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„Goin’ to the chapel and we’re gonna get married:“
Reconstructing the Masterstory
in Women’s Lives

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Hinweis

Diese Diplomarbeit hat nachgewiesen, dass die betreffende Kandidatin oder der betreffende Kandidat befähigt ist, wissenschaftliche Themen selbstständig sowie inhaltlich und methodisch vertretbar zu bearbeiten. Da die Korrekturen der/des Beurteilenden nicht eingetragen sind und das Gutachten nicht beiliegt, ist daher nicht erkenntlich, mit welcher Note diese Arbeit abgeschlossen wurde. Das Spektrum reicht von sehr gut bis genügend. Es wird gebeten, diesen Hinweis bei der Lektüre zu beachten.

*And the time came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful
than the risk it took to blossom. Anais Nin*

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1 Introduction

The term “masterstory” was specifically chosen for this thesis in order to name a social phenomenon observed within US culture. The phenomenon lying at the center of this paper resulted from the observation that numerous young, mostly middle and upper class Americans followed a seemingly ritual order of events in their lives. After college, it appears, most middle and upper class Americans enter wedlock. What is probably most striking for Europeans is the determination and naturalness with which a considerable number of young Americans enter or actually maintain a predetermined life course. The fact that, as mentioned before, many Americans get married in their early twenties only set the stage for investigating whether there are other timed major steps in the life cycle of Americans that have to be taken to fulfill society’s expectations.

Research in the field of cultural studies showed that such a phenomenon concerning the predetermination of the life course have not been the subject of closer investigation. The life stories of a particular community such as of US Americans have not been studied with regard to their similarities and specific features that differentiate them from the life courses of other cultural communities. Since a review of sociological and anthropological literature has shown that there is a lack of studies dealing with life course events and their timing within a specific community, it appears vital to conduct research in this area.

The social phenomenon discussed in this thesis was named “masterstory”, a term that refers to both the story-like quality of lives and the fact that something like a perfect and preferred version of how to live one’s life is offered. The initial part of the title, “Goin’ to the chapel and we’re gonna get married,” already highlights the presumably most important event in the life of American women besides other expected events that constitute the masterstory. The masterstory therefore denotes the rigid life plan of American women as expected by society.

The masterstory as a social phenomenon is characterized by its culture-centeredness, its collection of specific events and their timing and sequence. The first chapter that follows places the masterstory and its characteristics within a framework of various academic disciplines that should aid in defining and analyzing the concept. Only an interdisciplinary approach, it will be argued, is fit to cover the masterstory's various aspects and explain its workings and its function in society.

The second chapter is dedicated to the identification of the range of events constituting the masterstory in women's lives. It is crucial to note that the events and roles identified are only illustrative but not mandatory for the masterstory. The list of events and roles is not exhaustive but intended to show some of the specific features of the masterstory. In order to provide evidence and textual illustration, sequences of a popular US American TV series named *Gilmore Girls* have been subject of the analysis. The show was specifically chosen because it portrays a girl's crucial steps into adult life. Since the show is geared towards a US audience, it is representative of communally shared cultural norms and values. Some of the events featured in *Gilmore Girls*, such as the debutant ball, are typical of upper class American society. They are also valuable examples for demonstrating the masterstory's qualities.

The thesis will prove the existence of the masterstory in American women's lives and outline its essential features and its function for the individual as well as the community.

2 Grasping the Concept of the Masterstory

Review of Theories

What exactly defines the masterstory in academic terms? In the following a theoretical investigation of the phenomenon is carried out in order to reveal whether there is a strict order of particular events that constitutes the aspired life course and what function such a sequence fulfills. When analyzing the term “masterstory” various cultural and literary studies approaches seem to be best suited to provide a framework to describe the social phenomenon it connotes.

Mieke Bal (2001), a cultural theorist and critic, argues for interdisciplinarity in the humanities. From her experience as a supervisor for students who are writing academic papers, she knows that there are “projects that [are] not easy to place within any one discipline” (5). She puts special focus on the cross-disciplinary use of concepts. In her approach she regards concepts as being universally applicable tools that when clearly defined can vastly contribute to the analysis of cultural texts. Accordingly, Bal (2001) sees the concept of narrative as a mode and not exclusively as a genre. In her view narrative is a “cultural force” that lends itself to be applied as a transdisciplinary concept (10 ff.). In the attempt to arrive at a clear-cut definition of the term masterstory, Bal’s call for the interdisciplinary use of concepts, such as the term narrative, helps to analyze the masterstory according to the characteristics of a narrative. Applying literary terms in the study of a social phenomenon pays credit to the second part of the term, namely “story”. A story quite obviously refers to something being fabricated by someone, something constructed. As opposed to the concept of naturalness a story’s constructedness implies that it is something artificial. With regard to the masterstory, the strict ordering of events points to the narrative aspect of the term. It becomes clear now that any definition and analysis of the masterstory implies “the analysis of narrative structures in symbolic forms and cultural practices other than literary texts” including rituals (Erll, *Narrative* 90). Narratives therefore are an essential part when it comes to defining the masterstory.

2.1 *Interdisciplinary Use of Narratology and Sociology*

The thesis of this paper was inspired by the real life observation that numerous Americans from distinct social classes seem to follow a ritual order of events in the course of their lives. The phenomenon here described as masterstory emerged out of particular life stories. According to Charlotte Linde (2005) “the life story is defined as a temporally discontinuous unit consisting of all the stories told by an individual during the course of his/her lifetime”. Those stories consist of “culturally defined landmark events” such as career milestones, marriage or childbirth (277). More emphasis on the landmark events will be put in subsequent chapters. Based on the concept of life story, the masterstory equally is a selection of culturally defined events that are assembled like a narrative.

Other researchers like the sociologists Daniel Bertaux and Martin Kohli (1984) have examined the use of life stories in the context of social relations. Their primary interest is to review the multitude of uses of life stories in the social sciences. With regard to the scope of this paper one of their findings is of special importance namely that “[l]ife stories are shown to be a rich ground for the formulation of substantive theories”. They place the study of life stories within the field of interpretive social research also including theoretical input of phenomenology (215). Drawing on their remark about theories it can be said that the life stories of Americans and their landmark events in particular, also bear the potential to render themselves as a basis for formulating a social phenomenon.

The previous paragraphs sought to explain and define the masterstory with regard to the narrative and storyline element. Again, the point has to be made that the masterstory treated as a distinct social phenomenon in United States culture is characterized by both the selection of specific events in one's life and the rigid timing and sequence thereof. Those three essential qualities inherent in the masterstory are subject to closer investigation in the following part.

Ruthellen Josselson's research in the field of narratives and lives has helped to produce new perspectives on how life stories can be illuminating starting points in tracing social phenomena. She carried out an impressive psychological longitudinal study among US women over two decades in which she aimed at exploring the role of social narratives in the social sciences. Her study, that formed the base for her book *Revising Herself: The Story of Women's Identity from College to Midlife* (1996), followed US American women after completing college and noted in interviews what their choices in life were and how those decisions were informed. Josselson (1996) pointedly notes that "[t]he cultural narrative of women's lives, told in literature, was a story of growth, events, and choices leading to marriage" (31). In this statement she compares a woman's life cycle with a cultural narrative similar to this paper's concept of a masterstory. Both concepts, "masterstory" and "cultural narrative", originally stem from the field of literature. Furthermore, Josselson also refers to events that constitute the narrative that ultimately culminate in marriage. Her point seems to be that any woman's narrative finally aims at marriage and that all steps, or events, are informed by that ultimate goal. Although the concept of masterstory, as applied in this paper, does not suggest marriage as the only goal of a woman's life, it does however state that marriage is an essential event in the storyline that serves a particular function.

Similarly alluding to narrative terms, Josselson (1996) remarks that "a woman's path to marriage is the only real drama in a woman's life" (31ff.). Again, the term "drama" implies that life is full of staged events that might follow a strict order of events like a screenplay prescribes the plot and manner of a performance.

With regard to the narrative angle of the masterstory, the psychological contribution by Josselson has shown that cultural narratives in general can be interpreted as (life) stories that consist of events or plots that serve social functions.

When the concept of masterstory is understood in terms of a cultural narrative that spans from cradle to grave including all events and actions that happen to a person in the course of a lifetime, similar to a narrative of a book,

then literary narrative rules also apply. According to Müller-Funk (2007), psychological discourses suggest that identity is constructed in a narrative manner (13). He goes as far as to say that narratives make sense through the production of a linear ordering. Narratives in general function as ordering tools that organize randomly assembled events in a chronological order. Narratives construct meaning due to their structuring quality. The thereby established continuity produces a prevalent stable identity for people. The process of establishing a chronological order consequently constructs identity (29). With respect to the masterstory and its narrative quality, it can be concluded that narratives both in literary as in general social terms produce meaning. Their major function appears to be the generation of meaning and ultimately the production of identity.

Another useful approach in defining the masterstory is Weeks' (1991) idea of a 'script', "used by interactionist sociologists to account for the way we take our sexual meanings" (57). The approach is based on John Gagnon's concept of scripts that "specify, like blueprints [...] the whos, whats, whens, wheres and whys for given types of activity ... It is like a blueprint or roadmap or recipe, giving directions" (Gagnon qtd. in Weeks 57). Sidonie Smith (1993) moreover observes that "ideologies such as gender ideologies rigidly script identities and differences according to apparently 'natural' or 'God-given' distinctions" (21). Gagnon's idea of social scripts provides a good base for defining the questions involved in reconstructing the masterstory. So for instance, questions have to be posed of who is living the masterstory, what events constitute the masterstory, when do the events take place and why are some events vital to the masterstory?

Having approached the narrative constructedness of the masterstory, the question arises of who writes it? As John Modell (qtd. in Hareven) pointedly formulated in his book *Into Own's Own: From Youth to Adulthood in the United States, 1920-1975*, "[t]imely' action to 19th century families consisted of helpful response in times of trouble [when the family was in need of money for instance]; in the 20th century, timeliness connotes adherence to a socially-sanctioned schedule" (321). Tamara Hareven refers to this quotation when exploring the changes in the life course of Americans over

the centuries. In the context of the life course timely action can refer to the timed entering into marriage, leaving the parents' house at a particular time or starting to work, all those actions being taken at a specific time. While Modell (qtd. in Hareven) intended to stress the difference in the meaning of timed action, this paper is especially interested in his formulation of an "adherence to a socially-sanctioned schedule". Now what is a socially-sanctioned schedule? The term suggests that there is a pattern of events, like a timetable, that is based on a society's accreditation. Consequently, the timing of such important events like a marriage seems to adhere to society's proposed norms of timing. The influence of a society's values on individual life course decisions appears to be ubiquitous. A major step in one's life, as for instance, the choosing of a partner and the public celebration of love in civil marriage, is consciously or sub-consciously following a so-called socially-sanctioned schedule.

Modell (qtd. in Hareven) further supports the concept of a masterstory when acknowledging the fact that in society, there exists a kind of blueprint that offers a certain timed pattern of life events to members in society.

Hareven (1992) offers an explanation for the existence of an ordered life plan. She refers to history and the fact that "voluntary and involuntary demographic changes that have come about since the late nineteenth century have resulted in greater uniformity in the timing of transitions along the life course despite greater societal complexity." In former times, she argues, life patterns were much more subject to variation than they have been in the 20th century (318). What is essential to the discussion of the masterstory is the fact that over the course of history uniformity in the timing of transitions has occurred, but only in the previous century. Moreover, it has been stated that "[t]he overall historical pattern of family behavior has [...] been marked by a shift from involuntary to voluntary forces controlling the timing of family events. It has also been characterized by greater rigidity and uniformity in the time of people's passage from one family role to another over the life course" (320). The shift to voluntary forces governing the timing of events implies that from that point onwards the uniformity resulted out of a consciously chosen timing. While involuntary forces in former times may have influenced in great amounts the timing of a marriage, for example,

nowadays in most cases a voluntary decision about the time of the marriage is being made. So when a considerable number of couples get married at the age of 22, then the suspicion is that they do so out of free will and, according to the masterstory, because society suggests that. Society's role in the timing of life events is of paramount importance in the reconstruction of the masterstory in women's lives.

2.2 Collective Memory and the Masterstory

Finding a theoretical foundation for describing the masterstory is quite a challenging endeavor, but as it has already been mentioned, any attempt at defining social phenomena is necessarily a trans-disciplinary one. The study of memory promotes interdisciplinary research and so has managed to bridge the gap between social and natural sciences. Apart from its interdisciplinarity, the study of memory also has a high relevance in discussions about history and public memory (Erll, *Gedächtnis* 2).

As Olick and Robbins (qtd. in Erll 2005) have already stated, the cultural study of memory is a “nonparadigmatic, transdisciplinary, centerless enterprise” (5). Numerous concepts and paradigms have been established in various disciplines. The term “memory” has served as an umbrella that has presented a fruitful starting point for socio-cultural discourses among the disciplines. “Collective Memory” as a broad sub-category, for instance, evolved from the intensive research that has been done in recent decades in memory studies. Erll (2005) in her handbook provides a general definition for the term collective memory that says “[d]as >kollektive Gedächtnis< ist ein Oberbegriff für all jene Vorgänge organischer, medialer und institutioneller Art, denen Bedeutung bei der wechselseitigen Beeinflussung von Vergangenem und Gegenwärtigem in soziokulturellen Kontexten zukommt” (5ff.). This comprehensive definition is able to cover a great number of disciplinary approaches and models treating “memory” and at the same time stresses a focal point namely that of the reciprocal influence of the past and the present in a socio-cultural context. Two of the main characteristics of remembering are its relevance for the present and its ability to construct. Memory should never solely be interpreted as a reflection of the past but rather as a representation of the present conditions and needs of the one remembering. Memories are therefore not objective representations of the past but necessarily subjective reconstructions thereof (7). In the following passage a brief overview of various concepts in memory studies is given in order to refer to their relevance for the masterstory.

2.2.1 A Psychological Approach to Collective Memory

Besides literary and narrative studies, psychology has contributed valuable concepts and models to the research of cultural memory studies. Prominent contributors have been the socio-psychologists David Manier and William Hirst who established a comprehensive psychological model of collective memory (88 ff.). Based on the assumption that the term “collective memory” has a wide scope and refers to traditions, myths and historical events equally, they use psychological taxonomy to subdivide “collective memory”. According to their approach, “collective memory” is characterized by the fact that “[i]t must serve a function for the community”. Any past historical event or fact that is remembered by a community does not automatically qualify for a “collective memory” in their definition. Quite plainly formulated by Manier and Hirst (2008) while “[m]any Americans know the approximate value of pi, [...] that does not make it an American collective memory” (253 ff.). The shared memory of the mathematical term and its meaning does not automatically make it a collective memory. In general terms, a mere communal memory of something is not a collective memory because in order to qualify for the term, a function for the community has to be fulfilled. In the case of pi, no communal function for American society is served.

Consequently, Hirst and Manier’s (2008) definition of the term states that “[c]ollective memories, then, are representations of the past in the minds of members of a community that contribute to the community’s sense of identity”. More precisely, those representations of the past can be, for example, shared narratives consisting of single events but do not necessarily have to be. The concept of collective memory in the model at hand also includes “patterns of thought” and “shared experience” (253). This last part of Hirst and Manier’s approach will turn out extremely helpful in placing the masterstory and its functions within the realm of collective memory.

Having based “collective memory” within a psychological framework, some scholars argue that such a transdisciplinary approach that transfers cognitive-psychological concepts to the socio-cultural study of memory would be misleading and over-simplifying. However, Manier and Hirst (2008)

provide a detailed account of how cognitive psychological findings in individual memory systems can be applied to a collective memory system (254). Their research and findings are outlined in order to support the concept of the masterstory and to enhance its definition.

Psychological research has found that human memory comprises multiple mechanisms that deal with the “encoding, storage, and retrieval” process and that there exist various memory systems. One of the principles for dividing memory systems is based on the existence of a recollective experience co-occurring with the memory or the lack thereof. This characteristic draws attention to whether the person remembering is aware of the fact that he or she actually is reminiscing. If the person consciously remembers, then psychologists call this an explicit memory whereas if the recollective experience is lacking, it is an implicit memory (Hirst, Manier 254).

Other psychological schemes for the classification of memories are based on their content. So, for instance, there is a difference between *episodic memories*, including events and places remembered, and *semantic memories*, referring to facts. Moreover, a division can be drawn between *declarative memories*, denoting “both memory for experiences and memory for facts”, and *procedural memories*, representing “skills, or things that you *know how* to do”. All those psychological classification models for individual memory are based on neurological research. They have proven to be helpful in grasping the complex workings involved in individual memory processes, but can they also be transferred to the field of collective memory? In their approach to building a cognitive taxonomy of collective memory, Manier and Hirst (2008) intended to shed light onto the varieties and functions of collective memory. Using the psychological insights gained on the individual level of memory systems, they present a theory to subdivide collective memory (256ff.).

Applying the defining categories of memory from the individual level to the collective level, we are now able to further our insights into numerous manifestations of collective memory. Besides episodic and semantic collective memory, the authors put major emphasis on the properties and

characteristics attributed to collective procedural or implicit memory. While semantic collective memories are constituted by episodic events, manifestations of collective procedural memories are traditions, community rituals and practices (Hirst, Manier 258ff.). The ritual of a wedding, for instance, can be seen as a collective procedural memory. Most participants of a wedding ceremony follow the ritual order of the mass without explicitly remembering the meaning of each individual action. However, guests at a wedding can participate in the ceremony due to their implicit knowledge of how a wedding is performed in a church. Rituals that are shared by a community, therefore, are based on the implicit knowledge of each individual to know how to do something.

As previously stated that any collective memory has to serve the community's identity, it can be concluded that equally rituals, as being a subcategory of the same, have to fulfill this function. Hirst and Manier (2008) point out that "[r]ituals and traditions, or more generally, procedural memories, can serve as mnemonic tools that shape the collective identity of their practitioners" (259). In line with this argument, any ritual performed by a community contributes to the communal identity.

Apart from its identity-constructing function, procedural memories are characterized by their crucial effect on people's lives. This major influence originates in the fact that for many people rituals and traditions are taken for granted and believed to be natural types of behavior. People take part in ritual ceremonies or follow traditions without actually perceiving them as such. They have become embodied knowledge. Some examples of embodied knowledge are clothing, food choices or, more important for the masterstory, courtship habits (Hirst, Manier 259). The naturalness with which people enact rituals and traditions can easily be related to the aforementioned observation that Americans also follow the masterstory naturally as if it were the only way to do things. The statement about traditions as being embodied knowledge supports the assumption that the phenomenon of the masterstory, as denoting a strict order of events that can be interpreted as tradition, can also be seen as embodied knowledge. Consequently, the masterstory similarly is taken for granted by the members

of its community and this accounts for the proposed naturalness with which Americans are abiding by it. The assumption that women are intuitively acting according to the events of the masterstory is supported by the theory of embodied knowledge.

