control invokes a social hierarchy, in which men control women and land, the buddy films of the 1960s can be seen as an attempt to address
broadening gender roles of the period. As Robert Burgoyne maintains, the western as a genre acts as “a ‘repository of social experience’ that preserves certain historical perspectives even as it has been adapted to new contexts” (Burgoyne 48). The revisioned West of the 1960s buddy films records the social changes of the era.

The western genre traditionally foregrounds the capitalist ideal of possession and exchange. While these films critique capitalism, by depicting all the men as choosing to exist outside traditional modes of capitalist exchange, the ideal of capitalism as the exchange of property for profit remains unchallenged. In Easy Rider it is the drug deal that allows Billy and Wyatt the freedom to explore themselves and their surroundings. Butch and the Kid continue to rob banks, since that is the only way they can get money. Although they want to become like other people with normal jobs, their life of crime forces them to continue being criminals. And for Joe Buck, hustling is his attempt at the American Dream. Throughout the film he is told that he is pretty, that he is the best; therefore, he is simply trying to exploit his assets. In these films the protagonists are not necessarily subverting their sexuality, sublimating through control over their surroundings, since they are unable to gain that control.

While the western traditionally articulates sexuality through exchange and control over land and women, in the buddy film the characters wrestle with their inability to establish dominance over their surroundings. According to Virginia Wexman, in the traditional western “the landscape’s provocative emptiness invites the spectators imaginatively to penetrate and possess it” (77-78). In these buddy films, the landscape acts as a symbol of home, a home that the protagonists are unable to dominate. In Easy Rider, while adorned in the clothing of cowboys, Billy and Wyatt never attempt to exert
control over their surroundings. Instead, they pass through the landscape, using money earned from the system they seek to escape, failing to fulfil the dream of the 1960s. The title Easy Rider suggests plural meanings, both an allusion to someone who is sexually promiscuous and "a man who lives off the earnings of a whore" (Fonda and Hopper in the Born to be Wild documentary, as cited by Hill 19). The latter meaning implies that by endorsing consumer culture, embodied in the money the protagonists earn through the drug deal, Billy and Wyatt partake or exploit the people that they admire the most, like the simple farmer or the commune members. Wyatt comments on this contradiction in his statement "We blew it," although Billy fails to realize the larger implications of the self-imposed exile upon which they have embarked. The landscape shown in the various pit stops illustrates the failing of the American dream, with images of barren lands and desolate people who frequently assume a hostility that threatens the safety of the men.

The men in the buddy films are unable to control the gaze, and the camera objectifies their bodies, creating visual pleasure for the spectator. For Butch and Sundance, their most vulnerable moments are linked with states of undress. For example, while undressed in the bordello, they are almost caught by the posse, and they strip to jump off the cliff and evade the pursuing lawmen. In Midnight Cowboy, as Joe showers and dresses, the gaze of the camera and his costume undermine his authority. The slow pan up his body as he drops the soap, followed by his adorning his brand new clothing, acts first to feminize Joe through fetishization and then to emphasize the constructed nature of the performance of masculinity, directly illustrated in the affectation of his costume. Joe's performance when he pretends to tell his boss what he can do with those dishes, cocking his finger at himself in the mirror, signals the guise of machismo that can
be appropriated or discarded. In *Easy Rider*, Billy and Wyatt lack the traditional masculine qualities of authority and power. Concerning the scene at the café, Laderman states that “Wyatt, Billy, and George seem to be trapped by both gazes here, split between male and female, suggesting that the counterculture outsider, regardless of sex (or race), shares some affinity with women (and minorities) in relation to the dominant culture” (287-288). In this way the protagonists of the film are unable to maintain the illusion to support the male masquerade, and are consequentially subject to marginalization and objectification. The façade of masculinity is revealed as artifice, based on a social construct.

The western, with its theme of control over land and women exerted by men signifying the Law and the Lawless, enacts a strict social hierarchy that dictates position according to race, class, gender and sexuality. But the themes of conquest and ownership assume new meanings when placed within the social context of the 1960s. In *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* the conquest of the West is ending, and the West is no longer untamed. The advancements in the West have made Butch and the Kid archaic. In *Easy Rider*, Billy and Wyatt’s names are anachronistic reference to the old West, acting to signal the men’s ties to traditional masculinity. In *Easy Rider* Wyatt’s optimistic statement “they’ll make it” in the context of the commune member planting the seed in the dry, baked earth, suggests both the futility of the commune’s efforts and an inability in Wyatt to admit the reality of their situation. Similarly, Joe Buck’s first attempt at hustling, in which he ends up paying the woman, suggests a break between the expectations the characters hold and the reality that surrounds them. Since the emphasis of the western is on the ability to control the landscape, this inability of the men to
maintain their own roles addresses the intense concern regarding the changing roles of men during this time.

This anxiety over the role of men emerges out of a backlash against feminism, as parallels between the changing West and the changing social climate of the 1960s are drawn throughout the films. In *Midnight Cowboy*, it is Joe's perceptions about the new liberated woman, rich yet sexually unsatisfied, that draws him to New York to work as a gigolo. The reality of Joe's experience raises the issue of class and freedom, since throughout most of the film these newly liberated, rich women remain elusive. The women within the film suggest that not only is the male masquerade unsustainable, but the ideal embodied in the new liberated woman is also a myth. By deconstructing the figure of the idealized western hero these films can be understood as re-addressing a changing masculinity by situating the male masquerade in relation to the cowboy.

By recalling the West, these films deconstruct the characteristics associated with the cowboy, now an outmoded ideal, only to reinstate a similar set of masculine ideals under the guise of a new, more sensitive model of masculinity. While Butch and Sundance are constructed as more fun-loving and laid back than the traditional cowboy, the film still operates through marginalizing women based on the history of the West, which remains primarily unchallenged. In *Easy Rider*, the West is held up as embodying a fleeting simplicity, as shown in the sequences with the rancher. The perpetuation of a nostalgia for the pre-feminist days of the West creates a utopian association with an oppressive period in American history. The western articulates the American myth of the strong individual, and specifically codes these characteristics as masculine; however,
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faced with a country at war, in combination with ongoing social struggle and the power of the individual in American society, it is revealed in these films as untenable.

The journey is both literal and metaphoric for the characters. Mobility is literally highlighted in the films through an adaptation of western conventions. While the traditional iconography of the western is the horse and the wagon, the buddy film as revised western relies on modernity and changing technology. After the drug exchange in *Easy Rider*, the camera focuses on the motorcycle in a close-up that creates a distortion, fetishizing the curving lines of the engine and the frame of the motorcycle. Wyatt gets a flat and they drive into a farm to change the tire at the same time as the rancher is shoeing his horse, creating a visual parallel that references the western and the idea of changing times. A similar visual metaphor is used in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, where the bicycle is symbolic of a change from the horses of the past. The world of the West in the film is more civilized, filled with new machines like the automobile, the bicycle, steam engine and steam ship. Mobility is a running theme, and even in their last words to each other they jokingly discuss where they will go next. The journey is perpetual. In *Midnight Cowboy*, Joe begins by traveling by bus to New York, Rizzo’s lack of mobility is his greatest fear, and in the end Rizzo and Joe attempt to outrun death on a bus. The difference between the various modes of transportation employed by the men in the film illustrates differences in class and power.

The revisioning of American culture is closely tied to a redefinition of identity within the films. As Robin Wood points out, “In the films, home doesn’t exist, the journey is always to nowhere. ‘Home,’ here, is of course to be understood not merely as a physical location but as both a state of mind and an ideological construct, above all as
ideological security. Ultimately, home is America” (Wood 228). If home is America, then the films metaphorically enact a sense of displacement and exile in the characters’ perpetual flight. In all of these films the characters are distanced from their world and unable to identify with characters other than their buddy. In *Midnight Cowboy* his mother has abandoned Joe, and Wyatt and Billy exist in a world without family. The alienation that the characters are unable to overcome marks a difference from traditional narratives and emphasizes that the pursuit of America in the western is in actuality an evasion.

In *Easy Rider*, although Billy and Wyatt encounter various pit stops along the way, including the ranch, the commune, the jail and the brothel, there is no place in which they are able to make a home. They wander through the landscape in a state of disenfranchisement. And while Wyatt may admire the rancher and his family or the determined kids at the commune, the heroes remain observers. Similarly, in *Midnight Cowboy*, although Joe strives to assume the role of cowboy to conquer New York, instead he and Rizzo experience displacement as they fall between the cracks, living in a flophouse into which they have to squeeze. The quest similarly positions Butch and Sundance as outsiders, as outlaws in America, and as Americans in Bolivia they remain separate from any home, literally in exile. The western expressed ideals about expansionism, the taming of the West as a form of American colonialization, but in these films the West no longer is posed as a conquerable space. Instead, Billy and Wyatt move north to east, Butch and Sundance go west to south and Joe goes from south to east to south again. The West and all it symbolizes is no longer an available or adequate space, literally or ideologically; the characters are on a nostalgic voyage, looking for a lost America.
These films voice dissatisfaction with dominant ideals, furnishing an alternative to
domestication. Wood discusses the buddy films not only as a "reaction to the women's
movement," but as articulating a displacement of all that dominant ideology correlates
with women as symbols: "marriage, family, home" (Wood 225). These films also
represent both a backlash against and a means of drawing upon the benefits brought about
by the women's movement, creating a space for male empowerment. Wood states that
the films from this period, while seemingly structured around an idealized, all-male
world, instead address an "absence of home" (225). Home and the domestic act as the
antithesis of masculinity, and the erasure of the domestic space in the films creates a shift
in gender roles.

Within the buddy film home is frequently located in a lost past. Timothy Corrigan
states that in the road movie home is "preserved only as a memory or desire with less and
less substance" (Corrigan 145). The waning realism of the memory and therefore its
meaning causes the myth of home to be heightened. The use of flashbacks in Midnight
Cowboy, the photos in Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid and the montage sequences
in Easy Rider all invoke the idea of memory. These memories cite a fragmented, distant
and unattainable space of a lost home, creating a sense of nostalgia as defined by Fred
Davis—"memory without pain" (Davis 22). The presence of nostalgia in Midnight
Cowboy, Easy Rider and Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid is further illustrated in the
references to the classic western, which recall a place of stable masculine identity. In
Easy Rider the men all wear clothing that recalls a nostalgic performance of masculine
identity. George dresses like an athlete by wearing the football helmet, Wyatt is a super
hero, dressed in his leather and motorcycle helmet as Captain America, and Billy is
dressed like Davy Crockett in a coonskin cap and fringed deerskin coat. In *Butch Cassidy and Sundance Kid* the men are trying to live up to the expectations of their images circulated in the newspaper, and the same idea is seen in *Midnight Cowboy* when Joe bases the construction of his image on a *Hud* movie poster of Paul Newman. The men imitate a fiction, evoking Butler's idea of a copy of a copy, and their nostalgic evocation creates a distancing from their identities. Lev states that this nostalgia acts as an approach for avoiding the social events of the times (xx). Home, as a symbol during these times, no longer connotes safety. Lack of home is an opening in terms of traditional characteristics of the male performance of identity: steeped in authority and the phallus, the male masquerade, when freed from the binary constraints of domestication, brings into question the construction of masculine identity.

Another thematic concern of the buddy film is the marginalization of women. As a recurring theme, this relegation is at once a denial of the domestic sphere and therefore all that is symbolically associated with it, while celebrating an all-male world. The marginalization of women in the buddy film occurs through the use of misogynist language, jokes, and the treatment of women through narrative displacement. The division of the sexes is clearly reinforced within the social hierarchy of the film, which is a literal boy's club. This is significant since it works to establish the idea of difference, of what men are not. It is only through this defining of roles that the protagonists can then naturalize their own homosocial relationships while at the same time allowing the spectator privileged insight into the homosocial bond that the male protagonists share. If the female characters are absent, peripheral or insubordinate, this homosocial space is
naturalized. In this way, women play an important role in the buddy film, for by acting as
other they free the men from social fears.

While the emergence of this genre has been linked in part to a backlash against the
feminist movement, the buddy film continues to provide a voice for anxiety surrounding
masculine identity. For Molly Haskell, "the sixties and particularly the seventies may go
down as the time when men, released from their stoical pose of laconic self-possession by
the 'confessional' impulse and style of the times, discovered each other. They were able
to give voice, or lyrical vision, to feelings for each other they had been keeping under
their Stetson hats" (Haskell 362-363). However, Haskell sees the homosocial
relationships of the buddy films as a means of resisting positive social change by
excluding women (363).

The marginalization of women undermines actual cultural change, and although
they are revisionist westerns, the buddy films of the 1960s nevertheless adopt the
misogynist ideology of the Western. In *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, while on
the one hand Etta is an educated, employed, independent woman, on the other hand she is
also visually and verbally derided. For example, when Etta and the Kid are initially
shown together, the scene mimics a rape scenario, with the camera slowly panning the
woman's figure and the Kid leering at her menacingly, creating an impression that she is
soon to become his victim. When Sundance sees Butch and Etta together, he asks "What
are you doing?" Butch replies, "Stealing your woman," and the Kid answers, "Take her."
To reiterate the Kid's ambivalence towards Etta when inviting her to come to Bolivia,
Sundance rants, "It'd be good cover for us going with a woman. No one expects it. We
can travel safer. So what I'm saying is, if you want to come with us, I won't stop you.
But the minute you start to whine or make a nuisance, I don't care where we are, I'm dumping you flat.” The overemphatic quality of the dialogue can be seen as defensive, but even Etta seems to realize the confusion in her relationship to the Kid. She asks Butch what would have happened if she had met him first. Her comment implies the interchangeability between the men, and her treatment as an object of exchange.

In *Easy Rider* the women are separated from the men, the women’s roles being that of silent wife, concubine, commune girl, prostitute and giggling school girl in the diner. The female characters play no important role outside that of symbol connoting home, domesticity, or temptation rather than rounded personalities. In critiquing the film, Hill comments on the lack of a fully developed role for either women or black characters (Hill 54). The film evokes a homosocial world: the drug deal in the beginning is conducted by men, they speak primarily to men wherever they stop, men arrest them, men befriend them and men kill them. The absence of rounded female characters seems to evade addressing the issue of gender more fully within the narrative. Yet, in a film that critiques the American Dream, the absence of these figures acts as a statement about freedom and capitalism in the United States and who controls access to that perceived freedom. It creates oppression through omission, reinforcing paternalism while voicing the fear of losing control.

