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# Masculinities in Ruben Östlund's drama comedies

Master's thesis in Film- og medievitenskap

Supervisor: Julia Leyda

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## Abstract

In this thesis I will explore how Ruben Östlund depicts masculinities in his three drama comedies *Involuntary* (2008), *Force Majeure* (2014) and *The Square* (2017). Thus, for this thesis I will consider Scandinavian drama comedies as a regional cinematic category, while I investigate whether Östlund's drama comedies conform to Anglophone postfeminist theories. I will focus on finding distinctive patterns of masculine representations in three of Ruben Östlund's comedy dramas. In order to analyse contemporary films in terms of their representations of gender, I will explore some of the most prominent English-language theories of postfeminism in recent years, particularly those dealing with masculinity. However, the case studies that usually accompany this research are primarily US or other Anglophone in origin. Thus, I will investigate ways to transfer these theories into the quite different Scandinavian context, seeking to formulate a theory appropriate to this cultural context.

## Sammendrag

Denne masteroppgaven tar for seg hvordan Ruben Östlund skildrer ulike maskuliniteter i sine tre dramakomedier *De Ufrivillige* (2008), *Turist* (2014) og *The Square* (2017). I denne sammenhengen representerer disse filmene den skandinaviske kulturen og skandinaviske normer samlet, og som grunnlag for å analysere skildringer av skandinaviske maskuliniteter. Internasjonalt blir Skandinavia sett på som en region som har kommet langt i utviklingen av likestilling mellom kjønn. Jeg vil redegjøre for ulike engelskspråklige postfeministiske teorier, hovedsakelig britiske og amerikanske, som tar for seg begrepet maskulinitet og hvordan fremstilling av denne har utviklet seg i populærkulturen i nyere tid. Deretter vil jeg anvende disse teoriene og undersøke i hvilken grad Östlund's representasjoner av skandinaviske maskuliniteter skiller seg fra, eller stemmer overens med dem.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Julia Leyda, for her invaluable guidance and support throughout this research.

Additionally, I would like to thank my daughters, Julia and Ellinor, who have made me stop and think about other things than Scandinavian men and their masculinities.





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# 1 INTRODUCTION

*Contrary to what it seems, comedy was in reality the most serious genre in Hollywood – in the sense that it reflected through the comic mode the deepest moral and social beliefs of American life (André Bazin, in Truffaut, 2013: 32).*

## 1.1 DRAMA COMEDIES AS A SERIOUS FILM GENRE

More than seventy years later Bazin's quote is still relevant. Comedy depicts moral standards and social beliefs and critically discusses social challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in Scandinavia as well as in Hollywood. Without exception, Ruben Östlund's drama comedies *Involuntary* (2008), *Force Majeure* (2014) and *The Square* (2017) depict realistic human relationships and reveal the characters' ethical dilemmas, social views and moral standards through their attitudes and actions. Drama comedies often make fun of, and laugh at incidents and possible situations from reality and they have a different approach than more solemn feature films that treat serious topics or political matters. Thus, films within the comedy genre can be thought-provoking and function as relevant examinations of social structures and cultural norms.

Ryan Bishop writes in *Comedy and Cultural Critique in American Film*:

Aristotle asserts that a child becomes 'human' when s/he laughs because the child understands a specific combination of reality and fantasy, an awareness of rules, codes, values and the Law, and the pleasure derived from the imagination and creativity to manipulate them. The child's laughter emerges from the deep pleasure and giddy insight that the order of the world can be otherwise, which becomes the basis for critical engagement with it (Bishop, 2013: 9).

Aristotle's assertion corresponds well with Östlund's drama comedy narratives. Östlund's films combine reality and fantasy as he manipulates social codes and twists and turns human ideals and social norms with his exaggerated representations of Scandinavian society. Thus, he makes the film's audience laugh when they see the characters' often absurd and awkward choices of action. The depicted character's attitudes and attributes offer sources for critical engagement with the current Scandinavian society structures, as the audience considers whether Östlund's depictions reflect possible situations from reality. Östlund's drama comedies are ambiguous in their arguments, with narratives that depict several ethical rights and wrongs at the same time, depending on its audience's convictions. Hilary Radner adds the following:

In many ways, cinema is perhaps the most logical arena in which to analyse dominant trends in popular thought, because feature-length films provide a dense articulation of the contemporaneous discursive formations in which a film participate – formations that it may reproduce, modify and critique (Radner, 2011: 2).

I chose Östlund's films because I find that his depictions of Scandinavian societies are honest and realistic representations that explain the complexity of gender equality issues. His films initiate debates concerning gender equality, power relations and class issues. Instead of narratives with simple, single-tracked solutions, he creates intricate

and highly political storylines as he depicts 21<sup>st</sup> century everyday life in Scandinavia, although by portraying situations that are exaggerated to emphasize his points. Nevertheless, Östlund's ambiguous narratives correspond with my aim to address Scandinavian gender issues, and explore reasons for different kinds of male behavior, with an unbiased and open mind.

My aim with this thesis is to render more intelligible some of the structures that shape and form masculinity, from the perspective of Scandinavia with its well-known gender equality achievements. Accordingly, I will seek to broaden the understandings of why achieving gender equality still appears to be a complicated matter, even in Scandinavia. Thus, I have chosen to focus on Östlund's odd depictions of masculinities in his three drama comedies, from different perspectives of class and power- and gender relations.

I emphasize contemporary challenges of Scandinavian gender equality through Östlund's depictions of masculinities. With his three drama comedies Östlund depicts and criticizes tendencies of unequal power relations within different areas in society, and these power relations, I will argue, often appear as gendered. I analyze Östlund's various depictions of masculinities as a contribution to postfeminist theories, but from a Scandinavian culture, since a limited number of scholarly theories depict masculinities from this viewpoint. Thus, through Östlund's many-sided depictions of masculinities, I take one of the first steps to analyze films that depict Scandinavian social norms and society structures shaping Scandinavian masculine identities. I value Östlund's drama comedies as important contributions to the contemporary gender equality debates. Apparently, Östlund does not "take sides", but he rather examines various challenges of masculinity and gender equality issues. The questions these films raise, I will argue, are useful for further reflections on gender equality issues in general and masculinities in particular.

Östlund's films, I will argue, reflect current norms and values in the Scandinavian society through their comic mode. In all of his drama comedies, I find that the male characters struggle to find an innate position in their daily lives, or satisfactorily adapt to the construction of their own society. Thus, in this thesis I examine the way in which Östlund depicts various situations that lead up to their struggles. In her book *Slow Motion. Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* Lynne Segal writes: "From the sex-role theories of the fifties to the studies of gender and power in the eighties, the psychology of men has increasingly come to be seen as one fraught with strain and crisis" (1990: 2). She believes that "there is an understanding of the *differences* between men which is central for the struggle for change" (ibid). Therefore, she approaches the issue of men's depicted struggles by examining 'masculinities' rather than 'masculinity'.

Accordingly, Östlund's films, as social satires, point at various approaches of perceiving a variety of masculinities in Scandinavia alongside several imbricated social structures, such as power relations and class distinctions. Östlund makes an observant interpretation of different masculinities through Scandinavian culture and social life, inspiring his audience to social engagement and debate. Hence, Östlund's drama comedies contribute to reveal and criticize common attitudes and moral standards in Scandinavia with regard to masculinities and gender equality. Thus, I argue that his films serve as an appropriate point of departure to explore the pluralities of masculinities from a Scandinavian perspective.

Nevertheless, as Raewyn Connell argues in her book *Masculinities*: "No masculinity arises except in a system of gender relations" (1995: 71). She continues by emphasizing that relations "organized through the reproductive arena" form a major structure in society (ibid: 72). Further, she argues that practices that relate to this structure "[do]

not consist of isolated acts" (ibid). "Actions are configured in larger units", she argues, and that "when we speak of masculinity and femininity we are naming configurations of gender practice" (ibid). Likewise, gender relations are also a lens through which to interpret Östlund's films as I analyze his depictions of masculinities. Thus, representations of both male and female characters are important when analyzing the masculine identities depicted in his films. Östlund's drama comedies meditate upon relevant 21<sup>st</sup>-century gender issues as it plays out everyday situations that consider social structures that shape the male and female identities, in addition to the structures of power relations. Hence, in this thesis I will examine the way in which Östlund's drama comedies reflect Scandinavian masculinities through his depictions of male characters and their relations.

As a starting point, I will draw comparisons between postfeminist theories, which primarily depend on examples from the depictions of masculinities in American and British culture, with Östlund's depictions and representations of masculinities in Scandinavia. Additionally, I will make use of theories that apply to social structures, such as patriarchy and capitalism, and explore how they influence masculine identities. Most of the postfeminist theories on masculinities, and the films they refer to, have a cultural viewpoint that differs from the Scandinavian culture. In "Kjønn og makt i Norden – tolkninger og forklaringsforsøk», Øistein Gullvåg Holter and Elisabet Rogg emphasize that as the Nordic countries are ahead in the international development of gender equality, both opportunities and barriers become more visible. To understand these better is important with regard to gender and social disparity in general, they argue (2010: 113). Thus, Östlund's films that depict Scandinavian societies, serve as relevant examples to expand the pre-existent broad spectra of definitions of masculine identities.

I agree that it is crucial to have knowledge of the current gender equality achievements in Scandinavia, from male and female perspectives, to have a say in relevant contemporary gender issue debates. It is crucial to be able to relate to historical changes, legislations and developments in society, to better understand the actual state of Scandinavian gender equality with its current norms and traditions. Additionally, knowledge about masculinities and gender equality in Scandinavia will make it possible to compare it with other cultures in the western world. Thus, I will argue, that emphasizing representations of masculinity in contemporary Scandinavian films will identify opportunities and barriers in the Scandinavian society due to gender.

In addition to being relatively similar social welfare states, the similar languages in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway make it possible for the films' actors to speak their own language and the Scandinavian audiences to understand. Thus, for this thesis I will consider Scandinavian drama comedies as a regional cinematic category, while I investigate how Östlund's drama comedies differ from or reflect contemporary Anglophone postfeminist theories. In these ways, I account for historical and political or cultural differences when I analyze these Scandinavian films. The actors in the three films examined in this thesis represents all the three Scandinavian countries, as the main male protagonist in *The Square* is Danish, and several of the main characters in *Force Majeure* are Norwegian.

In the following chapter, 'Scandinavian Lads', I compare Östlund's male characters in *Involuntary* with the notions of the theorized soft and caring "New Man" of the 1970s and 1980s, and the 1990s pubescent, misogynistic "New Lad" as the main sources of comparison. Subsequently, in the third chapter, I compare Östlund's depictions of Scandinavian fathers in *Force Majeure* with Hannah Hamad's (2014) and Martina Martausová's (2017) theories on contemporary Hollywood fatherhood films. Furthermore, in chapter four, I will use Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) theories of capital to demonstrate how

patriarchal structures and power relations in *The Square* affect the identities depicted, in addition to make use of postfeminist theories to supplement my analysis on masculine identities. Finally, in chapter five, I reflect on the masculinities depicted in all the three films and apply Doreen Massey's theories that emphasize the importance of 'relations' from her article "Geographies of Responsibility" (2004).

## 1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In my thesis I focus on finding distinctive patterns of masculine representations in three of Ruben Östlund's comedy dramas. In order to analyze contemporary films in terms of their representations of gender, I explore some of the most prominent English-language theories of postfeminism in recent years, particularly those dealing with masculinity. However, the case studies that usually accompany this research are primarily US or other Anglophone in origin. Thus, I investigate ways to transfer these theories into the relatively different Scandinavian context, seeking to formulate a theory appropriate to this cultural context. My research questions are as follows:

**What are the most prominent features in the representation of Scandinavian masculinities in Östlund's drama comedies? Moreover, how does this differ from, or conform to, British and American theories and analyses of masculinities in the era of postfeminism?**

## 1.3 ÖSTLUND'S FILMS – EMBARRASSING MOMENTS AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Several of Östlund's films discuss morality and ethical dilemmas, questioning different social behaviors or preferred lifestyles. These films often present situations with several contradictory possible solutions, using characters with a somewhat bizarre and unconventional attitude and with exaggerated emotional outbursts, making the audience laugh as they find the scenes funny yet recognizable, or, rather, funny because it is recognizable, considering the above-mentioned Aristotle quote.

Thus, a hallmark of Östlund's films is the ambiguous depiction of Scandinavian people, their behaviors, and the structures of different areas in Scandinavian society. His three drama comedies depict, inter alia, troubled relationships between adolescent male friends in rural Swedish districts in *Involuntary*, a troubled Scandinavian father on vacation with his family in *Force Majeure*, and finally, an art curator managing his position within the powerful patriarchal elite in the city-center of the Swedish capitol in *The Square*. Östlund's films challenge Scandinavian gender equality with his films as he depicts societies that do not reflect Scandinavia's good reputation of gender equality. At the same time, his films also contradict classical Hollywood narratives as he critically depicts social norms and social structures, rather than making fairy-tale stories with its heroic male characters, wonderful father figures, and its happy endings. His films are ambiguous in the sense that the audience must make the difficult decisions on which side of the conflicts, or with which characters, that are the most or the least sympathetic. His ambiguity is appropriate, I argue, as he depicts environments that are not black or white, emphasizing that there are few easy answers to the complex social structures he portrays.

Östlund engages his audiences by debating realistic political issues in a rather critical manner. His films ask several relevant society topical questions concerning equality and morality in society. Thus, he encourages the audience to reflect on and stimulate the urge to discuss different ethical dilemmas. For example, what is an acceptable adolescent male attitude, as depicted in *Involuntary*, and how much sympathy and understanding does a lying husband deserve in *Force Majeure*? Finally, how much

charity would be enough to pay for your disrespectful prejudiced behavior in *The Square*? Östlund does not in any particular manner clearly answer the questions he raises, and he does not appear as moralistic, but the controversy in his plots creates exciting approaches to the complexity of Scandinavian culture concerning topics such as gender equality, class, welfare and masculine behavior.

Over the last fifteen years Östlund has received much attention for his films, both in Scandinavia and internationally. He has become a well-respected and well-known director, with access to famous actors such as Elisabeth Moss known from, inter alia, *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-2019), Dominic West from *The Wire* (2002-2008), *The Affair* (2014-2019), and Kristofer Hivju known from, among others, *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019). Östlund has acquired a prominent voice, and many see his humoristic representations of Scandinavian societies and its people. *Involuntary* was nominated for the Un Certain Regard Award in Cannes Film Festival in 2008, of which *Force Majeure* won in 2014. In 2017 *The Square* won the prestigious Palm D'or prize at Cannes. Moreover, Östlund's films have received many prizes and nominations at various film festivals around the world.

#### 1.4 DEFINITIONS OF MASCULINITIES

In the following I have chosen to use Raewyn Connell's theory from her book *Masculinities* (1995) to account for various theorized definitions of masculinity. She writes that:

'Masculinity' is not a coherent object about which a generalizing science can be produced. Yet we can have coherent knowledge about the issues raised in these attempts. If we broaden the angle of vision, we can see masculinity, not as an isolated object, but as an aspect of a larger structure (Connell, 1995: 67).

Connell's assertion is important for this thesis. Hence, while I analyze masculinities in Östlund's drama comedies I remain cognizant of depictions of the Scandinavian societies that shape the characters' identities and the influence of cultural norms and social structures.

Connell argues that "definitions of masculinity have mostly taken our cultural standpoint for granted, but have followed different strategies to characterize the type of person who is masculine" (1995: 68). Thereafter, she refers to four main strategies that have been used to describe masculinity. The first is the essentialist definition that describes men as risk-taking, responsible, or irresponsible and active. I demonstrate how Östlund depicts some of the the male protagonists as risk-taking and irresponsible. Nevertheless, as Connell argues, the obvious weakness of this approach is that the choice of the essence is arbitrary.