Collective procedural memories have a stronger influence on a community's identity than for example episodic memories. This argument is rooted in the fact that memories about specific events are more likely to change or be forgotten than are memories about how to do things, as for instance, how to participate in a mass (Hirst, Manier 260). People are more likely to forget individual events in their lives or particular factual knowledge than knowledge about procedures. As a result, it can be reasoned that since procedural memories last longer than other memories, they also must be deeper ingrained in people's lives and consequently have substantial impact on their identity.

To conclude, through the cognitive taxonomy of collective memory, principles and characteristics of collective memory and specifically collective procedural memory are inferred from the findings of individual memory research. In connection with understanding the nature and workings of the masterstory, those findings turn out to be of special importance.

2.2.2 Implications for the Definition of the Masterstory

The masterstory can be referred to as a representative of a collective procedural memory sharing all crucial characteristics. First, the masterstory can be seen as implicit and therefore embodied knowledge about how to lead one's life, about which events need to be experienced and how they should be acted out. The prominent characteristics of procedural knowledge quintessentially define the masterstory and accordingly prove it to be a part of collective memory. Having been defined as such, one of the most striking characteristics of the masterstory, namely the naturalness with which women stick to it, is also reflected in the description of collective procedural memories. As already mentioned in the introduction, the masterstory

describes the phenomenon of American women choosing a well-defined life path that contains specific events at a specific time in a specific order. Beside the construction of this behavior, the naturalness with which this pattern is followed is of central interest. Women appear to uncritically accomplish event after event as if any deviation would mean a renunciation of the most natural and normal behavior. This strong adherence to the masterstory implies that its knowledge is ubiquitous in American society, is transmitted by generations and prevails in the long term.

Secondly, the claimed influence on people's or a community's identity can also be applied to the masterstory. American women following the masterstory are motivated by the resulting identity construction. By adhering to the offered and publicly accepted life plan, women take on social roles that contribute to constructing their identity. All the events defined by the masterstory, therefore, help women to establish their identity in society as well as to contribute to the community's identity. As Hirst and Manier (2008) conclude in their paper, "they [collective procedural memories] are more likely to serve as the foundation of a community's cultural memory, and [...] of the community's identity" (261).

2.2.3 How Collective Memory Functions

Implications for the Masterstory

As the cognitive taxonomy introduced by Hirst and Manier has postulated, the overriding function of collective memory in general is to create meaning and a sense of identity. As a result the question at stake is how this function is fulfilled and what processes are involved.

In socio-cultural studies of memory, high importance is placed upon analyzing the role of narrative structures in the process of remembering. Thereby narration is understood as an omnipresent format to construct meaning. Gerald Echterhoff and Jürgen Straub (qtd. in Erll), for example, identify the creation of meaning, identity construction and identity representation as only some of narration's major functions. In the light of their

extensive list of functions, Neumann (qtd. in Erll) even argues that narration should be understood as a universal mode of structuring (87). As has already been mentioned in the beginning chapter of this paper, Bal (2001) similarly regards narrative as a mode that stretches across disciplines and serves as a useful tool in analyzing various social phenomena (10ff.). In the attempt to map the underlying function of memory, the concept of narration proves to be especially fruitful. Drawing on the role of narrative in the process of structuring, the term “narrative emplotment” arises. Only after the process of narrative emplotment can life experience become meaningful (Erll 87). Narrative emplotment is thoroughly analyzed by Donald E. Polkinghorne (1998) but before going into depth with his theory, a general definition of emplotment should be considered.

According to the encyclopedia, *Metzler Lexikon Literatur- und Kulturtheorie: Ansätze – Personen – Grundbegriffe* (2004), the term ‘emplotment’ denotes the embedding of historical events into a meaningful plot structure. H. Antor (qtd. in Volkmann), moreover, states that the process of emplotment is an anthropologically pre-given disposition that enables humans as “pattern-building animal[s],” to arrange both fictitious and non-fictitious texts into a coherent structure (145ff.). Following this definition, the basic function of narrative emplotment is to assign meaning by the structuring of individual events that only become meaningful when assembled in a plot.

Scholars widely acknowledge the idea that all humans share the ability to tell and understand stories and they spend a considerable amount of time organizing their experiences and actions. The ordering of past events into a narrative is a retrospective process that is necessarily governed by the present conditions. As Polkinghorne (1998) observes, “[w]ährend sich die Erzählung auf die ursprünglichen, vergangenen Lebensereignisse bezieht, transformiert sie diese, indem sie sie zu einer Plotstruktur anordnet” (21-23).

The act of emplotment refers to the concept of the masterstory in twofold ways, first it highlights the masterstory as a product of retrospective emplotment, as a collective memory, that projects from the past and secondly, it helps us see the masterstory as a narrative pattern that projects

into the future like a life plan. The latter one will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

The masterstory, representing a collective (procedural) memory, can be interpreted as sharing the main characteristics with a retrospective emplotment. Both produce meaning through fabricating events into a storyline. Linked to the broader context of memory, any reference to past events and in this particular case, their ordering into a narrative, are acts of memory. Narrative memory is based on the idea that any narrative is shaped by pre-existing, culture specific schemes as Frederic Bartlett argued (Erl 87ff.). Those schemes are dependent on the culture they exist in. The masterstory accordingly, can be seen as a manifestation of a culture-specific narrative that retrospectively produces meaning for the individual living it.

As the term “retrospective” implies, the story is fabricated in the present but containing events from the past. Analogous to this terminology the concept of prospective emplotment has to be introduced. Prospective emplotment represents the pendant to retrospective emplotment and is therefore equally a cognitive strategy to create meaning out of individual events. Based on the theory of narrative structuring of past events, this term refers to the narrative organization of future events from the present point of view. With the aid of coining the term “prospective emplotment,” one of the defining functions of the masterstory, namely the creation of meaning, can be taken into account.

Polkinghorne (1998) names the “Verwendung kulturell verfügbarer Plots” as one of the defining characteristics of a narrative. With this he means the selection of meaning-constructing narratives out of a variety of plots available to a specific society (24). This behavior suggests that there are already-existing patterns of thought or stories that are then used as a model for constructing a narrative in order to achieve the meaning most admired in a particular society.

Interestingly, he argues that “[d]abei mag jemand einfach die Rolle akzeptieren, die ihm durch jenem Plot zugewiesen wird, welchen die herrschende Kultur für Leute seines Geschlechts, seiner sozialen Stellung und Herkunft vorbereitet hat” (26). Narrative psychotherapy¹ arrests on the basic theory “that people normally incorporate for their identities the dominant story of their culture”. This assumption is founded on “Foucault’s notion of dominant stories” and also applies to the preferred plots that are picked to help create one’s identity (Polkinghorne, *Narrative Identity* 366). It can be argued then that the retrospective, as well as, the prospective formation of a narrative is always primarily an interpretation of past or future events in the light of the present including social scripts and conventions. The ruling class that sets the norm formulates those scripts Polkinghorne (*Narrative Identity*) implies. In this sense the masterstory can also be understood as being one of the preferred plots that are offered by a society since it constitutes the social scripts ascribed to its members.² And as cultural memory it is also subject to appropriation and individual needs, as Maurice Halbwachs (qtd. in Assmann, Czaplicka) pointed out by saying that “society in each era can reconstruct [cultural memory] within its contemporary frame of reference” (130). Thereby each society and generation reconstructs the given plots so that they fit into contemporary systems of meaning.

As in retrospective emplotment, past events are highlighted with reference to their retrospect-attributed importance (Polkinghorne *Narrative Psychologie*, 26), after knowing how the story ended, prospective emplotment works in a similar way. The masterstory, as a collective memory and therefore a widely acknowledged model of life, places special importance on the events it contains. Members of society who access the shared knowledge of the masterstory then automatically put importance on the future events that are postulated. Both in retrospective narration and in prospective emplotment those events are chosen which acquire a substantial role in making the story meaningful.

¹ see also Polkinghorne (1998, 36) on narrative therapy

² see also Weeks’ and Gagnon’s notion of scripts

Obviously the product of narrative emplotment is a narrative or story that can result from either a conscious or unconscious cognitive process. Interpreting this act as important cognitive processing, in most cases it happens unconsciously. Its overriding goal is “dem Selbst eine integrierende Identität und den eigenen Handlungen und Lebenserfahrungen Bedeutung zu verleihen” (Polkinghorne *Narrative Psychologie*, 27ff.). Clearly, the generation of a meaningful self that relates to society as a whole lies at the heart of narrative cognitive processes.

Drawing on the notion that narrative emplotment is a cognitive strategy to generate identity it seems intriguing to have a closer look at the ideas of narrative psychologists. According to them, identity can be understood as a narrative construction that is manifested in stories of the self. This belief is based on the idea that identity is not something fixed but rather an ability that has to be acquired in life. Equipped with the skill to construct one's own identity, narratives of the self are created that aim at uniting formerly separate events and actions, present beliefs, experiences and imagined future actions. Over the course of time those stories of the self are constantly subject to reconstruction. This process of reconstructing the present and future self does not solely rely on past events but also draws on imagined future scenarios (Polkinghorne *Narrative Psychologie*, 33-37). Polkinghorne (1996 *narrative identity*) further argues that the term “construction” should not be misunderstood as necessarily denoting a conscious process but he takes the view that “people come to their identity stories through processes that operate outside their awareness and over which they have no direct rational control” (365).

As it has already been debated earlier, the so-called preferred plots or social scripts offered by society lend themselves as patterns for identity stories. McAdams (qtd. in Polkinghorne *Narrative Identity*) and his review of narrative psychologists' work finds that, “[o]ne of the primary functions of culture is to provide answers to these questions [who am I? etc.] in a form that people can incorporate into their own self-definitions”. Their essential point is that “cultures maintain and communicate their identity answers in storied form” (365). Concluding from those narrative psychological ideas, the

masterstory could be seen as one major ruling identity story offered to members of society. Due to its extensive character, the masterstory could also be seen as an umbrella that functions as one main story with various similar minor storylines. In any case, the masterstory as an offered identity story, according to narrative psychology, represents an integral part in the formation of identity. Its main function, namely the creation of meaning and identity, is again supported by this theory.

The concepts offered in memory studies contribute to pinning down the characteristics and processes involved in the masterstory. As it has already been stated, any approach in describing and reconstructing the masterstory is preferably a multi-disciplinary one in order to cover as many facets of the social phenomenon as possible. The vast field of cultural studies allows the use of a great variety of concepts that prove helpful in the academic endeavor. Apart from drawing on collective memory studies, cultural anthropology as a rich area of cultural concepts, acts as a constructive addition in delineating the masterstory.

2.3 *Performance Theory*

As another discipline of cultural studies, interpretive cultural anthropology, offers the notion of performance as a key element in understanding culture. Based on the work of Victor Turner, an anthropologist and expert in the field of performance studies, culture should be understood as performance. According to Doris Bachmann-Medick (2003), culture is not only seen as a system of meanings but primarily as the process of symbolic actions. She argues that “[m]it solcher Strukturanalyse ritueller Abläufe gelingt es dieser kulturanthropologischen Performanztheorie, Prozesse der Bedeutungsherstellung an Handlungen rückzubinden und damit aus der Statik der Kulturbeschreibung auszubrechen”. Turner’s theory places special emphasis on two main points: the staging of actions and the experience of borders that he calls “liminal stages”. Through the lens of performance, symbolic and ritual analysis, prolific methods have been developed (91ff.). At the heart of applying interpretive cultural anthropology in the masterstory context lies the assumption that the masterstory as a social construct is as involved in the creation of meaning as symbols and rituals are. With respect to this presumption, theories of performance are able to vastly contribute in structurally and functionally analyzing the masterstory.

Elizabeth Bell (2008) explains in her comprehensive book about performance theory that performances are taken “as the entry point for studying texts, drama, culture, social roles, [and] identity” (1). This statement sounds promising and makes one curious about how a single concept can be applied in so many fields. As it is, performance as a multi-disciplinary concept appears to be particularly suited as a tool for describing the masterstory. “Culture”, “social roles” and “identity” are all separate threads that collectively constitute the web of the masterstory and accordingly need to be analyzed as such.

2.3.1 Performance as Concept

As Bell (2008) observes, the notion of “performance” is a contested one since multiple academic disciplines deal with it in their studies. The meanings of performance vary across the fields but also illustrate the dynamics of the term and its wide-ranging appeal. Anthropology, cultural studies, ethnography, psychology and sociology, to name only some of the disciplines, all use the concept of performance while their definitions thereof vary greatly. While the cross-disciplinary use of the concept adds much to its vibrancy, it also complicates coming up with a proper definition. Any attempt to find one definition that covers the various disciplines is doomed to failure. The term “performance” is “*slippery*” and “*unstable*”, meaning that its definitions produce multiple different meanings and that there is not one exclusive meaning but rather numerous co-existing ones. Therefore, it is important to list some of the possible meanings of performance and to highlight the ones relevant for the purpose of this paper.

While “performance” can also denote theater, parade, a protest and terrorism, it is the ritual meaning that is under examination (15). As Bell (2008) puts it, “performance has too rich a heritage and too exciting a future to pin it down” (18). As a contested concept with its fundamental inability to be covered by only one definition, “performance” also allows for an opening into various academic areas and issues. With the words of Jill Dolan (qtd. in Bell) “performance happens all around us, if you look at it that way” (27). From those two extremes, either seeing performance entirely in theatrical terms or as something that is all around us, another middle path one might say has emerged. In recent years, Madison and Hamera (2006) have argued that the scope of performance studies has focused on “comprehending how human beings fundamentally make culture, affect power, and reinvent their ways of being in the world.” This shift to a more complex understanding of the concept of performance has emphasized the notion that performance is a way of being and creating. Based on this understanding, questions about performances involve issues of “history, identity, community, nation, and politics” (xii).

To sum up, “[w]e enter the everyday and the ordinary and interpret its symbolic universe to discover the complexity of its extraordinary meanings and practices” (xii). An understanding of the notion of performance that centers on its cultural ubiquity is best able to explore numerous aspects and phenomena of life. However, first the key term “performance” needs to be reviewed and put into context.

2.3.2 Performance as Communication

“To tell what a thing is, you place it in terms of something else” (Burke qtd. in Meadows 80).

2.3.2.1 The Ritual Model of Communication

The relationship between performance and communication is essential to the theories of performance studies. Performance in a general sense can be interpreted “as a mode of communication” and hence there are two main definitions about communication that need to be examined. First, there is the Transmission Model of Communication that focuses on transmitting ideas over distance. Secondly, there is the Ritual Model of Communication that is in stark contrast to the latter (Bell 1-8).

The communication theorist James Carey (1992) in his book *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media* notes that “[a] ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; [...] the representation of shared beliefs.” Accordingly, communication in this model is seen as not merely the transmission of information but as “a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed” (15-18). The commonly shared beliefs within society are then presented in the form of dances, plays or speech acts. Vital for this model of communication is the assumption that “culture is created, maintained, repaired, and transformed in and through communication.” The ritual model enables us to think of performance as communication and therefore to investigate identities, communities and cultures “as and in performances”. The notion of

performance as a mode of communication allows us to define rituals, cultural practices or identity creation as instances of performances (Bell 8ff.). This link between performance and communication is therefore central in the analysis of social phenomena such as the masterstory.

Thinking of performances as modes of communication that are present in everyday life and among others involved in the process of creating one's identity, establishes a number of claims about communicative acts.

2.3.2.2 Communicative Claims about Performance

Richard Bauman (qtd. in Bell 9), a renowned folklorist, further places performance in the realm of communication and in doing so, establishes a number of claims. One of his major touchstones is that communication is a product and process within social life. More specifically, he argues that acts of communication "organize, produce, and reproduce" society (9ff.). Bauman, therefore, appoints a very prominent role to communicative acts when he locates them within the production process of society. Correspondingly, performances as communicative acts function as agents of reproducing and therefore maintaining society.

Another of Bauman's claims about communication states that the "expressive forms of culture", ranging from play, art, film, ritual and advertising to performance, are characterized by a heightened experience, by being commentary and reflective. With reference to performances as representing such expressive forms, they foster heightened awareness, comments and a reflective moment. In other words, performances are instances characterized by a heightened level of attention attributed to them. They also offer the opportunity to consider and comment on their content (10).

He further observes that various communicative acts are "differently valued and differently accessible". This becomes clear when assessing diverse performances and their audiences, for instance, a bar mitzvah, a wedding ceremony or a rock concert. All those performances are

distinguished by a different value and access that are ascribed to social, economic and political factors (10). In other words, performances of all kinds have different effects on different people and communities and are consequently differently perceived and valued. Information and beliefs represented at a rock concert, for example, vary according to the audiences and their ability to access them. It becomes clear then that the evaluation of and access to performances in the first place, are dependent on a pre-existing, shared repertoire of beliefs and scripts. Only if the audience is equipped with certain social lenses, performances are able to have the envisioned effect on people.

Finally, Bauman proposed that communicative acts are “cross-culturally and historically variable”. With this last claim, he points out that whether a performance is perceived as such depends on the culture that watches it. Furthermore, performances are anchored in time, meaning that at different stages in history, their forms vary greatly (10ff.).

Bauman’s claims about communicative practices and their forms and meanings in society help placing performances as products and processes thereof within that area. It becomes clear that when looking at performances as modes of communication their various forms, intentions and effects become tangible. The masterstory, when being examined in the context of performances and communication evolves again as a rich concept that can best be understood when linking theory with practice. Performance studies are able to carry out this task and locate and describe the concept.

2.3.2.3 Implications for the Masterstory

Applied to the masterstory, such claims about communication help defining its functions. First, the masterstory and its events can be viewed as a communicative act that represents and thereby promotes commonly held beliefs and values. The celebration of a wedding, for example, communicates values, such as romance, faithfulness, religious devotion and family. As a communicative event, the masterstory not only represents those values but

by acting them out it also contributes to the organization, production and reproduction of society. The prominent claim that culture is maintained through performances attributes heightened relevance and importance to the effects of the masterstory. Culture and society depend on permanent reproduction and the masterstory as promoting specific events and traditions aids this process.

The masterstory and its events can also be seen as opportunities for heightened experience that create a sense of extraordinariness for its participants. Performances in general promote a feeling of being part of something unusual and special. Being a debutant at a ball certainly communicates a feeling of taking part in a unique event that elevates oneself as a participant. Special events are therefore potential means to make people believe that they are part of something special that in turn creates an intense experience. Those experiences also give the chance to reflect on one's life and what one has reached so far and still intends to achieve. The masterstory not only provides events for retrospection but also acts as an inspiration and ideal goal for society.