In comparison, in *Midnight Cowboy* the women’s roles are far more complex. However, the women also are relegated mostly to the role of image, appearing through a filter of time and personal perception. Although Joe does meet one girl with whom he actually talks, it is the women in his past who have had the most significant impact upon him. Joe’s mother appears in a flashback as a young woman, leaving her son with her
mother. His grandmother is shown in a series of flashbacks as an overly clinging, desperate woman, lolling around drunkenly with Joe and her boyfriend, while at other times she is shown in her beauty shop or complementing Joe on his looks. The other woman in Joe’s memory is his girlfriend Annie, who has sex with him, telling him, “You’re the best, Joe.” They are both raped and Annie goes insane, leaving Joe wrongfully imprisoned. The flashback sequences construct the narrative of Joe’s past, suggesting the need to create an identification, and therefore empathy, between the character and the audience as well as to justify the relationship that the men share. These flashback sequences seem to vilify the women, suggesting that the lack within Joe’s masculinity is somehow caused by these monstrous women. The women in these films act to create a distinction, functioning to illustrate what men are not.

Another element within the buddy films that constructs a similar opposition is the presence of an expressly homosexual character. The explicitly homosexual character creates an Other, distancing the protagonists from homosexuality. As Wood states, “the overt homosexual (invariably either clown or villain) has the function of a disclaimer—our boys are not like that” (229). The boy who tries to pick up Joe in the bar where he first meets Rizzo is flamboyant, with exaggerated hand gestures and a soft voice. The overt feminizing of gay characters creates a strong contrast to the main characters. The other Johns Joe encounters are the crazy, self-loathing religious fanatic, the chintzy man in the bathroom, and the old man whom he attacks. Aside from the older man, the gay characters are constructed as lacking empathetic qualities. The conflict in the film is to absolve both Rizzo and Joe of their connection to homosexuality, since it is so clearly vilified in the film. To this effect their relationship is never eroticized, the narrative
instead emphasizing the more melodramatic aspects of their relationship. The resurrection of traditional masculine identity, through Joe’s heterosexual experience, produces a return to codes of behaviour such as violence, and represents a distancing from the ties that maintained the intimacy between the men.

Another method of evoking Otherness within the films is through incorporating queer iconography. Situational queer moments are woven into the narrative, in which places strongly associated with queer identity are highlighted. Buddy films rely on a set of conventions that strategically act to naturalize a homoerotic space. For example, the West is a space that evokes an all-male frontier, rarely encroached upon by the presence of women. The use of homosocial spaces, such as the West, prisons, athletic clubs, the military and bathhouses generates imagery that recalls homoerotic narratives while neutralizing the erotic context: *Easy Rider*, for example, draws upon the linkage between youth culture and motorcycle culture. The allusion to the sexual freedom afforded by the youth culture of the 1960s and the male dominated structure of motorcycle culture creates a homosocial space that acts to neutralize the bonds between Wyatt and Billy. The opening sequence uses a slow, close-up pan of the motorcycle to create a parallel between the body and the motorcycle. This sequence is significant since it suggests a shift in the construction of the dominant gaze, structured upon gender identification.

The film also alludes to the idea of performed identity, linking identity to drag. The use of the motorcycle in the film and the clothing that Captain America and Billy wear are excessive, suggesting a reflexive quality within their performance of their masculinity like that associated with the female masquerade. Butch and the Kid’s still photos show them dressed in tuxedos and suits, suggesting a multiplicity to the male
masquerade. Similarly, in *Midnight Cowboy* the clothing of the protagonists emphasizes a performance of identity, such as the cowboy clothes in the beginning of the film or the clothes they get to start their new life in Florida. The construction of masculinity in these scenes illustrates the discomfort with which the buddies assume the traditional male roles of authority. Wood suggests that the buddy films of this time point to the erosion of the home and establish a male relationship that is not confined by the constraining labels of homosexuality or heterosexuality, but occupies a space on the homosocial continuum (230). The blurring of these boundaries and the thematization of the performance of gender within the buddy films points to the common bond between the men, an inability to maintain the guise of traditional masculinity.

The love story between men represents another thematic concern of the buddy genre. The films emphasize male camaraderie (Gehring 77), men bound through an emotional investment in each other. In *Easy Rider*, Billy watches over Wyatt’s social interactions with a keen, jealous eye, occasionally making disparaging remarks directed towards the people they encounter. The repartee between Billy and the Kid is far more personal and intimate than the conversation between the lovers. The men share their histories and their dreams. Joe and Rizzo live together and spend all of their time and energy together. Yet, as Wood states, “If the films are to be regarded as surreptitious gay texts, then the strongest support for this comes, not from anything shown to be happening between the men, but, paradoxically, from the insistence of the disclaimers: by finding it necessary to deny the homosexual nature of the central relationship so strenuously, the films actually succeed in drawing attention to its possibility” (229). The films are clearly love stories, yet disavow the possibility of the men being in love. The domestication of
the homosocial bonds explored within the genre acts to denote this unvoiced tension.

While the films are set in specifically male settings, women are inevitably introduced to confirm the heterosexuality of the protagonists. The men attend brothels in both films, implying a mechanical quality in the sexual exchange, since they are in love with each other. Even in Midnight Cowboy when men perform sex acts with one another, these acts are vilified. To distance the concept of love and sex, the films repeatedly depict sex as routine and base. The male love affairs remain non-actualized, linking them additionally with the unachieved desire of the melodrama. Despite the vilification of sex, the gaze of the camera on the men acts to eroticize the male body, and opens the texts to queer readings. Even the glances between the men suggest a communication without words, reinforcing their feelings. The films focus on the love story, but also the need to negotiate representations of love.

Containment is used in the film to circumvent the erotic elements of the male social bonds. Death and domestication are modes of containment that are thematically addressed within the film. The death of Sundance and the Kid are alluded to throughout the film. In the opening scene, the old cowboy film foreshadows the end facing the outlaws. The sheriff tells them that there is no going “straight,” no coming in, that when they stop running they will die. The sense of an imminent death is implicit in Etta’s departure, for she will not stay to watch them die. Butch and Sundance stand united in the final scene, mirroring the earlier leap from the cliff. As they emerge from cover and the image fades to sepia, the scene recalls the nostalgia of the early western film and the still photos of their trip, creating the idea of an idealized space. The suggestion of death,
rather than the graphic enactment, provides an opening within the film to construct an alternative “mythic” ending in which the men evade annihilation.

In *Easy Rider* the containment acts to reinforce the dominant ideologies from which the men are seeking to free themselves. George Hanson (Jack Nicholson) is the redeemer, offering a form of salvation to the other characters. He is the one who has actively participated in changing the social landscape. His death acts as a reminder of the limitation of their exploration and a premonition of the deaths of Billy and Wyatt. Following his death, the two protagonists are distanced from the ideals that each stop along the journey represents. As Hill states, “the film juxtaposes its anti-heroes’ attraction to idealism and commitment with their tendency towards self-interest and hedonism” (Hill 44). The scene at the cemetery signals disillusionment with their vision for a new America, and their indulgent mourning is not only for their friend but also for this loss. The abrupt death of Wyatt and Billy revokes the freedom afforded to the men from their culturally privileged positions, illustrating the constructed assumptions surrounding gender and hierarchy that runs throughout the film. The prosecution of the men for the length of their hair suggests that their rebellion against social norms threatens the social order. George says that the men represent freedom, a freedom which is threatening to some people. The link to gender rebellion challenges these dominant norms, revealing the artificial nature of their construction.

In *Midnight Cowboy* the containment acts to domesticate not only the relationship between the men, but also male sexuality in general. The film raises the issue of male sexuality more emphatically than the other buddy films of the period since Joe’s job involves sex. While *Midnight Cowboy* highlights sexuality more than the other films
discussed here, it is also the film which presents the most threatening portrayal of sexuality. Sex is shown as a commodity, yet Joe’s relationships are all tied to sexuality and loss. In the flashback sequences Joe’s grandmother is shown receiving a massage from a young Joe, suggesting an impropriety or abuse in their relationship. This early sexualization creates a sense of loss of innocence and loss of home that continues throughout the film. Redemption for Rizzo and Joe comes at the cost of desexualizing themselves. However, even this is not sufficient in the domestication of their relationship, and it is only through death that it is safely resolved.

Within the buddy film, myths of masculine masquerade are performed which contest gender assumptions. The films are structured around themes that privilege masculinity, while at the same time the films reveal this identity to be a composite that may be assumed or discarded. The masquerade is thematically expressed in the protagonists’ voices, authority, and mobility. However, the films depict a level of homosocial bonding that contradicts the dominant associations with male identity. The films are contradictory, acting as warnings of the inherent danger and freedom in homosocial behavior. The films provide moments of intimate expression that draw on the melodramatic modes combined with more male-centered genres such as the western. By illustrating the changing male identity embodied in the shift from the traditional masquerade, such as authority and order to a new performance of masculinity, these films offer a male body unable to occupy the American landscape. Instead, the body is seen as a site of anxiety, paralleling the social changes of the time. The focus of male identity that is evident within these films can be seen to appear at a time in which civil rights, gay rights and the women’s movement began seriously challenging accepted notions about
gender, sexuality and race. These movements called into question the dominant
definitions of masculine identity, destabilizing the authority of the male masquerade, and
allowed for a new fluidity in gender politics.
Endnotes for Chapter Two


Chapter Three: Brawn, Brains and Bodies in the Seventies and Eighties

As a genre, the buddy film focuses on male relationships, thematically seeking to mediate the boundaries surrounding the homosocial continuum and the intimacy and eroticism implicit to male bonding. As Stephen Farber states, "movies about male friendships touch something in the fantasy life of Americans" (Farber 1). The fantasy explored in buddy films is one that closely ties the cultural milieu of the time to nationalism and myths circulating surrounding male identity. The films act as moral parables, complicating notions of male privilege through the performance of various masculine identities. Differences in male identity are symbolized in the twinned bodies of the protagonists: the most heroic of the pair is often characterized by traditional male qualities, stoicism, bravery, athleticism, while the sidekick stands as a feminized Other, sexually, racially or by class difference.

The problematic nature of identity within the films is embodied in the characters' rebellion against their social world. If in the films of the 1960s, rebellion can be seen as a response to ongoing social changes, then the films of the 1970s, such as Scarecrow (1973), Thunderbolt and Lightfoot (1974), Dog Day Afternoon (1975), and The In-Laws (1979), echo a similar sense of contradiction through both celebrating and resisting the changing masculinity. However, the buddies' rebellion against domesticity, symbolized in their homosocial relationship, is co-opted in later films such as 48 HRS. (1983), Tango & Cash (1989), Lethal Weapon (1987) Trading Places (1983) and Planes, Trains and Automobiles (1987) to bolster a more conservative masculinity. The outlaw is frequently integrated into the institutions that the heroes of the 1960s and 1970s attempted to
dislodge. The men in these later films are often middle-class, middle-aged, and married. In the 1970s and 1980s the films shift the focus from the protagonists' internal struggle against social conventions to struggles against external social forces, through a reconfiguration of the male masquerade. While the bodies in the buddy films from the 1970s and the 1980s offer contrasting visions of masculinity, the transformation of their bodies can be read as a response to the challenges the periods direct toward the masculine masquerade.

The political and economic upheaval of the 1960s was a continuing presence into the 1970s. Watergate and Vietnam affected national identity and perceptions about American government and policies, fracturing common beliefs about the stability of social structures (Wood 49). The differences between the presidencies of Nixon and Carter illustrate some of the changing masculine ideals of the 1970s. Nixon was viewed as strong but corrupt, while Carter was viewed in comparison as too soft (Jeffords 10). While the high unemployment rate decreased during Carter’s administration, inflation continued to increase, bringing about an economic recession (Lev 194-197). The energy crisis and the hostage situation in Iran in 1979 created an image of a weakening America, which contrasted with the strength that Reagan seemed to offer (Jeffords 3). As Berg and Rowe state, during the 1980s the return to traditional family values “began to look like a solution to the very political problems it had helped produce” (Berg and Rowe, 6). The political ruptures created a sense of incoherence in the construction of a national identity.

Consequently, the political and economic shifts of the 1970s and 1980s impacted the masculine masquerade. Since, according to Heath, the construction of masculinity is
connected to the “trappings of authority, hierarchy, order, position [that] make the man” (Heath 56), the 1970s represent a period in which these trappings are undermined economically and socially, through the war, rising unemployment, and inflation. The new economy, coupled with the advances brought about by the feminist movement, led to an influx of working women and double-income families. The 1970s continued to offer challenges to the white middle-class male in the development of equal opportunity hiring practices initiated during the 1960s. The Black Power movement of the 1960s continued to be an important voice during the 1970s, gaining an acceptance in popular culture. Then, during the 1980s, the impetus of the 1960s civil rights and feminist movements seemed lost in a cultural malaise. The development of globalization, coupled with the effects of corporate downsizing, led to continual and rapid market changes, and heightened the divide between the middle and lower classes (Lev 198). The radical economic division created isolationist tendencies amongst the white middle-class. The 1980s affluence, symbolized by yuppie consumerism, eventually imploded with the 1987 stock market crash. These significant social and economic fluctuations of the 1970s and 1980s altered masculine ideals, which were mirrored in the contemporary images of men.

The feminist movement of the 1960s had a continued influence in the 1970s and 1980s. The organizations that emerged out of the 1960s impacted issues surrounding women and equality. However, in the 1970s the feminist movement was criticized for essentialism, although the grassroots organizations of the seventies represent diverse interests. At the same time, more sexualized images of women were being circulated in the media. In the 1980s there was a backlash against second wave feminism. The image of men stepping in and taking over became a notable figure in popular culture.
Activists were often stereotyped as shrill troublemakers, causing discontentment. The liberated woman was constructed as a threatening figure, emotionally unbalanced and a danger to herself and others. The fragmenting of the feminist community led to a breakdown in definitions of feminism, creating infractions over the issue of sexuality, which eventually led to a loss of momentum. While women had made important advancements and secured more powerful positions, this new freedom was undermined by the valorization of family values evidenced in the popular texts of the time.

The more predominant queer politics of the 1970s and 1980s also speak to social changes in the construction of masculinity. The influence of the 1960s civil rights movement and events such as Stonewall helped to create an increasingly vocal queer politic. According to John D’Emilio, civil issues for gay rights, including the altered APA classification of gayness as a mental illness, changing sodomy laws and the inclusion of gay issues in the Democratic Party platform, mark the 1970s as a period of significant change for masculinity and queer identity. Varied representations of masculinity also became more prevalent during the 1970s. The growing openness in the construction of masculinity was countered in the 1980s with a return to the paranoid, patriarchal “Father” (Wood 241). This backlash against broader representations of masculinity, mirroring the feminist backlash, emerged partially in response to the AIDS epidemic and the false public perceptions that linked the disease to homosexuality. Other conservative cultural factors include the Republican platform (which was closely linked with the emergence of the Christian Coalition), an increase in anti-abortion rhetoric and “local campaigns against gay and lesbian demonstrations” (Jeffords 191). During the 1980s the sensitive “new man” of 1960s and 1970s films was co-opted to support
Reagan's "family values," reconfiguring the hard body, seen in films such as *First Blood* (1982), * Terminator* (1984), and *Tango & Cash*, to eventually create the family man in films like *Mr. Mom* (1983) and *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*.