The second definition originates in positivist social science, Connell argues, and views "men as a 'bloc' and women as a 'bloc'" (1995: 69). This definition is prominent in *Force Majeure*, as Östlund discusses differences between motherhood and fatherhood. In this sense, Connell writes, "The terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' point beyond categorical sex difference to the ways men differ among themselves, and women differ among themselves, in matter of gender" (ibid).

Further, the third definition Connell refers to is the normative one, which claims that "masculinity is what men ought to be" (1995: 70). This definition of masculinity is conspicuous in *Involuntary*, as Östlund depicts male characters that struggle to behave according to the expectations of their local environments. Connell refers to "Robert

Brannon's widely quoted account of 'our culture's blueprint of manhood'" (ibid.), and argues that role and identity correspond.

Finally, Connell points to the semiotic approaches that emphasize a symbolic difference. In this sense, "masculinity is, in effect, defined as not-femininity" (1995: 70). "In the semiotic opposition of masculinity and femininity, masculinity is the unmarked term, the place of symbolic authority. The phallus is master-signifier, and femininity is symbolically defined by lack" (ibid.), an assertion that conforms to the patriarchal notions that describe men as more rational and reasonable than women, which is prominent in Östlund's depictions of masculine identities in *The Square*.

Further, Connell writes that "Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (1995: 77). She continues by saying, "'Hegemonic masculinity' is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable" (1995: 76). This final assertion is crucial as I analyze Östlund's differing depicted masculinities from several different viewpoints of the Scandinavian culture.

## 1.5 POSTFEMINISM

Postfeminist theories are useful as a basis for analyzing depictions of masculinities and gender relations in Östlund's drama comedies, since it reflects on and critiques earlier forms of gender representations. In their book *Interrogating Postfeminism. Gender and the Politics of popular Culture* (2007) Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra write that:

Postfeminism broadly encompasses a set of assumptions, widely disseminated within popular media forms, having to do with the "pastness" of feminism, whether that supposed pastness is merely noted, mourned, or celebrated. Crucially for us, postfeminism suggests a more complex relationship between culture, politics, and feminism than the more familiar framing of "backlash" allows (2007: 1).

They further contend that: "Postfeminism displaces older forms of trivialization, generating a sense of newness, yet it also refreshes long familiar themes of gendered representation, demonstrating the ongoing urgency of speaking feminist critique" (2007: 22). Östlund's drama comedies support Tasker and Negra's assertion and emphasize the relevance of critically depicting masculine identities, gender relations, and the structures they are influenced of.

Rosalind Gill addresses contemporary gender equality issues in her article "Post-postfeminism?: new feminist visibilities in postfeminist times" (2016). In agreement with Negra and Tasker (2007), she emphasizes the importance of feminist critique by epitomizing gender equality issues in present-day British culture, and argues that:

There has also been an outpouring of feminist rage about everything from "lad culture" on university campuses, to female genital cutting, to the gender composition of our democratic institutions. Questions about gender inequality suffuse the mediated public sphere: on any given day, in the UK at least, there will be news stories about instances of sexual harassment, inequalities in pay, the gender make-up of company boards or political parties, the sexualized treatment

of female celebrities, the "confidence gap" between girls and boys, etc. (Gill, 2016: 614).

Gill describes the British culture with her assertion above. Nevertheless, as I demonstrate, several similar stories of gender inequality as those mentioned above appear, in some extent, in Östlund's depictions of Scandinavian gender relations. Furthermore, Negra and Tasker emphasize that the gender equality enacted in contemporary media culture is limited, and they argue that:

...such a limited vision of gender equality as both achieved and yet still unsatisfactorily underlines the class, age and racial exclusion that define postfeminism and its characteristic assumptions that the themes, pleasures, values and lifestyles with which it is associated are somehow universally shared and, perhaps more significant, universally accessible (Negra and Tasker, 2007: 2).

Negra and Tasker's assertion, I contend, are also still relevant in Scandinavian cultures, as demonstrated by the affluent family in *Force Majeure*, the insecure Scandinavian 'lads' in *Involuntary*, and the class and race issues depicted in *The Square*. Hence, in this thesis I demonstrate how Östlund's drama comedies call attention to the fact that these concerns are still present, even in a more gender-equal society such as Scandinavia.

**Key words:** masculinities, postfeminism, gender equality, culture, norms, 'laddism', fatherhood, male heroes, patriarchy, capitalism, self-confidence, relations.



## 2 SCANDINAVIAN LADS: A LONELY PURSUIT OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will make use of David Hansen-Miller's and Rosalind Gill's theories in their essay "Lad Flicks': Discursive Reconstructions of Masculinity in Popular Film" (in Radner and Stringer, 2011), Rosalind Gill's descriptions of the 'New Man' and the 'New Lad' in her essay "Power and the production of subjects: a genealogy of the New Man and the New Lad" (in Benwell, 2003), in addition to Benjamin Brabon's theories on what he describes as the postfeminist male singleton (PMS) in his essay "Chuck Flick: A Genealogy of the Postfeminist Male Singleton" (in Gwynne and Muller, 2013). Thus, in this chapter I will compare Östlund's depictions of Scandinavian masculinities in *Involuntary* (2008) with postfeminist theories describing constructions of male attitudes in the US and the UK, mainly through the notions of the 1970s and 1980s "New Man" and the 1990s "New Lad". I will seek to determine whether there is a similar change in the depicted Scandinavian masculinities, and I search for depictions of 'laddish' behavior. Thus, in this chapter, I demonstrate some of the ways in which Östlund's depictions of Scandinavian male characters differ from or conform to the notion of the 'New Lad', and simultaneously, I investigate whether the Scandinavian male characters depicted resemble to the 'New Man'.

The main theme in this original drama comedy centers on its characters' risk of being an outcast, or a misfit, and their lack of control of behaving according to what is expected, both from their female and from their male relationships. Nevertheless, the depicted struggles indicate that the expectations and definitions of masculinity are unclear. Rather than being a critique of 'laddish' behaviour *Involuntary* might as well function as a critique of a prejudiced or inhibited Scandinavian culture. This is evident through the male characters' embarrassment of talking openly about their needs and desires. As an example, male characters depicted in *Involuntary* struggle to talk about their sexual preferences, both with their closest male friends and with their spouses. Apparently, these male characters are afraid to be questioned about, inter alia, their sexual orientation, indicating that they do not know whether their behaviors conform to the cultural norms of their society.

Östlund depicts the struggle of loneliness as the heart of the *Involuntary* narrative. Nevertheless, all the male characters depicted are not alone, as such, but lonely in dealing with their struggles. The fact that the characters are lonely is not specifically outspoken, but is implied by the situations he depicts, where the male protagonists become outcasts because of their attitudes and appearances, in addition to a lack of communication. I demonstrate this through the analysis of three sequences, or "chapters", in the film. The first depicts the newly dumped bus driver in his mid-thirties, Henrik (Henrik Vikman). Initially he appears to be satisfied with the circumstances of his life, but eventually, it is obvious that this satisfaction is somewhat artificial. He acts like a stubborn and bitter crab, but he does not appear to want to admit that he is experiencing a difficult time. Instead, he turns all his passengers against him by overreacting when a curtain rod is broken at the bus's toilet and refuses to drive further before the person who did it confesses. The second story depicts a scene with a lone man in a subway car being bullied by a group of drunken teenage girls. In this sequence the depictions of the girls' attitudes towards the young man is crucial to better understand societies influence on contemporary masculinities. Finally, I analyze a scene that depicts a young man struggling to get along with his childhood friends at a cabin party. Apparently, their

relations have changed as they grew older, and their identities are developing in different directions.

## 2.2 A HISTORY OF CHANGING MASCULINITIES

In her essay "Power and the production of subjects: a genealogy of the New Man and the New Lad" Rosalind Gill writes that although "there have been many other different attempts to label and classify masculinities, none have had the staying power of 'new man' and 'new lad', or their ability to capture or speak to changes in the landscape of gender" (Gill, 2003: 36). These two figures, she points out, have become recognizable stereotypes in the UK. She moreover states that the 'New Man' is characterized as a sensitive man. Additionally, she emphasizes that he is respectful of women and emotionally aware. The 'New Lad', on the contrary, is described as quite the opposite of the 'New Man', with his misogynist and pubescent behaviour.

Gill describes the 'New Lad' as "hedonistic, post- (if not anti) feminist, and pre-eminently concerned with beer, football and 'shagging' women" (ibid: 37). She emphasizes that the impact of feminism is crucial to understand the figure of the 'New Man', as the criticism of hegemonic masculinity gave rise to a more emotional and caring masculinity. Further, she writes that some feminists "sought to deconstruct some of the binary ways of thinking that constructed masculinity as rational and instrumental against emotional and relational femininity" (ibid: 42). Thereafter Gill explains how the 'New Lad' attitudes became examples of "a refuge from the constraints and demands of marriage and nuclear family. He opened up a space of fun, consumption and sexual freedom for men, unfettered by traditional adult male responsibilities" (ibid: 47). Further, she points out that:

As Peter Jackson, Nick Stevenson, and Kate Brooks (2001) point out, however, it would be a mistake to read 'new lad' only in terms of a backlash against feminism. They draw on Barbara Ehrenreich's analysis of the success of Playboy magazine to argue that new lad's individualistic, hedonistic, pleasure-seeking attitude must also be understood as a reaction to and rebellion against the figure of the male as 'breadwinner' and family provider (see also Segal, 1990) (ibid).

Nevertheless, the male characters in *Involuntary* are not depicted as men that are predominantly pleasure-seeking, but rather, as young men with troubled thoughts who are insecure of what they want, and on how to behave. Thus, the masculinities depicted in *Involuntary* do not unconditionally conform to the misogynist 'New Lad', but, as I will demonstrate, they do differ from the respectful 'New Man', and several of the male characters are depicted as reluctant to accept their female protagonists' empowerment. Nevertheless, with the sequence depicting a lone man harassed by teenage girls Östlund accentuates a different trajectory. In this sequence the female characters are the ones who behave disrespectfully towards an innocent man. Thus, Östlund depicts a society where the characters' behaviour depends on various elements such as age, maturity, personality, culture and relations, in addition to gender. Thus, this sequence illustrates the way Östlund emphasizes the current environment's impact on masculine identities.

Hansen-Miller and Gill write that in lad flicks "masculinity itself is the central object". These films, they argue, portray "masculinity as an object of humour" (2011: 36). They argue that "the source of dramatic tension and humor is the protagonists' struggle with competing of what it means to be a man and their own ability to live up to that category" (ibid). Östlund's *Involuntary* correspond well with the confused men

Hansen-Miller and Gill describe, and he depicts a society in his drama comedy narrative that portrays the male characters' insecurity of how to behave appropriately and in accordance with their culture's expectations of them. Scandinavian male characters appear to be vulnerable, but they are not especially generous in sharing their feelings. This indicates that Scandinavian men keep their troubled thoughts to themselves rather than asking for help. The portrayed male characters do not know how men are expected to behave, which, apparently, leads to psychological struggles and inappropriate behaviour. Hansen-Miller and Gill describe the 'lad flick' as a film genre that reveals an "ongoing transformation in popular understandings of laddishness and contemporary masculinity" (ibid: 39). "The contemporary lad flick", they point out, "combines different genre elements to focus specifically on the interpersonal difficulties facing contemporary masculinity" (ibid). In this sense, I will argue, *Involuntary* can be defined as a 'Lad Flick', with its meditation of both 'laddish' behaviour and contemporary Scandinavian masculinities.

Further, Hansen-Miller and Gill write that "lad flicks can be thought of as a hybrid of "buddy movies", "romantic comedies", and "chick flicks" that center on the trials and tribulations of a young man or men as they grow up and make their way in the world" (ibid: 36). They propose that lad flicks not only depict laddish behavior, but they also meditate upon it. This, I argue, is in line with Östlund's *Involuntary* as he, in addition to depicting the male characters behaviour, aims to discuss different social norms and relations revealing how it feels to be a young man in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Scandinavia. Thus, he does not merely criticize the male characters' behavior but aims to understand the underlying reasons for their troubled appearance.

In his essay "Chuck Flick: A Genealogy of the Postfeminist Male Singleton" Benjamin A. Brabon criticizes Hansen-Miller and Gill's "reading of the postfeminist connotations of twenty-first-century masculinity for being 'largely underdeveloped'" (Brabon, 2013: 116). He continues by classifying it as being "limited to pre-feminist, backlash scenarios that situate the single man within the milieu of media panic about male achievement and men's inability to take up their roles as husband/father/provider" (ibid). He criticizes Hansen-Miller and Gill for requiring men to "put aside childish things and join the adult heterosexual world" (ibid). Nevertheless, his reading of their arguments, I argue, is insufficient. Hansen-Miller and Gill's essay on 'lad flicks' is less single-tracked than Brabon asserts as he disregards their assertion that the 'lad flicks' are "ambivalent about this" (2011: 47).

Nevertheless, Brabon moves away from the notion of the lad, as such, with its connotations to adolescent or childish behavior, and rather compares depictions of masculinity with the 1990s singleton woman and refers to characters such as Bridget Jones and Ally McBeal as examples. Thus, he chooses to focus on the postfeminist single man in films that he labels as 'Chuck Flicks' instead of 'Lad Flicks' (Brabon, 2013: 116). He is cautious of using the term 'New Lads' when he examines depictions of contemporary masculinities. All the same, he mentions that the postfeminist male singletons have some of the attributes of the 'New Lad'. Brabon is critical of the notion of "a crisis in masculinity". He rather searches for depictions of male behaviour through what he characterizes as the 'Postfeminist Male Singleton'. Economic instability, he argues, is one of the reasons for the new identities of men. Brabon emphasizes how social and economic pressures affect the Postfeminist Male Singleton. Thus, he argues that "the PMS questions a number of social, cultural and economic expectations and norms that link the successful construction and performance of gender with the interlocking systems of capitalism and patriarchy" (ibid: 117). He states that the PMS "is defined by his problematic relationship with the ghost of hegemonic masculinity" (ibid).

Additionally, he argues that progressive male subject positions are haunted by the threat of backlash and invocations of older forms of masculinity are re-signified by pro-feminist interventions. Thus, it appears that several conflicting theories address characterizations of contemporary masculinities, which then again underlines the struggles of knowing how to behave as masculine.

Brabon asserts that "in his initial manifestations, the 'new man' is conceived as nurturing and responsive to the demands of feminism. Where the bachelor of the 1950s and 1960s was self-centred and pleasure seeking, this 1970s version of the 'new man' is ostensibly sensitive, compassionate and family-focused" (ibid: 120). Further, he writes that the 'New Man'

had a destructive and divisive impact upon men simply because he marked a proliferation of male subject positions – many of which were unobtainable for the majority of men – and an expansion of a rhetoric of choice that served to destabilize hegemonic forms of masculinity that had historically been represented as static and unquestionably singular (ibid: 120).

In accordance to Brabon's quote above, the sensitive 'New Man' seems to be difficult, or not of interest, to live up to for several of the Scandinavian characters depicted in *Involuntary*. They seem to be used to a hegemonic position and are surprised when their female protagonists challenge this. Thus, Brabon points out that 21<sup>st</sup>-century postfeminist masculinities are hybrids of earlier forms of theorized masculinities, such as the 1950s hedonistic 'bachelor', the 1970s 'new man' with "his increasing sense of anxiety and crisis" (2013: 120), and the objectified 'metrosexual' with his sensual appearance, fashion interest and sexual orientation. The postfeminist man, he argues, can be thought of as "a melting pot" of earlier forms of described masculinities (ibid: 117).