With reference to varied evaluation and accessibility, the masterstory is certainly characterized by an audience-restrictedness, to stay with performance studies terms. As has been pointed out in the introductory paragraphs, various social groups within the United States value the masterstory differently. Economic factors, as well as social standing determine both the evaluation and accessibility of specific events. People from lower-income families might interpret full-fledged weddings differently than people from the upper middle-class. The masterstory as a communicative practice proves to be "socially embedded" (10).

In line with Bauman's argument about "cultural centeredness" (10) and historical variability, the masterstory features culture-specific qualities that only apply to US society. As has been argued within the context of cultural memory, US Americans tend to facilitate a certain collection of events that embody specific values. Those values are bound up with a certain culture and society. As with the claim about historical variations, events and phases

of the masterstory only qualify as such in a particular historical time. The masterstory that includes a number of typical stages and events manifests itself as a social phenomenon with a particular form only at a specific point in history. This means that when speaking about it, a certain timeframe is envisioned.

Bauman's communicative claims about performances add to the definition of the masterstory. Through situating the masterstory within performance theory, important insights into its functions and people's intentions are gained. When the major claims about communication are applied to the masterstory, it can be seen as a communicative process and the phenomenon gains details and clarity. In order to add focus to the concept, further claims and assumptions from the field of performance theory will be discussed.

2.3.3 Performance and Poiesis

Before addressing issues of performance in the context of poiesis, the concept of mimesis will be introduced. Mimesis denotes the act of imitating and reflecting the world like a mirror. In this view it is assumed that performances solely "fake" real life and its actors are not to be trusted since they are conditioned to imitate feelings and enact a "pretend world of make-believe and play". This narrow definition of performance locates it exclusively within the theater while other areas of application are left out (Bell 12).

Some scholars have reacted to this limited understanding of performances by acknowledging its "generative force" and ability to create (Madison, Hamera xii). Victor Turner has refused the idea to confine performances to their mimetic character and challenged this common notion by seeing performances as poiesis. Turner (qtd. in Bell) translates the term poiesis with "making not faking". While the notion of mimesis only restricted performances to be understood as imitations, poiesis, however, attributes performances a creative role. Victor Turner (qtd. in Bell) argues that all the performances produced by a particular culture conversely *make* this culture.

Cultural performances, according to Turner, therefore, generate “traditions, communities, debates, values, and worldview”. Performances, such as a graduation ceremony, the passing of the driving test or a bar mitzvah, “create a new identity, assert claims to selfhood, and are part and parcel of making us adults in the eyes of the community” (13). At the heart of Turner’s assumption lies the assumption that culture is something “constructed, embodied, and processual” (Hamera 46). This is a defining point that runs through this thesis like a red thread combining ideas about collective memory, identity and performances, ideas that originate from different academic disciplines but share the common notion of culture as being made. This very idea of construction implies that culture is not something fixed and pre-existing but rather something that is permanently reproduced by its members. Turner even attributed performances a “world-making power” (47) referring to the numerous instances where we take part in performances and thereby create our identities, our communities and culture as a whole.

The essential point is that cultures create performances that then produce culture. The masterstory, regarded as one big performance in life and simultaneously as a corpus of individual performances referred to as “events”, is a product of society while creating society itself. Therefore, it can be seen as both product and agent. Consequently, cultural performances, such as the events of the masterstory, should be seen in the light of being tools in creating culture and identities. A wedding, for instance, marks the passing from being single into being married. In some communities additional meanings are highlighted and created, so for example, the change from sexual virginity to married life. In any case, the binary status of performances as being products and agents suggests illuminating insights in culture.

Scholars across the academy have come to various definitions about performance that address miscellaneous aspects and functions thereof.

Besides conceiving of performances as creating culture, it is also seen as being a process and product. Victor Turner (qtd. in Bell) also emphasized this meaning of performance. For him “to perform” means to be in the process of doing something or more precisely speaking to accomplish something. This approach to defining performance stresses the processual

nature of the term and the underlying intention to complete an action or event (16).

As has been argued in previous paragraphs, performances are not only the product, the “embodied processes” (Hamera qtd. in Bell 116) that culture produces but at the same time those practices that make culture. Culture, as a concept subsuming individuals, groups and their identities, is created via performances. As a generative force, performances have numerous functions and purposes for culture. Mary Strine and her co-authors of the essay *Research in Interpretation and Performance Studies: Trends, Issues, Priorities* (qtd. in Bell) name eight purposes of performance, among them “cultural memory, [and] participatory ritual” (16ff.). Performances, therefore, provide opportunities to take part in communal actions, based on common frameworks of how to do things. Those events whose conventions are shared by a community both represent and contribute to cultural memory. This view corresponds with the idea that performances, as the masterstory, are active elements in constructing communities and identities.

Brought to the point by Stern and Henderson (qtd. in Bell) “a performance act, [...] involving symbolic forms and live bodies, provides a way *to constitute* meaning and affirm individual and cultural values” (17). According to this apt statement about performances and their functions and purposes in society, it can be assumed that the ultimate goal is to create meaning in the broadest of all senses and thereby to provide a community’s semiotic foundation. What holds the community together and reproduces it day by day is the same thing that is produced by the community.

With reference to the masterstory, its productive and purposeful element is placed in the foreground. The masterstory need not exclusively be seen as a product of culture, but as an active agent in producing the same. The process by which culture is created and maintained involves the communication of a shared set of values and its continual reassertion. This reaffirmation can be located in the repeated and widespread enactment of the masterstory and its postulated principles. A clear purpose evolves out of

understanding the masterstory in terms of being a performance, that is, the production and continuation of culture.

2.3.4 Performance is Constitutive – Identity and Culture

One of the crucial functions of performance is its ability to create identity. Performances make evident parts of our identities, such as, “race, [...] gender, desire, [or] class” (Bell 19). In watching others perform, we learn about their identities and simultaneously the ones performing create and re-create themselves. The participation in specific performances marks distinct identities and places one within the group whose culture creates the performance and informs its beliefs. Moving from the individual level of identity construction to social groups, communities or even countries, it can be seen that performances equally create identities. Examples of such group-constructing performances would be “[f]amily celebrations, sorority initiations, [...] [or] the Pledge of Allegiance.” What they all have in common is that they constitute groups. More importantly, it can be reasoned that those “performances make implicit and explicit claims about what is valued in and by the group and how members ought to act” (Bell 19). Again, referring back to the masterstory, it was argued earlier that it is offered to society as a life plan that includes specific directions about how to live one’s life. The implicit and explicit claims about a group’s values, testifies to be another most interesting field of inquiry when analyzing the masterstory manifest in life. Such claims will be made in succeeding chapters of this thesis.

Performance theorists argue that complex cultural processes that aim at structuring society become visible in performances. So, for example, the performance of a wedding can tell us much about structures of hierarchy, values and the formation of identity within a particular community. It can be concluded that any performance carried out by an individual, is a palpable manifestation of social rules and principles. Not until performances are thoroughly studied and analyzed, can we gain insights into what constitutes culture (Bell 20). As products and producers of culture they represent

invaluable informants of what makes culture and what are the specific characteristics of a particular community.

Bell (2008), in addition, refers to the “stories we tell” about our performances as carrying out two tasks. On the one hand, the performed events “create ourselves” while on the other hand, those stories also generate our culture (20). So far, we have come to understand performances as constitutive forces involving individuals, groups and culture.

All in all it can be said that through the lens of performance theory, rituals and social practices emerge as both constitutive and reflective processes. With the words of sociologist Joseph Gusfield (1989) “[l]anguage and ritual do more than reflect the experience of group life; they create it. To be a member of a community is to share in a name, a history, a mutual consciousness” (30).

2.3.5 Life as Drama – Our Life as Play

One metaphor that is often used in the study of performances is to speak of life as drama. The analogy reminds of Shakespeare’s famous quote “all the world’s a stage”. Looking at life through the lens of theater helps in understanding cultural practices. As a metaphor the term “drama” offers familiar concepts, such as, actors, the stage and a plotline which can all be applied when analyzing culture and its performances. The structures of drama and its vocabulary represent devices that help us “to understand the world” (Bell 87). We think of our daily experiences and actions as episodes of a larger drama that is unfolding, called our life. Drawing from our familiarity with drama, we are aided to make sense of our actions. That way, the analogy is another strategy, besides narrative emplotment, to create meaning out of individual events.

Performances serve as tools to produce reality and life, as has been argued. According to Bell (2008) “life is dramatically shaped and realized through our active and critical participation in dramas” (88). By looking at life and its manifestations in theatrical terms, we can learn how meaning and

communities are produced. However, it is not always obvious what the actual drama in a person's life is. It also seems invalid to speak of only one big drama since there appear to be numerous dramas all around us, in which we participate as minor or leading characters, to stick with the theatrical vocabulary. The scope of this paper is to extricate the masterstory as one main drama with various defining smaller dramas, all involved in the process of constructing and giving meaning.

2.3.6 Culture and Performance

The performance turn promoted an understanding of performances as forces creating and maintaining culture and gave rise to various approaches for studying culture. They all share the notion that culture is not something fixed but rather something that is continuously reproduced. In this ongoing production process of culture performances are best understood as "embodied processes that produce and consume culture" (qtd. in Bell 116). As such they represent valuable sources of insight into cultural processes and social structures as well as into attitudes and beliefs fostered by a community (Bell 116).

Definitions about culture vary according to disciplines and the time in which they evolved. Clifford Geertz (1973), an American-trained anthropologist, articulates one of the definitions of culture that helps in comprehending the performance approach to culture. He embraces a concept of culture that is a semiotic one. Geertz (1973) compares the relationship of man and culture with an animal that is surrounded by webs. He further states: "I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore [...] an interpretive one [science] in search of meaning" (5). Within this semiotic system of culture "meanings are publicly shared and the collective property of a group" (Bell 117).

Whenever a rite is performed, it is a founding moment in any culture. That is because participation in rites places individuals into history and serves as a link between humans "over time and across distances" (Bergeson qtd. in Bell 130). Any culture needs rituals in order to connect its members and to place them within a larger framework that holds people

together. The need for rituals can also be seen when people create their own rituals in every day life, as for instance, a party to celebrate the accomplishment of passing the driver's test. Such rites are then called "do it yourself rites" (Bell 130).

2.3.7 Rites of Passage – A Special Kind of Performance

2.3.7.1 A Definition

Adhering to the notion that performance is constitutive and actively involved in creating culture, it is an intriguing and illuminating task to analyze crucial performances within culture. One expression of such a performance are rites of passage, a term coined by Arnold van Gennep, a French ethnographer and folklorist at the beginning of the twentieth century. His focus is on the question of "how" and "why" certain practices defined as rites of passage occur and to what extent they are involved in the creation of culture (Kimball qtd. in Bell 120ff.).

In his defining work *The Rites of Passage* (1909/1960) van Gennep articulates his core thesis:

We have seen that an individual is placed in various sections of society, synchronically and in succession; in order to pass from one category to another and to join individuals in other sections, he must submit, [...] to ceremonies whose forms often vary but whose function is similar. [...] For groups, as well as for individuals, life itself means to separate and to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and to be reborn. [...] And there are always new thresholds to cross [...] the thresholds of birth, adolescence, maturity, and old age (189-190)

Based on van Gennep's ideas, individuals are subject to a constant crossing of phases in their lives. Life itself is defined by changing from one condition to another or changing from one social group to another. Society has developed rites that assist in this process of change. With regard to the masterstory, the passages in life, the ceremonies and the different groups are thoroughly defined and regarded as socially preferred if not obligatory when belonging to a certain group. Their accomplishment is mandatory if the

membership to a special social sphere is desired. The masterstory therefore promotes specific rites of passage and the traditional rules associated with them. Rites of passage attributed to the masterstory are, for example, the debutant ball, an engagement or a wedding ceremony. The masterstory, of course, is not exclusively based on rites of passage but they can be seen as performances of a certain kind, namely the passing from one stage to another.

2.3.7.2 The Function of Rites of Passage

The significance of rites of passage for the individual and a group as a whole is examined by James H. S. Bossard and Eleanor S. Boll (1948) in their study about formal debuts in American upper class society. They claim that rites of passage ensure a safe travel from one passage in life to another. Through the ceremony the individual will be prepared to act according to the rules and conventions of the newly entered passage. Changes in habits and social responsibilities occur when crossing different passages in life and in order for the individual to conform to them ceremonies prepare the individual and act as mediating vehicles. (Bossard 247) The ceremonies also guarantee a crossing of passages in “a socially approved way” (Bossard 255).

Besides centering on the individual and his or her facilitated passage from one life stage to another, those rites of passage are vital elements in the maintenance of culture itself. (Bell, 123) It is further argued that rites have the main function of “inculcating a society’s rules and values to those who are to become its full-fledged members” (Meyerhoff et. al 383 qtd. in Bell 123) For those who undergo the process of passage and are initiated into a new group it means to learn and incorporate the values of a particular community. Through the ceremony those values and expectations are manifested and can be learnt by the individual. Consequently, the representation of a community’s dominant values in rites also assures their continuation by its new members. (Bell 123ff.) Bossard and Boll (1948) speak in this respect about “the conservation of the best interests and values of the group”. (255) Rites of passage seem to unite the most valuable principles and habits

associated with a group. In addition to teaching the major principles to new members the heightened experience of values in ceremonies also strengthens the community's unity and symbolizes a moment of collective experience.

Once the individual has accomplished the ceremony and passage, he or she becomes a full member of the social group and is expected to act accordingly. Cultural membership is illustrated by those rites and distinguishes between individuals already part of the group, the prospective members and implicitly the ones outside of it.

Studying culture through performances sets forth that culture is created by the very same. Culture is performed, Bell (2008, 145) argues, and those performances are capable to reassure values within society, as well as, reveal them. The study of performances allows asking for their functions, attitudes involved, participants and audiences. As constitutive forces within and products of culture, they represent invaluable "texts" for the analysis of a culture's specific characteristics and values. Approaching the masterstory through the lens of performances enlarges the view on it and the aspects conceived. In addition to the aforementioned theories of narratology and collective memory, the study of performances broadens the insights about the masterstory's function for the individual as for the group. The main task of creating meaning and identity by accomplishing the masterstory is supported by the theories of performances.

2.4 *Collective Memory AND Performances*

In order to establish a meaningful and logical connection between the two concepts discussed, it is helpful to refer to Constantina Papoulias (2007) and her essay about memory as social practice. In her work she points at the shift from conceiving of memory as solely a “mental faculty” to memory as taking on a material form in social practices (114). In that view, memory presents itself as an “inventory of bodily practices through which shared beliefs and habits are carried on into the present” (P. Bordieu qtd. in Papoulias 115). The fundamental task of memory is seen as facilitating the transmission of a community’s ideas via social practices. To bridge the final gap between memory, practice and performance, Sherry Ortner (1984) argues that “social practices should be studied [...] as variable performances in which a cultural world comes provisionally alive” (qtd. in Papoulias 117). She takes the view that one should focus on performances and what is performed and not on the underlying system. This corresponds with the idea that memory should equally be studied as something being done, carried out by individuals and groups. Memories, therefore, subsume all the processes through which communities are created and maintained. They denote all the collective social practices and “collective stories” that foster unity among groups (qtd. in Papoulias 117). Such a concept of memory also shapes the individual through “collectively authored stories”, as for instance, placing the individual in a family narrative (Lipsitz 220).

2.5 *Review of Theories and Implications for the Masterstory*

After having examined an array of disciplines and their theories, it seems only adequate to present the insights gained with respect to the masterstory. Each discipline offers a specific concept or theory that helps to define the masterstory. Only when the various theories are reviewed collectively, does the masterstory evolve as a distinct concept. What follows is a synopsis of the main theories discussed earlier and their implications for defining the masterstory as a cultural phenomenon. This will lead to a concise definition of the masterstory on which the analysis in the second part will be based.

The first concept being discussed is that of the “narrative”, originally stemming from the field of narratology within the larger area of literary studies. The narrative, used as a universal concept not restricted to the realm of literature, can be seen as an ordering tool, assembling various items in a meaningful way. More precisely put, any narrative acts as a structuring tool that ultimately causes meaning. The masterstory equally works as an ordering tool, offering a precise model for life, like a model life story, that establishes a fixed selection and timing of events. The chronological structuring of the life plan makes it something meaningful. Anybody enacting the masterstory, therefore, gives meaning to their lives.

From sociology, interactionist sociologists, the concept of a social “script” or “preferred plot” is used to account for the fact that the masterstory similarly prescribes like a script the roles of a character. The social script is offered, as the term alludes, by society to the individual. The script offers the socially preferred order of events attributed to the members of society. By opting for the “preferred plot”, the individual is assured to fulfill society’s expectations and is accepted as a member of the community. Seeing the masterstory as a social “script” assumes that individuals are motivated to follow the script so that they are regarded as full members of society. Besides the motivating factor, the notion of a “script” also helps in structurally defining the masterstory, meaning the whos and whats involved.

From the field of cultural studies, the idea of a “socially-sanctioned schedule” helps in stressing society’s role in “writing” the schedule. The blueprint is something approved by society and so is the masterstory. The notion of a “socially-sanctioned schedule” only evolved in the 19th century when more and more voluntary forces governed decisions about family planning and one’s life course. This cultural explanation implies that the masterstory, representing such a “schedule”, also developed out of voluntary taken decisions. When members of society have the choice of how to live their lives and when to take particular steps, society is motivated to promote a certain preferred life plan. Having the choice of what to do with one’s life necessitates society to develop a model that maintains its values and holds society together. The masterstory, accordingly, is a construct created by society at large with the intention to show its members how they should live their lives and that way incorporate and reproduce their values.

The theories of collective memory studies suggest that the masterstory is a collective memory. One theory states that a collective memory is a representation of the past that contributes to the community’s identity. The masterstory, as a story that is handed down from generation to generation, subsumes events that represent communal values. The psychological approach to collective memory, in particular, speaks of implicit collective procedural memories. The masterstory can then be defined as a collective procedural memory since it consists of procedures that are communally remembered. Being classified as an implicit procedural memory, the masterstory represents embodied knowledge that then accounts for the naturalness with which it is enacted. Psychological theory suggests that embodied knowledge is deeply ingrained in people’s lives and has major influence on their identities. The masterstory correspondingly is ubiquitous in American society, is handed down by generations and so serves to maintain the community’s identity.