This conflicted masculine subject represents the influence of a group of young new filmmakers and the social concern films that emerged in the late 1960s and continued into the 1970s. The films of this period have been called the "New Hollywood" (Bernardoni 1, Bordwell and Thompson 667), "Political Movement Films" (Cagin and Dray xi), and "Revolutionary Films" (Corliss 11), representing a new vitality and a movement away from both the star and the studio systems (Lev xvii). The films of the 1970s have been characterized as fractured, both in terms of audience appeal and ideological concerns. However, as Seth Cagin and Philip Dray state, "popular films must always trade in shared, communal values, but to a sizable segment of the population, communal values had become difficult to discern" (246). The contradictory nature of these films is representative of this conflict of identity experienced in popular culture during this period. Of course, not all films in the 1970s are part of this new mode of filmmaking, and as Lev points out, *Airport* (1970) and *Love Story* (1970) were the most successful films of the year (17). However, for the buddy film genre the 1970s represent a critical period, due in part to the pessimistic nature of the films and the transformations within the social climate.

The New Hollywood films were altered through a series of changes relating to film production and distribution. Specifically, in the late 1970s and 1980s, the film industry became more reliant on advertising in conjunction with a quick, concentrated distribution strategy that depended on ad campaigns to create audience draw (Lev 184).
Also, audiences were further fragmented by technological changes, like the growing cable networks and video recorders that effectively took the viewer out of the theaters and created a more individualized experience (Lev 185). The technological advances made filmmaking suddenly cheaper and more accessible. The filmmakers of New Hollywood and their more radical views had become part of the Hollywood system, which by the 1980s was clearly a business (Cagin 192, Wood xi). The reorientation towards the blockbuster formula, with seasonal releases, huge advertising campaigns and famous film stars had a powerful influence on the buddy film, creating a market for more heroically structured films that avoided the downtrodden characters from the films of the 1970s.

The 1970s films’ narratives follow a structure similar to the hybrid genre films of the 1960s, and, as in the films of the 1960s, in the 1970s the characters continued looking for self-knowledge and survival. In Scarecrow, Max (Gene Hackman) and Francis (Al Pacino) are two drifters, fresh out of the Navy and prison, who decide to join forces. Max’s street smarts and Francis’s optimism help them in their adventures. Max wants to start up a car wash, but has to get his money out of the bank in Pittsburgh first, while Francis wants to visit his wife and child. Along the way the men must overcome various obstacles, including women, drunken carousing, prison and more women. The plot of Thunderbolt and Lightfoot unfolds in much the same way. The two men, John/Thunderbolt (Clint Eastwood) and the Kid/Lightfoot (Jeff Bridges), meet while both are trying to escape from trouble. Lightfoot convinces John that he needs a companion, and John eventually agrees. They start travelling together, only to be stopped by Thunderbolt’s old partners in crime. The four men decide to re-commit the same heist that they pulled years earlier, but things fail to go according to plan.
*Dog Day Afternoon* is another buddy film which begins with the men, Sonny (Al Pacino) and Sal (John Cazale), planning to rob a bank, only to find that the money has already been deposited, and instead of the buddies safely getting away their robbery turns into a drawn out extravaganza during which the men, ironically, are lauded as standing for the rights of everyman. The police and the media become involved in the personal lives of the men holding the bank employees hostage. When it is revealed that Sonny wanted the money for a sex change operation for his boyfriend, public opinion swings in reaction against him. In the end the men are caught and Sal is killed. In *The In-Laws* the two men, Vincent (Peter Falk) and Sheldon (Alan Arkin), are brought together through the impending marriage of their son and daughter. When conservative dentist Sheldon finally meets the father of the man about to marry his daughter, the strange dinner antics raise all kinds of questions. Unfortunately, his concerns are quickly justified and the men soon become entangled in a web of international intrigue, military coups, robbery and several near-death experiences. Through the course of their adventures the men become friends and the film ends with the wedding of their two families.

The changing perceptions of masculinity in the 1980s had a significant impact on the restructuring of the buddy films. While the men of the 1960s and 1970s reflected a sense of social anxiety and displacement, in the 1980s there was a return to an image of a stronger machismo.¹⁸ For the buddy films this meant that the earlier myths had to adapt to incorporate a broader range of narratives. The function of the myth was no longer simply to solve the conflict between the new and old man; instead, the films had to verify that the strong man did exist. The narratives served to erase the masquerade of masculinity suggested by the collapse of the “new” and the “old” man into a single
identity. Revealing that the men are actually the same also exposes masculinity as an artifice. Therefore, the narratives in the films shifted from articulating notions of a unified self to a fragmented self, focusing on masculinity in opposition to the Other.

In contrast to the bleak quality imbued in most of the films of the 1970s, the 1980s present a more conservative, stabilized narrative. In *48 HRS.* cop Jack Cates (Nick Nolte) and criminal Reggie Hammond (Eddie Murphy) join forces to catch the cop killer and robbers Albert Ganz and Billy Bear. When Cates and Reggie team up, each is a loner with his own style and his own approach to crime solving; however, in the end they overcome their differences to save the day. In *Tango & Cash* a comparable dynamic is established when Ray Tango (Sylvester Stallone) and Gabe Cash (Kurt Russell), two competing narcotics detectives, are framed for murder by a villainous drug lord. When they are sent to a prison filled with the thugs they have helped convict, despite their initial dislike of each other they end up joining forces to help each other. Together they are able to escape from prison, expose their wrongful conviction and foil the villain’s evil plot. Similarly, in *Lethal Weapon* two cops are again unwillingly partnered together. Martin Riggs (Mel Gibson) is the younger, wilder man on the edge, while Roger Murtaugh (Danny Glover) is an older family man who just wants to make it to retirement. The pair ends up investigating an evil drug lord determined to eliminate them, and it is only by setting aside their differences and trusting one another that the men are able to overcome the villain. *Trading Places* reworks the fish-out-of-water scenario when Louis Winthrope (Dan Ackroyd), a spoiled, wealthy stock trader, and Billy Ray Valentine (Eddie Murphy), a homeless con man, are forced to trade places. Once in their new positions Billy Ray learns all about responsibility, and Winthrope learns all about humanity. Eventually the
two meet and decide to overcome their opponents who put them in their precarious positions. This juxtaposition of class-based masculinities is also seen in *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* where two businessmen from different worlds, Del Griffith (John Candy) and Neal Page (Steve Martin), try traveling home for Thanksgiving holidays. A series of misadventures occur, starting with missed taxis, re-routed flights, trains breaking down, and cars flattening, during which the men slowly grow closer, moving beyond cultural standing. The buddy film narrative operates by repeating a specific structural pattern at a given time, clearly illustrating a relationship linking the narrative to a cultural need.

The public voice of the 1970s contained both reactionary and counter-reactionary movements, with ongoing tensions between progressive and conservative forces, both ideologically and socially. These same contradictory views are contained within the texts of the time period. As Cagin and Dray state, films like *Dirty Harry* (1971) and *Billy Jack* (1971) are “a marvel of cross-purposes and a testament to the confusion and loss of social cohesion that arose out of bitter resistance to the counterculture, as well as resistance to the resistance” (219). These films create an anti-hero who rebels against the system, using both conservative and progressive stances and ideologies. These figures illustrate the pliability of ideology, revealing a cynicism toward extremism that is often depicted as misguided within these films. A similar conservative figure is reconstructed in the buddy films to stand as a counter to the more liberal attitude often embodied by the younger man. By creating a double identity within the couple, the films act to diffuse either extreme, advocating a position of intermediate neutrality. This is seen in the contrasting characters in *Scarecrow, Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* and *The In-Laws*,
which the new sensitive man contrasts against the older, more traditional man.

Through this type of pairing the buddy film acts to stabilize the contradictions contained within these changing definitions of masculine identity. Buddy films attempt to show that the “new” and “old” men are alike, presenting an ideal synthesis, whereby the new man gains the insight of the older man and the older man is revitalized by the love of the young, sensitive man. For example, in Thunderbolt and Lightfoot it is Lightfoot’s admiration and excitement that prompts John to open up about his bank-robbing past and knowledge. The scenario itself is a traditional male narrative, yet in the 1970s it gains significance as part a movement in popular discourse concerning the new man and his sensitivity. While the mentor scenario has frequently played itself out over time, the buddy films of the 1970s highlight this relationship, creating a paradigm of containment through the contrast between the “new” and “old” representations of masculinity. The older protagonist is ultimately enriched through the sharing and compassion brought about by the relationship, while for the new man the relationship is frequently perilous, either emotionally or physically. The youthful man lacks the hardened façade of experience afforded to the traditional protagonist. The films recoup the sensitivity of the young man to re-instilling traditional representations of masculinity. These films act to symbolically reconfigure the prevalent masculine identity during this period, through a process of negotiation.

The bodies of the men in the films of the 1960s reveal a different concept of self than the bodies of men in the 1970s and 1980s. The bodies of the men in the 1960s were feminized both narratively and aesthetically. In Midnight Cowboy, Rizzo was the brains and Joe was the beauty, each needed the other to survive. Similarly, in Butch and
Sundance one is the brain and the other the brawn, and combined they function as a whole person. In *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, the men are almost identical in appearance. They are both handsome, tall, thin, blonde and blue-eyed men. That these adjectives are often applied to women rather than men illustrates the construction of a more feminized ideal of beauty within the film. The camera frequently fetishizes the men, as in the scene in *Easy Rider* when the men go skinny-dipping with the commune girls. The spectacle emphasizes the body and freedom. The films of the 1960s deal with a narrative that integrates “feminine” and “masculine” aspects and emphasize daily details in the dialogue and aesthetics, with a sense of adventure. If the films of the 1960s and 1970s appropriated the western to disassemble myths of masculinity, then the films of the 1980s were about reinforcing the ideology of the western without the iconographic citation. The ideological differences between the films from the different times are worked out on the bodies of the protagonists.

Frequently in the films of the 1970s, the partnership exists in a mentor-prodigy form. *Scarecrow* and *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* both rely on this framework, whereby the older man assumes an authoritative, didactic, fatherly position, while the youth is seen as reawakening the older man’s joy for life. The older men are portrayed as old-fashioned and traditional and often are symbolically associated with heroic qualities, such as knowledge, authority, and stamina. They have a street credibility and the ability to exist successfully within the socially conservative boundaries of masculine identity. While the older men may operate within a marginalized position, as outlaws and therefore peripheral, they are able to use their experience to their advantage. Max knows about how to survive prison, and always has spare money in his shoe. Another example is
when John Thunderbolt uses his experience to heal himself, as seen in the sequence when he fixes his dislocated shoulder. This scene is significant since the camera angle, which aligns the viewer with the position of Lightfoot as the watcher, reveals the constructed gendering of the men, positioning John as masculine and Lightfoot as feminine. In contrast to the tradition represented by the older man, his partner occupies a liminal space, without home or history. This scene is also significant since the gaze of the camera, which is aligned with Lightfoot, watches a shirtless John, his chest wet with sweat, gleaming in the sunlight, as he grimaces while inflicting this pain upon himself. The voyeuristic gaze constructed within this sequence implicates the viewer and Lightfoot in the masochistic spectacle. The mentor-prodigy paradigm, while not always overtly sexual, is founded on intimacy and reciprocity. When Max asks Lion if he is a drifter, he answers, “I’ve been at sea,” an answer with double meaning, alluding to both his stint in the Navy and his literal lack of purpose. They younger men are restricted by their naiveté and require the expertise represented by the figure of the older man in order to navigate even a marginalized masculine position.

While in the 1960s the buddies acted as a unified couple, whereby each man contributed either beauty or brains, in the 1970s and 1980s there are marked differences between the men. The mirror body image, exemplified in Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, is fractured in films such as Scarecrow, Lethal Weapon, Planes, Trains and Automobiles and 48 Hrs by factors such as age, class and race. The division of the couple, symbolized in the changing body of the 1970s and 1980s, reflects a shift back towards the conservative masculine identity that prevailed prior to sexual revolution of the 1960s. However, it is the films of the 1970s that most closely resemble the
construction of the films of the 1960s, with the difference located primarily in age and class, echoing the structure of the mentor-protégé narrative. In Scarecrow, while Max is the old veteran, Francis is the young innocent whose optimistic attitude, in that he believes that scarecrows are there to make the crows laugh, is slowly crushed. In The In-Laws Sheldon is more poised and refined while Vincent is gauche, lacking Sheldon’s veneer of class. By the 1980s, the sense of difference is exacerbated and the men no longer represent an integrated self. The fracturing of the duo represents a desire for a projected Other against which to define the besieged masculine self.

Inherent within the splintering of identity is the suggestion that the changing social world and masculine ideals present an incompatible male masquerade. Ruptures within the construction of masculine identity are internalized in the shifting tension between the relationships of the men in the films. In the films of the 1960s, like Easy Rider and Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, the tension is located between the men and society; however, in the 1980s the narrative conflict emerges as a result of the conflict between the men. From the beginning of Tango & Cash the men are established as adversaries, competing with each other rather than against an external social threat. In Lethal Weapon, Murtaugh is actually scared of the loose cannon Riggs, while in Planes, Trains and Automobiles and Trading Places the men are strangers who meet and are in conflict throughout most of the film. The men no longer struggle to disrupt social convention; instead, by focusing on each other the tension is articulated in terms of racial or class distinctions, anxieties reflecting the values of the Reagan era.

If the 1960s films were united by the common theme of rebellion against society, in the 1980s the rebellion has been redirected towards differences between the men within
society. In *Tango & Cash* Tango is described as a “Hollywood wop” and “Armani with a
badge,” while in contrast Cash is called a “downtown clown.” The men are depicted as
clashing in ethnicity and style. Similarly, in *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* and *Trading
Places* it is the class differences that most clearly distinguish the protagonists. Although
the plot is structured upon emphasizing difference, in the narrative the reality of social
inequality is mythologized. Poverty is constructed within these films as a choice or style.

Del is the happiest of the couple, at home with other people, just as Billy Ray is shown as
more giving; he throws a big party when he is wealthy, in contrast to Winthrope. In the
films of the 1980s, tension and isolation is linked to the upper class, while poverty is
associated with being happy-go-lucky. Dislocating the tension from a critique of society
onto visible difference in terms of class or race allows for an ideological domestication of
both the relationship between the men and of the progressive potential of the films. The
relationship between the men is reconfigured in terms of an Otherness, through which one
man assumes the position of the dominant and his partner is constrained by difference
manifest in class or race. This thus supports hegemonic ideology, shifting the critique
from overarching social structures to locate it instead in the Other.