### 2.3 AN UNCONVENTIONAL DRAMA COMEDY

Östlund's *Involuntary* (2008) is a drama comedy with a rather distinctive form. The film differs from Hollywood's classical genre conventions of story telling as it is constructed on five different scenarios that present a completely different set of characters at different locations. Thus, the film's different short-story's "chapters" have no clear connection in the fictional universe but rather share a common theme mediated to its audience's universe. Thus, it serves as an example of a film that communicates with its audience without being one continuous narrative. At the same time the film corresponds with several of the theories about 'Lad Flicks', not because of its form, but rather because it makes humor out of male behavior and meditates upon Scandinavian masculinity as a troubled category. This unconventional drama comedy presents several comparable scenarios within the same film. Ostensibly, these different short stories have no connection in the film's discourse, but each follows its own chronology and causality, despite the fact that the quite different scenes and settings are switching between one another. Nevertheless, all these different stories combined produce a complete universe of characters that represent various dilemmas in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Scandinavian (or Swedish) countryside.

This "collection-of-short-stories" drama comedy depicts many awkward and embarrassing situations. In the *Involuntary* narrative, small issues that, in principle, are irrelevant are emphasized and receive a disproportionate amount of attention. Examples include the fear of admitting it is your fault that you broke a curtain rod in the bus's

bathroom, or, being too stubborn to admit you actually were hurt when the New-Year's Eve fireworks went off, after being foolish enough to go closer to examine what could be wrong with it, despite everyone's warnings. Östlund has a special ability to transform such small issues into important political or moral issues.

The film has a naturalistic appearance, with shots of long duration within the sequences, naturalistic lighting and characters with casual make-up and costumes, which creates a realistic form that makes it easy to forget that this is fiction film. Thus, the film style emphasizes the impression of a film that attempts to communicate with and increase its audiences' social and political engagement. *Involuntary* presents different conflicts between the characters. When these conflicts escalate they reveal the male characters' underlying struggles. Thus, the film presents different yet shared collective stories of the struggle to naturally blend into their current environment in an adequate or expected manner. In *Involuntary* masculinity is posited as a troubled category, depicted through several male characters in various settings.

The male characters in *Involuntary* are depicted as insecure in their relations to women, or they lack interest in contributing in their relations to women. Nevertheless, they do have some similar attributes to the above-mentioned theorized lad characters, for example, pubescent behaviour such as that of the 'new lad', and they do not want to take responsibility as grown-up men do. However, do they represent a backlash to feminism by showing misogynistic behaviour? In some ways, I argue, their attitude may be depicted as misogynistic, but not to the extent of the theorized postfeminist descriptions of 'New Lads'. Östlund's male characters' misogynist behaviour is not clearly outspoken, but it is rather depicted by their 'laddish' reluctance to adjust their attitudes towards a more gender-equal society.

Nevertheless, the male characters in *Involuntary* seem fragile and unable to stand up for themselves. The male characters may seem fragile and insecure because the female characters in *Involuntary* are depicted as confident, smart, and convincing (especially in their relations to men). In the *Involuntary* narrative the female characters are portrayed as more powerful and more efficient than the male characters, which may make the male characters feel intimidated. As I demonstrate, the male characters' 'laddish' behaviors in *Involuntary* seem to be held in check, to some extent, by their confident and liberated female protagonists. This conforms to Brabon's (2013) assertion that new masculinities occur due to a change in the economic independence.

The Scandinavian male characters depicted in this drama-comedy struggle to express their troubled thoughts and feelings. Thus, the Scandinavian male character's 'laddish' behavior is, perhaps, more reserved than the theorized depictions of the 'New Lad'. Additionally, I investigate whether Östlund's Scandinavian male characters correspond to the depictions of a masculinity in crisis. Moreover, if this is the case, which role in this depicted crisis does social structures and feminist impact have? Is the Scandinavian Lads' pubescent behaviour in *Involuntary* some kind of whimpering for their falling power and attention? On the other hand, rather, are the masculinity norms in the Scandinavian society unclear? What does Scandinavian society demand from (young) men? Are their struggles, or crisis, a laddish reaction against feminist achievements?

In the *Involuntary* narrative, several sequences accentuate the depicted Scandinavian male characters' troubled masculinities, which, I argue, are consistent with Hansen-Miller's and Gill's lad theories depicting a crisis in masculinity. Nevertheless, in the three different situations I will consider, the representations of female characters are important when exploring the male character's masculinities (or their self-concept) through their social interaction.

The male protagonists in *Involuntary* struggle to behave according to the expectations of the surrounding environment. Miller-Hansen and Gill's assertion that "the lad flick foregrounds the confusion and instability of masculinity as a category" (2011: 42) is pertinent in this film. In keeping with Östlund's key qualities, *Involuntary* presents different conflicts, but does not take sides (with regard to feminism, backlash, misogyny, homosocial/sexual bonding, heteronormativity etc.), or produce answers. This applies to all Östlund's films and is an invitation to the audience to see different dilemmas from several political view-points. However, Östlund is not completely neutral in his choices of representations, as he appears to suggest that some of the male protagonists in *Involuntary* behave like pubescent 'lads' who need to grow up and "put aside childish things", in line with Hansen-Miller and Gill's (2011) theories on 'Lad Flicks'.

Nevertheless, While Östlund has created funny scenes depicting the male characters' dilemmas as sources of comical situations, he does not merely ridicule their laddish identities, but he rather reveals their difficulties. His representation of their struggles also reveals a sympathy for the male characters and presents their problems as a serious matter. Thus, he uncovers the Scandinavian lads' feelings, rather than merely exposing their attitudes to entertain the audience. Therefore, the absurdity of the situations is funny, as Östlund does not ridicule the characters themselves. Östlund continuously portrays the male characters' vulnerability with respect, in other words, the scenes and situations are funny but the male characters' struggles are depicted as real. Nevertheless, Östlund places these issues on the agenda both to illustrate the characters' struggles, while, at the same time he indicates a changing culture of Scandinavian gender relations. This change might be the underlying reasons for the male characters' difficulties and 'laddish' behavior. The depictions of Scandinavian 'Lads' in *Involuntary* then, I argue, do create sympathy for the bothered characters, even while he appears to pity their relations to women.

*Involuntary* does not correspond to all the definitions of 'Lad Flicks' in postfeminist theories. The film conforms to the 'Lad Flick' genre by meditating on young male characters' struggles, and their uncertainty of how to behave like men. Nevertheless, the film does depict characters with a so-called 'laddish' behavior.

#### 2.4 THE ABANDONED BUS DRIVER

One of the male protagonists depicted in one of the *Involuntary* "short-stories" is a bus driver, recently abandoned by his wife. According to him, she left with the children suddenly, leaving just a note on the kitchen table. Apparently, he was unable to affect his wife's decision. Miller-Hansen and Gill write that "men were becoming the new victims as they lost out to women in divorce courts..." (2011: 38). Rosalind Gill writes that, according to Imelda Whelehan (2000), the 'new lad' represents "a defensive assertion of masculinity, male power and men's rights against feminist challenges" (Gill, 2003). Further, Gill writes that:

The most common cultural narratives of masculinity in the 1990s (alongside talk of its crisis) was the story of the displacement of 'new man' by 'new lad'. In such stories 'new lad' is a reaction against 'new man', as well as a backlash against the feminism that gave birth to him (ibid: 37).

In contrast to the female Singleton, Brabon argues, the male Singleton experienced a loss of economic power. He points out the following:

...the cultural history of the male Singleton marks a different trajectory and hinges upon a loss of economic power, where the questioning of hegemonic structures of social and political authority – and men specifically – fosters new uncertainties that are represented as destructive/deconstructive” (Brabon, 2013: 119).

Apparently, Henrik’s wife no longer wants him around. He behaves as though he believes that his wife is the only one to blame for their separation and he cannot believe that she can treat him this way. He shows his tour-guide the note from his wife, and he demands confirmation on his opinion that she has treated him unfairly. Nevertheless, a week or two after the break-up he tells her that he is coping. His behavior, nevertheless, tells a rather different story. Instead of seeking professional help with his difficult situation, he continues as though nothing has happened. Eventually, Henrik overreacts regarding the broken curtain rod on the bus and refuses to continue driving until the person who damaged it comes forward and admits the misdeed. He is obviously treating his passengers unfairly, but he appears to be too proud to admit it. On the contrary, he takes out his personal struggles and frustration on his passengers. However, his temper might have been one of the reasons why his wife left him in the first place. With such an irascible temper, one can understand that he might be difficult to cooperate with. Another reason why his wife could leave him, is that she is part of a culture where women often have the economic security to choose to be independent.

Nevertheless, Henrik works as a bus driver in a family company that he shares with his brother. His passengers do not respect his decision to not continue to drive and they attempt to persuade him to consign again. It is important to Henrik that he maintain his authority, but his behavior rather reveals his lack of control. Hansen-Miller and Gill emphasizes how this depicted lack of control is central for ‘Lad Flicks’ by saying that:

...the lad flick foregrounds the confusion and instability of masculinity as a category. Lad flick male leads are not heroes, but nor are they anti-heroes. Instead they offer up a depiction of masculinity as fallible, damaged, and distinctly unheroic. In career terms many of the men are floundering, or doing jobs that are tedious and poorly paid. The majority of men within lad flicks are on the bottom edges of a middle-class existence, and this classed location of the protagonist’s is key to understanding the movie’s depictions of unheroic masculinities (2011: 42).

Henrik is also highly conscious about his age, and pretends he is not offended when the tour-guide guesses that he is older than he actually is. He says, “many people actually believe that I am younger than I am”. This indicates that it is important for him not to be out-dated, and to still be valued as young and attractive. This, I argue, is a rather unusual depiction of male characters. The fear of being left for someone younger and prettier is usually by women in favour of younger women. Nevertheless, Hansen-Miller and Gill emphasize what they refer to as “young men’s increasing body anxieties” (2011: 38). Through the depiction of Henrik, considering his anger towards his wife and his apparent crisis, he is one of Östlund’s depicted male characters that conforms to the notion of the misogynist “New Lad”. The depiction of Henrik meditates upon whether female rejection give rise to angry men, when women are more liberated.

## 2.5 THE LONE MAN

In one scene, a gang of drunken teenage girls, barely able to stand on their feet, starts to intrude upon a man sitting alone in a subway car. They sit at his side and ask

him to take their picture with his phone. The girls have a confident and careless attitude and appear somewhat threatening. Despite the girls' inappropriate attitude, this sequence indicates that *he* is the outcast, since he is the one being harassed. Their patronizing behavior gives him the appearance of being small, due to their choice of attacking him in particular. Thus, in this sequence, the girls' play an important part in Östlund's depiction of masculinity. The girl's choice of bullying this guy makes the film's audience evaluate this male character and wonder why they choose to pick on him in particular.

Earlier in the film, a scene shows these girls trying to look sexy as they are taking their pictures in front of a web camera. They seem to be very aware of how their sexualized attitude has an effect on men's interest and how to gain attention through a seductive attitude. Apparently, the girls' attitude has been influenced by pornography, and when they try to behave as secure and confident girls, they do so by approaching attitudes originated from patriarchal structures, the demands of being beautiful, or sexy in line with the male gaze. Nevertheless, in this situation, the girls are the ones that control the situation.

This sequence accentuates a legitimate risk of becoming a source of ridicule. The girls laugh at the lone man and shout out different names, calling him "Johnny boy" and "hey beautiful". "Have you bought a new phone?", they ask. "That's nice. Then you can use it to take pictures of us beautiful girls. Beautiful girls - could that be something for you?", while they laugh aloud and giggle. Apparently, they do not think of him as a man worthy of their respect. His insecurity and inability to stand up for himself make them feel superior. Thus, Östlund has depicted a situation where the tables are turned, where young teenaged girls are the ones trying to take advantage of an innocent man.

Östlund's choice of using this particular character for this part is probably not incidental. The male protagonist in this scene is in contrast to the confident and well-dressed male protagonist depicted in *The Square* (Östlund, 2017). Thus, the lack of male confidence in *Involuntary*, is quite opposite to the middle-class male confidence, which I will demonstrate in chapter four. Nevertheless, in this situation in *Involuntary*, Östlund accentuates how an insecure working-class man is treated differently than a highly respected man in a powerful position. Thus, the man in this scene may become a target because of his looks and his lack of confidence. These girls intrude upon this particular man because of his lack of authority, and because of his insecure appearance. Nevertheless, the male character in this scene is depicted as nice and polite, rather than tough and strong. Thus, he is more vulnerable, and more likely to receive negative attention, than men with more confident attitudes. He appears as shy and insecure, although he is capable of resisting their request of buying beer for them.

Perhaps Östlund created this scene is because it is a play on a situation that more commonly occurs the other way around, in other words, men harassing women. Nevertheless, this sequence also functions as a reminder that such harassment also happens to men. With this sequence Östlund accentuates issues of masculinities that are attacked and valued. In this particular situation, the male character in the subway-car does not attract any positive attention, and, apparently, the girls do not approach him because they find him attractive or exciting. Apparently, they intrude upon him because he seems like an easy target. This scene function as a representation of a prejudiced society, and might be transferable to lad theories, to exemplify assumptions of masculine identities from a 'chick' perspective, or a female gaze.

Brabon speaks of a "bipolar condition of masculinity" (2013: 121) and refers to the descriptions of the 'new man', in addition to the 'new lad' and the 'metrosexual' appearing in the media in 1994. This confirmed that masculinity was evolving with a dual



directionality, he argues, the middle-class 'metrosexual' and the working-class 'new lad' (ibid). The metrosexual, Brabon writes, was both a consumer and an object of consumption, as "the essence of masculinity: the desired male body" – which signals a shift in the gaze (ibid). Perhaps because they see him as undesirable, the girls harass the lone man because of what he is not. Perhaps he is not good-looking or "masculine" enough to earn their respect.

## 2.6 OLD HABITS OF MALE BONDING TURNING INTO SEXUAL ABUSE

Hansen-Miller and Gill write that "one of the striking features of lad flicks is their dependence upon dynamics of intense heterosexual male bonding, paired with explicit homophobic humour" (2011: 44). Östlund portrays homophobic behaviour in the film, but instead of creating humor from it, he rather problematizes this homophobic attitude. Thus, Östlund's film meditates upon lad flicks, at the same time as his solution differs from them. He emphasizes the characters fear of being regarded as gay even while he shows their homosexual relations. In *Involuntary*, Östlund has depicted both this intense heterosexual male bonding (or, homosexual relations by heterosexual men) combined with homophobic attitudes within the same characters.

For example, one sequence in the film shows a friends' gathering at a cabin, and a group of adolescent men are meeting to have a weekend of party and fun. They have clearly been friends throughout their childhood years and have gathered to spend some good times together. Now most of the men are married and live further apart than they used to. Nevertheless, the fun they have - or used to have - is attached to a bittersweet sub-harmony, as they have grown up, they discover that their relations as young adults have changed.

In this sequence Östlund meditates upon the lads' struggle of knowing what it means to be a man, or rather, to prove their manliness towards one another. Apparently, to be considered masculine by one another, they must behave as they did when they were teenage boys. Acting like adults does not elicit more respect from their friends. Thus, 'laddish' behaviour boosts the status among the men, but it is not expected from them in their family lives. As an example, at the cabin, they manifest their manliness by bullying each other for their choices of replacing their sports car with an estate car because of the need for their children's car seats. One of the men explains that his new car's engine is just as strong as the old one, and he shows off by revving the engine, as some kind of proof of his virility. Fast and reckless driving on a field is also depicted as an activity proving their "live fast and die young" pubescent, or 'laddish' behavior. Additionally, when they get drunk, they put on a "rough" attitude, shouting and making noise, acting tough to impress their friends.

At night, when they are drinking beer together, Leffe (Leif Edlund) shows himself off to the others, stripping and doing monkey tricks, while the others laugh, sing and shout out his name, cheering on him to make him continue entertaining them. Leffe stands on his head completely naked, with a Swedish flag in his buttocks, when his friends start taking pictures. Obviously, Leffe does not tolerate being photographed, and he immediately ends his performance. This indicates that what happens at the cabin is supposed to secretly stay at the cabin. Thus, Leffe is aware that this kind of behavior is not 'adult' but is rather reserved for this all-male adolescent environment.