Having a closer look on the remembering process itself, narrative structures again arise. While remembering, distinct past events are put into a narrative so that viewed together, they as a whole become a meaningful

story. This process of retrospective emplotment creates meaning. The masterstory, seen as the product of a collective retrospective emplotment, serves as a tool for society and the individual to give meaning to past events and by doing so to contribute to the individual's, as well as, the community's identity. The masterstory can then be defined as a storyline that is shared by a community. As a culture-specific narrative it not only projects from the past but also into the future. As such it gives meaning to life by arranging events for the future. Anyone living the masterstory is assured to know what will happen next. As a collective memory the masterstory is continually reconstructed by society to adjust to current needs. Its main plot stays the same but minor details change over time.

From the field of narrative therapy the process of identity production is used to further examine the role of the masterstory. It is said that culture communicates identity answers through stories. The masterstory is then one major identity story that allows each individual to shape his or her identity by adhering to the prescribed plot.

Theories of performance imply that the masterstory as one big performance is a communicative process in which commonly held beliefs are represented and promoted. In this view, it is society's interest that as many members of society as possible should strictly stick to the rules of the masterstory. Only then their shared values are maintained over generations.

The masterstory seen as one big performance that subsumes several minor ones implies a number of characteristics. First, any performance is distinguished by heightened experience. Conforming to the masterstory or any ceremony connected to it, brings about a feeling of being part of something unique. Secondly, performances are differently valued which also hold true for the masterstory that only caters for specific members of American society that can identify with the dominant beliefs. Similarly, the masterstory is restricted to time, meaning that over time the form and events change.

Based on the belief that culture is a construct, the masterstory produces and maintains society. It is not only a product of society but also an active and crucial agent in generating society. In this process of reproducing society by performing, common claims are asserted and individuals are put into their places within society. The masterstory and its performances provide identity roles for members of society. It can also be said that it generates identities through performing.

In more detail, the rites of passage as specific performances, exemplify how individuals are placed into social categories. The masterstory also contains rites of passage, as for instance, a debutant ball, that operate as vehicles to put people from one group into another. In addition, those rites represent the values of the elites and assure their conservation over time. The masterstory and its rites of passage help individuals to attain membership to various communities (i.e. being an adult ready for marriage etc.) and preserve the dominant beliefs within society.

3 EVENTS and ROLES Constituting the MASTERSTORY – The TV Series *Gilmore Girls* as Illustration

3.1 *The Masterstory – A Story*

After having reviewed various theories for the purpose of defining the masterstory it is now time to have a closer look at the story itself. Any story features a plot that develops chronologically. The masterstory, as it evolved out of the theoretical research elaborated above, is characterized by a selection of particular events that have to be enacted in a specific order. Those events or also roles are well defined by society and follow a precise script. In the following section those events or roles are roughly described, their importance for the masterstory is analyzed and their functions for the individual and society are explored.

The term masterstory was chosen in order to demonstrate the narratological structure of the life course. This well-defined structure, as it has been assumed, is based on specific events accomplished by the individual and on certain roles taken on by the same. The selection of both the events and roles is of prime importance to the masterstory and subject to rigid rules that have been passed on by tradition. Put together, the events and roles constitute a characteristic plotline that is offered to the individual.

This storyline can be held against the notion of a narrative structure exemplified by the Freytag's triangle. With reference to this narrative model, the story is characterized by a symmetrically rising and falling action. The turning point in such a storyline symbolizes the climax, the moment of culminating tension (Patrick O'Neill 367). Any action leading up to the climax is therefore distinguished by functioning as a supportive act that aids to bringing about the desired point of heightened tension. The actions succeeding the climactic moment, consequently, gradually lose tension.

The narrative structure, according to the Freytag's triangle, serves as a helpful tool in describing the masterstory with regard to its ascending and falling storyline. The distinct events and roles can be categorized as either being pre-climactic or post-climactic of nature. Therefore, it is important to define what the climax of the masterstory is and why.

As the title of the paper already alludes to, the masterstory's climax is represented by the wedding ceremony. This can be seen in the numerous references of American women to weddings as being the most important day of their lives. In their eyes, the wedding ceremony represents the highest goal to be reached and a moment of ultimate happiness. In addition, the events characterized as preceding the climax all have in common that they are essential parts leading up to a wedding. So, for example, dating has the ultimate goal of finding a possible future husband. The events of the masterstory prior to a wedding seem to share the underlying function of bringing about a wedding. Since the initial events of the masterstory seem to predominantly serve the function of bringing about a wedding, the same can be viewed as the climax of the story.

Having established the wedding as the climax of the masterstory, another observation can be made namely that of a diachronic and synchronic structuring. While the part of the masterstory that precedes the wedding is composed of specific events that can be located at particular points in the masterstory, the characteristics of the masterstory succeeding the wedding here referred to as roles, happen across time. The part of the story leading to the wedding subsumes events as the debutante ball, choosing a college and dating, all of them illustrating specific moments in time. Similarly the story after the wedding includes phases that feature particular roles on the side of the woman, such as, being a wife or mother.

All this pays testimony to the fact that the masterstory is characterized by a narrative structure that features a climax, namely the wedding, which evolves around events and roles.

Up to now, the masterstory has almost entirely been treated as a theoretical concept that originated in observation. However, to better illustrate the workings of the phenomenon, a US-American TV series will serve as a valuable source for demonstrating key elements of the masterstory. The TV series analyzed is called *Gilmore Girls* and ran from 2000 to 2007 on the TV network CW (formerly WB). The show was chosen since it is geared towards a US American audience that one can suppose is familiar with US cultural norms and values. The show is therefore assumed to be representative for illustrating communally shared values that are characteristic for US Americans.

The TV show evolves around Lorelai Gilmore, a single mother, and her daughter Lorelai “Rory” Gilmore. The series deals with issues about friendship, family and generational tensions. Lorelai comes from a wealthy upper class family that she left at the age of sixteen when she was pregnant with Rory. Her relationship with her parents Emily and Richard is complicated due to her refusal of upper class etiquette and norms. Rory attends an elite private high school and later studies at Yale University where she starts dating Logan Huntzberger who comes from a wealthy upper class family.

3.2 “*LEADING up to the Chapel*” – *The Long Way to Marriage*

The process of gearing the woman into the direction of marriage is further distinguished by following a rigid, socially approved as well as expected manner. Since the order is decisive, the events and roles are chronologically arranged starting with the debutant ball.

3.2.1 “Officially Open for Business” - The Debutant Ball

The first major event of the masterstory under inspection is the debutant ball. This event has been included in the research because it perfectly illustrates the starting point of the publicly lived masterstory that is the moment when adult society officially recognizes a new member. The debutant ball, of course, is a highly exclusive event and only reserved for the privileged members of society. However, it denotes a turning point in a woman’s life when taking part in this ball.

3.2.1.1 The Debutant Ball – A Rite of Passage

In their sociological study from the year 1948 about rites of passage, James Bossard and Eleanor Boll deal with the debutant ball, an event restricted to upper class American society. With their analysis they give a detailed account of what phases constitute the ceremony and what function they fulfill. In accordance to Arnold van Gennep and his groundwork for the study of rites of passage, the two sociologists trace the three stages involved in those rites.

Arnold van Gennep, as was mentioned earlier, introduced and defined rites of passage as particular performances in the course of a lifetime. They assist the individual in adjusting to a new life stage including new social roles and responsibilities. Through a formal act of passage society acknowledges the individual as a new member of a group and ensures that common values are transmitted to the individual. In this way they are maintained over the next generation.

3.2.1.2 Functions of a Debutant Ball – Making it a Part of the Masterstory

The concept of the debutant ball goes back to a European tradition as the French word “débuter” reveals. The dictionary definition of a debutant speaks of “a young woman making her debut into society” (wordnetweb.princeton). The event constitutes a part of American cultural memory that is informed by European cultural heritage. American tradition, it seems, makes use of old European rites in order to strengthen its own communal identity.

As Bossard and Boll (1948,) have emphasized, “the formal debut [is] marking the introduction of young girls into society” (247). The event presents the crucial moment when girls become ladies. Through the distinct ceremony they are presented to and accepted in society and consequently from that point on subject to public evaluation. But the ball not only means the entrance into society and the adult sphere but even more importantly it means the entrance to the “marriage market”. From that moment onwards, women are considered as potential future wives.

When Rory confronts her mother with the fact that she is going to make her debut at the ball, Lorelai tries to make her daughter understand what this event means in upper class society:

LORELAI. Rory, do you know what a coming out party says?

RORY. It says I'm a woman now.

LORELAI. No. It says, 'Hi, I'm Rory. I'm of good breeding and marriageable age, and I will now parade around in front of young men of similarly good breeding and marriageable age so they can all take a good long look at me.'

RORY. You're exaggerating.

LORELAI. No, it's like animals being up for bid at the county fair, except sheep don't wear hoop skirts. (Season 2 Episode 6)

While Rory only wants to do her grandmother a favor by participating in the event, Lorelai interprets the ball as mere parading around and girls being treated like animals that can be bought. In fact, her opinion on the debutant ball alludes to the materialistic character of the event. Girls become ladies that are ready for marriage. Lorelai's mentioning of the "county fair" stresses the symbolic character of the ceremony and refers to the business like transaction. The women come out into society, signaling to equally well-off and honorable young men that they are waiting to be asked for a date. It appears to be the first formal step towards marriage. Later on in the conversation between Rory and her mother, the latter one pointedly formulates "that Rory Gilmore is officially open for business" (Season 2 Episode 6). Girls giving their formal debut in society make a clear statement that they intend to follow the traditional path expected of a young woman of their age. They take their first official step in conforming to the plot of the masterstory written by society.

With regard to the debutant ball, the ceremony's main function is to turn a girl into a lady, an adult member of society. The event signals "a girl has ceased to be considered as a child [but from now on is] to be considered as a young adult" (Bossard, Boll 247). To formally enter adulthood as a girl also signifies that one is ready for higher education, a professional career and probably most importantly ready to be married. This crucial point in a girl's life is reached when society assumes the girl to be "physically and socially fitted" (247). In order to accomplish the transformation from childhood into adulthood a formal ball is held in which the debutant is presented to society. In the TV show *Gilmore Girls* Rory is visiting her grandmother when friends of the latter ask if Rory is giving her debut soon.

LADY 3. Emily, your granddaughter is just lovely. How old is she?

EMILY. Sixteen.

LADY 3. Sixteen, that's a nice age.

LADY 1. So, have you thought about her debut?

EMILY. Oh, uh, no, not yet.

LADY 3. Well you know, the Daughters of the Daughters of the American Revolution Debutante Ball is next week.

EMILY. It is? I hadn't realized.

LADY 3. Why don't you present Rory there?

[...]

LADY 3. Oh you have to. With a girl like that Emily, you'll be the hit of the ball.

NATTIE. She'd definitely be the prettiest one there.

LADY 1. Except for Katie Heathington.

LADY 3. No, didn't you hear? Katie fell off her horse, has a scab on her face.

NATTIE. Oh, well then, if Katie Heathington has a scab on her face, Rory will definitely be the prettiest one there.

LADY 3. It'll be your crowning moment. (Season 2 Episode 6)

Emily's friends first wonder what age Rory is and after they find out that she is sixteen, they assume that her debut is coming soon. They seem to think that the only logical and proper next step in her life is to be presented at the ball. For women of their social standing a debut at the age of sixteen is taken for granted. One can see that the social hierarchy a woman is in strictly defines the order of events in her life and their timing. Members of upper class society in the US seem to expect their daughters to comply with the rules and responsibilities of society. One of those expectations is the participation in the formal debut. This is also reflected in Rory's reference: "Before I knew it, Grandma was telling me how important it is for a person to be properly presented to society" (Season 2 Episode 6).

Emily, representing the dominant social class, is informing her granddaughter about the social necessity to come out into society. It is not to be understood as a favor to the older members of society but as a crucial and necessary task for the woman herself. In addition to adult society, which is expecting their younger members to follow into their footsteps and preserve their rules and values, the girls also perceive the event as a very special

moment of their lives, as Rory's quote illustrates: "And how every young girl dreams of this day" (Season 2 Episode 6).

The fact that even young girls think of the debutant ball as a special event of their life suggests on the one hand that society communicates the value of the ball to the next generation and on the other that the ball fulfills a major function in the girls' life. In the case of the former, the debutant ball, representing part of the masterstory, serves as a communicative tool that transmits a group's beliefs to its members. The girls perceive the debutant ball as something unique since they implicitly know that it is part of a larger story, the masterstory, which sets off by this event. The masterstory as cultural memory is omnipresent within society and contributes to a society's communal identity. The debutant ball, accordingly, is an event that girls who wish to become full members of a community desire. By participating in the event a girl assures that she is accepted in society. This acceptance can also be seen as a highly motivating factor for the girls to come out into society which leads to the second observation namely that of the debutant ball's function for the girls. The ball as a performance acts as a tool to put girls into their places within society. The identity offered to girls is that of being a proper lady of society. Girls dream of the day when they become ladies, a role that makes them respected members of society and attributes them with new duties and rights. All in all, girls attain a more sophisticated role in society that leads them in the direction of a wedding.

The act of presenting one's daughter to other members of the exclusive group is of paramount importance as also Bossard and Boll (1948) state. "They 'present' the product of their careful rearing to their approved friends" (248). Parents present their daughters and show that they have successfully handed down the best of all values to their daughters who are now able to take their place in society.

The presentation itself, of course, has to follow certain rules as well and has to be carried out in a proper manner. Being properly presented to society appears to be as important as the participation in the ball itself. Since the debutant ball is a rite, it is subject to a specific set of rules that have to be strictly followed.

It all begins with the preparation of the future debutantes “according to a fairly well-defined system (Bossard, Boll 250) involving the learning of “customs and manners of that group” like “‘correct’ dress” or “familiarity with certain forms of etiquette” (250). Apart from the preparation of the girl prior to the event, the ceremony itself is equally following a rigid set of rules as can be seen in the following extract when Lane, Rory’s friend, studies the rulebook of the debutant ball: “Yeah, according to this it says that all escorts must be properly attired in black tails, white cummerbund, and white gloves” (Season 2 Episode 6).

The escorts are the boyfriends of the debutants who accompany the soon to be ladies to the ball. In this extract one can easily see that the dress code of the evening is not only exclusive but also very clearly determined. The precise order of actions and guideline for the ceremony are typical of rites since they are based on a community’s shared knowledge of what the event should look like. The event itself is an embodiment of the highest values within a community that intends to pass them on to the younger generation. Only a clear structure of the ceremony ensures that the traditional setting is maintained over generations and so are the connoted values.

Beside the functions of the ball for the individual and the community, it also fulfills a major function for the daughter’s parents. When they present their daughter to society they simultaneously signal to society that they have successfully passed on their common beliefs. As parents they are considered by society to act as mediators to teach their children the proper ways of how to act and become a respectable member of society. Finishing off the process of raising a child, who is now to become a full-fledged adult, pays testimony to having successfully accomplished the role as parents. It is a prestigious moment for them and as Emily’s friends suggest to her: “It’ll be your [Emily’s] crowning moment” (Season 2 Episode 6). The presentation of the daughter shows that the parents have contributed to society by introducing a new member and therefore maintained their culture.

The debutant ball after all represents an event that fosters cultural membership. As performance theory suggests, rites of passage inevitably show who is becoming part of the group, who is already inside and who stands outside the group. For those who are part of the group, the ball symbolizes an event presenting the highest of all values. The collective experience unites the community and inculcates its values to its members, old or new.

3.2.1.3 The Business Aspect to the Ball and the Masterstory

The provocative comment made by Lorelai about Rory being now “officially open for business” (Season2 Episode 6) alludes to an intriguing aspect when studying the masterstory and its events and roles, namely that of the business transaction. Based on the previous statement that culture is performed (Bell 145), performances not only consolidate common values but also reveal the same. Accordingly, a performance such as the masterstory as a whole as well as one of its constituting events like the debutant ball can be analyzed with respect to the values it reveals about a culture. In the case of the debutant ball, the business terminology appears to be an informative resource for studying American values apparent in the masterstory.

The terminology borrowed from business suggests that the events of the masterstory share distinct features with a business transaction in which goods are acquired. In such a transaction someone is interested in buying something in return for a specific price. Prior to the actual business transaction, the buyer normally inspects the product being acquired and gathers necessary information about the same. Comparing the debutant ball with a business transaction, therefore, sheds light onto the scripted act of the event and helps understanding its purpose. Lorelai describes the message of the ball as an event that signals to society and predominantly men that a girl of a good family is old enough for marriage.

Clearly, Lorelai thinks of the ball as being the first part of a business agreement in which the buyers, here the potential future husbands and their respective families, inspect the possible wives. As in all business transactions, the “seller” and in this case the young ladies’ parents want to make sure to present the “goods” in the best possible light. The girls parade in front of the men and try to make a good impression on them so that in the near future the knot can be tied. Everything is geared towards promoting the future wives to society. The ladies appear to be simply objects under inspection as Lorelai further states: “No, it's like animals being up for bid at the county fair, except sheep don't wear hoop skirts” (Season 2 Episode 6).

The image of a fair at which animals are traded might seem exaggerated but at the debutant ball all comes down to presenting the young lady so that the first step towards marriage is taken. The woman stoops to the level of being a mere object that is under scrutiny whereas the men seem to be in the position to pick.

With the debutant ball the bidding for finding a marriageable partner starts and inevitably catapults the young ladies and gentlemen on the market called “marriage market”. This term is widely used in American society to refer to the business-like situation of singles when they intend to find a wife or husband. As the term “market” suggests, both women and men at a marriageable age are either commodities or customers. Their roles are well defined by the script of the market that attributes to them specific tasks and patterns of behavior. So, for instance, the woman seen as a commodity is forced to offer herself to men so that she will not have to “stay on the shelf,” meaning to stay single. Women feel the urge to present themselves and advertise their benefits to men, including their social status, outward appearance, manners and of course the fitting into the role of being a wife. The debutant ball, therefore, might also be interpreted as being the initial phase of an “advertising campaign” directed by young women and geared to young men. During this “campaign” the young woman of society is presented as a perfect fit for fulfilling the blueprint version of a good wife and mother. Consequently, the importance of outward appearance is manifested in an event such as a debutant ball, and reveals the materialistically shaped

attitude of large parts of American society. Although it has to be added that numerous other cultures similarly harbor materialistic values to some extent, however, the point is made that in the US those values are considerably pronounced and manifest in great parts of language.