When comparing the bodies of the men from the films of the 1960s and 1970s to
the bodies of the 1980s, there is a clear distinction in the construction of masculinity and
of the male relationship within the films. In *48 HRS.*, actors Nick Nolte and Eddie
Murphy represent a paranoid masculinity, symbolic of the changes to be undergone in the
body of the actors in later buddy films. Likewise, *Tango & Cash* generated media
attention specifically because of the actors’ costumes and body image in the film.²¹ It is
ironic that for Sylvester Stallone this film was an attempt to reconstruct his body image,
moving away from the muscled image of Rambo towards a classier, refined image, when he appears so much larger in contrast to figures like Clint Eastwood and Dustin Hoffman. In comparison, the men from the earlier films *Easy Rider, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *Midnight Cowboy* have almost feminine frames. In *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot*, when Thunderbolt is “laying pipe,” shirtless and sweating in his leather pants, he is subjected to a gaze, which is subsequently revealed to be that of a naked woman. In contrast, the masquerade of masculinity of the 1980s is rarely overtly challenged. Instead, the conceptualization of masculinity as muscle is taken to the point of excess. The bodies of the men in the 1980s can be seen as reinforcing the message that size does matter and that despite the frequent lack of intelligence in the protagonists their bodies are heroic.

While the 1970s films articulate the male anxiety surrounding intimacy, the films of the 1980s attempt to repress this tension by highlighting racial and class differences between the characters. Jeffords states that the white male body in the action films of the 1980s comes to characterize “heroism, individualism, and bodily integrity” (Jeffords 148). While the excessive bodies and the masculine paranoia of the early 1980s were reworked in later films, rarely has the white hero and his privilege in the genre been challenged. *48 HRS.* (1982) is significant to the genre as the protagonists in the film consist of a biracial couple, a theme of difference which marks a shift in the relationship between the male characters that is elaborated in later buddy films. While Willis argues that the biracial coupling of the buddy film has the potential for continually adapting, this potential is in fact limited (55). For example, Willis states that the white buddy cannot be placed in the custody of “a black male lead” (55). This is aptly demonstrated during the country bar scene in *48 HRS.* where Billie Ray pretends to be a cop. When he states, “I’m
your worst fucking nightmare, I’m a nigger with a badge. I have permission to kick your ass whenever I feel like it,” it is simply a performance of authority. The scene is comical, since there is never any question about who is actually in control, as Cates lurks quietly in the background, blending in with the redneck locals. As discussed in Chapter 4, later films such as Bullet Proof, Shanghai Noon (2000), and Rush Hour (1998) disrupt authority and race conventions; however, the privilege of the white hero remains predominant. Willis states that the hierarchical structure of the films allows for racial difference to appear without acknowledgment, erasing inequality (Willis 30).

A similar strategy of evasion is seen in the films’ representation of other issues of inequality, such as sexuality or class. In Lethal Weapon Murtaugh has the American Dream, the family, the house, the boat, and his life is free from overt racism. Instead, ill treatment is reserved for the body of the heroes (Willis 57). In Lethal Weapon, Riggs is tortured and electrocuted, and Tango and Cash are also electrocuted and threatened with rape. By shifting the suffering onto the body of the white heroes, their power is merited. Whereas the buddy films of the 1960s represented a union of masculine and feminine traits through the erasure of visible difference, in the 1980s sexuality, race, class and age have become signs of inflexibility in masculine identity, built through opposition.

To reinforce the naturalization of the buddy relationship, the genre conventionalizes homosocial spaces and homoeroticism. The films of both the 1970s and 1980s continue to re-enact a naturalization of the male fantasy of an all-male world through the creation of homosocial environments. For example, in Scarecrow, the men meet after spending five years in the Navy and six years in prison, institutions that Stephen Farber states are “two of the most overtly homosexual subcultures in America”
(1). The homosexual subtext is frequently highlighted in the structure of the buddy film with the inclusion of scenes in which homoerotism and male sexuality are foregrounded. Prior to the shower scene, Tango and Cash are shown naked walking to the showers, the male nudity acting to signal the possible erotic tension within the scene. While in the shower, Cash drops the soap, and Ray reacts: “Hey, What are you doing? What are you doing? What are you doing?” Cash replies, “Relax, soap! And don’t flatter yourself, pee-wee.” Tango retorts, “I don’t know you that well; don’t worry, Cash, someday the other one will drop.” Cash says, “Atta boy, tripod,” and finally Tango answers, “Sure thing, Minnie-Mouse.” The extensive attention to phallic nicknames during this scene while the men are naked together to reaffirm their masculinity only emphasizes the source of their discomfort. Similarly, when the men in *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* awake after cuddling each other throughout the night, they discuss football as a means of distancing themselves from their intimacy. The use of all-male spaces also acts to distance the idea of sexual preference as a possibility in the buddy film. The homosocial settings in the film justify the male bond, or why the men are together, while creating links with queer sites. In *Tango & Cash*, whether in police headquarters, prison, or the nightclub, the heroes are continually surrounded by other men. The films reinforce the incompatibility of the masculine ideal of the 1980s and homosocial intimacy through the use of paranoid references, as exemplified by the couple’s language, which only highlights the homoerotic tension.

Another device of the buddy films of the 1970s and 1980s is a reliance on a heavily coded language to reinforce subtext. Homoerotism is established in the film through dialogue. That the audience never views intimate moments between Max and
Lion, and that Max calls Lion his wife, suggests their closeness. The frequent use of nicknames or pet names in buddy films creates a camaraderie far closer than that shared with any women. The films also use language to create a sense of the abject in relation to homoerotism. In 48 HRS. Cates continually refers to Reggie as “asshole,” even going so far as to say, “I own your ass.” In Tango & Cash, when threatening criminals, Tango says, “I’m going to tear you a new hole in your ass.” The language in these scenes sends a message of displacement (King 164). By continually using such language, abjection is linked with homosexuality, and the men gain permission to be homosocial since they have demonstrated their homophobia. These exhibitions of homophobia recreate a disavowal that parallels the derision of gay characters in the films. This homophobic language illustrates the characters’ fears of the homoerotic, and also functions to lessen audience tension by establishing men who enjoy the company of men as Othered (King 164).

The villains of the buddy film illustrate the same fears and contradictions seen in the heroes of the genre. The films often structure the antagonists in a complementary pairing in opposition to the heroes. The mirroring of good masculinity and bad masculinity allows the film to restate positions, demonstrating negative behavior for annihilation. In Thunderbolt and Lightfoot, Red is an overbearing, exaggerated caricature. His guns, suits and car are anachronistic. At first seen as a war hero, it is later revealed that Thunderbolt saved his life. Most significant, aside from his lack of loyalty, or ability to adapt, the film constructs Red as a perverse voyeur, asking for sexual details, staring at a naked couple, yet uncontrollably violent when Lightfoot gives him a false kiss. This over-emphatic performance of masculinity undermines the masquerade,
exposing the construction. Compared to his partner, Eddie Goody is small, shy, kind and almost womanly. Out of all the men, he is assigned the silliest job as the ice-cream truck driver, demonstrating how the feminization of the villain is another way the films create parallel constructs of masculine identity. In Scarecrow, the villain Raleigh is feminized through his appearance, his blonde hair and shapely face, and his attention to his clothing shown by his clean white shirt and cowboy hat. Perret, in Tango & Cash, also wears all white, has a sinister accent and plays with mice named Tango and Cash. These characteristics all act to other the villain, suggesting a perversion of the performance of masculinity. The excess of the villains in masculine or feminine terms corresponds with the films' construction of the heroes, in which the pair represents these extremes of male identity. The films act as a warning against these excessive positions, through both the heroes and the villains.

By the 1980s a sense of conservatism and cynicism pervaded the social and cultural atmosphere. Robin Wood points to a shift in the popularity of the buddy films, which he saw as dwindling in the 1980s; however, the change is best understood as a distinct movement towards a more conservative articulation of masculinity (229). The films of the 1980s represent a movement towards a conservative masculinity, distinct from the earlier more intimate relationships of the 1960s, in which the homoerotism of the men's relationship is repressed and reconfigured. Wood attributes the change to the development of mainstream gay themes in such films as Victor, Victoria (1982), and Making Love (1982) (237), as well as To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar (1994), The Bird Cage (1996) and independent productions like My Own Private Idaho (1991). These more mainstream representations of homosexuality can be seen as
defusing the homoerotic negotiation that is thematic of the buddy film. However, the representation of gay identity in dominant cinema frequently endorses images of Otherness by portraying homosexuality with an extreme camp sensibility or by suggesting that homosexuality stems from gender confusion. According to Wood, while “promoting liberal attitudes towards homosexuality,” these films ultimately act to domesticate the opening in the traditional construction of masculinity created in the 1970s (224). The early buddy films can in some ways be seen as attempting to endorse more flexible depictions of masculinity, in which men were attracted to both each other and women, creating positions of bisexuality. These mainstream gay roles are distinct from the queer fluidity of the buddy love stories. The buddy genre is fraught with innuendoes and allusions, the films rarely presenting a closed narrative; instead, the openings in the narrative act to challenge gender roles. In the 1980s the sense of social critique is displaced and social agency is rejected in favor of a return to more conservative models of gender.

While the films of the 1970s portray a more critical perspective of gender and society, in the 1980s the heroes revert to a standardized masculinity. While Scarecrow uses sexist language to introduce an element of homophobia, it is done to illustrate weaknesses within the character. By showing Max’s discomfort with feminized men, in the first café scene where he decides to call Francis by the nickname Lion, his character’s machismo is foregrounded in mockery. Their later love, also signaled by language when he calls Lion his wife, undermines the credibility of his macho image. Max’s rowdy drinking, brawling, and womanizing are qualities that are shown as hindrances rather than advantages. In 48 HRS, the overt racism of Jack Cates’ character in his comments (for
example, calling Billie Ray "watermelon") resurrects the idea that masculinity is tied to a racist ideology. Further, cross-cutting establishes parallels between the two men and their relationship to women during the scene in which Jack talks to his girlfriend on the phone and Reggie propositions a pair of sex workers in the hallway of the police station.

Reggie's referencing of women as "trim" or "pussy" is echoed in Jack's own problematic relationship. Masculinity, particularly in the dominant half of the couple, is frequently linked with misogyny and racism. While it may be used to draw attention to gender, race or class, it mainly functions to diffuse the fears associated with difference, constructing a highly reactionary position.

These films of the 1970s and 1980s include references to conventions established by earlier buddy films and so rely on these conventions to negotiate the issues surrounding masculinity and representation. The films of the 1960s relied on the iconography of the western to deconstruct representations of traditional masculinity; however, the films of the 1970s and 1980s transform the western iconography to the more contemporary form of the action film. In these buddy films emotional expressions are redirected into more traditional outlets such as humor and physicality. The endless fighting, car-chases or shoot-outs are symbolic extensions of the male body. The fight scenes, which allow the men to strip down and get sweaty, create an emotional identification that recalls the structuring of the traditionally feminine dialogue of the melodrama. In *Tango & Cash*, the introduction to the characters occurs in the form of a car chase and a fight scene. These scenes act as a form of shorthand, conveying information about the characters through tests of their stamina and skill as opposed to a more emotionally based understanding of the characters. The symbolism creates a
language of double entendre in which the conservatism of the masculine masquerade
voices repressed tensions. For example, in 48 HRS. when Gains shoots Cates’s partner it
is a double violation since he shoots him with Cates’s gun. Gains emasculates Cates by
forcing him to surrender his weapon, then turning on his partner and penetrating him with
it. Even the vehicles the men drive speak to male fantasies and fears, from Cates’s
battered convertible to Cash’s flashy sports car.

One of the main themes of the western, the trafficking of women, is reworked
when appropriated within the conventions of the 1970s and 1980s buddy films, in which
women are frequently absent. This control is re-articulated in two different ways: first, it
is redirected in the narrative hierarchy of the films, which often results in one of the
characters assuming a position of feminization; and secondly, it also appears in the
recurring thematic concern of home that the absent women symbolize. The hero literally
wears the pants in the buddy film while the sidekick might occasionally have to wear a
dress. In Thunderbolt and Lightfoot, during the robbery it is Lightfoot who has to go in
drag and distract the security man, while in Tango & Cash it is Gabe who has to disguise
himself as a woman to escape from the thugs. These performances rely on the camera to
slowly pan across the transformed men, revealing their identity only after fetishizing the
body. The exaggerated performance of gender within the films stresses the instability of
masculinity that the films are attempting to reconstruct. The films locate this tension not
only in the bodies of the men, but in the absent women and their relationship to home.

The family is a site of contention in the buddy films of the 1970s and 1980s.
While early buddy films offer what appears as an idyllic vision of life freed from the
constraints of domesticity (i.e. Easy Rider, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid), these
films clearly project the message that there is no home without family. The coupling of the men is never offered as an alternative to this dream of home. The family becomes not only an absent unrealized dream, but also a source of anxiety that dictates all other behavior. In *Scarecrow*, it is the loss of the family symbolized by his “dead” child that leads Lion to his nervous breakdown. In *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot*, the Kid is shown as a drifter, lost in part because of his separation from his people. The performance of masculinity is intrinsically linked to family, and the men who reveal their need for family are feminized and punished, while the stronger of the couple is shown as stoically able to endure, despite his emotional isolation.

In the 1970s films the family represents a source of anxiety, particularly in relation to masculinity; however, in the 1980s the films reinforce conservative family values through showing family as under attack yet worthy of defending and saving. The image of home in the 1980s clearly illustrates the fragility of male identity. Loved ones are continually threatened, captured and generally in need of rescue. Like the heroes of the West, the men must struggle to round up the entire family lest they fall prey to the insatiable villains. In *Lethal Weapon*, an old war-buddy’s daughter starts the problems of the narrative by her weakness for porn and cocaine, and later the villains kidnap Murtaugh’s own daughter. In *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*, for Neal and Del getting home for the holiday and not having a home to go to for Thanksgiving are the problems around which the plot trajectory is built. For these men, the home has become a site of anxiety from which to escape. Murtaugh’s house is literally disassembled and Riggs has no home since his wife has been murdered. Cash has no home and Tango’s only family is his sister, whose sexuality he is unable to control, until his partner eventually tames her.
The home establishes a compromise to the men's love.