Their new adult life-situations reveals an uncertainty within the relations of the subjects depicted. Apparently, some of the characters in the group of men do not know what kind of behavior that is expected, or still tolerated among what used to be their closest friends. This insecurity, considering their relations, indicates that they no longer

know how to behave towards one another. Something has changed as they became older, but at the same time the male characters are reluctant to admit it and want their relations to remain as they were when they were younger. This depiction is similar to Hansen-Miller and Gill's (2011) description of the 'New Lads' reluctance to grow up.

At one time on their weekend trip, four of the men walk on a high road when Olle (Olle Liljas) turns and walks into the grain field to urinate. Apparently, they are having a good time together, chatting and laughing, and the atmosphere is light. Then Leffe decides to run after Olle and decides that he wants to give him a blowjob, shouting, "I want to suck". Olle asks him to stop, but Leffe keeps running after him. He yells, "you will never escape. You're going to get sucked". At this point, it looks more like a play in a friendly spirit, and it does not seem as though Olle is notably afraid that Leffe actually will go through with it. After a short while, the situation becomes serious, and Leffe receives help from one of the others to hold Olle still while Leffe does perform oral sex on him. Olle's friends laugh while it happens, but Olle keeps asking them to stop.

After this incident, Olle leaves the field in tears but tries to hide his reaction from his friends. Olle is in despair since his childhood friends have just sexually abused him. Obviously, the men have conflicting opinions on how they should behave when they are together on a weekend-trip. Apparently, Leffe's pubescent and pleasure-seeking behaviour resembles more closely the description of the 'New Lad' than Olle's. Actions that Olle regarded as acceptable when he was younger are no longer tolerable. However, who will understand and acknowledge his changed attitude? Leffe calls after him, saying, "it was just a joke, Olle. You can't be pissed off about that", as he argues that they have done it many times before and, therefore, should be an extenuating circumstance. The two men in the back starts to discuss whether Olle laughed or not when it happened, and they start to feel insecure about what they have done. Thus, Östlund depicts a growing bad conscience within the 'laddish' characters.

The next day Olle's wife, Vera (Vera Vitali), arrives to take Olle back home. They are in the car discussing whether or not he should return with her or stay with his friends when an interesting conversation between the two arises. Olle asks if she is disappointed in him for being irresolute. She answers that she is not, but that she thinks the situation is weird. "You called me in the middle of the night, crying, and wanted me to come. I drove for two hours and now you want to stay?" she says. Vera wants him to explain what is going on. Olle replies that if he does not talk to his friends about it now they will never be able to talk about it. Vera cannot understand that he considers staying and she emphasizes that what they did to him is "sick". "They held you down and sucked your dick; that is not okay". "No, it is not okay", he replies. "And you want to stay with them at the chalet," Vera asks. Olle continues, "well, okay, but drive then".

In a later sequence, the conversation in the car continues and Vera asks Olle whether Leffe is gay. Olle is surprised and answers, "Of course not, he is married". Olle seems insecure but tells her that they did have sexual relations in the past. He indicates that this time, nevertheless, it was different: "This time I said no". Instead of meeting him with understanding Vera reacts with being really surprised that they used to do "these things" before, indicating a lack of sympathy for him and his difficult situation. Olle struggles as he tries to explain how these things were not a problem to him about ten years ago. "So, you blew each other?" Vera asks. "No," he nervously replies, "not blew each other, that sounds so harsh." Vera laughs, and says that it sounds freaky. Then he defends himself by saying that *he* did not do it, but Leffe did. "I never sucked Leffe's dick", Olle explains, trying to assure her that he is not "into that stuff." "I certainly hope not," she responds. She starts to laugh and says that it makes her feel bad that they did these things with each other. Then she asks how he would have felt if she told

him that she and her female friends had similar sexual relations. Olle starts laughing, and says that is a completely different matter, to which she disagrees, saying, "it is the exact same thing."

The dominant way of understanding the emergence of new lad is as part of a backlash against feminism. From this perspective the figure of the new lad, constructed around knowingly misogynist and predatory attitudes to women, represents a refusal to acknowledge the changes in gender relations produced by feminism, and an attack upon it (Gill, 2003: 47).

Olle is not depicted as misogynistic, or with a predatory attitude. Nevertheless, his reluctance to accept that Vera should be able to behave in the same manner as he does, nevertheless, indicates that he does not believe that she, as a woman, deserves to have the same freedom of choice as he does.

## 2.7 A CRISIS IN THE SCANDINAVIAN RECEPTION OF MASCULINITIES?

The depiction of Olle's and Vera's homophobic attitude is interesting concerning what they assume that a man or a woman should be like. Perhaps this prejudiced attitude, from both Olle and Vera, men and women, are one of the reasons why the Scandinavian laddishness appeared. Perhaps 'crisis' is not the right word to describe the Scandinavian masculinities depicted in *Involuntary*, but rather a description of a narrow understanding of what masculinity ought to be. Apparently, Östlund indicates a crisis in the reception of masculinities that need to reconcile with the idea of masculinity as fluid, in addition to social acknowledgment

It is difficult to place the different male characters in *Involuntary* in one box. Perhaps the identities of the male protagonists comprise 'a melting pot' of masculinities, as Brabon (2013) implies. Nevertheless, the Scandinavian masculinities depicted come with a larger part of the Scandinavian culture, influenced by Scandinavian gender equality achievements and more empowered women. Nevertheless, I argue that *Involuntary* shows more 'laddish' behavior depicted than depictions of 'New Men', because of the male characters conspicuous insecurity and their pubescent behaviour, and their apparent reluctance to accept gender-equality developments.

Many of the Scandinavian male characters appear to have in common their inability to openly discuss their feelings. The lads in *Involuntary*, I argue, conforms neither entirely to the 'new man' (soft, caring, egalitarian, etc.) nor the 'new lad' (hedonistic, misogynistic, etc), but rather with elements from both. The introvert Scandinavian lads' main struggle appears to be to confidently reveal their feelings and their needs. Östlund does not explicitly depict 'new lad' characters as representative of a misogynist Scandinavian culture, nor does he depict characters that serve as a backlash for feminism, although the male characters have some reluctance to acknowledge women's empowered positions. Östlund depicts a culture of male characters who are irresolute and insecure, who appear to lack good role models with various masculine identities.

As Hansen-Miller and Gill asserts, "while the lad lets go of his need to live up to traditional and homosocial standards of masculinity, he seems to only re-emerge within the not so clearly pleasurable confines of the nuclear family (2011: 49). Additionally, as Gill points out in "Power and the Production of subjects" (Gill, 2003: 39):

There are no agreed-upon criteria for identifying new men or new lads among actual male populations. Indeed, the one much-repeated 'key index' of newmannishness is

his contribution to domestic work – something that is usually invoked to support arguments that the figure of the new man does not exist in the real world!

### 3 FORCE MAJEURE – MASCULINITY IN A SCANDINAVIAN NUCLEAR FAMILY

*"I really believe I'd run in there even if I didn't have a weapon"* (Donald Trump).

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The introductory quote is from February 26, 2018, when the president of the United States of America, Donald Trump, criticized an FBI worker for being a coward, at a meeting at the White House after the Florida school shootings. Additionally, Trump stated that the FBI worker was not exactly a medal-of-honor candidate. Trump's statement is similar to the critique that arose when the leader of AUF, Eskil Pedersen, fled from the attack at Utøya in Norway, on July 22, 2011, to rescue himself. The critiques claimed he should have remained because he was responsible for the many children attending the political summer camp. Alleged "cowards" and "heroes" often make big headlines in the media across the world, and in Hollywood blockbusters, emphasizing how certain masculine behaviors yield more positive attention than others do.

These two incidents are pointed out not because they have anything to do with fatherhood, in the first place, but rather to initiate a discussion on whether or not masculinity, in the form of fatherhood, should be another arena where men gain status as heroes, or are labeled cowards. In Östlund's *Force Majeure* (2014) there is a similar situation to those referred to above: a man running away instead of "running in" when a dangerous situation happens. In this case the man is a father running away from his wife and children when an avalanche strikes. This avalanche incident is the catalyst situation for conflicts between the protagonists Tomas (Johannes Bah Kuhnke) and his wife Ebba (Lisa Loven Kongsli), as he chose to run away and, even more crucial, that he subsequently resolutely denies that he did.

In *Force Majeure* Tomas is struggling in his role as a father and husband. He tries to have a good time with his family on their vacation, but Ebba is constantly criticizing him, even before the avalanche incident, which indicates to the audience that Ebba is generally dissatisfied with him. "Are you checking your phone now?" she asks at one point. He instantly denies it, replying, "No, I'm not", but concurrently we see Tomas picking up his phone while Ebba is in another room, indicating that they have had a troublesome relationship for a while.

In the Cambridge Dictionary, the term Force Majeure is defined as "an unexpected event such as a war, crime, or an earthquake which prevents someone from doing something that is written in a legal agreement". In the film *Force Majeure*, the avalanche prevents Tomas from following the "legal agreement" of protecting his own children from danger. Hannah Hamad writes in "Hollywood Fatherhood: Paternal Postfeminism in Contemporary Popular Cinema" that "narratives of apocalypse provide an apt device for popular cinema to 'return to an idealized fantasy of family values'" (Hamad, 2013: 110). She uses the word 'fantasy', indicating that these narratives do not represent reality but rather heap masculine ideals upon their audiences. Thus, Östlund's narrative, I argue, is more realistic and less categorical than Hollywood's fantasies.

Hamad states that, in contemporary Hollywood, "the currency of fatherhood as a defining component of ideal masculinity has emerged as a dominant cultural trope of postfeminism, and a structuring paradigm of mediated masculinity" (ibid: 99). She emphasizes that the 21<sup>st</sup>-century cluster of films depicting fatherhood as a "paternalization of Hollywood's cinematic output" (ibid) has come with an abundance of narratives with scenarios of protective father figures. Thus, she points out that

contemporary Hollywood fatherhood depictions have become a “cultural trend” that highlights these father figures as the ideal masculinity (ibid: 101).

Furthermore, Hamad explores contemporary postfeminist Hollywood narratives, and interrogates the consequences for feminism with the omnipresence of protective lone father heroes and absent mothers to the discursive fore. She questions whether the abundance of depictions of fatherhood in Hollywood since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a positive contribution to gender equality (ibid: 103). Subsequently, she points out that these dads, “effortlessly multitasking and breadwinning domestic hero double-shifters simultaneously navigating the public and private spheres to equally admirable levels of unflappable efficiency, are succinctly and repeatedly referred to as ‘superdad’” (ibid: 106). Thus, Hamad indicates that such a depiction of father figures in Hollywood films does not represent reality. Further, she emphasizes the circulating rhetoric that this father figure is valued as “desirable for women through its framing as hot and sexy” (ibid).

Hamad emphasizes that this postfeminist masculinity ideal is not merely limited to Hollywood productions, and accentuates how *The Woman in Black* (James Watkins, 2012), starring Daniel Radcliffe as an idealized single father, was dominating the UK box office in accordance to the American postfeminist fatherhood films (Hamad, 2013: 111). Fatherhood is also a common theme in many 21<sup>st</sup>-century Scandinavian drama comedies, which feature the relationship between father and child, or the lack of contact between them, such as *Buddy* (Tyldum, 2003), *Truth About Men* (Arcel, 2010) and *Grand Hotel* (Fröhlich, 2016). Nevertheless, these Scandinavian films do not depict idealized father figures in the way Hollywood and UK productions do.

With his fatherhood film, *Force Majeure*, Östlund raises the complex discussion of the contemporary parenting norms and expectations in Scandinavia. He does not idealize the Scandinavian father figures depicted, but rather emphasizes their apparent struggles of behaving in accordance with the expectations of being present parents who puts their children first. These parenting expectations are presented mainly through the marital struggles between Ebba and Tomas, and, additionally, through that of their friends, Mats’ (Kristofer Hivju) and Fanny’s (Fanni Metelius), with their comical and rather heated debate about which of them has the better parenting skills. Through these four characters, I will explore whether or not Östlund’s depictions of Scandinavian fatherhood correspond with the postfeminist Hollywood depictions of masculinity.

### 3.2 THE ESCAPE

An avalanche incident a few minutes into the narrative is the pivotal scene in the film. On their first day of skiing the family is having lunch at the top restaurant in the ski resort just alongside the downhill ski runs, when, all of the sudden, they hear explosions from a distance. Ebba is immediately worried and asks Tomas if it is safe, to which he resolutely confirms: “Yes, they know what they’re doing”. Then Tomas explains that this is a controlled release, just as an avalanche is coming closer and closer towards them. Shortly after, the avalanche crashes down the slopes next to the restaurant, and many people are panic-stricken. The loud rumbling sound from the masses of snow rushing down the mountain hillside is a frightening scene. Six-year-old Harry (Vincent Wettergren) is screaming “Daddy, Daddy”, without receiving any response from his father. The film’s audience witnesses Tomas running away from the restaurant table alone to get himself to safety, but before he escapes, he takes his time to pick up his iPhone. Ebba rushes to cover her children and protect them from danger as Tomas flees.



**FIGURE 1**

Fortunately, the avalanche loses its power immediately before it could destroy the restaurant, only covering the outdoor tables with a light cloud of snow, and after a few minutes, everything returns to normal and they can continue their lunch. The daughter, Vera (Clara Wettergren) asks her mother: "Where is daddy?" to which Ebba replies, "Vera, just go sit down," still with a shaky voice. She is clearly not interested in explaining her husband's actions at this moment. Subsequently, Tomas returns to their table and makes small-talk, but his shocked wife and children do not respond. Nevertheless, Tomas's wife remained with the children throughout the avalanche ordeal, demonstrating their different choices of (re-) action. Thus, Östlund has made a narrative that differs from the prevailing depictions of ideal father figures in Hollywood.

Afterward, in a scene where they are standing on the conveyor belt on their way back to the hotel, we see close-up shots of the angry and disappointed children scowling at their father. The silence and the tense mood between Tomas and Ebba is urgent. Back at the hotel, Tomas asks Ebba, "You seem a little annoyed, are you?". "I don't know, should I be annoyed?", Ebba replies. Both display distinct insecurity and disappointment in the direction of how their relationship is developing. Ebba's question indicates that her feelings will depend on Tomas's reasons for running away. Tomas, on the other hand, does not understand why anyone should be angry with him.

This pent-up situation between the couple is what makes up the main plot in the film. Through Tomas's and Ebba's conflict Östlund points at different challenges concerning the life of a nuclear family, such as parenting obligations and marital expectations, not to mention gender roles. The main critique of Tomas as a father is not that he got scared and ran away, but rather, the depiction of his absence, despite his physical existence. Alternatively, at least, this is the source of his family's disappointment, knowing that he is capable of abandoning them. Seemingly, his phone is more important to him than his wife and children, representing another way of escaping from them. As Ebba says at one point when explaining the situation to their friends: "Tomas natural direction is away from us".

At a social dinner gathering the same evening, the conflict between Ebba and Tomas is increasing. They make fools of themselves, as a couple, arguing about what Tomas did, or didn't do when the avalanche appeared, in front of Ebba's friend, Charlotte, and her new acquaintance, referred to as "Mr.Tomba" (Jorge Lattof). When they are talking about their avalanche experience Ebba bursts out with, "He got so scared that he ran away from the table." Tomas is naturally surprised since they had not

talked it through in private yet. Even though Tomas did run away, it is understandable he feels humiliated in this situation, making their friends laugh at him. Subsequently, Tomas refuses to admit the fact that he ran away, saving only himself and his phone. Then Ebba is surprised since both she and the film's audience know that she is telling the truth. Ebba is disappointed by the fact that Tomas' instinctively saves himself and his phone, and subsequently lies and says he did not, while Tomas is disappointed in losing respect and being evaluated as a coward, as a complete opposite of the postfeminist Hollywood fatherhood ideals of heroic protective dads. Ebba's instincts were saving her children, while Tomas's were saving his iPhone and his own skin.