Another aspect of viewing the debutant ball as opening up the marriage market for individuals in American society is the implicit statement it makes about singles. Judging from the girls' omnipresent mission of finding a suitable husband the assumption is that being a single means not living up to one's ideal role. Staying single for too long makes implicit claims about a woman's attitude towards society's expectations and values. It resembles the act of rejecting tradition or simply failing to follow it. By staying single for a long period of time, a woman makes implicit claims about her attitude towards society's expectations and values. It resembles the act of rejecting tradition or simply failing to follow it. Being a single for women, therefore, means not complying with social expectations and cultural values. The woman automatically loses in status and is either seen as incapable of entering matrimony or as being too self-centered as to arrange with a marriage. It can be concluded that living the masterstory assures social prestige and acceptance. The pressure exerted on girls to live the masterstory is revealed in the following scene when one of the debutants explains the ball's importance to Rory:

RORY. That's a lot of pressure.

LIBBY. The two minutes you are standing on those stairs tonight will determine the social status for the rest of your life. (Season 2 Episode 6)

As the debutant remarks, it all comes down to social status and one's position within society. The ball's prime function is locating the woman within society. Since an extensive part of her identity and social standing is determined by her choice of husband, the process of picking the right one gains significance. In terms of the masterstory, the choice of a husband denotes the choice of the leading characters as it were and moreover their economic and social situation when living as a couple. Being aware of the fundamental decisions made at or as a consequence of the ball, the event

appears to be a decisive cornerstone in a woman's life that sets the stage for the masterstory.

As already suggested, at a debutant ball the girl is seen as a "*functioning* member of an adult group" (Bollard, Boll 248). The event signals her readiness for marriage and all the roles and tasks involved. The masterstory offers a script of the proper roles and tasks of a woman. The woman who is able to fulfill the script can then be seen as a "functioning member" of society. Looking at women as functioning-like tools stresses their role for society. The debutant is equipped with all skills and characteristics assumed as being vital to following the masterstory and functioning in society. With regard to the business-like character of the masterstory, women who are ready to function in society are also referred to as "marriage material". Once again, the term "material" points to the materialistically inflected category of women being a commodity. Young women who are thought of as suitable for marriage enjoy high status within their community since their skills and attributes prove to be socially accepted. Being referred to as "marriage material" symbolizes being a "functioning member" of society.

As it has been outlined in the beginning of the chapter, the debutant ball representing a rite of passage facilitates the moving from childhood to adulthood. In the case of women of the upper segment of the social hierarchy it signifies the passing from being a girl to being a lady. In the view of society a proper lady is the incarnation of the best of all values and one of the most desirable roles taken on by women. A lady unites all noble characteristics most admired by society, such as, good manners, appropriateness and charm. The debutants are ladies that aspire to lead the life assumed most desired to society.

The debutant ball certainly is not part of the average American woman's life course but, as it was shown, illustrates in detail what values are present in American society and how those values are an integral part of the masterstory. Once the "market" is entered, college represents one of the locations for "negotiations."

3.2.2 Education and the Masterstory

3.2.2.1 A Short History of Women and Higher Education in the United States

At the turn of the 19th century a first wave of opening up academic possibilities for women reached the United States. The so-called “age of the academy” brought about an opening of previously closed academic institutions and promoted the founding of several women’s colleges, the oldest of them being Mount Holyoke, founded in 1837. In the same year the first co-educational institution of higher education, Oberlin College, welcomed both men and women. While in some schools “intellectual achievement” was of primary interest, other institutions pursued a curriculum that promoted domesticity. One of the most influential advocates of teaching domestic subjects was Catharine Beecher, sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe. She traveled throughout the country to support women as teachers. In antebellum America, periodicals and advice books on domestic issues were booming and informed, for example, about motherhood, religion and health (Clinton 45-47). Paradoxically, “[m]any women earned a living promoting women’s dependency on men and a female’s sole occupation as housewife” (47).

Women’s colleges became preferred institutions for women seeking to pursue an academic career. Based on the schools’ curricula a distinct “ambivalence about women’s role that pervaded society at large” can be detected (Woloch 278). Vassar, for instance, was characterized by a strong academic curriculum centered on the arts and sciences comparable to one of the prestigious men’s schools (278). However, the clear purpose of an academic education for women was hard to define and rather vague statements were made. So, for instance, Vassar formulated the acquired ability as “to fill every womanly duty at home and in society” (279). A common rationale behind mission statements as the previous was that since women had considerable impact on society, an educated woman could have a more informed impact. Beside a woman’s duties in society, her role as wife and mother was stressed by the curriculum. Bryn Mawr’s administrator finally

concluded in 1901 that educated women got better marriages, “were healthier, [...] bore healthy children, and made ‘efficient housekeepers as well as wives and mothers’” (Woloch 279). The promoted purpose of a college education for women was distinguished by ambivalence rooted in the ambiguous role of women in society (279).

The college experience on the other hand was distinct in nature. Women in college for the first time experienced a community outside of the family, probably a sorority and a new identity. Women felt independent and at the same time as part of a community that strove for academic excellence. However positive the college experience for most women was, it also caused a split after graduation in which women felt torn between college and society’s expectations for a woman’s life. Academic training and college community were replaced by “the family claim”, a family’s expectations for a woman like being a housewife and mother (Woloch 279 - 281).

Although the academic curriculum at the elite institutions served to educate women similar to men, after World War II, a new traditionalism fostered a vocational training in domesticity (Woloch 500).

3.2.2.2 College – “A Glorified Playground”

The college’s importance for the masterstory can also be seen in the opportunity it presents for finding the right man. As Nancy Woloch (1984) finds, “[t]he social rites and rituals that began in the 1920s were extremely important for the coed, whose marital future might well be decided in the campus arena (a ‘glorified playground’ one educator called it)” (403).

During the 1950s marked with a prevalent outburst of domestic ideology, college women adjusted to the new traditionalism and took part in the “rush to matrimony” (Woloch 500). In 1955, the New York Times reported that “[g]irls feel hopeless if they haven’t a marriage at least in sight by commencement time” (qtd. in Woloch 500). Woloch’s statement about the rush to matrimony also implies that college was seen as the opportunity to find a good husband by most women.

Two main factors seem to support this assumption, the first one being that young women in their early twenties felt the pressure to find a suitable husband as soon as possible. Even though a low marriage age was widespread in industrialized countries after 1945, the number of youthful marriages was especially high in the United States (Gatlin 17). After World War II America experienced a rise in domestic ideals that promised “secure and prosperous environments” (Woloch 496). In the postwar years family life became the epitome of security. Living through the Depression and World War II caused an incomparable longing for safety that could best be achieved by starting one’s own family it was believed. Rosalind Rosenberg (1992) quotes an observer on youthful marriages who says “[y]oungsters want to grasp what little security they can [...] they will cultivate the one security that’s possible – their own gardens, their own ... home and families” (148). As a consequence, the post-war period was characterized by early marriages, as statistics prove. “[T]he average marriage age for women dropped to twenty; by 1951, one woman in three was married by nineteen; and in 1958, more women married between fifteen and nineteen than in a any comparable age-span” (Woloch 496). The new emphasis on domesticity promoted the role of being a housewife and mother, the sooner the better. The college years had to be seized to find a good match and possibly be engaged by graduation. Secondly, college represented a good environment for finding an adequate husband that is of equal social and economic standing and well-educated, in short, one of the same kind.

College years proved and still prove that “[t]he average college girl viewed her future ‘through a wedding band’ [...] today’s 21-year-old has difficulty looking beyond [the ceremony of] her own marriage” (Woloch 509). Although this statement dates back to 1962, current developments and the masterstory show that it is still valid today for some parts of society. Marriage and making a good match still dominates a woman’s early adulthood and so has equally considerable influence on her academic career. Opting for higher education seems to be not entirely aimed at preparing for a successful professional life, but at least as a positive side effect might bring about a good marriage. Spending four years at an elite institution gives an informal opportunity for getting to know men of similar status or even above. The

campus environment fosters social activities and offers a unique “playground” because it is an unobserved environment where one can get to know each other (Woloch 403).

Part of the masterstory is finding an appropriate husband, one that can offer a decent lifestyle. Preferably, it is someone who shares the same values and can identify with the beliefs of the masterstory. Peers who have been raised in a similar social context are familiar with a community’s shared values and ideas of an ideal life course. As a culture-specific narrative, the masterstory is shared by a specific group that enacts the outlined events and phases. The group’s knowledge and values are so deeply ingrained in their lives that they follow the script with a distinct naturalness. The passing on from one generation to the next is best achieved when members of the group stay among each other and live their masterstories together. That is why young women and men sharing the notion of the masterstory as a model for life attempt to stay together or find each other in college. College, therefore, serves as an important location on the way to realizing the masterstory. It represents a step in the storyline that proclaims education as a signal of social status and at the same time by being that step it also assembles young adults who share in the same ideal.

In the United States the decision of what college to go to after high school is at least as important as deciding about what to study. The institution and its identity and mission are vital factors that guide the decision-making process. The name of a particular college on the curriculum vitae can easily decide over one’s professional future. However, prestigious colleges not only give a spin to one’s career but they also represent good opportunities to meet one’s future wife or husband. Attending a renowned college means spending considerable time with equally smart, rich and well-behaving peers. Chances are good that by the senior year and after numerous campus events the perfect match is found.

In upper class society, Ivy League colleges are the first choice for high school graduates. Going to one of them assures finding someone of equal social standing. In the following scene from the *Gilmore Girls* Rory brings her

Yale boyfriend to her grandparents' house for dinner. Both of Rory's grandparents went to Yale and met there. As can be seen in the extract, Emily and Richard both appreciate their elitist education and share a clear notion of what it means to go to Yale.

RORY. Why don't we talk about something other than Yale?

EMILY. Nonsense, there's nothing better to talk about than Yale. Because Yale men are the greatest. I dated a few Princeton men and a Harvard man back in my day, and they had nothing on Yale men.

RICHARD. They'd better not. (Season 5 Episode 20)

Emily makes clear that Yale is an essential part of her life, not merely the college she attended but it appears to be a statement about her life. For her going to Yale means following in a tradition set up by her family. It is therefore a major part of her identity that defines her as a member of upper class society as well as a woman of her kind living the masterstory. Choosing Yale was one step of continuing the masterstory. Her up-bringing taught her to follow the tradition of attending a prestigious institution that ultimately led to her marriage with Richard, a Yale graduate himself. Her remark that "there's nothing better to talk about than Yale" shows her strong affiliation with the school and everything it means to her life. Talking about Yale serves as a tool to revive tradition and through that maintain it. As part of her identity, her attendance at Yale also represents part of a collective memory that is shared by other members of her class. The collectively shared memory about going to an elite school as Yale, contributes to the community's identity, in this case upper class society, and as a result to the individual's identity. Emily draws part of her identity from the decision to go to Yale that was supported and expected by the social community at large.

What is also striking about the conversation between Emily and Rory is that Emily puts men into school categories. Attending a particular college places oneself in a specific category that stands for a set of characteristics. Emily of course stresses the popularity of Yale men while men from other elite colleges are lower-ranked. This is no surprise for a Yale graduate. What is interesting though is the naturalness with which men are categorized

according to their schools. This illustrates once again the impact of one's college education and choice of college on the identity of a certain group. The decision of where to attend college plays a substantial role in defining one's identity and reassuring the membership within a community. To sum up, it can be said that the choice of college contributes to one's identity and decides to some degree with which people one hangs out and dates. Therefore, college choice influences and represents an important step of the masterstory.

3.2.2.3 Sorority – Preparing Women for their Future Roles

The campus environment not only represents an informal setting for finding a future husband but it also serves the purpose of teaching young women their future social roles. Being part of a sorority uniquely shapes a woman's college experience and contributes to the fulfillment of the masterstory.

Apart from academic courses, students enrolled at colleges also take part in extracurricular activities. These activities outside the classroom evolve around sororities, the counterpart of fraternities. The first sororities founded at coeducational institutions were primarily devoted to offering a private sphere for women. Their activities included mostly social service that was later expected of a middle class woman. It prepared the future housewife for her social tasks outside in the community (Woloch 404ff.).

Besides training women in getting socially active, the first sororities back in the 1920s also presented an "exclusionary institution". It re-established a social order in colleges that were increasingly frequented by different social groups. In order to be accepted as a full member, girls had to prove that they are attractive, amiable and adaptable. The attributes looked for in women resembled those preferred by men in dating relationships. Accordingly, admission to sorority symbolized admission to the dating market. In doing so, sororities strengthened the image of a woman as being both a "pal" and "partner" for men (Woloch 405).

3.2.3 Dating

Steve M. Tipton and John Witte (2005) investigate in their book called *Family Transformed: Religion, Values, and Society in American Life* investigate the changes of attitudes and behavior connected to family life. In their book Barbara Whitehead finds that over the last century a fixed system of courtship that geared towards marriage was well established. This system was directed towards heterosexual, unmarried young adults “and its clear intent was pairing off people for marriage” (178). It was characterized according to Beth L. Bailey by a particular “set of rules, conventions, and practices” that everyone knew (qtd. in Whitehead 178). Dating still represents a ritual known by each individual of society but its history only goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century (Woloch 404).

The concept of dating replaced “calls paid at home by suitors” and symbolized an increase in independence for middle-class women. Going on a date with a man means that a girl is no longer under adult supervision. The car contributed to this newly gained independence when getting to know a man. Dating was an innovation in courtship rituals and has survived, although slightly changed in manners, to facilitate a marriage (Woloch 404).

The rite of dating was and is regarded as normal and socially expected behavior. The conventions and rituals attributed to dating are so widely acknowledged and practiced by society that it can be assumed as being a cultural memory itself. The communal values present in dating range from courting a girl, acting politely to taking part in social activities. As part of the masterstory, dating confirms those common beliefs and establishes a framework in which young adults can enact those values.

Dating is so commonplace within American society that women not engaging in this ritual are considered as breaking with social conventions.

Hans-Dieter Gelfert (2002), professor of English literature and cultural studies, notes that in American society young adults experience social pressure to demonstrate that they are “normal” meaning that they engage in heterosexual relationships. The result is reflected in marriage statistics

indicating a relatively low marriage age and in the fact that young Americans start dating at an early age (112). Going on dates also signals to society and oneself that one sticks to the norm. The college, as was described, serves as a particularly rich “playground” and training field for young adults, especially women. Apart from academic courses and sororities, dating forms an essential part of the college experience. When being among potential partners, dating is seen as an efficient way in order to meet one’s future husband. Campus life is distinguished by independently acting students who are far away from their parents’ homes, which contributes to informal access between the sexes. While families in former times had substantial influence on the pairing of their offspring, the college requires young adults to get active themselves and engage in activities where they can get to know each other. The close connection between college and dating is also illustrated in one of the episodes of the *Gilmore Girls* in which Lorelai explains to her daughter Rory, who is in her first year of college, how important dating is.

LORELAI. All right. If not him, are there any other guys on the horizon?

[...]

LORELAI. Okay, fine, I may not be the world's best dater, but I do it and you should give it a shot. I mean, you're in college now. What else is there to do in college but date? (Season 4 Episode 5)

According to Lorelai, dating represents a fundamental part of the college experience and missing this part would mean having an imperfect experience. A college student is assumed to go on dates and try out possible partners, even if it is only for the sake of getting socially active.

Dating is subject to strict rules and conventions and acting accordingly means knowing what behavior is appropriate. In upper class society, the rules of dating are well defined and give evidence of whether a young woman or man fit into their social group. Emily, for instance, puts emphasis on her granddaughter’s manners and dating habits when she learns that Rory is invited to a date.

RORY. I'm actually going on a date.

LORELAI. You are?

EMILY. Well, your first college date.

[...]

LORELAI. What did you do? Did you ask him out?

EMILY. You asked him out? Oh, Rory, tell me you didn't ask a boy out.

RORY. I didn't ask him out. I just made sure he knew I was available.

LORELAI. Better, Mom?

EMILY. No, that's not better. Rory, you're in Yale, not Amsterdam. How you conduct yourself socially is as important as how you conduct yourself academically.

RORY. I promise, it was very proper.

[...]

EMILY. It's bad enough that you haven't taught your daughter how to interact with the opposite sex. You will not dress her up in one of your "*Sex and the City*" ensembles and send her out to tell the entire campus, "Don't worry. I'll ask you."
(Season 4 Episode 5)

Emily is upset that Rory did not comply with the rule that only boys should ask girls out. In her opinion, boys are the active agents who take the initiative and ask girls for dates. Women, on the other hand, are more passive and distance themselves from taking the initiative. A proper way of arranging a date in Emily's view is that a boy approaches a girl and asks her out and not the other way around. Girls should refrain from getting active or signaling that they are interested or available. Rory says that she communicated to the boy that she was available for a date. In return Emily discards this behavior as inappropriate for someone who is a Yale student and wants to be respected. Social conduct is equated with academic conduct, which illustrates the importance being placed on proper behavior. The way in which women engage in dating defines them and their social status. In Emily's social sphere proper behavior is well defined and strictly followed.

Dating as an important ritual and performance is able to reassure the roles and identity of its performers. In the case of asking someone out for a date, the kind of behavior affirms one's social status and place within society. In the case of Rory, her identity as a Yale student who derives from a wealthy and prestigious family asks for a particular behavior in dating. Only when she sticks to the conventions of elite society, is her identity as a woman of high social standing affirmed. Dating interpreted as a performance, therefore, makes clear that subject positions in society are permanently assured by various actions. The knowledge of how to act is essential for the individual and that is why those codes are communicated from generation to generation by other performances. Emily reprimands Lorelai for not teaching her daughter proper behavior for the interaction with men. This also implies that Lorelai is not acting according to proper behavior herself and Rory could not have learned indirectly though imitating her mother.

As the masterstory and its events are defined as a collective remembrance of a community, so the ritual of dating and its conventions are a collective memory. More specifically, dating is a procedure and therefore one can speak of an implicit collective procedural memory. Proper behavior on dates means sticking to the rules of the community. Conforming to the rules is mostly done sub-consciously and women know how they should act in specific situations. The notion of proper social conduct is embodied knowledge that is enacted naturally without explicitly remembering and deeply ingrained in people's identity.

Dating as part of the masterstory has one major function, namely to bring about marriage. As such, dating ensures that women can get to know men without obligation until they find their perfect partner. Dating as many men as possible increases a woman's chances to find a suitable partner for life. Metaphorically speaking, women go on a "hunt" for appropriate husbands and so do men. Lorelai summarizes the purpose of dating as the following:

LORELAI. Yeah, but dating is how you get to know your potential partner. It's the only way.

[...]

RORY. It just all seemed so forced. I mean, I felt like I was locked into the pointless societal ritual. There has to be another way.