In the 1980s the women, when they are present, symbolize the emphasis on the nuclear family prevalent at the time. In *Lethal Weapon* the death of Martin Rigg's wife and his violent Vietnam experiences are what drive Riggs to his suicidal state. A man without a home is unstable. In contrast, Roger Murtaugh, his partner, is shown firmly entrenched in domestic life, yet it is this very connection that threatens to emasculate him. Repeatedly, Murtaugh is shown surrounded by his children, carrying them and eating with them, casting him in a feminine role. A parallel formation is seen in *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*, in which the absent wife of Del Griffith is contrasted with the picturesque family of Neal Page. However, in this situation it is the lack of family, rather than the abundance of family life, that emasculates Dell. The absence of family signals a lack in the performance of the male masquerade. Similar to the hyper masculinity signaled by the muscle-bound bodies, this lack creates a feminization in which the construction of the masquerade is highlighted. The excessive emotions and body of John Candy in *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* reinforces this feminization. As Mikhail Bakhtin states, the grotesque signals a break with normative values, and this break affords Dell a freedom from the constraints of masculinity. However, this transgression is undercut by the feminization projected onto his figure in the film. While he may be constructed as a challenge to the tidy, sleek, manicured body of Steve Martin, the narrative undermines his power to disrupt the authority of the male masquerade through the loss of his wife. He is emasculated in his inability to provide for or maintain a family. The artifice involved in masculinity is seen in the inability of the men to occupy any positive role in connection to family.
In the buddy film the family is linked thematically to security and sexuality. However, it is what the family represents at a given time that illustrates how symbolically loaded the family becomes within the homosocial world of the buddy film. *Midnight Cowboy* and *Scarecrow* address homosexuality, a subject anxiously avoided by the protagonists of most buddy films, unless referenced in threat or jest, and both films repeatedly foreground the family. The inclusion of homosexual activity within male narrative seems to elicit a justification reflex: the films include flashback sequences that act to clearly indicate that these protagonists are not everymen, that they have individual histories. This is significant since their history locates the source of men’s problems in women. The domineering woman plays a significant role: for Lion it is his wife Ann and for Joe his mother, who abandoned him only to be replaced by his grandmother. In *Scarecrow*, when Lion raises the question of what men do without women, having himself just spent five years at sea, he is in some way questioning the audience’s discomfort with homosexuality, represented by Max’s inability to answer him. While the women in the films of the 1970s are associated with home, they frequently represent problems with the domestic.

The films support the homosocial bond in that the men are happiest during their adventure, even the violent escapades, when compared to the stress and boredom offered in the images of domesticity. This reification of domesticity does not contradict the misogynistic humor, such as the sight gags at the expense of Ophelia in *Trading Places* (1983). However, while degrading women, the films also present women as the solution to the troubling love between the men. In asserting the reunion of the family, the endings recuperate the erotic space opened through the love shared by the men. Unlike the 1970s
buddy films, which celebrate the separation from domesticity, the films of the 1980s ultimately locate the solution to the social and economic problems of the day in the security to be found in the home.

The men of the 1970s buddy films exist outside the confinement of employment and marriage, while the men in the 1980s cling to the security offered by their jobs. In *The In-Laws*, both the conservative dentist and the wild and uncontrollable ex-secret agent are defined in part by their jobs. Heightened concern surrounding unemployment in the 1980s is reflected in films like *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* and *Trading Places*. In both films the sidekicks are depicted as lower class with Billy Ray homeless in the beginning of the film and Del as a travelling salesman. The concern with economic status is part of a cycle of films such as *Mr. Mom*, *Gung-Ho* (1986), and *Die Hard* (1988), in which the main character’s job is lost or undermined, creating tension in the authority of masculinity. Other men in the 1980s films struggle to work within a bureaucratic system that is depicted as another obstacle hindering them from achieving their goals (Jeffords 19). While this can be understood as a critique of the social institutions that the heroes defy, the weakness of social institutions and bureaucracy was a predominant message within Reagan’s policies, subverting the sense of social deconstruction (Jeffords 19). The anxiety that these films express during this period stands in contrast to the freedom of the men in the films of the 1960s and 1970s. For the men in these films, the system has failed to support their masquerade, leaving them to resurrect their identity through other oppositions.

In both the 1970s and 1980s in the homosocial world of the films the male masquerade grows more tenuous to maintain. Each era articulates a specific set of
cultural anxieties related to the myth of masculinity by appropriating conventions and reworking these conventions to address the emerging anxieties surrounding the construction of masculinity. In the films, without opposition the gender performance is exposed as an absence of a cohesive ideal. The differences between the men during this period address a return to conservatism and the marginalization of broader masculine characteristics. Earlier films explored some multiplicity within the male masquerade, while the films of the 1980s retreat from an intimate exploration of identity and sexuality to a more traditional mode of homosocial expression. However, within the conservative redefining of masculinity of this period a fracturing occurs: the definition of the masculine ideal is structured against difference; masculinity is no longer definable largely in contrast to femininity. The difference of masculinity, signaled through race, class, and gender within the performance of male identity, alludes to the constructed nature of the performance and the ideology that the masculine ideal upholds.
Endnotes for Chapter Three

1 The perception of Carter as soft resulted from his policies, including his liberal ideas on welfare, health care and the environment. His image was also softer, as he had a more casual appearance and wore sport coats and appeared without ties.

2 Reagan’s celebrity afforded him a familiarity, furthered by his cowboy image and his use of popular vernacular.

3 This is illustrated in the widespread popularity of the blaxploitation films of the 1970s such as Shaft (Gordon Parks, 1971), Superfly (Parks, 1972) and Blacula (William Crain, 1972).

4 The 1980s represent a period of strife in feminism in which anti-abortion and anti-pornography became issues that fragmented women’s communities.

5 Globalization, as described by Malcom Waters, is “A social process in which the constraints on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding.”


8 For example, pornography became more graphic and more mainstream in the 1970s with films like Deep Throat (Gerard Damiano, 1972), The Devil in Mrs. Jones (Damiano, 1973), and Behind the Green Door (Artie Mitchell, 1973).


10 See, for example, films like Tootsie (Sidney Pollack, 1982), Mr. Mom (1983), and Mrs. Doubtfire (Chris Columbus, 1993).
Consider the difference between Mary and Rhoda on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS, 1970-1977), in which Mary is the sweet, kind character while Rhoda, the independent feminist, is annoying and unhappy.

The backlash can be seen in films such as *Nine to Five* (Collin Higgins, 1980), *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987), and *Mr. Mom* (1983).

Andrea Dworkin's book *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Penguin, 1981), along with the writings of Catharine McKinnon, had a significant impact on the women's movement, leading to the Meese Commission and the development of FACT, therefore creating divisions between the different women's groups.

By the 1980s Women's Studies and Gender Studies could be seen to de-politicize radical feminism by making it a part of history and culture rather than action.

Following the raid on the Stonewall Inn on June 1969, the New York Gay Liberation Front was formed and one year later the first Gay Pride parade took place.

For example, full frontal nudity became legally publishable in photographs during this period.

Video cameras helped give more people the ability to try making films, which led to a resurgence of independent filmmaking in the 1980s and 1990s and also affected the pornography market through the wide-spread proliferation of the cheaper films of the 1980s.

For example, the men in television shows such as *Bosom Buddies* (ABC, 1980-1983), *The Dukes of Hazzard* (CBS, 1979-1985), and *Simon & Simon* (CBS, 1981-1988) can be seen as exhibiting a return to a more conservative masculine ideal in the later episodes.

Another example of the anti-hero figure during this time can be seen in the film *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976) in the conflict between the protagonist's self perception as hero and the unhinged vigilantism of his actions.

For example, see films such as *Deliverance* (John Boorman, 1972), *Kramer vs Kramer* (Robert Benton, 1979), and *American Graffiti* (George Lucas, 1973).

For example, Janet Maslin's article "Stallone and Russell As Buddies" in *The New York Times* (December 22, 1989), p. 16, discusses Stallone's attempt to construct a more sophisticated body image within the film through costume, creating a distance from the association with Rambo.
Other similar films are *Stir Crazy* (Sidney Poitier, 1980), *See No Evil, Hear No Evil* (Arthur Hiller, 1989), *Blue Streak* (Les Mayfield, 1999), and *National Security* (Dennis Dugan, 2003).

For further reading see Julia Kristeva *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia UP, 1982), in which she discusses abjection as a blurring of the boundaries, whether symbolic or literal, of the self. The slippage between the outside and inside of the body creates anxiety, and the repression of the bodily through the process of abjection can be seen as an attempt to re-establish the boundaries of self.

Lightfoot's name can be seen as alluding both to his skills as a burglar and his sexuality.

Chapter Four: The Nineties to Now: “Straight Men” and “Funny Guys”

By examining the buddy film genre throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, a distinct pattern can be seen in which masculine identity is constructed in opposition to race, class, and gender, thus locating male identity as an embodiment of a specific cultural and national moment. These opposing elements reinforce the dominance of a white, middle-class patriarchy by engaging in a myth of home, stability and camaraderie, while challenging the authority of this masquerade of masculinity. The films are important since they create a space for changes in male identity. However, the strategies used within the films to develop these spaces frequently circumvent progression within masculinity. Citation is one strategy that the buddy film genre continually evokes. To this end the films are highly reflexive, self-conscious, and ironic. These distancing devices, along with the comedic elements of the films, foreground the construction of masculinity, while also minimizing the messages of that performance.

The films often contain queer characters, whose presence is contrasted against the protagonists and their bond, disavowing homosexuality. However, queerness is over-represented, creating an opposition to heterosexuality, specifically male heterosexuality. This is not to say that the films attempt to create progressive critiques of masculinity; however, the reliance on stereotypes challenges masculine construction since the femininity ascribed in the coding of queerness is positioned as a lack within traditional masculine identity. In buddy films the goal is to achieve integration, yet this integration is heavily coded as misogynist and homophobic specifically because the union is between men and directed towards men. To resolve the tension between traditional masculinity
and behavior coded as queer or femme, the films ultimately attempt to divorce male intimacy from sexuality. The films negotiate to repress the connection between expression of concern and love that are the basis for the relationship between the men and the possible physical extension of the relationship. The immediacy of the contradiction, masculinity as an avoidance of sexuality, is a central myth, one which works to erase the obvious subtext within the films. By rejecting the potential of the homoerotic, the men in the films are distanced from sexuality, as any expression of intimacy recalls the relationship between the protagonists. The distinction between the homosocial relationship between the men and heterosexual relationships featured within the films is emphasized by divorcing the heterosexual relationship from the bonds of intimacy shared by the men. The films since the 1990s to present times rely on a postmodern aesthetic to create a reflexive text that denies the differences of race, class and gender.

This most recent period is marked by social and historical shifts that illustrate a growing reliance on global economy and technology. America, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, underwent rapid political change. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the conservative stance popularized during the Reagan era could no longer be fully supported by George Bush Senior’s administration. While in office from 1989-1993 Bush called for a kinder, gentler nation, and was criticized for being too old, too wimpy and riding on Reagan’s popularity. However, Bush’s militancy contradicted his famous call for kindness. In 1991 the Persian Gulf War occurred, but the post-war backlash against Bush ultimately helped his successor, Bill Clinton, during the election. The Clinton era marked a period of economic recovery, but his presidency was marred by continual scandals surrounding Whitewater, Paula Jones and Monica
Lewinsky. In contrast to Bush, Clinton's policies shifted focus from the military onto issues of education and health care. His "don't ask, don't tell" policy on gays in the military received mixed reaction, as too conservative and too liberal; however, it effectively brought attention to gay and lesbian political issues. In general, Clinton's policies were overshadowed by his personal infamy. Spin culture, exemplified by the media attention given to the O.J. Simpson trial, seemed to drive the politics of the time.

With the end of the millennium approaching, fears directed towards the technological invasion grew, illustrated by the Y2K anxiety, creating a similar survivalist impulse to that seen in the mid-1970s. The new millennium began with the debated election of George Bush Jr. in 2000, a stock market crash and the suicide bombing of the Twin Towers. The fall of the towers was followed by the passing of the Patriot Act and the Gulf War, showing an increasing militancy and anxiety affecting contemporary America. The effect on America could immediately be seen in changing attitudes and in the media. The war polarized public opinion, echoing the divide of the 1960s and 1970s, resulting in an international anti-war movement that was countered by an increased patriotism and a concern for "homeland" security. The social identity of the 1990s was strongly influenced by the ongoing conflict between conservative and liberal ideals in America, which can be seen as having an ongoing impact on the cultural politics of contemporary times.

The continued ideological contradiction in American culture can be seen in various social struggles. While the 1990s were distinguished as constituting the third wave of feminism, which is seen as more inclusive than the second wave, in many ways the ideals represented within feminist thought have been undermined by the circulation of
highly exploitative images of women. The struggle for women’s physical autonomy has recently resurfaced in America with President Bush’s preliminary challenges to female reproductive rights as guaranteed by Roe vs. Wade. A similar contrast is seen in the unrest in the black communities of America. While the 1990s can be seen as a period of a more generalized equality, this mythic ideal is ruptured through repeated systemic breaks. Following the Rodney King trials and the Los Angeles riots of 1992, there was a rise of black activism in the 1990s acting to counter the proliferation of negative stereotypes in the media. However, while feminism and civil rights have frequently been aligned in political agendas, in many ways the Million-Man March, while a celebration of rights and empowerment, was also founded on the exclusion of women. The resurrection of conservative ideals of patriarchy is emblematic of a renewed social conservatism.

Following the end of the Reagan era, Cynthia Fuchs noted that the genre “yielded ever more formulaic buddy films, featuring higher body counts, larger numbers of interracial and cross-class buddy teams, and increasingly homophobic comedy” (Fuchs 196). In contrast to the films of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, contemporary films have clearly moved away from the earlier masquerade of the rebel against society and the hero working to protect society, and instead restructured the hero as both an outsider and a loser, yet one content with society. Rather, the films are transformation myths of social acceptance in which the men in the films are no longer penalized, tortured or killed off, but are instead domesticated. Even their love is sanitized in the excessive reproduction of the fantasy. However, the popularity of the genre suggests a wide range of identifications occur, appealing to both men and women. The fluidity of the pleasure offered within the films illustrates how this genre has been co-opted as a part of mainstream dominant
culture, due to the marketability of its narrative, which works to reassure men and women of the ability of the juvenile male to gain social competency and to be caring and nurturing, at least to other men.