In the film's narrative, the avalanche incident is not the main problem between Tomas and Ebba, but rather functions as a catalyst for their family struggles. Östlund does not depict either of them as ideal parents. In one scene Östlund depicts Ebba as tired, distant and hung-over from the night before, when the children want her to get ready to go skiing. Her six-year-old son says to her, "You smell like wine". Both Ebba and Tomas are depicted with different flaws. This, I will argue, is a fair invitation to activate an honest discussion of parental challenges in a postfeminist era.

Tomas's primary obligations are not to perform as a rescuing hero, but rather to be a father to his son and daughter, and a loving husband to his wife. Nevertheless, his masculine pride lies in his ability to be some kind of a hero, or a protective father figure, making him feel like a failure when he does not grab the opportunity to perform as the protector of his own family. Tomas does not reveal these thoughts directly, but through his persistent denial of the fact that he ran away, it appears that his good reputation is more important than the well-being of his own family.

Thus, *Force Majeure's* narrative differs, in several ways, from Hamad's (2013) descriptions of the idealized 21<sup>st</sup>-century Hollywood fatherhood, and thus supports her critiques of the postfeminist Hollywood masculinity ideals. Primarily, Tomas is not depicted as the successful protective hero and Ebba is not depicted as an absent mother, as in many of the aforementioned 21<sup>st</sup>-century Hollywood narratives. Secondly, Östlund does not glorify 'superdads' in the *Force Majeure* narrative. Instead, his film rather realistically depicts, and opens for debate, gender equality issues in Scandinavian nuclear families through his balancing of the depictions of an inept, insecure father with an imperfect mother who wants a functional family with a present father figure.

Tomas sees himself as provider for his family economically, but Ebba wants more equality and shared parenting obligations. In one scene, Ebba will not accept Tomas' VISA-card when he offers it to her, indicating that she does not need him to provide for her. Tomas seems disappointed, implying that economic equality somehow diminishes him. Despite the popular image of Scandinavia as gender equal, Tomas is depicted with a relatively obsolete understanding of the obligations that come with being a father.

Ebba does not expect Tomas to be a hero, but she expects him to be honest and reliable. Tomas apparently has trouble being honest, not because his family expects him to be a rescuing hero, but because he wants to be one himself, or at least not be thought of as a coward, or an inept father. Thus, he tells lies that better suits his understandings of what a successful man is. This might be one explanation for Tomas lying habit, it is simply too difficult for him to admit that he fails in being a hero.

Apparently, what Tomas needs is sympathy and positive attention. Nevertheless, as long as Tomas' continues with his dishonest behaviour, Ebba will be disappointed in him. In one scene, Tomas says he is disappointed in himself and that he hates the person he has become. He says, "I don't want to live with this pathetic person anymore." He says he is a victim of his own instincts, as he makes a scene crying out loud in the hotel hallway, admitting that he has lied, cheated on Ebba, and that he cheats when he



plays video-games with his children. Nevertheless, if he changed, he would receive more positive attention, which would be beneficial both for himself, and his family.

### 3.3 THE PERFECT PICTURE

In *Force Majeure*, sound, noise and music are frequently used to underline the often stressed and dissatisfied nuclear family who is struggling to find a satisfactory way to live their lives together. The film's discourse emphasizes the characters' stress and discomfort as it communicates with the audience's perceptual comprehension. Östlund frequently uses a "double" soundtrack in this film, combining intense classical music with disturbing noise from the setting's surrounding atmosphere. For example, angry children shouting "mommy," "daddy," and "no," and the annoying sound of a vacuum cleaner make up the background when their parents try to have a private talk outside their hotel room. Thus, the exaggerated noise is, perhaps, a humorous approach to people in the audience who can identify with the recurrent exhausting sound levels that accompany families with children.

These layers of sound are crucial for the film's representation of Tomas as a father because it presents a realistic picture of the everyday family situations he will be part of if he fulfils his obligations of being a present father. In *Force Majeure*, there is no melancholic yet calm and delightful music covering for much of the everyday stress as in, for example, the Hollywood production *The Pursuit of Happyness* (Muccino, 2006). In this film the focus is on protagonist Chris Gardner's (Will Smith) heroic effort and admirable determination, and on how he manages to climb up from poverty, making for himself a career as a stock broker and, therefore, eventually having enough money to provide for his son. The mother of their son has to move away to get a job, and Chris Gardner tells her, "You know you can't take care of him", and he confidently nominates himself as the obvious choice to care for their son. Both Hamad (2013) and Martina Martausová use *The Pursuit of Happyness* as an example of idealized fatherhood in Hollywood, in their essays on postfeminist masculinities.

In her essay "The 21<sup>st</sup>-century American Adam: Postfeminist Masculinity in American Cinema" (2017) Martausová, in accordance with Hamad's theories on Hollywood father figures, emphasizes the ubiquitous depictions of successful fathers in Hollywood narratives in the postfeminist era, representing "the American myth of the pursuit of happiness" (Martausová, 2017: 189). She agrees with Hamad that these depictions of fatherhood in a postfeminist popular culture revitalize traditional masculinity "as they manage to restore the status quo and confirm their manly authority in a domestic sphere traditionally reserved for women" (ibid: 190). She asserts that, "The Adamic perception of life determined by this vitality for onward movement, referred to as the American dream" (ibid: 185) depicts Hollywood male characters as confident with their positions and motivated for changes in society. Scandinavian characters seem to be more confused, or blind to see the same opportunities, compared to this rather optimistic article concerning American masculinity.

According to Martausová, the Hollywood male characters are utilizing the developments in society for their own benefit, with their "self-constituting performative acts that allow male heroes to declare their position in society" (ibid: 190). Östlund's male protagonists in *Force Majeure*, on the contrary, seem to be depicted as being stagnant and they lack the Hollywood vitality for onward movement. Or, perhaps, change in Scandinavian masculinities just appear to develop slower, due to the rapid gender equality developments, making the contrasts in "old" and "new" masculinities more visible. Perhaps gender equality in Scandinavia has changed so rapidly over the last

decades that it is difficult for men to follow. Or are Scandinavian male characters depicted as more reluctant than their American counterparts to adjust to developments in society?

The Hollywood *Pursuit of Happyness* (2006) narrative concentrates on the father figure's ability to provide economically for his son, while Östlund appears to depart the from-rags-to-riches narrative, as money is not the main struggle for the Scandinavian nuclear family depicted, but rather time and attendance, and egalitarian parental teamwork. In *Force Majeure*, the characters struggle despite their wealth, which is depicted as a tough journey for these Scandinavian father figures.

The music in *The Pursuit of Happyness* evokes audience sympathy towards the protagonist-fathers struggles with poverty, and, likewise, reinforces their need to applaud his extraordinary achievements when he ultimately succeeds. Thus, the music score reinforces the Hollywood masculinity ideal, leading the audience to admire him for his heroic actions and his success. On the contrary, the disturbing film sound design in *Force Majeure* shows the environment as a more truthful representation of parental challenges, than the more dreamlike postfeminist Hollywood fatherhood fairytale. The continuous noise in *Force Majeure* might represent the persevering energy and strength required to be a real-life parent. This sort of strength, though, will not result in an idealized superhero, as in the Hollywood narratives depicting fathers rescuing their children from dangerous situations, or from poor conditions, all by themselves.

Thus, comparing Östlund's depictions of a father who struggles to put his family first, with the world's view on Scandinavian gender equality achievements, eventually reveals that fathers' wish to be valued in the same way as the glorified, postfeminist, masculinity ideals of Hollywood. Nevertheless, Östlund does not portray Tomas's or Mats' parenting efforts as admirable, but rather function as a contrast to the Hollywood fatherhood films.

Alongside the buzzing, incessant sound from the ski lift, *Force Majeure's* opening scene presents the Swedish-Norwegian family of four, with downhill skis and ski suits, at the top of a hill. We hear the voice of an intense, ongoing and talkative photographer, shouting "Hello! Bonjour!" to get their attention. He wants to take a picture of the family in front of the idyllic view of snow-capped mountains, to sell to them as a souvenir from their vacation in the French Alps. The family reluctantly obeys the photographer, and stand close together, showing off their most beautiful smiles. Already at this point one has the feeling that these nice souvenir pictures are quite different from the story that the audience is about to see.

The repeating intense and chaotic classical music appears to ignite the tension between Ebba and Tomas while accentuating the turbulence of their holiday. In the evening, on their first vacation day at the fashionable hotel, the overly loud machine noise of four electric toothbrushes is accompanied by the high tempo of Antonio Vivaldi's Summer Concerto violin theme, while the family is standing together in the bathroom. The last part of the Summer Concerto has been referred to as a storm because of its fast tempo and intensity, and this scene depicts something resembling a storm, rather than a calm and relaxing quality-time holiday.

According to Ebba, they are going on this trip is because Tomas is working so much. "Now he has five days to merely focus on his family", she enthusiastically twitters to her Swedish friend Charlotte (Karin Myrenberg) at the hotel reception. Tomas reacts negatively to Ebba's exposure of him, clearly bothered by that kind of denudation. Here, the film suggests that the vacation has been initiated by Ebba's desire for Tomas to focus on the family, and his apparent resistance to her plans. Östlund's depictions of how Ebba becomes frustrated by the constant interrupting of Tomas's phone indicates that she

wants a husband who is more present with his family. The fact that Tomas runs away from the avalanche but takes his time to pick up his phone at the table, symbolizes his general lack of focus as a father, as he is more interested in escaping and in communicating with his phone than he is in fully taking part in his seemingly stressful family life.

Tomas represents a new type of father, and in some ways, it resembles the postfeminist dad that Hamad and Martausová describe, but inflected by its Scandinavian context. The basis for Scandinavian gender progress is a heteronormative family structure with gendered divisions of labor. In their historical outline of Scandinavian gender equality, "Gender Equality and Welfare Politics in Scandinavia", Melby, Ravn and Wetterberg point out that family reforms and legislations are essential for understanding the welfare state (Melby, et al., 2008: 1). They ask whether the hallmark of the Scandinavian welfare model might be "a special combination of gender equality and gender differentiation" (ibid). Further, they point out that "despite a long tradition of gender-equality policy, the labor market is highly gender-segregated in the Scandinavian countries" (ibid: 2). Furthermore, they write that "when equality was claimed in the context of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century marriage reform it was, openly or not, based on the assumption of gendered division of work" (ibid: 18). They point out that 'equality' at that time was understood as "different but equally important," with the married man as the provider and head of his household (ibid).

Apparently, the family of Ebba and Tomas is still shaped by this understanding, despite the tendency of equality policies in Scandinavia in the 1960s towards family policies to be dominated by gender neutrality (ibid: 19). Reforms and legislations in Scandinavian countries today indicate a broad focus on gender equality. Nevertheless, in the *Force Majeure* narrative the father works more and spends less time with his children than his wife does.

Accordingly, on the Norwegian Government's website, in the political gender equality statement for 2019, the Minister of gender equality, Trine Skei Grande, writes that 85 percent of Norwegian employees work in female- or male-dominated professions. Further, she writes that many families have busy lives combining work with domestic obligations. She points out that working part-time is a strategy that women use to cope with this situation. Such rhetoric indicates that the contemporary Scandinavian division of domestic labor is not equal, in a country frequently referred to as one of the most gender-equal in the world. The statement implies a culture in which women still take on the majority of domestic labor, despite gender equality reforms and legislations, and that discourse and practice do not necessarily concur.

Melby et.al. describe the relationship between discourse and practice and emphasize that "political ambitions, laws and so on are not identical to how things work in practice and how ordinary people think and act in everyday life" (ibid :17). The relationship between discourse and practice, I argue, is pertinent when comparing the congruence between the Hollywood fatherhood ideals with Östlund's depictions of fatherhood from a Scandinavian point of view. Hamad asks, "What is at stake politically for feminism in culturally conceiving and viewing contemporary masculinities through the lens of postfeminist fatherhood" (2013: 103). In their book "Interrogating Postfeminism, Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture" Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker state that: "Yet in arguing that barriers to equality are as much cultural as legislative we seek here to address the distinct issues posed by a postfeminist culture in which women are assumed to have achieved equality" (2007: 13).

Later, when Ebba is evaluating the pictures at the photographer's office, the photo-assistant remarks that "the light and everything is perfect in the

picture”, indicating how representations in pictures are just as important as reality. The souvenir pictures can be shown to family and friends, functioning as proof of a perfect family vacation, to maintain a perfect facade. These pictures clearly do not tell the whole story, and neither does Scandinavia’s good reputation of gender equality. Reforms, legislations and statistics come with no sound and might be comparable to a tourist picture in front of a beautiful view.

### 3.4 PARENTING AS A COMPETITION

In *Force Majeure*, the mother is present, so Tomas is not depicted as the idealized lone father that we see in various Hollywood productions. Rather, he struggles to adequately contribute as part of a nuclear family. The key gender issue in *Force Majeure* is not, I argue, to separately select the one better parent, but rather to discuss the prevailing gender roles in a contemporary Scandinavian heteronormative relationship.

One night, Mats (Kristofer Hivju) and his young lover Fanny (Fanni Metelius) are visiting Tomas’s and Ebba’s hotel room, when Ebba has a sudden urge to explain her troubled thoughts, sitting in a luxury hotel, feeling deeply unhappy. She cannot stop thinking about the avalanche incident and the fact that Tomas still refuses to admit that he ran away. Again, Tomas and Ebba embarrass themselves as a couple, and Mats tries to lighten the heavy atmosphere: “When such incidents happen you forget your values, you instinctively try to save yourself,” saying it is a human primitive force. Nevertheless, his words bring little comfort since everyone in the room knows that Ebba did not run away but stayed with the children.

Subsequently, Mats enthusiastically proclaims, “I believe that the enemy here, is the picture we have gotten from heroes. We are constantly fuelled with these hero-stories and the demands of doing heroic things”. “But the truth is”, he continues, “that when reality stares right into your eyes it is very few of us who act heroically”. Thereafter, in the same monologue, he almost copies this chapter’s epigraph by Donald Trump: “If a villain had rushed into this hotel room, I would have demolished him by instinct”. He adds that it, nevertheless, would not make him an aggressor. Mats is apparently intent on proving his own and his friend Tomas’s value justifying their own actions to preserve their masculine dignity. They do not want the discredit of an aggressor, but the reputation of tough and strong, protective heroes. The way in which Östlund depicts the impact of Hollywood ideals in the *Force Majeure* discourse is conspicuous, as the male protagonists claim they suffer from “the picture we have gotten from heroes”. The protagonists in *Force Majeure* seem to be predisposed to Hollywood narratives, while Östlund has made a contradictory film that problematizes such heroic fatherhood ideals.

Thereafter, Ebba remembers they have everything on camera and decides to show it to their friends. Tomas is completely silent and clearly embarrassed, while Mats generously explains that Tomas ran away so that he would be able to heroically dig his family out of the snow afterwards. Tomas, with his denial of his actions, and Mats with his unlikely explanation for Tomas’ actions, appear to share a pre-existing notion that men are supposed to act like heroes, in any situations, which makes them constantly defend their actions in case they may be regarded as cowards. However, interestingly, Ebba got no applause for her heroic effort to protect her children. Nevertheless, Ebba’s basic disappointment does not merely stem from Tomas’s act of running away, as much as for his dishonest delayed attitude. Tomas does not seem to understand that the act of being dishonest gives him just as much, or even more, discredit as from getting scared

of an avalanche. This makes Tomas disappointed in Ebba's behavior towards him, which then again makes this an eternal circle of dissatisfaction.