LORELAI. Luke and I were debating that. Luke thinks it's all about gut instinct - you know instantly if a person is right for you. I think you have to go through a lot to find a contender. And you've been very lucky with boys before. They were just always sort of there, but I think for the most part, a girl's got to hunt a little. (Season 4 Episode 5)

Rory thinks of dates as “pointless societal rituals.” Dates are indeed governed by certain codes of behavior that are widely known and acknowledged by members of society. Since Rory has not been on many dates before and the current one is marked by awkwardness she concludes that dating as a whole is “pointless”. Society as a whole, however, attributes dating special functions that altogether promote marriage. One of the functions of dating is that it “provide[s] practice in the paired activities that would later be a way of life” (Woloch 404). This is apparent when looking at what a typical date looks like. As in the TV series, first the man asks a woman out for a date. Given that the woman agrees, the man will then come to her house and pick her up. They head to a decent restaurant for dinner where they spend the evening and get to know each other. After dinner, the man accompanies the woman back to her house where, if the date was successful, he kisses her at the doorsteps and they both agree to repeat that another night. Although this might seem like a cliché, it is what most Americans associate with going on dates. The structure and procedure of a date are communally known and therefore make it a ritual in the first place. Going out for dinner and watching a movie at the theater are exemplary activities of couples. Training those activities as a couple prepares young adults for their future roles once that they are married. Dating, when seen as a vital element of the masterstory, functions as preparing the woman for her future roles. It is assumed that the more experienced a woman is in the interaction with men, the better she can fulfill her role as a wife it is assumed.

Functioning as an efficient way to find a husband, dating also trains social skills when it comes to interacting with men and engaging in couple activities. The codes and rules connected to dating on the one hand give security but on the other hand, they might also make it appear superficial or pointless. They certainly establish dating as a collectively remembered ritual that is prevalent within society and contributes to the accomplishing of the masterstory. Once a suitable partner is found, the path to marriage is close and the next “chapters” of the masterstory are opened.

3.3 “GOING to the CHAPEL”- Engagement and Wedding

Having examined the masterstory in terms of its narrative qualities suggests that there exist typical categories derived from the narrative triangle. The most prominent category presents the climax of a story. It is distinguished by heightened tension and actions that are decisive for the resolution of a conflict. Any climax, it is assumed by narratologists, is preceded by a storyline that builds up the tension, which reaches its peak at the climax.

Translated to the concept of the masterstory, the climax is formed by the wedding ceremony. The ceremony itself is subject to rigid conventions and rules as is the event leading up to the wedding. This event is the engagement. Its existence testifies to the ritualized order of the climax and it functions as an event to increase the tension and degree of awareness at the wedding ceremony. The engagement itself is a well-defined rite that is preferably followed by a couple that ultimately intends to get married. The proper social behavior, as expected from society, includes this ritual for fulfilling functions aimed at the individual and the community.

“To tie the knot,” means to fulfill the fundamental goal of the masterstory, namely to become husband and wife. The social script referred to by Jeffrey Weeks (1991) prescribes like a blueprint the sexual roles assumed by individuals within society and the events that are to be acted out (57). As for the masterstory, getting married is viewed to be of paramount importance for a woman. The plot has already been written by society and culture and the woman simply has to integrate herself into the story by accomplishing the specific events.

The gravity of society’s expectations draws the woman towards becoming a character of the masterstory. The force of turning a woman into a wife and mother is so strong since it is embedded in continuing a patriarchal system. Sylvia Walby (1995) defines patriarchy “as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women

(20). Adrienne Rich (1986 *Of Woman Born*), an American poet and essayist, published works criticizing the social roles projected onto women by a male-dominated society. Her own experience as a wife and mother of three has inspired her critical view on a woman's role. The force described as pulling a woman into the masterstory, she refers to as a "sacred calling." Starting in colonial America where women could only survive economically by switching from one family to another, Rich claims that patriarchal society relies on a woman that is a wife and mother. Only when women embrace motherhood and domesticity, does society survive in its present constellation. Due to the importance of motherhood and being a wife, these roles are promoted to be natural for women (43).

The social script is so ubiquitous in society and connoted with nature and holiness that women can barely resist. A role that is presented as being conform to religious beliefs gains attractiveness if only for being regarded as a pious subject. Anyone resisting a role as authoritative as the one of being a mother and wife would be considered as being "abnormal". Apart from portraying the idealized role of women as something holy and sacred, economic conditions influence the accomplishment of the masterstory. Rosalind Rosenberg (1992) who examined the lives of women in her book called *Divided Lives: American Women in the Twentieth Century*, quotes Jane Adams's expression of "the family claim." Rosenberg describes this phenomenon and says that no matter what social and economic background a girl had, "her family expected that she devote herself to her husband and children if she married, or to her parents"(145). The notion of a "family claim" puts pressure on women to either get married or stay in their family. There was considerable pressure on women a hundred of years ago, but even now women still perceive that society expects a certain behavior and roles. It can be argued that while in former times mostly one's own family exerted the pressure, society as a whole nowadays fuels the expectations. Consequently, women give in to the omnipresent image of a perfect life that is realized by sticking to the masterstory. The notions of a "sacred calling" as well as "the family claim" both reveal the intensity and universality of the force towards living the masterstory.

While the initial events of the masterstory, the debutant ball, college selection and dating, serve to find a man, the succeeding event prepares the path towards marriage. The sequence and form of the event leading to the wedding are characterized by strict codes. The first event being described is the dinner at the parents' house that is later followed by the engagement.

3.3.1 The Engagement Period

Once a couple is entering a more serious phase in their relationship, social codes have it that the couples' parents invite them for dinner. The step from "casual dating" to an exclusive relationship that might lead to marriage is taken when Rory approaches her boyfriend Logan to reconsider their relationship.

RORY. I can't do this anymore Logan.

LOGAN. Do what?

RORY. This casual dating thing. I don't like it. It's not who I am and I don't want to make it who I am.

[...]

RORY. I'm a girlfriend girl, Logan. I have boyfriends, not escorts.
(Season 5 Episode 19)

Rory makes clear that she is ready for a more serious relationship that involves commitments. Here the dating phase is over and replaced by the more exclusive phase of having a relationship. The seriousness and degree of commitment included in a relationship also manifests in the names of the roles. Going on dates is rather non-committal and does not bind a person to someone else. As the name "escort" implies, the man is merely escorting a woman to a dinner, for example, but he does not establish an emotional tie to the person. Both maintain independence and could theoretically go on dates with someone else. Entering the next phase means showing commitment to the partner and making her or him the exclusive love interest.

Rory signals that “the hunt” for a boyfriend is over and that she wants to get more seriously involved. This can be interpreted as a typical feminine behavior, asking the man to contribute to a serious relationship and that way getting closer to a marriage. Whatever her motivations are, Logan agrees to enter the next phase with all the duties and responsibilities involved as he states: “Hey. Boyfriends bring their girlfriends to their family’s houses for dinner. It’s natural” (Season 5 Episode 19).

The formal invitation for dinner to the parents’ house is one of the conventions. It shows that the parents respect their relationship and that they want to get to know their child’s partner. In the TV series *Gilmore Girls* Rory is first invited to Logan’s, her boyfriend’s, parents’ house. The following excerpts are taken from this episode and illustrate the conversation between the couple and the boyfriend’s family. Elias is Logan’s grandfather criticizing the liaison, Shira is Logan’s mother and Honor is Logan’s sister.

ELIAS. There are serious matters to be discussed here. This is an important family. Marrying into it is important business.
[...]

ELIAS. We’ll celebrate when we have finished our discussion!

HONOR. Which discussion?

ELIAS. The discussion about unsuitable people marrying into this family.

HONOR. What?

SHIRA [panicked]. I’ll be right back! [She rushes out.]

ELIAS. You should know better than this, Logan! I know you like to joke around, and tease us, but I always thought at the end of the day, you understood what your responsibilities to this family were!

LOGAN. Mom, I suggest you come back in here, right now!

SHIRA [hovering near the doorway]. Logan, you just haven’t thought about this. I mean, I’m sure Rory understands. She wants to work. Isn’t that right, Rory? Emily’s always talking about you wanting to be a reporter and travel around doing this and that. A girl like Rory has no idea what it takes to be in this family, Logan.

LOGAN. Oh my God.

SHIRA. She wasn't raised that way. She wasn't bred for it. And this isn't at all about her mother, it's just, you come from two totally different worlds. (Season 5 Episode 19)

The grandfather emphasizes that marrying into their family is an important business. The remark about marriage being a business agreement is not new in this discussion since the debutant ball, earlier discussed, already referred to the business-like character of elements of the masterstory. Part of a business agreement is negotiating the terms and conditions. In this case, the suitability of the partner is discussed. The barometers determining whether a person is regarded as an appropriate "match" depends on various factors it seems.

Rory is not considered as an adequate wife to Logan due to some extent to her career aspirations. She wants to become a reporter and travel around the world meaning that she will lead a life that also allows independence from her future husband. Her pursuit of a professional career as a reporter will not only guarantee her economic independence but it will also affect her roles as wife and mother. For Logan's family, the Huntzbergers, a future wife to their only son has to fulfill numerous expectations regarding her roles. First of all, it seems that a future Mrs. Huntzberger should be entirely devoted to her children and husband. A wife is expected to direct all her energy to the home, a family's refuge. This would not allow her to pursue a career of her own. A woman getting married to someone as influential and prosperous as Logan Huntzberger requires her to additionally assume social roles. She has to present her family to society, manage the household and plan social events. All this demands a dedication to the family and an awareness of the proper manners expected by society. Although Rory's family enjoys a high social standing, her unconventional upbringing and her career plans disqualify her from becoming the future Mrs. Huntzberger.

Clearly, the Huntzbergers share a very conservative version of the masterstory that assigns the woman traditional roles of wife and mother restricted to the domestic sphere. In their opinion a woman marrying into their

family has to equally share this notion and be prepared in the first place. As it was already mentioned when discussing the importance of the debutant ball, preparedness for the future roles of a woman of society and later a wife is of central importance to the masterstory. The breeding, as referred to in the dialogue, determines if someone is appropriate and prepared to following the masterstory. This reference to the upbringing suggests that the masterstory can only be acquired and internalized by direct observation as claimed by collective memory theories. According to the theorists, the masterstory and the roles it suggests for women are an implicit procedural collective memory. In order to assume it as natural behavior and act accordingly, one has to be exposed to a community sharing this memory. Rory, however, was not part of this community until her mother introduced her to her grandparents. It was only then that she became familiar with traditional upper class American social codes. Her mother, Lorelai, refuses those rules and conventions and motivates her daughter to embrace a more independent lifestyle, one that is not confined to social expectations, such as, aiming at marrying as soon as possible.

Logan's mother thinks, "[a] girl like Rory has no idea what it takes to be in this family." She assumes that since Rory was brought up in a middle-class family setting, she would not be able to anticipate the scope of what it means to be a Mrs. Huntzberger. With the words of Shira, the two "come from two totally different worlds" referring to the different social worlds. It appears that the social surrounding of an individual determines his or her social conduct and manners. Obviously, the social network within an individual is raised effects his or her habits and attitudes; however, in the case of Rory and Logan the social networks do not differ greatly. Both attend Yale University and they come from renowned families. Still, Rory's lack of a conservative "record" and her career options ultimately determine her unsuitability. Following this ascertainment, the family dismisses Rory as a prospective future wife to Logan.

This scene illustrates the negotiating phase prior to an engagement. Its purpose is to ensure that only an appropriate partner becomes part of the family who shares the common values and understanding of social roles. An

agreement in those vital points ensures that collective values are transmitted to the next generation as apparent in the masterstory.

The Gilmore's invitation serves as another example for the first official dinner at the parents' house. The moment Rory's grandparents learn that she already was invited to the Huntzbergers' house, Emily and Richard get nervous and decide to issue an invitation themselves.

RORY. [...] I had dinner at his house, and then –

EMILY. Dinner? What dinner?

RORY. Um, just a dinner that Logan took me to.

RICHARD. At the Huntzbergers' house?

RORY. Well, yes.

EMILY. When? When?

RORY. About a week ago, I guess.

RICHARD. Good Lord.

EMILY. Richard, it's already been a week!

RICHARD. We need to invite him right away!

RORY. Who?

EMILY. Logan! The ball's been dropped!

RICHARD. I'll put an invite in the mail first thing tomorrow.

EMILY. We really should have had him over first. We probably should call him as well.

RICHARD. We could messenger it in by tonight, it isn't even eight.

RORY. Well, it's really nice of you to want to have him over, really, but you don't need to.

EMILY. Rory, if you could mention it to him yourself, preferably tonight, I'll get a note over to him tomorrow.

RICHARD. He'll need a choice of dates.

EMILY. I'll get my book. (Season 5 Episode 20)

The grandparents get nervous since in their opinion the formal protocol requires them to return the invitation as soon as possible. It seems as if there exists an unspoken schedule for the timing of reciprocal invitations at the couple's family homes. Emily stresses, "it's already been a week!" and signals that the timing is essential for the proper protocol. Richard, her husband, agrees with her, showing that he also shares this notion of proper rules governing the first official dinner. Their behavior supports the assumption that there is a set of codes and rules that apply to the process of making a relationship more serious.

The presumption is further strengthened when Emily notes that "[t]he ball's been dropped." Her figurative language alludes to the fact that the common set of rules can be viewed as being part of game, a social game in this case. All the participants of the game have to play according to the rules and in the first place know them. In this light, Emily and Richard appear to know this game all too well while Rory is unfamiliar with the strict conventions, as her remark to her mother about the dinner plans shows: "Apparently they've already exceeded the polite reciprocal invite window, and if he doesn't come to dinner soon, Grandma has to give back her pearls" (Season 5 Episode 20). Rory makes fun of her grandparents' behavior and reveals that she is not fully sharing her grandparents' values and therefore stands outside the exclusive circle of upper class society. Since Rory was not taught proper behavior in situations like that, she cannot be considered a full member of her grandparents' community.

Emily's reference to the start of a game, moreover illustrates the "playful" character of the procedure. Apart from knowing the game's rules, it is crucial to follow them correctly. The elder Gilmore's put considerable effort in transmitting the invitation to Rory's boyfriend in time. Although it can be assumed that Logan would probably not be bothered to receive the invitation the next day, it is regarded as important to stick to the timing and show that one knows the rules. Presenting to the rest of society that one knows the rules of proper behavior and acts accordingly is crucial.

The preceding excerpt puts emphasis on the assumption that the masterstory is based on a fixed order and timing of particular events. In this case the masterstory suggests that once a relationship becomes serious, meaning that an engagement is likely to follow, both parents of the couple are instructed to invite them for a formal dinner. Compliance with the masterstory's rules establishes the individual as a functioning member of society. That is why the Gilmore's are very concerned about following the proper rules.

The game-like protocol is not only evident in the sequence of events but also in the people "playing." When Rory and Logan finally arrive at the Gilmore's house for the formal dinner, Logan brings the hostess gifts. Rory admits that he knows the rules when she notes, "Well played, Huntzberger!" (Season 5 Episode 20). Logan obviously is familiar with the expectations associated with a formal dinner at Rory's grandparents' house since when he comes, he is well prepared and brings gifts to impress the Gilmore's. He knows the etiquette and what is expected of him as a suitable partner of their granddaughter.

Upon their arrival, Emily and Richard welcome the couple enthusiastically as can be seen in the dialogue.

LOGAN. How are you, Richard? Emily?

EMILY. Wonderful, now.

RICHARD. Yes, wonderful.

EMILY. Oh, look at you two, you're just perfect. Aren't they perfect, Richard?

RICHARD. Perfect.

RORY. We're not perfect.

EMILY. Nonsense, you're perfect! (Season 5 Episode 20)

The grandparents immediately show their satisfaction with them being in a relationship and approve of them as a perfect couple. The word "perfect" denoting for them a specific set of characteristics. First of all, Logan is of

similar social status and is acknowledged as “one of them”. He is a member of the exclusive group of upper class society that shares as its main principle the values of the masterstory. Secondly, he enjoys an elitist education at Yale University, similar to Emily and Richard, who both attended Yale themselves. They are viewed as a perfect couple that is perfectly fit to enact the masterstory properly.

Logan’s suitability for Rory’s future husband is also made explicit in the succeeding comment made by Richard. “You are a good man, Logan Huntzberger!” (Season 5 Episode 20). The attribute “good” now might refer to how good a husband he would make for Rory. His prestigious family background and polite behavior make him appear as a desirable match for Rory.

As Logan possesses all credentials expected of a future husband and Rory is regarded as perfect anyway, they are portrayed as having a promising future ahead of them.

RICHARD. Well, you are both enormously talented. Because if you have one tenth of your father’s ability, young man, you are going to go straight to the top.

EMILY. A power couple. That’s what you are.
(Season 5 Episode 20)

Their prospects of a successful future together are expressed by Richard who is convinced that Logan will “go straight to the top,” implying that he is going to make a fortune. As Logan’s family already is very prosperous, it becomes apparent that mere fortune is not sufficient for representing a proper husband. In American society the accumulation of wealth is of importance as continual success in the workplace is. His professional career continually represents the essence of all American values success measured in wealth and the striving for more, and therefore is highly appreciated by the Gilmore’s. They can be seen as a couple that truly embraces American cultural values and with them the masterstory.

In the elder Gilmore's eyes, Logan unites all attributes valued by them. Before he leaves, Rory's grandparents also refer to his sports car. Emily expresses her admiration by noting: "Now, would you look at that! What a cunning little car! I adore sports coupes" (Season 5 Episode 20). The car stands for material success that is not regarded as showing-off but as signaling to society that one has made it. Any visual presentation of materialistic goods is viewed with respect in American society and indicates that the person lives the American Dream. Logan with his prosperous lifestyle, of course, is financed by his family but will soon be able to pay for it by himself.

Apart from inspecting and discussing the future husband's character, other vital issues are debated at the formal dinner. Two of them are illustrated in the TV show. The first of them is the wedding ceremony and where it should take place. Although Rory and Logan are not even engaged at the time of the dinner, Emily assumes that it is adequate to approach the subject by mentioning various locations. The location of the event is important because it seems to affirm the family's social rank. In the following passage Emily's persistent reference to a possible wedding is of interest.

EMILY. It's lovely in the vineyard [Martha's Vineyard]. A few years ago, Richard and I attended a wedding there. I thought there could be no more gorgeous a spot for a wedding.

LOGAN. It's beautiful.

EMILY. But then we went to one on Cape Cod and it was wonderful too. Either place would be good for a wedding, don't you think?

LOGAN. Sure, I've been to weddings at the Cape myself.

EMILY. So you like Cape Cod?

LOGAN. Yes.

EMILY. We like Cape Cod.

RICHARD [nodding]. Mm.

LOGAN. Great.

EMILY. And I know Rory would like Cape Cod.

RORY. I like what I've seen in pictures.