The films of the 1990s until the present day represent an elaboration of the conventions of the buddy film, which reflects a growing focus on media culture and a growth in information technologies. The films are structured through reference to other films and figures that are able to illustrate a dialogue that addresses masculine identity, its representations, and the expectations perpetuated by these images and ideals. From the 1990s onwards, several transitions have occurred in the buddy genre stemming from changes in film production, developing technology and market fluctuations. While the 1970s are noted as a time of innovation in films, in the 1980s this progressive film style was countered by renewed emphasis on blockbuster filmmaking. However, rapid technological advances, exemplified by the portable videocassette recorder, also allowed for the rise of the independent filmmaker. Chuck Kleinhans states that “‘independent,’ then, has to be understood as a relational term–independent in relation to the dominant system–rather than taken as indicating a practice that is totally free-standing and autonomous” (308). Independent filmmaking is often challenging in terms of ideology or aesthetics, like that of the filmmakers of the 1970s, and in the 1990s the growth of independent filmmaking provided a renewed emphasis on stylistic devices. This impetus in filmmaking led to the development of mainstream contemporary filmmakers, whose work is highly self-conscious and self-reflexive. The intertextuality of the buddy film as a genre has been intensified by the social focus on filmmaking and genre. This self-consciousness about critics, fans and cultural references has had a significant impact on
the style of the genre.

The growth in the entertainment industry since the 1980s has resulted in a restructuring of film production and renewed interest in genre films, since generic films often fulfil the needs of corporate expectations (Geoff King 133). However, King also states, “genre-recognition itself might have been sufficient to help guarantee the moderate success achieved by large numbers of films in the classical era. It is less likely to be sufficient on its own to carry any individual title into the ranks of the fewer bigger hits around which Hollywood economics revolve today” (133-134). By extending beyond the boundaries of genre to include other marketing strategies, such as pre-sold material, star appeal, and hybridity, the diverse factors involved in the apparent success of the buddy film and its prevalence as a genre emerge.

Buddy films frequently rely on sequel momentum to create audiences, hence *Lethal Weapon, Lethal Weapon 2* (1989), *Lethal Weapon 3* (1992), and *Lethal Weapon 4* (1998). Like the 1980s horror films, the popular studio response to box office success has been a tendency to recycle saleable material, resulting in a proliferation of the buddy film genre. That the films are structured around two male leads creates a broad audience appeal, since the films are able to showcase divergent representations of masculinity. This is clearly illustrated in films like *Hollywood Homicide* (2003), featuring a young actor, Josh Hartnett, and the older star Harrison Ford. The duo is able to expand the possible audience demographics, ensuring a higher profit. Other films like *Shanghai Noon* use actors with different backgrounds; Jackie Chan is best known for his work in martial arts films while Owen Wilson is a comic actor. Equally, the hybridity of the films, which can often be classified as action, comedy, crime film, or thriller, allows for
films that may appeal to a broad audience, or might end up appealing to no one at all. While hybridity is an important factor in the adaptability of the buddy film and accounts for its cross-classification, as King states, “many of what are later recognized as single, stable genres go through a process of what appears initially to be quite complex genre combination” (King 141). The hybridity and seriality of the buddy films stem from the standardization of the narrative structure of the buddy film genre, and the re-saleability of given pairings.  

The buddy genre commonly uses a highly formulaic narrative; however, contemporary films draw on a diverse range of sources for their material. In Dirty Work (1998) Mitch Weaver (Norm Macdonald) and his best friend, Sam McKeenan (Jack Warden), who turns out to be his brother, are incompetent losers. Together they start a Revenge for Hire business, only to be duped by an evil developer. Eventually, they join forces with the community, get their own revenge and the money needed to save their father. In Dude, Where’s My Car? the two men, Jesse (Ashton Kutcher) and Chester (Seann William Scott), are out-of-work slackers, who have lost their car. Together they embark on a series of bizarre adventures, and eventually realize that they are involved in a conspiracy of intergalactic proportions. Baseketball (1998) follows a similar framework in that the two men, Joe Cooper (Trey Parker) and Doug Remer (Matt Stone), high school friends without jobs, direction or ambition, invent a game that becomes a nationwide phenomenon. Their transformation into sports stars has them facing tough moral questions. In the end their love for each other helps them overcome their various adversaries. These films follow formulaic narrative structures, but create genre parody by appropriating and restructuring conventions from genres such as sci-fi, musical, action,
sports, comedic and romantic films. In doing so, the films are able to highlight how genre conventions inform expectations of gender construction.

*Bulletproof* (1996) follows a similar narrative pattern to that of *48 HRS.*, but reverses the race of the two buddies: Archie (Adam Sandler) is the white criminal, and Rock Keats (Damon Wayans) is the black cop. Keats is an undercover cop working to bust the drug lord Frank Colton. Archie, whom Keats has befriended, works for Frank. After the drug bust the men are forced to work together again in order to convict Frank, and eventually they renew their friendship. *Independence Day* (1996) is a more traditional action film: with aliens attacking the planet and the world thrown into disarray, it falls to two American protagonists, David Levinson (Jeff Goldblum) and Steve Hiller (Will Smith), to join forces and eradicate the alien scourge. The classical brain and brawn coupling allows the men to join together despite their diverse backgrounds and save the day. Throughout these narratives, the genre's previously dominant depictions of masculine identity are reversed: the white hero is no longer the challenging rebel of the 1960s or the outlaw of the 1970s; even the strong man heroes of the 1980s have lost their ability to perform. The strong heroes of the 1990s are often men who are in some way othered, and the white middle class men have been left in a questionable position of authority.

The 1980s marked the beginning of a series of transitions with the buddy film genre. While in the films of the 1960s and 1970s the protagonists function in union, as brains and brawn, in the 1980s and 1990s the duo often seems more like brawn and brawn. In an elaboration of the idea of the co-dependency of the pair, as seen in the early films, a cycle of films has emerged that I.Q. Hunter has dubbed the "dumb white guy"
films (111). Starting in the 1980s with *Bill And Ted's Excellent Adventure* (1988), *Wayne's World* (1992) *Dumb and Dumber* (1994), and continuing with more recent films such as *Kingpin* (1996), *Dirty Work* and *Dude, Where's My Car?*, this series of films represented a renewed interest in the figure of the white, young male as displaced from dominant society. The protagonists of these films are often depicted as buffoons or slackers, unable to compete successfully in the present job market; instead, they hold anachronistic or undervalued skills which in the narrative later prove valuable. The recurring theme of the dumb white guy in the buddy films of this period raises the related question: to whom are these figures appealing, and what ideological implications are being suggested in their perpetuation? In the films the men are unemployed or unambitious, yet by the end the men have attained some measure of success. In *Dirty Work*, the men start their own business, get girlfriends, save their father and end up rescuing their community from an evil millionaire. In *Dude, Where's My Car?* Jesse and Chester, who initially are incapable of finding their own car, literally save the world, while gaining the respect of their peers and their girlfriends. Since these films are comedies, the lack of goals or jobs is not addressed as a serious issue, and the white, middle-class male is continually held up as a hapless, victim figure.

The male figures in these films can be understood as a response to anxiety about the fluidity of gender roles, and displacement from the traditional male masquerade. While the men in the films are uneducated, jobless and stupefied by inertia, through the course of the narrative the men, with little initiative, become skilled and gain recognition. Yet rather than critiquing the passivity of the protagonists, these films ultimately reinforce the dominance of the white middle class as monolithic and undisturbed by the
forces of ennui and consumerism. The slacker youths are ultimately the heroes of the films and it is their very lifestyles that ultimately provide them with the knowledge to overcome the crisis within the narratives. This dialogue about masculinity and fears of displacement are undermined by the unreal spectacle of comedy. As I will show, by relying heavily on absurdity and laughter, these films create multiple spectator positions while creating a dialogue about contemporary masculine identity.

The 1990s represented a return to the “gross-out” culture of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The comedies of the 1970s and 1980s were structured on a bawdy humor that relied on the teen audience and its curiosity and pleasure in the body, creating a “tits and ass” style of comedy that belied the conservatism found in other genres of the times.\(^{10}\) The use of slapstick body humor frequently challenges common ideals of morality by representing liberal sexuality and independent decision-making in youths, although in the 1970s and 1980s these comic moments frequently reaffirmed dominant ideals.\(^{11}\) While the buddy films of the 1980s used physicality to mutilate the bodies of the protagonists, in the recent films this attention to the physical is transformed into a spectacle of abjection. In *Dirty Work*, whenever Mitch turns on his tape recorder personal secrets are revealed, such as his need for ass wart cream. In *Bulletproof* Archie pisses himself while handcuffed to Keats, and later smokes a joint he had hidden in his ass. The bodies of the men in the films of the 1990s are no longer violently punished; instead, they are subjected to ridicule. In this way the films of the 1990s and contemporary times deconstruct the authority of the male masquerade through the use of comedy, while at the same time furthering a conservative masculine position.

Comedies, while successful, rarely received the same critical response. The
difference then is not in terms of their popularity but in the construction of recognition that they receive, illustrating a hierarchy in critical circulation and an embracing of high culture values in critical circles. Nicole Matthews states that “perhaps the existence side by side of physical gags and middle-brow parody also speaks to the peculiar unwillingness of theorists, who have claimed so much of these parodic techniques, to examine this kind of popular parody” (42). While critics often dismiss body humor as low humor, this mode of humor is able to operate outside of critical discourses, and in the 1990s body humor was resurrected during the return of the teen films. These films, like the earlier films of the late 1970s and early 1980s, contained three elements that were important influences on the buddy films of the 1990s: bawdy humor, intertextuality and reflexivity.

Self-reflexivity has been lauded by theorists as deconstructing the illusion of seamlessness in film, and so disrupting the passive spectator. Steven Neale and Frank Krutnik state, “comedies frequently reveal the apparatus for making the film, point to the status of performers as performers, and allow characters to address the camera directly” (102). The use of reflexivity in comedies is seen as an attempt to create a sense of audience inclusion. Discussing the use of self-reflexivity in films such as Scream, Geoff King states that the films use this device not for political or ideological reasons, but to “increase the pleasure offered to a youth audience similar to that attracted to the original slasher” (132). Therefore, it is seen as a form of intertextual reference rather than deconstruction. In the opening sequence of Tango & Cash, after stopping the criminals in a reckless manner, one of the sheriffs asks Tango, “Who do you think you are–Rambo?” Tango replies, “Rambo’s a pussy.” The ironic citation of Rambo/Sylvester Stallone, and
his dismissive feminization of Stallone, illustrates the importance of reflexivity in the buddy film. Reflexivity functions as a key, recalling figures that are able to recall multiple meanings, allowing the audience to construct meaning. According to I.Q. Hunter, "to a large extent, popular culture simply is postmodernism: wilfully ironic, tricksily referential and permanently within quotation marks. For example, given that effects of ironic distanciation are often regarded as signs of avant-garde intent, it is worth noting how frequently they turn up even in so-called exploitation films" (117).

Postmodern devices, then, are not always linked with a progressive deconstruction, but may function in other ways.

However, the theoretical idealization of reflexivity in one form seems to illustrate an aesthetic contradiction. King suggests that "self-aware films such as the Scream series might also be understood in social-cultural terms, as products designed to appeal to the audiences of a media-saturated world in which any point of non-media-literate 'innocence' is impossible to locate" (132). The pleasure in recognition of citations in texts seems equally valuable, whether in a Woody Allen film or Scream, since both texts often rely on citation to invoke meaning yet can be understood without textual recognition. By shifting the construction of meaning from the text to the reader or viewer of the text, the ability of the individual to create meaning regains its significance. As frequently occurs in the development of genre films, the buddy film is reflexive of the genre to the point that it has become a convention. In Anger Management (2003), after beating up an old enemy, now a Buddhist monk, Dave Buznik says to Dr. Buddy Rydell, "I feel like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid." The reflexive citation of other buddy films creates a parallel across the genre between the protagonist buddies that acts to
confirm the viewer's knowledge of the genre and situate the film as a buddy film.

Hunter states that "this kind of knowing self-reference throws up problems for critical analyses, especially for determinedly symptomatic ones. A good example is that postmodern films tend to confuse text and subtext, to the point where critical disinterment of hidden or symptomatic meanings seems rather a wasted effort" (Hunter 118). This blurring of text and subtext is a predominant characteristic of the buddy films of the 1980s and 1990s. In Baseketball, the subtle subtext of homoerotism that is usually contained in furtive glances and jokes is finally abandoned in the kiss between the men, which occurs during a half-time show, when Reemer and Cooper are rejoined after a fight. The men reconcile by taking responsibility for their mistakes, then embrace and kiss. In Bulletproof, Archie tries to escape out the window nude, and Rock stops him with a gun in the ass—the audience is aligned with the perspective shared by the inn keeper, to whom the sequence appears like a sexual scene. In Dirty Work, while in jail the other prisoners take Mitch away and he returns buttoning up his pants. The films incorporate the known subtext, exposing conventional assumptions about gender construction. To Hunter, "the point, of course, is that postmodern popular culture recycles symptomatic interpretations along with everything else" (117). Highlighting genre conventions draws attention to their construction and the expectations of the audience for the film to consistently uphold these expectations.

Bulletproof uses devices from a variety of genres relating to issues of negotiated representations of masculinity. The film creates a hybrid text through the use of film noir, action, romantic and comedic conventions, illustrating the connection between gender and genre. This allows for an exchange between subversion of genre expectations
and play with gender roles. The film uses predominantly masculine genres, such as the police genre, while drawing upon action conventions with sequences that include exploding planes, car chases and gunfights. Keats’s girlfriend assumes the familiar figure of the film noir femme fatale, first appearing as an innocent, kindly nurse only to attempt to murder the men later in the film. Yet rather than separating and killing the men, within this film she brings them closer together; it is in facing off against the woman that the men finally trust each other. While the men gain closeness in opposition to this vilified Other, recalling the misogyny of the buddy film in general, the noir citation specifically invokes the crisis of masculinity that is of special relevance to the buddy films. However, the film inverts the conventions and expectations of these masculine genres by including moments that refer to romantic or comedic conventions. The men in Bulletproof are subject to laughter, for expressing their emotions, for being unable to fulfill the role of masculinity or for referencing the body. The comedy arises then in response to associations with the performance of gender. The conventions are strongly linked to the romantic elements within the film, which surface to reinforce the male bonds; however, these bonds are supported as romantic bonds primarily for comic effect. The reflexivity of the film is indicative of an ambiguous ideological position that creates moments of parody that undermine the homoerotic elements of the film.

However, despite the negotiation that takes place between expression of homoerotism and laughter, in the end the film stands as a simple male love story. Archie and Keats literally ride off into the sunset together, settling happily into their routine of drinking and fighting in Mexico. While the men are usually forced to introduce a woman into the formula to prove their masculinity, aside from Archie’s stoned mother and some
girls Archie is talking to at the bar, in the end of the film the men are living the buddy fantasy. In a final scene they are shown in Mexico together, resolving the prior inability of the buddy narrative to sustain the bonds of the couple; instead the men are shown as living happily ever after.