After the visit, Mats and Fanny continue this discussion on their way back to their own hotel room. Fanny says that she believes she would have acted in the same way as Ebba and stayed with her children. Thereafter she says that she thinks Mats would behave differently and makes a point about him being on holiday with her while his wife is at home taking care of their children. Mats does not tolerate that she believes that he would not protect his children and acts as if his masculinity has been attacked. The discussion continues, turning into a quarrel, as Mats takes her statement as an insult of his masculine integrity. Then he says, "What if I told you that I think of you as a person not woman enough to have children?" This way Mats tries to retaliate against her attack on his traditional masculinity by attacking what he sees as her traditional femininity, childbearing. Thus, parenting skills become a competition between mothers and fathers, and a way of demonstrating their feminine or masculine validity.

Mats' comment to Fanni of not being "woman enough" implies that he will not accept to be accused of "not being man enough" to rescue his children. It seems that the accusation that men are less likely than women to protect their children is extremely provocative for both Tomas and Mats, despite the fact that they do not seem to take the responsibility of parenthood as seriously as the mothers of their children do. They prefer the status of being ideal fathers without too much effort, despite the long tradition of gender-equality policies in Scandinavia. Apparently, Östlund is using this scene to critically comment on the fantasy of ideal Hollywood fathers, rendering the egalitarian ideals of Scandinavian parenting in conflict with the Scandinavian characters' self-respect. Thus, I argue, Östlund values the postfeminist Hollywood masculinity ideals as incompatible with gender equality by depicting different expectations for mothers and for fathers. He appears to be more occupied with the solutions of functional gender-equal co-parenting rather than separating the paternal and the maternal roles.

### 3.5 A HARMFUL DESIRE OF BEING A SUPERDAD

In *Force Majeure*, Tomas is not depicted as 'superdad', but rather a father who puts himself before his children and his wife. Apparently, the two male protagonists in *Force Majeure* have adopted the Hollywood notion of ideal masculinity, and their self-respect is directly related to their heroic (or non-heroic) actions. Nevertheless, since they are not living up to these fatherhood ideals, they feel inferior. I propose that the main reason that they fail as fathers is not that they cannot be heroes, but rather because of their fixation with having the status of important father figures. This is evident through Tomas's denial of running away, and Mats' persistent effort to justify his escape as the logical thing to do, since then he would be able to heroically dig them out afterwards.

Nevertheless, through Östlund's complex yet critical depictions of a nuclear family, and his satirical representations of masculinity through fatherhood, a rather different masculine ideal emerges. He mocks the idea of heroic father figures and then creates a scene where Ebba pretends to be in danger, which allows Tomas to have his longed-for super-hero attention. Thus, the argument of the film differs from Ebba's and Tomas's solution for their parental struggles, as Ebba solves Tomas's inferiority complex by helping him become the "Hollywood-hero" after all.

Nevertheless, the character of Tomas does change throughout the narrative, from initially expressing that he feels like a failure, to eventually acknowledging himself as good enough if he just does his best, in addition to some support from his wife. Nevertheless, the notion of an ideal superhero masculinity is present in the *Force*

*Majeure* narrative, as Tomas feels like a failure because of his unheroic actions. Thus, this Hollywood ideal of being a 'superdad' perhaps motivates Tomas to lie, which paradoxically makes him not only unheroic but also a dishonest man and an inadequate father.

Nevertheless, some similarities exist between Östlund's and Hollywood's fatherhood narratives, as the Hollywood lone fathers, according to Hamad, go on emotional journeys through their respective narratives, culminating in strengthened bonds with their children. This is also evidenced in *Force Majeure*. However, in Östlund's narrative heroic fathers are not depicted as the ideal family figure or as ideal masculinity.

Hamad writes that many Hollywood productions "...centralize protectorate fatherhood in narratives that place fathers and their children in extreme and exceptional circumstances that test the limits of their paternal credentials" (2013: 109). Östlund's film, on the contrary, while being a fictional drama comedy, is more honest in that it represents a Scandinavian family without idealizing the mother or the father. Instead, it discusses how to overcome the everyday marital struggles in a nuclear family. Östlund complicates further the issue of fatherhood with a narrative that questions the parenting roles instead of applauding an idealized and protective father figure. Perhaps this is a consequence of the Scandinavian equality achievements: men are not praised for being regular father figures. Östlund is not, to any extent, glorifying the rather improbable postfeminist Hollywood ideals of paternal accomplishment, but rather directs attention to the equality issues of co-parenting. Thus, Östlund's film portrays a kind of masculinity that he is critiquing, while the Hollywood films offer idealized masculine characters.

At odds with Hollywood's "discursive turn towards fatherhood as ideal masculinity" (Hamad, 2013: 101) Östlund has created a narrative that raises questions of the unclear definition of ideal fatherhood in Scandinavia, but he emphasizes the importance of being present and showing interest. Nevertheless, *Force Majeure* also depicts the male protagonist with a privileged identity formation, only not as addressed as in the Hollywood discourses. *Force Majeure* leaves the audience wonder whether Tomas' identity formation is enough to qualify him as a good enough parent, willing to sacrifice his pride and his time, contributing to his children's well-being.

When unexpected, dangerous situations happen, is there a clear expectation of a certain behavior from fathers in a nuclear family, to automatically take the leading position? Moreover, what does a Scandinavian father think is expected from him? Do the apparent gender-equal Scandinavian societies expect the same actions from men and women? What kind of attitude do Scandinavian women expect from their husbands, and children from their fathers? Is a Scandinavian father supposed to rescue his family from dangerous situations? When is a man considered a coward, and when is a woman considered a hero? These are questions that Östlund meditates upon with the *Force Majeure* narrative. He does not answer all these questions but rather emphasizes that Ebba wants an involved father to her children and a more present husband. Ebba wants an "us", and not a "me" and "you"-solution for their family.

### 3.6 AN ADEQUATE SCANDINAVIAN FATHER FIGURE

With the *Force Majeure* narrative, Östlund indicates that contemporary Scandinavian families have issues concerning gender equality. This is evident through his depictions of Tomas' and Ebba's struggle to agree on the distribution of their parenting responsibilities. Östlund does not, to any particular extent, foist postfeminist masculinity ideals upon his viewers, but he rather depicts both Tomas and Ebba as complex characters with different qualities and flaws.

Hamad mentions several fatherhood films from the 80s and 90s as examples of films "creating humour from a narrative of inept but subsequently transformed and ameliorated fatherhood". In some ways, Östlund's depictions are similar, since the character of Tomas changes in the end. Nevertheless, his change indicates that he intends to be more honest and more present, not that he is more able than his wife to take care of their children. Östlund's depictions of fatherhood, I argue, is unlike the father figures in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Hollywood narratives, and clearly less glorified. If Hollywood depicts a postfeminist fantasy of ideal masculinity, Östlund endeavors to present a more realistic opposite. He mocks the Hollywood depictions of fathers, as heroic deeds are portrayed as inordinately important for the fathers in the narrative, making the audience laugh at their frantic desires for positive attention. In *Force Majeure*, the fathers' depicted desires of being valued as protectorate heroes resemble a negative masculine attribute and function as a counter-argument to the contemporary postfeminist Hollywood masculinity ideals. In his narrative, the desire of being 'superdads' is depicted as egotistic, rather than 'hot and sexy'. Thus, Östlund is, apparently, more concerned with what attributes make an adequate parent, rather than reinforcing idealized fantasies.

In the same way that Trump's conceited statement was a source of ridicule, Östlund's depictions of a Scandinavian family father suggests a shift away from the postfeminist Hollywood 'superdads', and it mocks the male protagonist's pathetic desire to be acknowledged as heroes. Apparently, Östlund welcomes the ordinary parent. Thus, he seems to challenge the imperialistic Hollywood fatherhood ideals and leans toward an equal model of parenting, making both Ebba and Tomas inept parents in different ways, but at the same time equally important to their children. He does not claim that gender equality is achieved in Scandinavia; instead, he proposes abandoning the postfeminist masculinity ideals behind and promoting a discourse of egalitarian 'good enough' parenting. Leaving both the 21<sup>st</sup> century Hollywood masculinity ideals, and the 20<sup>th</sup> century tradition of fathers as breadwinners and mothers as housewives, Östlund seems to suggest something in between.

Hamad points out how "the cultural logic and political efficacy of popular cinematic postfeminist fatherhood as a means by which to at once 'account' for feminism and reify new hegemonic masculinities" (2013: 113) The protective lone father heroes in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Hollywood discourses are glorified both as the better parent, and additionally, also as the better man. In this way, it has a negative effect on both mothers and fathers, making parenting a competition of the superior gender. Such a competition, I argue, is not beneficial concerning either gender equality, nor the children being the sources of the rivalry. As an example, one scene depicts Ebba's and Tomas's son, Harry, burst out that he is afraid that they are getting a divorce. Later, the children demand Ebba to take part when they are trying to comfort the upset Tomas, indicating that they want their parents to cooperate.

Nevertheless, Tomas' lying habit changes in the last scene of the film, where one of the other tourists offers Tomas a cigarette. At first, he politely refuses the offer, but after thinking about it momentarily, he reconsiders and says, "Actually, can I have one anyway?". Then we see Tomas, with his son's hand in one hand and a cigarette in the other, and when Harry asks, "Do you smoke, daddy?", he dares to admit it: "Yes, I do!" This is an interesting turn, which paradoxically, transforms the act of smoking a cigarette in front of his son to a symbol of Tomas's transformation into an efficient father. Compared to Hamad's depiction of the idealization of protective Hollywood father figures, Östlund is, perhaps, representing a positive contra entry, from a feminist political perspective, indicating that the expectations from a Scandinavian father are qualities

such as truthfulness, honesty and interpersonal skills, rather than being some idealized predominant super-hero father figure, waiting for his parenting skills applause. Yet, as depicted in *Force Majeure*, these Scandinavian male protagonists still need time to accept and embrace their positions of equal parenting.

Both Hamad (2013) and Martausová (2017) emphasize the abundance of postfeminist Hollywood narratives that expose protective heroic father figures as their most conspicuous ideals, reifying masculine hegemony. *Force Majeure* instead discourses about what it takes to be two equal parents, able to cooperate with their mutual responsibility of their children's well-being, as a team. From a feminist perspective, an ordinary, honest and relaxed, cigarette-smoking father should be more 'hot and sexy' than a self-righteous protective hero-figure longing for his parental medal-of-honor.



## 4 PATRIARCHY AND POWER IN THE SQUARE (2017)

“How much inhumanity does it take before we access your humanity?” (The Square, 2017)

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

On the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research’s website, patriarchy is described as “a deeply rooted social structure that is clearly based on and reinforces heteronormative notions”. This patriarchal structure remains strong in today’s society, they argue, due to a variety of norms, values and social mechanisms. They state that knowledge about patriarchy and its structures can be used to understand how gender inequality is created and maintained in modern society. Furthermore, “as a consequence of the patriarchal notion that men are rational, reasonable and political beings, while women are assigned the opposite traits, men are considered best suited to posit the economic, political and legal power.” In his book, *Masculinities in Contemporary American Culture* (2017), Thomas Keith contends that there are many theories on patriarchy, of which Marxist theory is the most cited example. This theory, he continues, claims that “patriarchy is a power-structure whereby one group of people (men) controls another group of people (women), and that this control depends on capitalism, since the control group holds financial power over the controlled group» (Keith, 2017: 3).

This chapter considers Östlund’s depictions of masculine behavior in *The Square* (2017), and I examine in which ways the film’s characters behave according to the above-mentioned patriarchal notions. I demonstrate that the film, set in Scandinavian society, depicts an environment with a fair amount of social injustice despite the social developments framing Scandinavia’s reputation. The two-and-a-half-hour-long satirical drama comedy portrays a variety of dilemmas concerning power relations, including several contemporary political debates in its discourse, such as immigration policy, class distinction, and along with it, gender equality.

Östlund is criticized in several reviews (*Variety*, *Vox*) for overreaching himself with this film, attempting to do too much at once. I agree that *The Square* encompasses a broad variety of political issues. However Östlund is trying to call attention to the fact that these issues are connected to each other, just as different structures in society are connected. Thus, *The Square* is an ambitious effort to discuss complex structures in the machinery of power. I highlight several scenes in the film, with depictions uncovering some of the structures concerning class hierarchy and power relations, and I focus on those affecting masculine identities in one way or another.

*The Square* follows the chief curator of the prestigious “X-Royal Museum” in Stockholm, Christian (Claes Bang), and the process of planning and launching the exhibitions, as well as how to promote them propitiously. The up-coming art exhibit ‘The Square’ is both the concrete and symbolic theme for the film’s narrative, accentuating issues such as equality, trust, and caring. Östlund’s seems to use *The square* to make fun of the bourgeois cultural elite. The film depicts a cruel and egocentric capitalist society, as Östlund has portrayed the city of Stockholm with a considerable number of beggars, homeless, and disadvantaged people who are ignored by preoccupied passers-by, which demonstrates a cold and narcissistic society. These depicted class distinctions offer a rather pessimistic vision of the Scandinavian culture.

The concrete art installation, from which the film’s title is taken, is a four meter by four meter, bright white, up-lit, painted square on the brick stones in front of the museum, with an inscription on a metal plate in front: “The Square is a sanctuary of trust and caring. Within it we all share equal rights and obligations.” This is a pleasant thought

experiment, but evidently far from the environment depicted in the film. Thus, a key point of *The Square* is that the elite hide their underlying agenda of making profit, concealed by their apparent great engagement in fine arts. Or rather, their egotism is hidden behind fine words and ideologically challenging art work, selling the words of 'sympathy' and 'caring' while they simultaneously turn their backs on injustice.

There is a parallel, concurrent story to the main narrative, concerning Christian's attempt to get his phone and wallet back, after they are stolen from him in an early scene in the film. In this side-story, Christian tracks his phone via its GPS signal and decides to distribute a threatening letter to all the residents living in the apartment block where the stolen goods are located, in an attempt to intimidate the one perpetrator. Later, Christian is followed by an immigrant boy (Elijandro Edouard) living in one of the apartments. The immigrant boy is in trouble because of Christian's accusation that leads his parents to believe he is a thief. The boy promises to "create chaos" for Christian if he does not apologize for the unjust act. Eventually, Christian's private issues obscure his responsibilities at the museum, and his moral standards are challenged.

## 4.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I will make use of theories from Pierre Bourdieu's "The Forms of Capital", (1986) and Raewyn Connell's book *Masculinities* (1995), in addition to Thomas Keith's book *Masculinities in Contemporary American Culture* (2017), as I examine the attributes and behavior of the film's main character, Christian, and his male associates.

Gender issues are not discussed in Bourdieu (1986), but I wish to use his theories about class to maintain an awareness of the fundamental significance of *cultural* and *social* capital (in addition to monetary capital) within the structures of power appropriation, as "means of acquiring exclusive advantages" (Bourdieu, 1986: 27). He describes three forms of cultural capital: *the embodied state*, as "long-lasting dispositions in the mind and body", *the objectified state*, as cultural goods, such as pictures, books and dictionaries, and, finally, *the institutionalized state*, as "the objectification of cultural capital in the form of academic qualifications" which are convertible into economic capital through the monetary value of academic capital (ibid: 17). Bourdieu explains social capital as "...membership in a group – which provides each of its members the backing of the collectively owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word" (ibid: 21). These different forms of capital are visible in the film's depictions of power hierarchies, class distinction and patriarchal structures, and, as I demonstrate, are affecting the identities of *The Square's* characters in several ways.