EMILY. You two would look awfully cute in Cape Cod. (Season 5 Episode 20)

The repeated reference to Cape Cod makes one assume that it is not only referred to as a good location for a wedding, but rather a code for speaking about the possible wedding of Rory and Logan. It seems as if discussing the possibility of a wedding ceremony being held at Cape Cod makes a marriage the more real. Emily pictures the two of them in Cape Cod and adorns that image. Her remark about them "look[ing] awfully cute in Cape Cod" might be understood as her approval of a possible wedding. The image of them fitting into Cape Cod might additionally mean that they fit into the masterstory. The numerous implicit allusions to a wedding show the grandparents' impatience and highlight their understanding of a proper wedding. However, since it is too early to seriously discuss wedding plans, the conversation stays at a humorous level it seems and functions more as a reminder for the couple to stick with the masterstory.

Another cornerstone in the dinner conversation is the family, the nucleus of American culture. Since the masterstory revolves around the family, it represents an important institution in the storyline of the masterstory.

EMILY. No. [To Logan] There are a lot of kids in your family, aren't there?

LOGAN. Yeah. The extended family's been pretty busy procreating lately.

RICHARD. They have, have they?

EMILY. Do you like kids?

LOGAN. Sure.

EMILY. Kids love Cape Cod. (Season 5 Episode 20)

In this sequence the focus clearly is on starting a family and having children. The grandparents underscore the fact that having children is considered a central element in a married couple's life. It also shows that importance is placed on Logan's family and their values, in this case with regard to children. The masterstory, being founded on a group's fundamental values, represents the same. To follow the masterstory implies that the individual embraces those core values of society. Emily and Richard's intention is to check whether Logan also shares family values and is ready to act accordingly. Emily signals her satisfaction about Logan's values with her remark about kids who love Cape Cod. This picture of Cape Cod and the kids playing on the beach visualizes the ideal family envisioned by Emily. Both, the location, Cape Cod as an exclusive American holiday destination, and the family setting, symbolize an ideal representation of the masterstory. The passage is therefore highly illustrative for the permanent reference to the masterstory and its model character.

All in all, the dinner at the Gilmore's house shows that the masterstory is based on a specific timing and order of events. The issues discussed at the dinner table, as for example, the husband's social background, his career aspirations, the wedding and possible kids, are characteristic of an ideal life plan. The order and accomplishment of those specific events and qualities proves again to be vital for the masterstory. The discussion resembles a negotiating process that aims at affirming the values of the masterstory and thereby ensuring its transmission to the next generation. Only when the older members of a group enact and communicate the masterstory will it survive in future generations.

3.3.2 "To Tie the Knot"

The Wedding

Having approached the climax of the masterstory, the wedding finally symbolizes the major event happening in a woman's life. In order to grasp the importance of marriage to women it is helpful to consider "the function of the marriage institution and the way in which it defined [and still does]

women's status in the society" (Lerner 42). Referring to the 1950s, Jeffrey Weeks (1989) formulates the basic function of marriage as such: "Marriage more than ever was 'an almost inevitable step in the transmission to adult life', the essential gateway to independence, social status, sexual gratification and children, slotting people into their 'rightful places as adults in society'" (257). Although referring to the 1950s in the United States, Weeks' statement still holds true for a substantial part of American society, more specifically the one following the masterstory. Living the masterstory, it was argued, constructs identity and gives meaning to life. The narrative order of events causes meaning and the roles assumed when acting out the particular events contribute to constructing one's own identity. As a consequence, the masterstory offers people "places" and "roles" within society. Analogous, Weeks (1989) speaks of the marriage's major function of offering and placing people into their correct roles within society (257). This statement testifies to the masterstory's function and purpose of moving individuals into their places in society.

With regard to the masterstory's overall function, the wedding serves as an event that signifies the transition to adulthood. Now it might be argued that the debutant ball, given as an example to illustrate the wedding centeredness and business character of the early phase in the masterstory, already marked the transition from childhood to adulthood. While this is also true for the debutant ball, the wedding however symbolizes the ultimate fulfillment of the masterstory. This is the case because in addition to marking adulthood, the marriage also attributes roles as wife and mother to women. Those social roles appear to be so fundamental in their nature, as will be discussed in the succeeding chapter, that they pose a decisive step in a woman's life. The wedding marks this major transition and opens up those new roles offered to women.

3.4 *“AFTER the Chapel...Living the Good Life”-*

Married Life

Woloch by referring to Suzanne LaFollette (qtd. in Woloch) brings the meaning of marriage within the framework of the masterstory to the point when she argues, “marriage was still a ‘state’ for men, but for women it was a ‘vocation,’ a calling” (409). Although LaFollette was talking about the 1920s, the essence of the quote seems to have remained subtly embedded in the masterstory. One of the characteristics of the masterstory is that it promotes an image of women that was heavily influenced by the developments of the first half of the twentieth century. Christopher Lasch (qtd. in Beuka) points out that “the ‘traditional family’ as we know it in the United States is in fact largely a ‘mid-twentieth-century innovation’” (151). Based on this assumption, it is viewed essential to refer to the 1950s when analyzing present female roles in US society. Marriage as the ultimate goal in a woman’s life and more a “vocation” still remains the climax of the masterstory today. The roles and tasks of women involved in married life seem to fulfill such important functions in society that they are considered a calling. Only women, it might be claimed, are capable of enacting the most admired values in a society within marriage. As wives, homemakers and mothers, they are regarded as cornerstones of society. It is therefore not surprising that society has labeled those roles as “callings” since they ensure the continuance of culture. Besides the function for society as a whole, women’s roles offer new identities and help in giving meaning to life. The following chapter seeks to examine the most important roles assumed by women after marriage, why they are part of the masterstory and what functions they fulfill for the individual and society.

3.4.1 Blueprint of a Wife

By understanding the idealized version of a woman, being wife and mother, as it was coined mostly in the 1950s, the role of women promoted by the masterstory is better understood. Since the 1920s an idealized, conservative image of a woman that confines to the sphere of the home and its chores was promoted. The role of a woman as housewife and mother gained

wider currency throughout the first half of the twentieth century when people claimed that “fulfillment within the family [is] a goal to which women of all classes and backgrounds might aspire” (Woloch 496). An edition of *Life* magazine of the year 1956 features the ideal image of a housewife on the cover. It illustrates the dominant values of the time and thereby helps reconstructing how the present social script of women living the masterstory was written. Nancy Woloch (1984) recapitulates the issue’s description of a suburban housewife as such:

[she] was a hostess, volunteer, and ‘home manager,’ who sewed her own clothes, entertained 1,500 guests a year, and was supported by a husband whose annual income was \$25,000. ‘In her daily round she attends club or charity meetings, drives her children to school, does the weekly grocery shopping, makes ceramics, and is planning to learn French’ (495 ff.)

This excerpt explains in a nutshell what being an ideal housewife meant in 1950s America. Understandably, by far not every woman attained this ideal image but numerous tried to.

Movies testify to the image of women popular at the time. According to Quart and Auster (2002) most women were portrayed as either “housewives or women seeking to avoid spinsterhood, who found salvation in marriage” (55). A woman’s proper role as can be seen was being next to a man. Rich (1995 *Lies, Secrets, Silence*) similarly saw that a part of her “was to define herself by her relationships with men” (40).

The economic situation in the post World War II years allowed for a retreat into the suburbs and the embracing of a conservative lifestyle as pictured above. The booming economy helped finance the idealized version of family life when even young families suddenly could afford a house and a car (Woloch 497). A family could do without a woman’s income and consequently her place was confined to the house. The idealized version of homemakers and mothers was to a great extent the product of the “cult of domesticity” (Chafe *Women American Society*, 328).

3.4.1.1 The Cult of Domesticity and the Masterstory

The term “cult of domesticity”, prevalent mostly in 1950s America, refers to the “revival of traditional ideals of woman’s place” (Woloch 495). Its evolution goes back to the nineteenth century when middle-class values were subject to refinement and placed “the lady on a pedestal”. The ideal version of a woman based on middle-class ideology was almost impossible to be reached by women of that time. However, the prevailing notion of an ideal woman was used to measure women’s performance. The overriding purpose of the “redefinition of the home as woman’s domain, was [...] to channel women’s contributions into a proper course” (Clinton 40). According to Clinton’s view, male-dominated society intended to control a woman’s power by directing it towards the home. The dominant culture, Chafe (1992) argues, clearly defines a woman’s proper place in society. One of the consequences of the industrial revolution was the separation of home and workplace. This development entailed that it was regarded as a sign of success and wealth when a man could afford that his wife stayed in the home where servants assisted her. While in former times a woman had to contribute her share in the workplace, in the late nineteenth century “reality began to approximate more closely the cultural ideal – at least for the daughters of the white middle and upper classes” (328).

Following the hardships and the lack of security of the Great Depression and the Second World War, Americans craved for “normalcy”. This longing for security and a return to order was echoed in the gender roles dominant in the post-war years. With the words of Campbell and Kean (2006)

[g]ender offered pre-set compartments into which male and female could be arranged so as to create a sense of ‘normalcy’ and order that were non-threatening and in keeping with precise, uncomplicated versions of an ideal America developed in these years of consensus (212).

Following this statement, gender represents a category in which social scripts can be inscribed based on current ideology and needs. In line with this view is the notion of social scripts as it has already been discussed. Scripts determine like a blueprint how a person should act in a particular

situation (Weeks 57). With regard to the United States and 1950s ideology, social scripts were written by the dominant group in society in order to represent their shared beliefs and values. Since Americans in the 1950s wanted to get over the disruptions of the preceding years, their notion of sexual scripts mirrored a desire for security and “normalcy”. As a result women and an ideal family were modeled according to conservative beliefs no matter how unrealistic they had been. One of those examples of a traditional social script of a woman in the 50s was *Life* magazine’s suburban wife and mother. Although seemingly unrealistic and superficial it represented a model for women that was aspired by many at the time.

The prospering economic situation of the post-war years led to an increased move of middle-class families to the suburbs. This phenomenon of suburban migration had a fundamental impact on the construction of gender roles. Social critics often regard this decade as “marking the return of ‘traditional’ family structure and gender identities.” However, after having a closer look at the social developments in the 1950s, the period after World War II marks a “socially constructed revolution in gender identity” (Beuka 150 ff.). Following the argument that the cult of domesticity and its associated gender roles was not a return of conservative values but rather a new creation of the time, the notion of family conveyed in the masterstory goes back to the shifting of gender roles in the 1950s. Consequently, the point can be made that the blueprints and scripts forming the core of the masterstory are based on the gender roles that were constructed in the post-war years.

In order to gain a more detailed view on gender roles, their evolution in the 1950s and their present version reflected in the masterstory, it seems vital to enlist influences involved in their production. First of all, World War II led to an absence of masculinity due to military service overseas. The lack of masculine presence in the United States during the war years fueled the desire for pronounced masculinity. The “traditional” role of men was attached to notions of strength and authority. This identity manifested in his role as the “breadwinner” and head of the family. The migration to the suburbs reinforced this image of the man who worked in the city and earned a living while the wife was confined to the home in the countryside. Her sphere was

predetermined by household tasks and childrearing (Beuka 151 ff.). Architectural critic Annmarie Adams (qtd. in Beuka) observes that “the mass movement of young American families to the suburbs in the 1950s and early 1960s had devastating implications for women’s status.... The suburbs isolated them from political, social, and financial power” (151). The “new woman”, “an independent person with a public role,” as postulated in the 1920s, “promoted the housewife to expert manager and consumer” (Todd 130-132). She represented a professional housewife but was more than ever confined to the home.

The developments of the 1950s and early 1960s led to a celebration of domesticity and maternity. This period also referred to as “new traditionalism” gravitated around the woman as the symbol of security and ‘normalcy’ whose task was “the maintenance of a clean home and a contented family unit” (Beuka 152ff.).

Based on the claims that the idea of a “traditional family” really was a “mid-twentieth-century innovation” and that social dynamics in the 1950s constructed new gender roles, it can be argued that the social scripts and roles promoted by the masterstory are influenced by if not modeled after the feminine ideals of post-war America. In the light of this argument the masterstory and its roles and scripts offered to women are disclosed. Investigating various beliefs and the image of women circulating in the 1950s aids in grasping the current roles and scripts directed towards women in present-day America.

3.4.1.2 The Home and the Masterstory

The step into an early marriage and a succeeding move to the suburb symbolized for American women of the 1950s “a step upward into the middle class, into normalcy, though it was a ‘normalcy’ that had never existed before” (Woloch 497). As mentioned earlier, young women in the post-war years longed for security since they had only experienced hardships and tensions. Although it is not surprising that they anticipated security, it seems

interesting though that they embraced an idealized model of a perfect housewife that really was invented in those years. However, the suburban housewife that dedicated all her energy to her husband and family represented “normalcy” or in other words, an order that suggested a “normal” way of life. The secure lifestyle associated with domestic ideology was as attractive to women as it might be nowadays. The conservative distribution of gender roles caters for an ordered life plan that holds no real surprises and means a general approval of society.

Suburbanization and consumerism, therefore, according to Rochelle Gatlin (1987) promoted an “ideology of the ‘private’ family” that evolved around a woman’s traditional role in the household, isolated from the public sphere. Women in the suburbs were dislocated from social life and consequently saw their fulfillment in doing the household chores and raising the children. Since no other tasks were offered to women in the suburbs, they had to fully commit to their traditional roles as wives and mothers (53).

The idea of the home as a safe haven that houses the small family and is run by an enthusiastic housewife fulfilling the domestic chores to perfection is best understood by tracing its origins in the past. The separation of the woman’s sphere of the home from the men’s sphere of the public is a rather new development in society. While up to the nineteenth century the home was the place of work where the family, including women and children were actively involved, only later the home became the symbol of a refuge. “Women and children were part of an actively busy social cluster,” according to Rich (1986). A woman’s life was marked by hard but communal work that was shared among the family members. Her sphere was not an isolated and private but an open and public one. Maternity and running the household did not present the only tasks in a woman’s life but were part of a wider range of activities. Industrialization and the dislocation of the workplace from the home to the factory had a substantial impact on social issues. Suddenly, families had to deal with the problem of finding someone to look after their children. This situation led to a concern about children and their condition. Besides the arising problem of missing childcare, women working in factories placed a threat to men. The home became the sphere of women during the nineteenth

century due to two main forces namely the increasing concern about “child welfare” and “patriarchal values” (Rich *Of Woman Born* 46-49).

Adrienne Rich (1986 *Of Woman Born*) subsumes the result of the social developments accompanying the industrialization as such: “The home thus defined had never before existed. It was a creation of the Industrial Revolution, an ideal invested with the power of something God-given, and its power as an idea remains unexpunged today” (49). She refers to the home as an idea that stands for a woman’s true sphere. Her almost “sacred calling” to take care of her children and run the household mystifies her role and elevates her tasks. The home as the proper and idealized place of women still resonances into the present and the masterstory in particular. It still represents the center of a woman’s sphere in which she acts out her proper roles and tasks. The woman and the home have become such closely-nit entities that cannot be separated from each other.

3.4.1.3 The Feminine Mystique Confirming the Masterstory or The Desperate Housewife of the 1950’s

The ideal family of the 1950s was not as perfect on the inside as it appeared on the outside. Especially women who saw themselves confined to the home as their only proper sphere felt isolated and split. Although the image of the perfect family, living in the suburbs represented a moral fortress for society, gradually the façade began to crumble and the not so perfect family was revealed.

Gatlin (1987) argues that the post-war years “presented women with an ideal script against which they measured their performance” (7). The language used to describe women’s situation reveals that there existed a widespread image of an ideal woman, a “script” that is learned and enacted by women. A woman’s prior concern had to be to adhere to the script, one that was written by men. Betty Friedan, a journalist and author, coined the phrase “the feminine mystique” that refers to the social script “that women had to learn in order to be acceptable within the new suburban middle class”

(Campbell and Kean 212). Friedan was one of the first to articulate the disillusionment as perceived by American women who saw themselves entrapped in their restricted roles. At the beginning of the 1960s she examined the split that she herself as a mother of three experienced and gave it a name: “the problem that has no name” (Woloch 483 ff.). Friedan’s major point was that society offered and accepted only one fixed notion of a woman’s proper roles, as wife and mother, that was seen to lead to total fulfillment (Chafe, *American Woman* 227). To support her arguments, Friedan reviewed the works and theories of social and behavioral scientists and compiled interviews of suburban housewives and experts (Horowitz 200). Her findings demonstrated that reality overshadowed the “feminine mystique” and that a great number of women led a life of a “desperate housewife”, one that felt empty on the inside but had to pretend perfection on the outside.

Friedan’s book, *The Feminine Mystique* published in 1963, not only demonstrated women’s frustration in the suburbs but it also pointed to the reasons. Although the values governing the “feminine mystique” served patriarchal goals, the women also had their share in permeating the ideal image. She (Friedan qtd. in Woloch) explains that after World War II, a woman “trad[ed] in her individuality for security”, she continues that “[i]t is easier to live through husband and child [...] than to make a road of her own in the world” (Woloch 484). According to Friedan, women in part gave in to the ideal script and supported it due to the security of a home gained by the conservative life plan.

The purpose attributed to the conservative gender roles was that of social stability as sociologists attested. The family was based on a stable home that involved a working husband who contributed financially and a wife that stayed at home. Based on sociological studies, carried out by experts, such as, Lillian Rubin or Helena Z. Lopata, showed that “women have been socialized for mothering and housework, not for careers.” Their lives revolved around the household. Gatlin refers to Sheila Rowbotham who found that “paid work is something a woman might *do*, but the work of a housewife and mother is what she *is*” (Gatlin 50). This quote brings to the point what

motivates numerous women still today to take on traditional roles at home. Women saw in their roles in the house a way to define their identity. Identity construction is one of the major motivations also for the masterstory that is based on a conservative distribution of gender roles.

Betty Friedan's research carried out in suburban post-war America contributed vastly to the understanding of the 1950s scripts offered to women and the conditions that led to this outburst of traditional values. The split character of the middle class women's lives in the suburbs on the one hand describes the façade by questioning its fundamentals while on the other hand it confirms the argument posed in this thesis, that the blueprint of the masterstory was constructed in the post-war period. The motivations for women to lead a life in concordance with what Friedan named "the feminine mystique" are similar to those of women following the masterstory. It seems as if the desire for security as well as the identification with traditional roles also constitutes the attractiveness of the masterstory as the ideal life plan for American women.

3.4.2 The Mom and the Masterstory

Besides being a housewife, a woman following the masterstory also assumes the role of a mother or in America called "mom". This role is so essential to women that one might speak of it as an institution. Adrienne Rich (1986, *Of Woman Born*) identifies motherhood as an institution that is based on a woman's instinct of how to take care of her child. It is also referred to as a "sacred calling", given that it happens during marriage. With the words of a historian of the year 1910 a "woman is the embodied home, and the home is the basis of all institutions, the buttress of society" (42ff.). This view on motherhood suggests that there is no occupation as honorable and important to society than that of a mother taking care of her children. Being a mom in American society is seen as one of the most desirable duties fulfilled by women.