Contemporary buddy films have appropriated postmodern devices, such as intertextuality and reflexivity, and undermined the critical distance that is strongly associated with these conventions, through the use of bawdy language and comedic conventions. The bawdy language of *Dirty Work*, (for example, when Sam sees Mitch and says, “What’s up, fruity?,” and Mitch replies, “Hey, ass-bite”) illustrates the paranoid concern for sexuality and the body that occupies the buddy films. The more recent buddy films continually include self-referential moments in the texts which build a sense of recognizable iconography and convention. The films identify themselves as buddy films due to their citation of other texts, which strategy also works to mediate homosocial tension, allowing men to perform in a manner dictated by genre convention. The genre has been formalized, and the conventions have become a parody or pastiche. The eroticism of the flirting between the men is denied meaning since it conforms to genre expectation. When Steve and David have a post-mission cigar together, after killing the aliens, the allusion to the post-coital cigarette is simply a rote inclusion of homoerotism on par for buddy films. The subtext of buddy films, the homosocial and the homoerotic, are exposed as convention and parodied in contemporary buddy films. The proliferation of buddy films in this period is linked to the fluidity of gender, working simultaneously to reinforce traditional notions of masculinity even as they break down the very notions that the films seek to bolster. The contradictory nature of the films lies in their conservatism,
which can be seen as part of a response to the feminist movement.

The early buddy films can be read as parodies and satires, referencing other histories, films and texts, frequently to highlight the conflicts within the construction of masculinity. Nicole Matthews suggests that "parody is characterised by its play with form: the conventions of genre and medium that constitute the film itself" (13). However, the later buddy films frequently rely on the citation of other buddy films to clearly invoke parody, creating self-parody. As Linda Hutcheon states, "parody’s sharing of codes can be used to many different ends; in each case the inferred intent must be determined individually" (99). Self-parody often creates a citation that is repetitive to the point that the citation is without fixed meaning. Contemporary buddy films, in citing other buddy films, build on established codes to subvert the meaning of the conventions of gender and genre. For Neale and Krutnik, parody engages aesthetic conventions, while satire engages social conventions (19). However, the separation of aesthetics and social conditions is problematic since aesthetics evolve in response to social conditions and vice versa. To suggest that these are separate and autonomous neglects to account for the interaction between the social and the aesthetic. The films of the 1960s and 1970s can be read as aesthetic parodies, commenting on the social conditions of the time. Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid includes scenes that parody the western, such as the initial showdown scene at the bar, in which the Kid shoots the belt off the man during a challenge without shooting him. The scene of Butch and Etta riding around on the bike, with Burt Bacharach music playing inappropriately in the background, parodies the tough guy image of the western. In contrast to the rugged country reels or foreboding whistling of other notable westerns, the pop music of Bacharach stands as a stark contrast, creating
Bacharach stands as a stark contrast, creating a revisionist fantasy of the “new” western man. Similarly, the moments of parody in *Easy Rider* and *Midnight Cowboy* cite the image of the cowboy and reveal it as a façade. The parody within buddy films acts to cite other genres, or the genre of buddy films, to critique its ideological positioning.

Humor is one of the strategies employed by the buddy film genre to mediate the tension created by the opposition that upholds masculinity. Buddy films use montage, slow motion, flashback sequences, and music to invoke the convention of the traditional romance genre. In *Dumb and Dumber*, when the men decide to embark upon their trip to Aspen, music starts playing softly in the background, reaching a crescendo as they embrace. In *Bulletproof*, Rock has a flashback, remembering all the beautiful times he shared with Archie, and in *Dude, Where’s My Car?* there is a sudden break into a dream-like beach party sequence. These all act to recall the devices of traditional love stories and draw parallels to the love stories of the buddy films. The construction of gender identity in the buddy film leads to the need to recognize, at least on some level, that difference exists. However, buddy films evade acknowledging that difference is a social construction and frequently attempt to disavow or naturalize Otherness. Even drag, in films like *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* and *Tango & Cash*, acts to signal Otherness and erase it through laughter. Humor serves two functions in the buddy films: to establish difference, then to dislocate it from social reality. Humor acts to introduce class, race, or gender, usually through misogyny or racist jokes, yet the creation of laughter acts to deny the ideology of the joke. Humor represses differences in masculine identity.

However, humor also is used to reinstate the power of male identity as constructed by the phallus. While penis jokes may seem to belittle men and therefore undermine the
authority of the phallus, in the end the jokes reinforce dominant ideology. Peter Lehman states that “penis jokes are usually throwaways, with unattractive male characters as their butt” (54), and that “the audience identifies with the women who utter the remarks and laughs at the men at whom the remarks are aimed. This structure reinforces dominant presumptions that to be a man is to have a big penis” (55). In Tango & Cash the obsessive dialogue about penises and penis size clearly signals to the viewer the anxiety surrounding the circumstances in which they find themselves; however, this anxiety also works to affirm their heterosexuality. The continual use of strange blocking and angle shots to avoid showing the penis in nude scenes only serves to draw attention to what is not shown. The shower scene is a clear example of highlighting the absent. The men are naked, as seen in the shot where they walk to the showers, showing them from behind; however, while in the shower they are shot so that only their torsos remain in the frame. In contrast to the “tits and ass” shots of the women in the films, the male nude frontal shot remains unexplored. As Lehman states, “these awkward visual structures that deny the view of the genitals are compounded when we hear characters talk about the penis but we are denied the view of it. This combination opens a potentially interesting ideological space that is likely to be foregrounded even in the conscious perceptions of the viewer: what is at stake in so carefully and systematically denying us the view of what we are hearing about?” (51).

The constraints of the buddy film are that it addresses male anxieties and mediates these tensions. However, to unleash the penis in the homoerotic context of the buddy film would serve only to demystify the phallus. Representations of the penis in buddy films frequently operate to highlight sexual anxiety, linking the phallus to ideals of
power, or a possible loss of power. *My Own Private Idaho* is a buddy film that contains frontal nudity, and while the film addresses homosexuality, it also contextualizes the male nudity by making the buddies, Mike (Keau Reeves) and Scott (River Phoenix), prostitutes. While *Baseketball* has a penis shot, it is a joke penis that is shot from the back and flops like a piece of rope to the floor. By continually referencing the penis in these scenes of tension, the ideals embodied in the phallus are reaffirmed. Similar to the paranoid football reference in *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*, “those aren’t pillows” scene, these references, while drawing attention to anxiety about the penis, also validate phallocentrism.

Jokes can be used to create empathy for a character or to create identification with the person telling the joke. Lehman discusses Freud’s concept that men told women dirty jokes to embarrass them, specifically after being turned down, linking joke-telling to an expression of repressed desire and hostility (48). Similarly, in buddy films the continual verbal sparring between the couples, which is conducted in highly sexualized language, is a way for the characters to voice their frustrated desire, sublimating it in a form of antagonism. Key to the concept of masochism is the suggestion that pleasure is obtained through submission. The balance between aggression and pleasure creates a better understanding of the verbal language of the buddy film, which is often peppered with homophobic slurs (“fag” or “homo”) while contrasting with the anxiety surrounding the penis mediated by these penis jokes or phallic moments. In *Bulletproof*, when the men are checking in the hotel manager asks them, “You guys, you aren’t...?”, to which Archie replies, “He says he’s not gay, but I’ll see what a few drinks and a back massage will do to him. That might gay him up a little. Look at him, look at how he’s standing.” In the
next shot Rock is shown signing the register, bent over, his bum waggling. The homophobia and hyper-awareness of the penis speak to male fears and fantasies that are played out in this masochism.

A major thematic change in contemporary buddy films is their treatment of racial difference. The films of the 1960s and 1970s attempted to create an integration of feminine and masculine characteristics, represented by the mirror body structures of the couple. A critique of the society was also clearly constructed within these films. However, during the 1980s biracial buddies emerged as an important expression of male anxiety surrounding difference. The denial of racial tensions led to a narrative othering of one of the protagonists, in terms of race, class or sexuality, while the films recouped this representation of difference in the end, invalidating the existence of these inequalities. While Murtaugh is feminized throughout the film, the film ends happily, the beating of the bad guy and jokes about his wife’s cooking disavowing the message of difference. The critique of society is replaced with visions of domesticity, which seem to haunt the men of the 1980s. However, in the 1990s, following “hood” films like Boys in the Hood (1991) and Menace II Society (1993), buddy films began to focus on highlighting representations of race, often to “comic” extremes.

The buddy films of the 1990s construct conflict based on racial difference, externalizing any critique of masculinity. These films feature non-white leads in films such as Shanghai Noon, Shanghai Knights, Rush Hour, Rush Hour II (2001), Friday (1995), Bad Boys (1995), How High (2001), and I Spy (2002). In both Bulletproof and Independence Day, the black actor plays the lead role. This contradicts Willis’ idea that the white man could never be under the supervision of a leading black protagonist,
although comedies do not necessarily invert the authority inscribed in the roles. While Rock plays the lead and the straight man, Archie frequently steals the scenes with the punch lines. Further, Rock’s authority is compromised by his moral decision to betray his friend’s trust. Steve Hiller is a more distinguished hero, yet he is contrasted against the intellectual David, who like Archie is also Jewish. In both films the black leading man is constructed in opposition to a feminized, Jewish male. Archie is dependent on Keats for physical protection, unable to sustain a relationship with a woman, and is frequently positioned as abject. David is overly-intellectual, overly concerned with the environment, and abandoned by his wife. Neither David nor Archie are constructed as the dominant of the couple; instead, they represent the feminization of the white middle-class. The films of the 1980s constructed racial difference to bolster the faltering masculinity of the white middle class man, and in reversing the positions of the protagonists a similar bolstering occurs. While these films create an opening of the construction of masculinity and racial identity this space is still afforded at the expense of the Other.

In contemporary films difference is constructed in a number of ways. Willis argues that although recent action films frequently include a self-consciousness surrounding masculine identity, this awareness is countered by attempts to stabilize white male identity in contrast to difference experienced through race, class, sexuality and gender (31). Further, the postmodern devices discussed earlier in the chapter have a significant impact on the ideology of films such as I Spy, Shanghai Noon and Rush Hour. Though these texts are all about difference, racism is not an issue they address. In I Spy, for example, Kelly Robinson (Eddie Murphy) first claims that there is no way he will ever share his feelings with anyone, only to break down and tell his life story to his new
partner, Alex (Owen Wilson), while they are trapped in the sewer. *Shanghai Noon* also focuses on the relationship between the men and their difference, through a hyperreal parody of the West. Instead of confronting the racial implications of the differences that the films invoke for comedic value, the characters occupy a world in which all difference merely elicits laughter. That the films themselves rely heavily on racist stereotypes, reworking them without acknowledging their implications, illustrates a lack of agency in the comic mode. *Rush Hour* is perhaps the most racist of this cycle of films, since Chris Tucker’s character, Jack Carter, seems to enjoy callously making fun of Chief Inspector Lee’s (Jackie Chan) taste, voice, and customs. Difference initially distances the men from each other, creating emotional barriers that they are unable to overcome.

When contrasting the earlier buddy films with current films, the apparent difference is in the restriction of emotional expression found within contemporary films. While the characters are frequently constructed as inseparable, as in the couple Jesse and Chester in *Dude, Where’s My Car?*, or the similar relationship between Remer and Cooper, what is noteworthy is the lack of intimacy within their relationship. Personal disclosure is structured as a point in the narrative that needs to occur, yet for the protagonists in these later films this bond seems laden with threat. In *Baseketball* the conversation in which the men reconcile is formed by a series of absurd clichés, such as “maybe we just grew up too fast” and “my worst enemy turned out to be me?” The depictions of masculinity in recent buddy films have moved away from overt emotional expression to postmodern textual play, highlighting gender through language, dress and physicality. The deconstruction of the male masquerade is accompanied by the need to reinstate an emotional distance, specifically in the relationship between the men. While
the buddy films of the 1990s clearly invoke the genre’s homoerotic subtext, attempting to foreground the erotic elements of the genre, the eroticism that the films highlight in fact works to create a disavowal of emotional intimacy.
Endnotes for Chapter Four

1 For further reading on millennium tensions, see Mark Kingwell, *Dreams of Millennium: Report from a Culture on the Brink* (Toronto: Penguin, 1999).

2 There was a general conservatism in cinema during this time, as seen in films like *Serendipity* (Peter Chelsom, 2001) and *The Majestic* (Frank Darabont, 2001). And in television, despite the constant news coverage, the terrorist narrative was continually played out on shows like *Law & Order* (NBC, 1991-present) in which terrorists were shown as a threat to New York, but a threat that could be captured and therefore punished.


4 The Million Man March, organized by Louis Farrakhan on October 16th, 1995 was intended to rally the black male communities of America.

5 Films like *Boyz N the Hood* (John Singleton, 1991), *Menace II Society* (Albert Hughes, 1993) and *Belly* (Hype Williams, 1998) perpetuated a negative representation of criminal behavior and black life.

6 Pre-sold refers to material developed from an original source, whether it is a novel, television show, comic book, or an earlier film (King 56).

7 For example, films including *Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984) and *Friday the 13th* (Sean Cunningham, 1980) resulted in a number of sequels.

8 For example, *Shanghai Noon* and *Shanghai Knight* (2004) offer hybrid genre structures such as the Western, martial arts and comedy within a standardized narrative, serialized due to the success of the chemistry between the duo.

9 Some examples of this can be seen in films like *Happy Gilmore* (1996) and *Kingpin* (1996), in which shooting slapshots and bowling are the talents possessed by the protagonists.

10 Example of the “tits and ass” films include: *Porky’s* (Bob Clark, 1982), *Animal House* (John Landis,

11 Although slap-stick humor often conforms to dominant ideals, films like *Fast Times at Ridgemount High* (Amy Heckerling, 1982) and *Where the Boys Are ’84* (Hy Averback, 1984) offer alternative spaces for women.

12 The renewed popularity of the teen film in the 90s provided an exploration of body humor, with films like *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1996), *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (Jim Gillespie, 1997), *American Pie* (Paul Weitz, 1999), and *She’s All That* (Robert Iscove, 1999) that mirror the thematic content of the teen films of the late 70s and early 80s.
Conclusion: When Butch Meets Sundance

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“A man on the road is a man looking for something, and who sooner or later finds himself pretending to be something he isn’t, or thinks he isn’t, or wishes he were, or doesn’t realize he wishes he were” (Lang 335).