Bourdieu criticizes the definition of the economy of practices in economic theories, claiming it is "reducing the universe of exchange to mercantile exchange, which is objectively and subjectively oriented toward the maximization of profit" (ibid: 16). In this way, he argues, it implicitly defines the forms of capital that are economic in the restricted sense as noneconomic, or rather, "in the immaterial form of cultural capital or social capital" (ibid). He explains how these latter forms of capital are convertible into economic capital as social energy, when appropriated on a private agent or group, in the form of reified or living labor. The social world, he explains, is accumulated history, and capital is accumulated labor over time, emphasizing that exchange of capital is not based on accidental circumstances with perfect equality of opportunity (ibid). Thus, Bourdieu's theories of capital explain, to some extent, the logics of the inequalities depicted in *The Square*. Through this analysis, I will search for traces of cultural capital, acquired by the character of Christian, in addition to his social capital, and subsequently give an account for the increasing amount of power it generates. And, along these tracks, I will search for

depictions of masculine behavior illustrating why power, repeatedly, seems to have a male prefix.

Bourdieu's theory is pertinent explaining some of the structures maintaining the social disparity amongst the characters in *The Square*, as well as the basis for its depiction of the bourgeois elite's depicted immoral and egotistic behavior. This drama comedy portrays a distinctively split Scandinavian society, where democracy, social welfare and gender equality, in principle, are among one of its most celebrated characteristics. Thus, I will argue, the film is a suitable point of departure for discussing capitalist patriarchal structures. I will demonstrate through the attributes of Christian, which ways a fortunate position such as he enjoys helps to manage his increasing accumulation of power. Analyzing male characters' behavior in *The Square*, using Bourdieu's concepts of cultural and social capital, supplemented with Connell's and McIntosh's gender perspectives, will make more evident the film's depictions of social structures forging masculine identities. Connell argues:

Because gender is a way of structuring social practice in general, not a special type of practice, it is unavoidably involved with other social structures. It is now common to say that gender 'intersects' – better, interacts – with race and class. We might add that it constantly interacts with nationality or position in the world order (Connell, 1995: 75).

This underlines my point that, with *The Square*, Östlund illustrates how different Scandinavian social and political structures affect each other, and, that this complexity often makes these structures more difficult to discover. Thus, because of these imbricated structures, it is easier to have a lucky escape with unjust actions, since one cannot oppose discrimination or abuse of power, for instance, if it is not clear what causes it, or from where it arises.

### 4.3 THE BENEFITS OF SYMBOLIC CAPITAL

It is common knowledge that capital is needed to gain and maintain a powerful position in a capitalist society, while what counts as capital is not always as indisputable. In his theory 'The Forms of Capital' (1986), Bourdieu explains in which sense some social mechanisms function as capital, and the cause for their sustainability. Thus, utterly relevant for the society depicted in *The Square*, Bourdieu demonstrates how capital can be expressed in different forms, rather than simply monetary, and argues that "it is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory" (Bourdieu, 1986: 15).

In *The Square's* prologue, Christian is asleep on a couch in his office, fully dressed, with a half-eaten take-away burger on the floor. He has apparently spent the last few hours of the night there, as the film score plays fading night club music that transforms into a constant beeping-noise, indicating a troublesome case of tinnitus from yesterday's loud party and a rather laidback and immature attitude concerning his work obligations. He wakes up, evidently hung-over, when a female co-worker enters the office and reminds him of an upcoming interview. A moment later, in an exhibition-room during sound check, he lies unscrupulously about what he had for breakfast, trying to appear a bit classier than the more loutish truth, unblushingly listing up "bread and cheese, coffee, an egg, juice and some corn flakes". Thus, in the following, I attempt to explain some of

the reasons for Christian's dishonesty, and the kind of social game of which he seems to be a part.

Because of his powerful position, people behave differently towards Christian than towards characters portrayed with less power. When Christian speaks, people listen. For example, when he presents the up-coming exhibition for the museum's regular visitors, donors and "friends of the museum", as he deliberately addresses them, everyone pays attention to his thoroughly rehearsed "off-the-cuff" performance, and respectfully laughs at his jokes, while the chef, subsequently presenting the menu, is ignored. *Symbolic capital*, as Bourdieu describes cultural capital, "because the social conditions of its transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic capital [...]" (Bourdieu, 1986: 18), is evidently of high value, and it is often significant for acquiring an even more important position, as an upward spiral of power appropriation. Christian and the chef have different relations to the audience, as Christian is speaking to "his own" class, while the chef does not draw the same kind of security, or benefits, from this cultural elite that constitute a considerable part of Christian's social capital. Christian's power accumulates through the exchange of cultural and social capital as the museum with its donors and its members grant Christian cultural credentials to expand his already important position, and vice versa.

*The Square* does not explicitly depict or narrate Christian's years of growth (despite his Danish accent), nor his parents' positions, economic status, or educational pathways. Nevertheless, his attitude, attributes and expertise account for what the society he is part of has taught him to become, and how he consequently benefits from his privileged persona. Therefore, in the following, I uncover depictions of Christian's cultural capital in its embodied form and demonstrate how this form of capital shapes his character, as "external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into habitus" (Bourdieu, 1986: 18). At the same time, I attempt to determine patriarchal traces of appropriation of social and cultural capital as I continue to investigate depictions of the structures maintaining his, and his male colleagues', positions of power.

Obviously, the character of Christian possesses a fair amount of capital. Economic capital from his apparent high salary, cultural capital, both in the embodied and in the objectified state, and social capital, through his considerable network of connections. Christian's position at work, distinguished clothing, confident attitude, supportive friends and colleagues, posh accent when he speaks fluent English, in addition to his fine apartment and expensive Tesla car are some examples that symbolize his upper-class subject position. Elements of symbolic capital are important for Christian to maintain or increase this powerful position.

Perhaps Christian *wants* to embody the humanistic ideologies of 'The Square', but as one of the museum's employees, he also *needs* to be associated with it, since the sustainability of the museum depends on bourgeois donors, who, then again, want to be members of and associated with a highly reputable institution. Thus, Christian's appearance is needed to maintain the museum's good and profitable reputation. In this is the paradox of the art installation: using the ideological art-work's idealistic words, such as 'respect' and 'equality', to gain cultural and social capital, thereby widening the power distinction between the elite and the working class. Apparently, the management of the art institution knows the rules of the economic game and how to make use of symbolic capital for further profit.

The bourgeoisie cultural elite, with Christian as its leading disciple, seems to be preaching for greater humanity while they rather act in the opposite direction. Throughout the narrative, it appears that the museum's intention to investing in an art-installation decorated with a humanistic rhetoric is primarily to make profit from it. The

word "equality" seems to function just as much as a business strategy as it does as a desired achievement. Thus, the handsome, articulate and well-educated character of Christian is beneficial for the museum's reputation. Additionally, his social and cultural capital has a high marketable value, profitable both for himself and for any people and places to which he chooses to distribute his labor.

Compared to the poor, homeless, immigrant, or disadvantaged people depicted in the film, it is easy to detect who has the greatest opportunity to appropriate power, or capital, in any form. The film implores us to notice the gap between the opportunities of the highest and lowest classes, between Christian and the depicted poor people in the streets, for instance, who lacks all the forms of capital listed above. More interesting, however, and less obvious, are depictions of how the most powerful people manage their power, and which kinds of characters, or attitudes, make the decisions that govern the hierarchical orders, or rather, the identity of the current society, *within* the bourgeois elite. In other words, which kinds of power, or capital, govern the directions of social justice?

In one early scene Christian rehearses his introduction for the museum's donors and members of the up-coming exhibition, disingenuously planning to start over again saying, "this sounds too stiff, may I start over again", which reveals he is delivering rehearsed lines rather than speaking from his heart, as if he had an important part in a theatrical show (which is not far from the truth due to the crucial profits from demonstrating his cultural and social capital). He explains, while rehearsing, that this project means a lot to him, as the noble man he wants to appear. Christian proudly describes 'The Square's' ideology, presenting it for his audience saying, "In the square we take care of one another, here you can ask for help". He appears to enjoy the credibility he receives from functioning as a noble benefactor, which makes himself and the museum look good. The ideal community values that the exhibition "The Square" accentuates don't exist in real life in the film, but rather functions as an illustration of what is wrong with the structures outside the, in many ways, utopian quadrangle of absolute Scandinavian equality. Thus, 'The Square' functions as a symbol that the middle class likes to decorate themselves with, like an ornament of humanity. Nevertheless, as I will come back to, this ornament will be substantially tremendously damaged.

The fine words describing the exhibition have limited utility value for those who are less likely to be invited to the fine social gatherings, which the elite uses to increase its power. When Christian presents this exhibition to the museum's habitués he enthusiastically emphasizes the importance of these human values, which he personally seems to fail to embody. The powerful position Christian holds at the museum makes him rather self-absorbed and conscious of his appearance. He knows what kind of attitude, or performance, in addition to his visual appearance, is the most beneficial to uphold, or increase, his status.

Furthermore, perhaps more importantly, his position appears to make him more arrogant and egocentric. Considering Bourdieu's theories of capital, this attitude is a part of the economic game of society, in other words, as "reified or living labor" (1986 :15), as certain kinds of behaviour, or performances, make different kinds of profit. For example, the details of Christian's outfit, a fine suit with orange socks and shiny leather dress shoes, and the smart red glasses complementing his scarf with blue and green details are most certainly intentional, and is better suited to the imaginary breakfast he lied about than the greasy take away burger on the floor in his office. He has the knowledge, or the cultural capital, to offer an impressive performance, and a fashionable, or, a rather snobbish appearance, which indicates what kind of social groups he likes to be identified with. Bourdieu emphasizes the game Christian appears to be part of by saying:

The class of practices whose explicit purpose is to maximize monetary profit cannot be defined as such without producing the purposeless finality of cultural or artistic practices and their products; the world of bourgeois man, with his double-entry accounting, cannot be invented without producing the pure, perfect universe of the artist and the intellectual and the gratuitous activities of art-for-art's sake and pure theory (Bourdieu, 1986 :16).

#### 4.4 A TOP-DOWN ATTITUDE

Several of the main male characters in *The Square*, with Christian as the most conspicuous one, have leading roles at the museum. Nevertheless, as I demonstrate, they do not appear to be "rational and reasonable" as the patriarchal notions that favor male management expect them to be. Instead of taking care of his obligations at work, Christian is more engaged in personal matters. For instance, he chooses to be absent from an important artist talk and several meetings at the museum in favor of implementing the spontaneous and rather silly plan to retrieve his stolen phone and wallet back. Another crucial example of Christian's lack of responsibility, or even lack of engagement in fine arts, is salient in a scene in which he is informed that one of the cleaners at the museum has accidentally vacuumed parts of a paper-piles art piece. Christian arbitrarily decides that the museum employees must put it back themselves, without reporting the incident, as he believes that no one will notice. His decision reveals his ignorance of the art he is supposed to mediate, and a lack of respect for the artists and the visitors paying to see it. At the same time, it illustrates the social game more clearly, indicating that Christian's position is more important for him than his obligations within it, manifesting his attachment to the cultural elite.

The values that the museum proclaims to pay homage to, in other words, the installation's ideals of equality, are applicable for analyzing Christian's identity. Ostensibly, Östlund has created this character to illustrate how a position of power forges people's attitudes and influences their choices of action. Thus, the character of Christian navigates the film's audience through contrasts in the unjust culture of which he is a part. In the film's narrative, Östlund emphasizes the importance of making people with power aware of the responsibility that accompanies their fortunate positions. Christian's apparent double standards make the ideals of the art installation appear false. Whenever he feels like it, Christian can be tempted to some spontaneous charity, as in a scene where he is overwhelmed that he received his stolen wallet back and cheerfully gives some money to an immigrant beggar woman. However, wealthy people distributing money now and again will not compensate for their unjust actions, nor will it close the power gap between the rich and the poor. Thus, Christian's sporadic "generosity" rather manifests his fortunate position compared to the beggar woman.

Apparently, Christian's position of power seems to have a negative influence on his identity. He behaves with an arrogant attitude towards people outside his own circle, and, seemingly, he considers his own well-being as more important than caring about the troublesome situations he causes for others. While he has behaved disrespectfully towards the immigrant boy, by handing out the threatening letters, he does not, in principle, intend to apologize for his unjust acts. On the contrary, Christian appears to be annoyed that the immigrant boy causes trouble for *him*.

This ignorant top-down attitude also follows Christian in his relations with women. In one scene, when he is at a party, he approaches several women, but when he does not succeed in awakening their interest, he randomly targets out the next one. One example

of Christian's self-glorification concerns his relation to his female antagonist, the journalist Anne (Elisabeth Moss). After a party, they end up at her apartment having sex, although he clearly emphasized earlier the same evening, talking to himself in a bathroom mirror, that he was not going to sleep with her. Nevertheless, it transpires that Anne is more emotionally attached to him than he is to her, a situation that he takes advantage of, having no intentions of further contact. Nevertheless, the problem is not merely that they had sex, but rather his arrogant behavior towards her afterward. Subsequently, when Anne is going to the bathroom, Christian refuses to allow her to take the used condom to throw it away. She enthusiastically tries to persuade him, since she cannot understand his persistence. Anne begins to suspect that he is resistant because he is afraid that she would secretly use it to impregnate herself to have his baby, indicating that he believes that Anne thinks of him as the perfect catch. Then Anne makes a point: "You really think highly of yourself don't you," which seems to be an appropriate description of his attitude.

Later, Anne confronts Christian at the museum when Christian would not answer her phone calls. She accuses him of using his position: "...which is a position of power, to attract women, and to make conquests, that is what I think", she says. Christian rhetorically questions her in return, asking, "Well, did it work for you?", and he continues by asking, "Why is it so hard to admit that power is a turn-on?". This conversation becomes an intricate and thought-provoking discussion between the two, with Östlund's omnipresent ambiguity leaving the audience wondering who of the two is the actual conqueror. Nevertheless, Christian admits that he is aware that power is "a turn on", which, accordingly, makes all of his condescending acts more deliberate.

As I have called attention to, the society depicted in the film *The Square* lies far from the exhibition 'The Square's' ideals. Many of the characters in the film need help for various reasons. To ask for help and not receive any is thematised multiple times in the film, from different positions within the power geometries of class, gender, and nationality. Throughout the narrative, no one wants to help anyone but themselves, except, perhaps, the poorest and most powerless people, presumably having nothing to lose. Being rich and powerful does not seem to be a recipe for compassion. Instead, it creates more materialism and egocentrism, and Christian's character is the embodiment of this. As an example of his top-down attitude is demonstrated in a scene at a shopping mall, and Christian refuses to help an immigrant "beggar man" with some money. He brushes him off and says that he does not have any cash. Subsequently, when an urgent situation regarding 'The Square' promotion campaign arises, Christian needs help and fruitlessly tries to contact several people without getting any attention. Then he rushes back to the "beggar man", whom he just rejected, rudely interrupts him while he is praying, shamelessly asking for *his* help and asks him to watch over his shopping bags while he looks for his daughters. The "beggar man" immediately complies with Christian's request saying that it is "no problem".

Through 'The Square' exhibition, Christian emphasizes the importance of words such as "trust", "caring" and "equality", which are fundamental human values. But, hypocritically, when he is robbed the only thing he seems to care about is how to get his things back and ignores the troublesome situations he causes for others. This kind of ignorance, I will argue, is a disheartening attitude that puts equality issues at risk. Thus, Christian, as the museum's disciple of equality issues, seems more preoccupied with maintaining his powerful position through *speaking* about the fine values of the fine arts than using his position to actually achieve equal rights. Thus, such a double-dealer attitude favoring patriarchal power actually contributes to maintaining a rather convenient status quo for the already powerful elite. Such an attitude clearly also

supports a gendered division of power, since the equality values of the art installation Christian presents apply to the entire capitalist patriarchal society. When injustice “happens” beyond his comprehension he does not seem to care at all but rather puts on blinkers. Such an attitude accounts for his severe derogation of responsibility for those with less influential power.