Going back in history to the aforementioned social developments fueled by the Industrial Revolution it can be seen that motherhood also experienced changes. While the pioneer mother and “working-mother” of the industrial age were both involved in the production work at home or in a factory, the nineteenth-century mother gradually resolved entirely to the home. The public claim for “full-time, exclusive motherhood” gains currency at the turn of the twentieth-century. The decline in family size and the technological progress further support the image of a full-time mom (Rich, *Of Woman Born* 44).

Another reason for the promotion of full-time motherhood was the assumption that mothers who stayed at home to raise their children were regarded as patriotic. This notion was based on the idea that women at home could spend extensive time on teaching their children the core values of society and therefore turning them into pious and respectable members of society (Rich, *Of Woman Born* 44). Motherhood came to symbolize patriotism one might argue and elevated a woman’s role in society. She not only raised her children but also thereby contributed her share to society.

Rosenberg (1992) states that for women giving birth presented “the ‘most satisfying moment’ in the lives of almost half the married women in a 1961 Gallup survey, and two-thirds rated motherhood the ‘chief joy of womanhood.’” Those views demonstrate that motherhood was the main focus of women in the post-war years. Their lives centered on their children. At this time common belief was that being a mother was a woman’s highest goal in life. Interestingly, also young prosperous and “well-educated” women embraced the importance of being a mom. Elaine May who conducted a study in the 1950s found that the main reason of why those educated women start families at an early age and become full-time mothers is they realized the limit to their professional careers. Although they held college and university degrees, those women were aware of the difficulties they would face as women on the labor market. The obvious alternative to the hardships of building up a career was to have children and be a mother (148 ff.).

This centrality of full-time motherhood mirrored in a phenomenon called “mom-ism.” It refers to an “excess of adoration” for children that compensates for a woman’s “emptiness” experienced in the limited sphere of the home. This kind of “mother worship” could be interpreted as additionally enforcing a woman’s role at home (Chafe, *The American Woman* 201). The mom represents to most Americans it seems the incarnation of care and home. Women as moms are wrapped up in family life and in fulfilling the daily routine of motherhood. Such tasks of a typical mother apart from basic household duties like preparing food include bringing the children to extracurricular activities and engaging in and planning school events. Those activities are regarded as “jobs” of a mother who manages her children like she manages the household. Her kids allow her to take up other roles outside the household that similarly contribute to her identity.

Women take up the role of mothers as they take up the role of wife and homemaker. They “have to somehow take up a place in it [symbolic order] if they want to function in the world at all. Women’s traditional place has been primarily to pass on the symbolic order, as mothers, to the next generation” (Lauret 99). Following this view, women simply have to fit into society and the scripts offered by it. The dominant version of a woman’s script is that of a mother who functions as communicating the order she embraces to her children. As a mother she serves the community to maintain and reconstruct culture day by day.

Rory Gilmore attends an exclusive school named Chilton that expects active parents’ involvement in school activities. Lorelai is not as active as a “Chilton mom” could be and as a result the headmaster recommends her to get involved in some of the numerable clubs offered to parents.

LORELAI. I have a file?

HEADMASTER. You most certainly do.

LORELAI. It’s tiny.

HEADMASTER. It’s very thin.

LORELAI. Well that’s good, right? It means I haven’t gotten into a lot of trouble.

HEADMASTER. On the contrary, a thin file for a parent indicates lack of participation.

[...]

HEADMASTER. Ms. Gilmore, active participation in Chilton activities for a parent is vitally important. (Season 2 Episode 7)

Rory's school asks parents to get involved and participate in clubs that organize fundraisers or other charity events in the name of the school. The school benefits from those activities as money is being raised and the moms set a positive example for their children when they engage in communal events. Emily shares this view and takes it for granted that mothers get involved in school activities. It is part of her notion of being a good mother, namely to become active in the children's school. Emily confronts Lorelai with this notion when she says "You are a grown up, you have to set an example. If she's not involved with school, then she learned it from you" (Season 2 Episode 7).

In addition to the obvious purpose of raising money for school, mothers are expected by society to set an example and participate in social affairs. Mothers who are role models for their children are responsible for teaching their offspring the values inherent in social events that serve the community. In the case of the masterstory the community regards social involvement as a key function for women. The title of the episode, *Like Mother, Like Daughter*, already alludes to the idea that a mother is expected to hand down the values attributed to her as a woman and mother. The social script of a mother following the masterstory asks women to teach their daughters a sense of communal responsibility and how she is expected to fit into her future role as a woman. Emily reminds her daughter about how natural it would be if she acted like an upper class mother is expected to do: "How nicely you seem to be fitting into the world that you ran away from" (Season 2 Episode 7). Fitting into the social script promoted by the masterstory is of primary importance for women.

With regard to the episode, the masterstory seems to maintain its set of ideas and values by having women acting as role models for their daughters. Women are not only expected to engage in charitable activities but also in

those supporting their children's schools. It seems to be viewed as a natural duty of mothers to actively participate in their children's lives including school.

3.4.3 The Charity Lady and the Masterstory

Already starting in the late nineteenth century, "women's associations" entered the scene. Those clubs focused on "civic affairs" and charity. Besides their social functions the associations most importantly "created a separate space for women in public life." The Women's clubs evolving at that time also served as institutions to train and educate women for the public domain. Middle and upper class women became members in clubs not only for the purpose of contributing to social endeavors but also to simply associate and communicate with peers. It allowed women to participate in public issues and still keep the domestic values. During the progressive era women engaged in social affairs since it was considered "a symbol of middle- and upper-class status" (Woloch 287-293). Up to the present it can be argued, women get involved in charitable activities as to signal that one can afford to work for the public. Conducting social work outside the home certainly shows that one has the time and money to care for society.

The groups that were formed largely in the progressive era also included "special interest groups" such as the Daughters of the American Revolution that still exists today and is mentioned in the *Gilmore Girls*. Their activities centered on "philanthropic work" but what all groups had in common was that they intended to serve women's interests. The rational and justification behind women who anticipated in community affairs was that in order to "serve the home, she must go beyond the home." The society as a whole was incorporated into her sphere of the home and family (Woloch 299).

As in former times as today, women are introduced to charity work and social service when they become a member of a college sorority. Woloch (1984) argues that sororities offered "practice in the types of social service

work appropriate for middle-class women” (405). The sorority among other things promoted social involvement to its members and acted as a training ground for organizing charity events. With regard to the present, social sororities, the ones centered predominantly on public social affairs, still cultivate virtues of compassion and community. They foster a feeling of social responsibility among young women who later might become involved in charities.

The 1950s ideal of a housewife as promoted by *Life* magazine mentions her social involvement when describing her daily routine: “In her daily round she attends club or charity meetings” (Woloch 496). It is part of her identity to organize charities and contribute to the community’s welfare.

For upper class women it represents a duty to be “patrons of culture and directors of social welfare projects.” Gatlin (1987) moreover points out that “[w]ealthy women maintain ‘elite’ culture by serving on the boards of trustees for museums and orchestras” (70). By taking on the roles of charity ladies, they ensure that what Gatlin refers to as “elite” values are transmitted to the next generation. After all, of course, events centering on “high” culture as for example art exhibitions or classical concerts, they reinforce the image of a middle class housewife that is educated and thrones above lower social classes.

Emily Gilmore, as an upper class wife who seems to represent the epitome of a woman living according to the scripts offered by the masterstory, understandably engages in charity events. Her active involvement in social affairs is illustrated in the passage beyond.

EMILY. I have been the co-chair of the Starlight Foundation for the last eight years.

RICHARD. I know this, Emily.

EMILY. And the Black and White Ball is the main fundraising event of the season.

RICHARD. It's one year.

EMILY. The co-chair cannot miss the main fundraising event.

RICHARD. Why? Won't the chair be there?

EMILY. Is this a joke to you?

RICHARD. Emily, I have too many things to take care of at work. I don't have time for frivolous parties.

EMILY. Frivolous parties? Friv. . .

[...]

[Reading from a stack of invitations]

EMILY. The Hartford Zoological Silent Auction, the Mark Twain House Restoration Fund luncheon, the Harriet Beecher Stowe Literacy Auction.

RICHARD. I can read those myself, you know.

EMILY. This is the fourth event you've taken upon yourself to turn down on our behalf. And I am on the board of all of those foundations. Now how do you think that makes me look?

RICHARD. Like your husband is busy and has a great deal of responsibility.

EMILY. Well, I have responsibilities too.

RICHARD. I understand that your social engagements are important.

EMILY. They're not just social engagements.

RICHARD. Anything at which you serve tea is a social engagement.
(Season 2 Episode 6)

The sequence about Emily and Richard's debate points to the role distribution in an upper class American society. While the husband works for a firm and appears to be stacked with work, the wife is involved in "social engagements." He is the one who is justifiably busy due to his heavy workload. Richard looks down on his wife's duties at home when he refers to them as "frivolous parties" being mere "social engagements" where tea is served. The husband's profession is associated with responsibility and being busy and is therefore elevated compared to the wife's occupation. He looks down at her community tasks and dismisses them as being parties but not

real work. The debate reveals the underlying power distribution in the family. It becomes obvious that the wife's duties are considered less important than the husband's who has to earn a living.

The masterstory supports the notion that a wife's primary duty is to take care of the family and its image in the public. Emily takes this responsibility endowed on her very seriously since she regards it as her contribution to a "perfect" family. A husband, however, has to cater for the family's materialistic well-being and assure an adequate lifestyle. According to the masterstory, he is only able to do that when his wife takes care of the family. The charity work is seen as a woman's contribution to the larger community in the name of the family. Apart from the positive image gained through charities, women can adopt other roles besides being a mother and housewife. Emily, for example, takes the role of a co-chair who organizes a fundraiser. Her sphere is extended to that of the public where she assumes managerial roles.

Emily, of course, also assumes the role of a charity lady since it symbolizes upper class status. It might be reasoned that only when constantly performing events connected to high social status, one is of high status. Having the materialistic resources and the time to engage in welfare makes it a noble endeavor. Women present their families as noble and caring ones who serve society. Engaging in welfare projects and community affairs, women not only serve the good cause but also the home by representing the family in a good light. As mentioned earlier, to serve the home she has to go beyond.

Another major function of women getting involved in charity that can be examined is their job for society. Wives being on the boards of various funds that seek to support such good causes as literacy or the arts, automatically maintain the highest values of society. The funds support social projects by organizing events to do, for instance, with art that reinforce values previously referred to as "elite." The charity lady as part of the masterstory, therefore, helps maintaining the values held by the dominant group in society. The masterstory proves, once again, to serve the dominant group of society.

3.4.4 The “Corporate Wife”

In the *Gilmore Girls* Lorelai calls her mother a “corporate wife” denoting her duties of organizing and managing parties to do with her husband’s business or family occasions. Emily has been organizing events for her husband and family throughout her marriage but when her husband’s business partner Jason takes over the planning, Lorelai defends her mother’s duties:

LORELAI: Jason, my mother is a corporate wife. Her job is putting these parties on, and you put her out of work. You know that, your mother does the same thing. Imagine if you took these functions away from her. What would she have left? (Season 4 Episode 6)

The term “corporate wife” combines the role of being a wife responsible for the husband and household with the role of a manager. A wife’s duties and tasks gain prestige when referring to them as corporate activities. Her work involving the organization of events and parties is equated with the professional work in a corporation. Women combine both spheres, the home and professional life. A “corporate wife” runs the household like a business adding to her role as mother and wife that of a professional. Her tasks function as meaning-giving activities that enable her to identify with a managerial woman as well as making her feel needed by the family.

Summing up, the role of a “corporate wife” as referred to by Lorelai demonstrates another role out of various ones that can be taken up by a woman. Those roles come with a certain script that is expected by society and offers an opportunity to construct one’s identity. On a general level the roles and tasks open to women who follow the masterstory give meaning to their lives. They are promoted by society since they embody the highest values and serve the community and its tradition.

4 Conclusion

The central argument of the thesis, that there is a social phenomenon called masterstory that refers to a distinct life plan typical for middle and upper class Americans, has been supported by the theories presented and the identification and analysis of various parts of the masterstory.

All three main branches of theories, narratology, collective memory and performance theory support the fact that the masterstory's main function is the production of meaning and ultimately the construction of identity. The distinct ordering of events, their timing and sequence define the masterstory as a distinct phenomenon observed in US culture.

According to the theory of collective memory, communities "write" a masterstory in order to ensure the survival of their core values that can be handed down from one generation to the other. The theory further accounts for the fact that numerous American women naturally follow the masterstory since it can be interpreted as an implicit procedural collective memory that is remembered sub-consciously by the community. Consequently it is deeply ingrained in people's minds and has a substantial impact on the individual's, as well as, the community's identity.

According to the theories of performance, culture is continually recreated by performances and the masterstory can be interpreted as one complex performance reproducing culture. Hence, it is of prime interest for a society to maintain its core values by the continuous performance of the same. US Americans are motivated to follow the masterstory and its proposed life course due to the identity roles offered to them. By performing the masterstory, identity is generated.

The analysis of various events in the course of an American women's life has contributed to the understanding of the masterstory's functions. The examination of events and roles has helped to uncover ideals and role models geared towards American women in the present. Some of those ideals and social scripts stem from the 1950's and form the base for the present version of the masterstory. What all events and roles being described have in common is that they revolve around the woman's relationship with

men. Either a woman is presented to society and potential future husbands at a debutant ball, engages in dating, gets married or simply is a wife, the definition of a woman's place in society and her identity is linked to men. Being conform to the masterstory promotes normalcy and acceptance in society. It is viewed as the blueprint for a happy and satisfying life.

A pressing argument of the masterstory is that it still exists and that it is not something archaic or a marginal phenomenon within American society. It is alive and well in present America as the illustrative sequences of the TV series *Gilmore Girls* show. The masterstory is intermingling in all aspects of life and shaping a woman's role and life cycle.

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7 Appendix

German Abstract

Die vorliegende Arbeit befasst sich mit dem Phänomen genannt „Masterstory“ welches den vorherbestimmten Lebenslauf US-amerikanischer Frauen beschreibt. Als Ausgangspunkt der Forschung diene die Beobachtung, dass zahlreiche junge Amerikaner aus der mittleren und oberen Schicht mit Selbstverständlichkeit einen scheinbar rituell bestimmten Lebensablauf folgen. Kurz nach dem Studium, so scheint es, heiraten viele Amerikaner aus der oberen sozialen Schicht. Was für manche Europäer allerdings am meisten hervorsticht sind das Selbstverständnis und die Bestimmtheit mit der viele Amerikaner diesen absehbaren Lebensablauf folgen. Diese Diplomarbeit widmet sich deshalb der Bestätigung der Existenz, den Charakteristiken sowie den Gründen warum die Masterstory in der US-amerikanischen Kultur soweit verbreitet ist.

Forschung im Bereich der Kulturwissenschaften, Soziologie und Anthropologie hinsichtlich einer kulturspezifischen Vorbestimmtheit des Lebenslaufs hatte zum Ergebnis, dass eine Forschungslücke in diesem Bereich besteht. Studien über die Ähnlichkeiten und Charakteristika der Lebensläufe innerhalb eines Kulturkreises, welche sich von anderen Kulturen unterscheiden fehlen. Daher erscheint es von besonderer Wichtigkeit die Lebensabläufe, deren typischer Ereignisse und Abfolge näher zu erforschen.

Der erste Teil der Diplomarbeit beschreibt das Phänomen der Masterstory in einem interdisziplinären Kontext der Kulturwissenschaft, im Besonderen der Narratologie und Soziologie. Nur ein interdisziplinärer Zugang, so wird argumentiert, ist in der Lage die Masterstory mit all ihren Facetten zu beschreiben und ihr Funktionieren in Teilen der amerikanischen Gesellschaft zu erklären.

Theorien im Bereich des kollektiven Gedächtnisses in Bezug auf die Masterstory lassen darauf schließen, dass Kulturen eine bevorzugte Lebensgeschichte „schreiben“ und bewerben, um die Weitergabe essenzieller Normen und Werte an die nächste Generation zu sichern.

Weiters kann die Masterstory als ein Ausdruck des implizit-kollektiv-prozeduralen Gedächtnisses interpretiert werden. Demnach wird erklärt warum amerikanische Frauen mit einem hohen Grad der Selbstverständlichkeit unbewusst die Masterstory realisieren. Da implizit-kollektiv-prozedurale Erinnerungen in den menschlichen Köpfen tief verwurzelt sind, erschließt sich so auch die Bedeutung der Masterstory für die Identität des Einzelnen als auch für die Gemeinschaft.

Neben dem kollektiven Gedächtnis bieten die kulturwissenschaftlichen Performanztheorien hilfreiche Konzepte und Erklärungen betreffend der Masterstory. Demzufolge wird Kultur ständig neu konstruiert durch Darstellungen wie beispielsweise der Durchführung der Masterstory. Eine Gesellschaft hat daher großes Interesse an der Erfüllung und Darstellung ihrer höchsten Werte, welche auf diesem Weg weiter tradiert werden. Die Motivation des Einzelnen die Masterstory zu erfüllen liegt auch begründet in den verschiedenen sozialen Rollen, die angeboten werden. Daraus kann geschlossen werden, dass durch die Auslebung der Masterstory Identität gestiftet wird, für den Einzelnen als auch für die Gemeinschaft.

Die Analyse einiger Ereignisse und sozialer Rollen welche mit dem Lebenslauf einer amerikanischen Frau der oberen Schicht assoziiert werden, gibt Einblick in die Funktionen der Masterstory. Bei näherer Betrachtung der einzelnen Ereignisse werden die vorherrschenden Ideale und Rollenvorstellungen der amerikanischen Gesellschaft dargelegt. Manche der aktuellen idealisierten Rollenbilder gehen zurück auf die 1950er Jahre. Alle haben gemein, dass sie durch die Beziehung zu einem Mann definiert sind. Ob Debutantin, eine junge Frau die sich verabredet oder eine Hausfrau, sie alle zeigen, dass der Platz einer Frau innerhalb der Gesellschaft und ihre Identität stark mit der eines Mannes verbunden sind. Die Masterstory suggeriert Normalität weil sie konform ist mit den Wertvorstellungen der Gesellschaft.

Abschließend kann festgestellt werden, dass die Masterstory als Modell eines erfüllten und gesellschaftlich akzeptierten Lebens in der heutigen US-amerikanischen Gesellschaft existiert und die Lebensgeschichten der Frauen beeinflusst.

Curriculum Vitae

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