Within this genre study, the main goal has been to examine representations of masculine identity and the homosocial within buddy films in relation to the social conditions of the time. My interest in buddy films stemmed from earlier research on women in action films. Having looked at the influence of genre conventions on the construction of female action heroes, I wanted to further explore how genres work to challenge gender positioning. In film, genre and gender similarly operate through sets of conventions. That each also experiences ongoing shifts and changes points to flexibility about the acceptance of these devices and their meanings. The buddy film genre has been neglected in recent critical theory, because the films within the genre have frequently been discussed in relation to other genres, such as the road, action/cop, or comedic genres. However, the genre has remained an area of special interest as it offers a point for examining representations of masculinity in relation to intimacy and sexuality. The genre has gained renewed favor in popular culture, yet despite the persistence with which these fantasies of masculinity are produced they are frequently bypassed as superficial.

The buddy film genre is prolific and widely recognized in popular culture, yet it seems in many ways to have evaded the close scrutiny afforded to other masculine genres such as the western, martial arts, action and road film. By looking at a broad span of

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time, from the 1960s to contemporary times, I have been able to identify distinct changes in the men on-screen and the function of the narratives, and to establish how the genre reflects and adapts to continually changing social and cultural mores. Throughout my examination of genre and gender I have hoped to relay the interplay between images of men and their relationships with the films' social and historical settings. These films speak to anxieties and fantasies about men for both men and women. The bodies of the men in the films become projected imaginings for a diverse range of spectating subjects and articulate myths about nationhood, fatherhood, and male sensitivity and sexuality.

Initially, I examined the structure of genre in order to understand the function of genre films and the relationships between them. While many genres feature a heavily entrenched iconography, buddy films are less defined by this standardization. The films appropriate many masculine genre conventions; however, specific to the buddy film genre are a number of conventions which act to naturalize and highlight codes of masculinity. Examining buddy films from over a number of decades illustrates the changing conventions, concerns and ideological positions within the genre. Although the genre may be examined within these contexts, and referenced as distinct, the hybridity of the buddy film allows it a plurality that creates ambiguities both in the continuity of the genre, as seen in the narrative and stylistic differences between films like *Easy Rider* and *Starsky & Hutch*, and in the meaning that these texts construct. While the fluidity of genre and gender operates within a recoupable position, the repetition of generic conventions generates openings within the texts. However, the subject of masculinity remains the primary theme of the films; what masculinity stands for, and how it is represented is continually reworked through the films.
Examing the genre in a historical context illustrates how iconography and conventions are altered to reflect changing social factors. The films of the 1960s rely on an iconography that reflects a hybridity, citing the western, the melodrama, and motorcycle films, deconstructing these genres’ conventions to critically examine the construction of masculinity. However, the buddy films of the 1980s can be seen as moving towards a more conservative position, frequently using iconography from action films, comedies or family dramas. While the genre conforms to a less critical stance during this period, the iconography also changed to reflect a standardization of the buddy film genre conventions. Earlier films had focused on the relationship between the men and the obstacles they faced, while the later films use a traditional hero-narrative to create a formulaic consistency. The current buddy films are structured to address a subversion of the traditional hero narrative through a return of the misfit heroes. The rebel underdog figure of the 1960s films is recast in contemporary film, not to voice opposition to the construction of the male masquerade, but to illustrate an inclusion within the newer definitions of masculinity.

The buddy film ultimately attempts to resolve the conflict between expectations of masculinity and the reality of the limitations created through the male masquerade. The performance of masculinity demands the preservation of authority, hierarchy, and order, yet these films attempt to reestablish connections to traits that have been conventionally gendered as feminine. To overcome this conflict in gender construction, the couple assumes an identity representing a fracturing of masculine ideals, one protagonist acting as the more traditional hero while the other assumes more feminized qualities. The duality of the couple acts to create an opening in the performance of authority. The
contradiction in the buddy film genre lies in the need to maintain the masquerade of masculinity, while establishing the bonds of intimacy in a relationship.

The men in the film reveal important ideas about masculinity and self that are inherent to the buddy film as a genre. Buddy films have always sought to deconstruct the façade of masculinity, and this is particularly evident in current buddy films. However, there exists a conflict between the theoretical implications of reflexivity and the masquerade of gender and the ideologies at work within these films. An awareness of the constructed nature of the masquerade has been conceived as a sign of critical distance; although, in these films this awareness is contrasted with the depiction of the couple as an opposition of masculinity and femininity, with masculinity defined in contrast to the Other. This opposition can be seen to undermine the ideological implications of critical distance, since this heightened attention to the construction of masculinity serves to reinforce proper modes of masculine identity rather than deconstruct any monolithic gender ideals. The films repeatedly foreground the protagonists' performance of masculinity through moments of transvestitism, costume or disguise. By altering the male masquerade, these self-conscious constructions raise the point that gender is also a performance, like a copy to a copy. However, these moments can also be seen as reinforcing a naturalization of the performance of masculinity by positing that it is an authentic identity, unlike the assumed disguise.

Bodies act as a site of projection, for fears about society and self and the ability or ineptness of the male masquerade to function within the culture. To this end, in the 1960s, the films thematically address the unity of the men, joined together, working as a single body to fight against society. Initially, the union of the men in the 1970s is similar
to the mirror relationships of the 1960s; however, the films of the late 1970s appear to have adapted to a more conservative notion of gender. The construction of masculinity in the 1980s represents extremes of identity. The coupling of the men no longer signals a synthesis of masculine and feminine qualities. Instead, the conception of self has been transferred into a construction of oppositions based on race, class and sexuality. While these elements are often feminized, they also reinforce a distinction between the protagonists, bolstering a conservative masculinity. The 1980s male body represented an externalization of the anxiety projected onto the differences between the men. In the 1960s and 1970s the men band together against larger social injustice, while in the later films of the 1980s and 1990s the couple fights against an external threat, displacing the social critique onto a foreign or feminized villain. As the relationship between the men can be understood as signaling a synthesis between divergent masculinities, the intersection between identity and intimacy indicates shifts in the construction of masculinity and socially dominant representations.

The bodies of the men in buddy films also illustrate altering aesthetics. The men of the 1960s and 1970s are slender and lithe as compared to the larger bodies of the 1980s, indicating a need to compensate for a lack of stability in the masquerade of masculinity. From the 1990s to contemporary times, the content of the buddy film had shifted once again to articulate anxiety related to difference; however, the films of these times attempted to use humor as a means of diffusing this anxiety. The men in the current buddy films do not exhibit the same muscular excess seen in the films of the 1980s; instead, the films strive to establish that masculinity is a façade. These films use the bodies of the men as a site of abjection, illustrating a lack or source of anxiety in the
current construction of masculinity.

A specific area of interest was the relationships between the men and what the relationships expressed about masculinity at the time. The formula of the buddy film, which focuses on the façade of masculinity divorced from sexual expression, acts as a domesticating space to homogenize difference. The men in the films frequently distance themselves from expressions of intimacy since that would recall the possibility of an erotic relationship between them. While the films of the 1960s and early 1970s attempted to address the problematic expression of intimacy in relation to the construction of masculinity, the later films dislocate the critique of masculinity onto difference. The films address the construction of male identity, repeatedly creating an environment in which the homosocial bonds of the protagonists are naturalized within a limited framework imposed by the ideological constraints of gender performance.

The buddy films also attempt to address a conflict in the construction of masculinity. The changing social atmosphere that emerged out of the 1960s sexual revolution, along with a new social awareness, led to shifts in representations of masculinity. The protagonists in the buddy films attempt to address the shifting definitions of masculinity in physical and emotional transformation. The men in earlier and later films seemed burdened by the tenuous nature of the male masquerade and seek to reaffirm the façade through a strategy of Othering. The men must define themselves against an opposition, whether external or internal, in order to create limits upon the performance of gender.

Nationhood can be related to the social historical context of films, whereby the men in the films come to stand as representations of contemporary political ideology.
The films create a link between the construction of masculinity and ideals of nationhood. Male masquerade stands as a performance of authority, an authority that like the construction of nationhood is built upon ideals of order and authority. Supporting dominant masculine ideals reinforces myths of sovereignty. The men's bodies in the films speak to American anxiety surrounding self and nationhood, while tying these two ideas into the privileged position of masculinity.

The films provide a position of empathy for male privilege. The audience identification can occupy either a narcissist identification of alignment or a distanced position of empathy. However, each process of identification works to bolster dominant ideology, since bourgeois masculinity, represented within a majority of the films, rarely needs bolstering. This is a common theme in the films of the 1990s, and by understanding the meaning and location of anxiety within these films, their resurgence as part of popular culture's social dialogue is better understood. The fantasies created within the films suggest that there is a need to see the privilege of the white, middle-class, male ritually re-performed. When the films focus on race, class or sexuality, it is to create an Other in opposition to a conservative masculine ideal. While performance is generally held up as a deconstruction of gender, in this instance the film performance is one that reinforces a dominant position.

Contemporary representations of masculinity frequently reference disenfranchisement, yet it is the embodiment in the divided self of the buddy film that has been re-worked in recent films. Recent films, such as Punch Drunk Love (2002), Lost in Translation (2003) and About Schmidt (2002), have drawn upon the isolated white male figure, unable to articulate emotional expression, cut off from the social world, re-
enacting the angst associated with marginalization. The figures in these films are partially successful and their discontent stems from an inner dissatisfaction, acting as a critique of current society. While the buddy films have gained a reflexivity in the performance of masculinity, there is a growing theme of isolation that pervades the buddy films. The inability of the protagonists in the films to express emotional intimacy is paralleled by the increased popularity of the disenfranchised figure. Within these films there is a celebratory element of this stoicism that belies the critique. However, with the standardization of the formula comes a reflexivity and intertextuality, which highlights and negotiates the construction of masculinity within the films.

Contemporary films rely on postmodern devices to create highly reflexive texts, which conceal their exaggerated construction of the Other in male identity. In this way the films highlight the differences between the men, yet create a distance between the construction of masculinity and any social significance. For the men in the films, both fatherhood and women represent domesticity, which creates a paradox, representing both their anxieties and their desire. Whether these links to domesticity are fulfilled or remain a lack within their lives, the result is the same, since both positions induce anxiety in the protagonists.

Thematically, buddy films as a genre highlight what is predominantly recognized as subtext, foregrounding the negotiation between intimacy and eroticism among men. Yet, throughout the films examined within the scope of my study, the mediation of homosocial bonds is rooted in the desexualization of the protagonists and their relationship to each another. Eroticism seems to haunt the genre, creating an intimacy that the films must establish while in no way blurring the boundaries of heterosexuality.
However, in this continual disavowal of sexuality, structured around women, homophobic dialogue and obsessive abjection, the films seem to have shifted to the point that the disavowal has become a parody. The films also parody the romantic convention that the films evoke. Parody acts to destabilize gender and genre conventions, and the films in this study have been rooted in a self-reflexive mode.

The buddy film genre is structured upon a tradition of appropriation and deconstruction, using the iconography and narrative structures of other masculine genres to reinforce shifting masquerades of masculinity in response to cultural changes. This is illustrated in the early films’ adaptation of the western genre to critique the performance of masculinity during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The later films of the late 1970s and 1980s can be seen as moving back to a more conservative ideology embodied in the prevalence of the action and family buddy films during this period. While the buddy films of the 1980s appropriated iconography from a number of genres, these conventions clearly supported the traditional masquerade of masculinity based on notions of authority, through Othering based on race, class and gender. This return of the traditional hero figures demonstrated a conservative backlash in response to the rapid social changes of the 1960s and 1970s, exemplified in the rise of the anti-hero. Recent films of the genre can be seen as articulating a new shift. The films have moved away from the spectacle predominantly associated with the action genre, in terms of the mutilation of the bodies of the men and the landscapes. While the films have shifted from the iconography of the action film, the films still reinforce the ideological stance of the action film, whereby the hero saves the day. Although the figures in the current films may hold some of the characteristics associated with the anti-hero of the early films, the men in these films are
domesticated within the narrative to establish the authority, order, and social hierarchy associated with the masquerade of masculinity.

An important area of further exploration on this topic could include examining audience response. While my analysis may reveal particular readings of the films, my interest in them was in examining the way the men’s relationship changed and what their relationship revealed about the period in which the films were made. Examining the user groups of these films, who watches the films and why, may disclose a diverse range of pleasures derived from viewing them. Texts such as chat sites could provide samples of various interpretations, illuminating the way that the films appeal to distinct groups of users who hold divergent interests. Shifting the focus from the films to their reception would change the authority of the films, opening the interpretative value to the meaning inscribed by the audiences.

The buddy film acts as a genre which affords the opportunity to examine the construction of masculinity as structured in representations of all-male relationships. The genre is specifically structured to create an insider glimpse into this mythic world in which “men can be men.” Having examined the construction of the genre, from the early films of the 1960s to contemporary times, the cycle of genre appropriation from the various masculine genres, such as western, cop, and action film, can be seen as providing a starting point for understanding how genre meaning is transferred and transformed. The adoption of iconography from other genres illustrates the way in which iconic meaning is passed along through genres. The fluidity of symbolic meaning suggests ways in which the buddy film is interrelated with other masculine genres. Having outlined some of the impact the western and the action films have had on the ideologies within the buddy film,
the question of the influence exerted upon other genres by the buddy film is raised. Further, this study in the construction of masculinity offers broader implications for examining issues of masculinity in other areas of film and cultural studies. The structures of masculinity explored within the scope of this study, while filmic representations, also reflect important ideas about how gender is constructed elsewhere in the changing social world.
Appendix A: Major Awards

The chart indicates the various major awards for the buddy films discussed throughout the body of my thesis. As this chart illustrates, the reception of the buddy films is diverse, covering a range of critical and popular sources. The chart includes awards such as the Oscar, the Cannes Film Festival awards, and the MTV People’s Choice Awards.

Appendix B: Box Office Figures

This chart provides a summary of box office figures of the major buddy films discussed within my thesis. The figures illustrate the reception of the film at the time of the release. The chart provides a clear impression of the changes in the construction of the genre of the buddy film. The films are listed chronologically to provide a timeline of their release.
Filmography


Big Daddy (Dennis Dugan, 1999) United States: Jack Giarraputo Production, Out of the Blue... Entertainment.


Billy Jack (Tom Laughin, 1971) United States: National Student Film Corporation, Warner Brothers.


Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (George Roy Hill, 1969) United States: 20th Century Fox, Campanile.


Chasing Amy (Kevin Smith, 1997) United States: View Askew Productions.


Dumb & Dumber (Peter Farrelly and Bobby Farrelly, 1994) United States: MPCA, New Line Cinema.


Mr. Mom (Stan Dragoti, 1983) United States: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Sherwood Production.


Shanghai Noon (Tom Dey, 2000) United States: Jackie Chan Film Production, Roger Birnbaum Productions, Spyglass Entertainment, Touchstone Pictures.


Terminator (James Cameron, 1984) United States: Cinema 84, Pacific Western, Hemdale Film Corporation and Euro Film Fund.


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