Christian’s lack of respect, and his top-down attitude towards Anne, the “Chaos-boy” and the “beggar man” allow Christian to behave as he pleases towards them. This top-down attitude is more pronounced early in the narrative before he finally has to leave his position as an art curator. Initially, their feelings are secondary as long as he gets what he wants: sexual satisfaction, his stolen phone and wallet, a helpful hand when he is in trouble, and along with this, his good reputation.

The main issue at stake with such behavior is what kind of society this top-down ignorance causes. It is often difficult to determine exactly how the bourgeois elite increase their power, which is one of the dangers inherent in equality achievements. The elite’s attitude concerns just as much what they are not doing. Ignorance towards less beneficial people will delay, or even worse, reset equality achievements. As John Stuart Mill wrote in his essay ‘On Liberty’ (1859) “A person may cause evil to others not only by his actions but by his inaction, and in either case he is justly accountable to them for the injury” (Mill, 2003: 96).

#### 4.5 A GENDERED GAP OF INFLUENCE

Prior to the opening of the exhibition, the exhibition team members gather to discuss how to promote ‘The Square’. The museum has engaged two ambitious young male journalists to produce the promotion material for the installation. However, they already have a rather specific idea of how they want the promotion material to look. Their arguments are well prepared, and they try to convince the management that their ideas are appropriate to support the exhibition. They claim that it is important to create a progressive and up-to-date campaign that is more visible than the posters and newspaper advertisements that the museum normally uses. Further, they confidently contend that if the museum chooses to use the regular promotion material they will reach no one but their regular customers, such as “old women”. On the contrary, they explain, if they make the promotion material more easily accessible, by using online moving images, they might perhaps be able to get international attention.

The distinct self-confidence among the men in the meeting room is in contrast to the submissive attitude among the women present. Nevertheless, it seems that many of the male characters in the film have a tendency to be carried away by their own spontaneous and imprudent ideas: Christian with the threatening letter, and the PR personnel with their promotion-material. The PR men know what they want, and, apparently, they will fight their way to win through with their planned project. Hence, for the occasion, the two PR-males have dressed up in a “we-want-to-look-important” clothing to maintain a smart appearance. At the first meeting, they wear similar “bubble” vests under suit jackets, and for the second meeting, they both have white shirts as part of their projected strategy for success. The way they confidently push their ideas forward, bulldozing the exhibition management with their plan, is somewhat disquieting, considering the uneven power balance depicted. They are not at all interested in answering, or even listening to, the young female staff member’s critical questions.

In this sequence, Östlund seems to be indicating different common attitudes for men and for women, with some men’s social advantages more pronounced, inter alia, due to their distinct expectations of being respected and listened to, in contrast to an



"I'm-not-sure-if-I'm-any-good" attitude amongst the female characters. On the Swedish Government web-site, a text emphasizes the importance of female influence:

The possibility of influencing the content of decisions requires participation in decision-making. If women are to be able to hold half of the real power, regardless of sector, influence over which issues on the agenda are addressed or rejected is required. This applies both to decision-making processes at all political levels in society, including at U level, and to arenas outside the formal democratic system.

Christian, as the leader of the exhibition, is preoccupied with his personal "get-back-his-wallet" project. He drops by in the middle of the second meeting, but only to take a brief look at the plans in progress, and he gives his approval immediately: "This looks good, you should go for it." His colleagues explicitly ask him to stay, but Christian will not listen to them. Then he disrespectfully whistles at one of the women present, a co-worker whose name he does not know, to get her attention and, subsequently asks her if she has a driver's license before he demands that she accompany him, without asking her if she wants to.

In the meeting room, confidence appears to be one of the most conspicuous, and most profitable masculine attributes with regard to power appropriation. Apparently, an over-confident attitude helps male characters clear their way to make their suggestions or claims win through. Östlund, in his casual yet cleverly absurd, socially aware and intricate manner, is critically trying to discuss the different attitudes of men and women, the male and female behavior, and the gains or losses they make because of the evident heteronormative gender norms present. This gendered division of power and confidence might be easy to disregard, perhaps, as Scandinavians seem to be blinded by the notion that they live in a fairly gender-equal society.

At one point at the meeting, one of the younger women present gazes seductively at the PR males. She is clearly fascinated by the confident young men, which illustrates an outdated and archaic idea of silly and naïve young women who are mainly interested in flirting and of being desirable. This depiction is deliberately provocative and plays on the initial quote of this chapter, with the notion of men being best suited, more rational and reasonable when dealing with politics and decision making. Subsequently, when she tries to question their promotion-project, she is silenced with a self-confident and discourteous hand-gesture.



Figure 2

At the meeting the authority is entirely in the hands of the dominating men who appear more educated and demonstrate a patronizing attitude. For example, when one of the women in the office proposes using "the ice-bucket challenge", her idea is rejected by an older male staff member, who, as a matter of course, is acquainted with what the ice-bucket challenge campaign really is. When the woman speaks, the feeling I get as an audience member, is that her idea is considered naive and lacks expertise, and that the men are just impatiently waiting for her to stop talking, eager to continue elaborating their own ideas. The PR people's impatient expressions are conspicuous, with their restless fumbling with a pen, clearly eager to continue the presentation of their, according to themselves, great project.

Thomas Keith writes that due to "systems in place that assure the continued subordination of women in a host of ways and degrees, males gain advantages unavailable or less available to women" (Keith, 2017: 4). This male privilege, he argues, is "the logical outgrowth of patriarchy" (ibid). He states that because of these systems benefiting men over women, men have certain advantages solely due to their gender. Subsequently, Keith refers to Peggy McIntosh who states, "The weightless and invisible backpack carried by white males is the largest and most expansive of all, granting them access to the most spaces with the least doubts about their sense of place or authority" (ibid: 8). Her argument is in accordance with Östlund's depictions of the male characters planning the shape of the exhibition's promotion material. Although McIntosh's assertions concern American men, her theory of male authority is just as relevant when analyzing Östlund's Scandinavian male characters. Apparently, they do not doubt their authority, but rather think that their ideas are superior to the female character's ideas or critical questions.

Eventually, the PR people convince the exhibition-team of the strength of their innovative promotion project, and, thus, they receive their enabling signal to initiate their plans. However, their promotion-video was not as good an idea as they persistently insisted. The final promotion product appears to be a highly speculative film that is posted on YouTube before Christian sees it, showing a young, blonde, poor girl exploding when a bomb detonates inside 'The Square' installation. A written message is attached to it: "How much inhumanity does it take before we access your humanity?". Nevertheless, this legitimate question addresses the elite's condescending attitude.

The video instantly receives a significant attention. The PR people enthusiastically shout out "we've gone viral" multiple times in a video-message to Christian. It seems that such attention has been their main goal with this project. The way the PR guys are convinced that their idea was a good one is conspicuous, especially due to the predominantly negative response after the release of the film. It seems that their idea of success, in this case, is how many views the video had on YouTube. Naturally, Christian is perturbed when he receives information about the content of the video, painfully aware that he is responsible for the promotion campaign.

Nevertheless, Christian's position at the museum is eventually jeopardized when the promotion video for the art installation receives a negative response from both the media and the citizens of Stockholm who consider the content offensive. The mass media responded in full panoply to the YouTube video, saying it offended beggars and the weakest groups in society by "pissing on them right in their faces". Thus, the PR people's video-message, then, becomes an honest depiction of the museum's concealed agenda, which entails using the situation of less fortunate people to promote an art installation in order to make profit from it. These social reactions damage for the museum's reputation, jeopardizing important future donations. Thus, the installation's that served as the museum's ornament of humanity is damaged, risking the museums good reputation,

integrity and power. This blunder reveals the museum's needs for such an ornament in the first place. The ever-assertive promotion people have, quite unaware, accomplished the opposite of what the museum wanted from them. With their imaginary and fairly over-confident expertise, they have managed to create a provocative campaign that makes people protest against the museum's disrespectful behavior, generating an increased engagement for the equality-ideals of the exhibition, which ironically damages the museum's reputation.

The small characteristics, actions (or lack of actions) of the masculine characters depicted in *The Square*, in sum, indicate a considerable abuse of power for personal benefits. This is shown by, for example, not remembering names or caring about their spontaneous affairs, not paying attention to their female colleagues and not thinking about the consequences for others when dealing with personal issues.

#### 4.6 AN EXCLUDING ART INSTITUTION

Working as a TV-reporter, Anne interviews Christian at the museum. "Hello, again," she says when she arrives, and smiles sincerely, but Christian does not appear to recognize her. His careless expression makes her uncomfortable and she is clearly stressed by the difficult situation. She accidentally drops her papers on the floor, thus demonstrating an insecure and inferior attitude. Christian remains ignorantly calm and does not attempt to ease the situation. Nevertheless, despite Anne's insecurity, her questions are well prepared and thoroughly deliberated. She initiates the interview by asking Christian what the most important tasks for the museum are. He underlines that he hates to admit that the answer is probably money, and he attempts to convince her that money is not important to him personally. In competition with wealthy art-collectors, he explains to her, he has an obligation to present art to the people. Thus, he is selling Anne the story of a responsible institution that tailors the opportunities for all to enjoy the finest curiosities in an open and inclusive museum. Subsequently, Anne surprises Christian by questioning the pretentious formulation of the text on the museum's web-site, and she states that it is not easily accessible to the average Joe. She reads it aloud to him:

Exhibition, Non-Exhibition, an evening conversation that explores that dynamics of the exhibitable, and the construction of publicness in the spirit of Robert Smithson's Site/Non-Site. From non-site to site, from non-exhibition to exhibition, what is the topos of Exhibition: Non-Exhibition in the moments of mega exhibition?

Christian is clearly caught off guard and struggles to remain composed, making a juvenile answer instead of the desired complex response. The institution Christian represents might not aim to be a "folksy" or popular museum, but rather wants the majority to believe that it is. Claims that he aspires to create a popular museum for the masses amounts to nothing but an artificial and rehearsed phrase to gain more credibility. Christian argues that it is important for the museum to compete in the buying of expensive fine art since it can then be presented to "all of Stockholm, and Sweden, and, perhaps, even visitors." Thus, due to the alienating text on the museum's web-site and Christian's ignorant attitude towards people with less integrity, it seems that the cultural elite are primarily included in his "all".

Social structures, depicted through the character of Christian and the society he operates in, seem to be a complicated matter concerning power relations. Bourdieu emphasizes how the different types of capital could be more equally valued, or, rather,

registered and acknowledged as precisely capital. Thus, he suggests a more honest economic system, a “general science of the economy of practices, capable of reappropriating the totality of the practices” (Bourdieu 1986: 16). Such a transparent, economic system would, perhaps, make Christian and his colleagues at the museum less preoccupied, whether it is conscious or not, using clever strategies to maintain their leading positions, appropriating more power with their cultural capital in disguise (compared to the more visible monetary capital).

When Christian proudly presents the human ideologies of ‘The Square’, he speaks as though these values represent the museum’s ethical perspective, taking credit for the artist’s humanistic messages, due to their ownership of the installation. However, the institution seems to have misunderstood that ideals, and especially those concerning equality, cannot be bought for money, as jewelry to decorate your façade.

‘The Square’ is an art-installation, which in the film is attributed to the Argentine artist Lola Arias who is a real, politically, or ideologically, driven artist. According to her homepage, “her productions play with the overlap zones between reality and fiction”, which makes her name correspond well with both the film and the art installation within it. In the narrative, her art-work is inspired by the French art critic Nicolas Bourriaud and his theories of relational aesthetics. “Relational aesthetics is an art-form that investigates how we relate to one another in a social context”, Christian explains when rehearsing the presentation of this new exhibition.

#### 4.7 HIDING IN THE HERD

Shortly after the disastrous promotion video is released, the museum hosts a fine dinner party for special guests, donors and friends to celebrate the Beatrix Hubertus Art Award. This prestigious celebration is critical for the museum to maintain their good reputation and prove their relevance as an important art institution. Thus, the museum can assure the donors that this is an institution worthy of their support and membership. Bourdieu emphasizes what he calls “the multiplier effect” (1986 :22) of social capital, in other words, beneficial gains, both material and symbolic, from membership or association with such “rare, prestigious groups” (ibid). Bourdieu points out that “The profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible” but emphasizes this is not necessarily consciously pursued (ibid). To be a member of the bourgeoisie cultural elite, it is profitable, as depicted in *The Square*, to maintain their superiority needed for their positions by being exclusive and not inviting everyone in.

When Christian arrives, the news-reporters want pictures of him together with the most important donors. Christian appears as somewhat nervous, but his boss gives him a quick “pep-talk” as he passes through the crowd of people: “Focus on that they don’t know, yet”, she says, referring to the disastrous promotion video, which eventually leads to his retreat as an art curator at the museum. For the characters depicted in this scene, *social* capital is just as important as *cultural* capital. Connections, or well-respected names, are tremendously valuable to be invited to this prestigious cultural event.

This sequence indicates that pursuit of maintaining beneficial relations controls the characters’ behavior, as they are preoccupied with retaining their elite positions. The management arranges a special performance for the art exhibition. When all the distinguished guests are seated, the ceremony dinner starts with a voice from a loudspeaker, accompanied by the sound of thunder, heavy rain and chirping of birds, saying:

I'm asking for your utmost caution during this performance. Welcome to the jungle. Soon you will be confronted by a wild animal. As you all know, that hunting instinct is triggered by weakness; if you show fear the animal will sense it, and if you try to escape the animal will hunt you down. But if you remain perfectly still, without moving a muscle, the animal might not notice you, and you can hide in the herd, safe in the knowledge that someone else will be the prey (*The Square*, 2017).

Subsequently, a shirtless man enters the dining hall while he makes loud monkey-sounds. The museum's management has hired a professional actor to make a performance as a monkey. This ape-man does not talk, and he behaves like a real monkey. He walks between the tables and stares at the guests, apparently trying to select his target. Initially the guests smile, laugh in excitement, and whisper eagerly to their dinner partners. Eventually, the monkey-man becomes increasingly aggressive and the pleasant atmosphere soon changes, making the guests become nervous. The monkey-man starts to bully one of the most important guests, the artist Julian (Dominic West), and makes fun of him by putting a napkin on his head and trying to make everyone laugh. Eventually, when Julian lifts his glass of water, the monkey-man suddenly knocks it out of his hands so hard that the glass breaks. Julian does not regard this performance as amusing and leaves the dinner in anger. At this point, all the other guests have become silent, each person afraid that they might be the next target.

In contrast to 'The Square' installation's ideals of treating all people with respect and everyone enjoying opportunities, the society depicted in the film resembles a jungle, where the stronger defeats the weaker. Thus, the monkey sequence might be an exaggerated representation of how the depicted society really operates. This sequence also might be a comment on how women often are frightened to speak up for themselves or to be noticed, and they rather display decorum to avoid being attacked. On the other hand, it might be a depiction of patriarchal power at work. In this sequence powerful people use the power of fear, in addition to their self-confidence, to rule over others. This is in addition to the female "ornamental shrubs" at the fine dinner-party in the dramatic monkey-sequence.

The most terrifying part of the monkey-performance is when the monkey-man jumps onto a table and singles out a woman (Madeleine Barwén Trollvik). He touches her face and her hair as he grunts with pleasure. The scene is utterly intense, and the woman is overcome by fear, but the monkey-man just continues with his abusive behavior.



The scene escalates when he suddenly grabs her hair and drags her body down to the floor. She screams and cries out for help, but no one dares to interfere. She desperately asks her male companion for support, but he does not make a move to assist her. Östlund points out in an interview in *Vulture Magazine* that this is a mini-reprise of the avalanche scene in *Force Majeure* (Östlund, 2014). Eventually, this monkey performance turns out to be even more of an embarrassment for the museum's reputation than the promotional video.

In this situation, the men's physical strength is important to defeat the wild animal. Nevertheless, their delayed intervention is conspicuous due to their obedience of the museum's hierarchal structures. To interfere would make them jeopardize their social capital. Thus, apparently, the structures of capitalism (including all kinds of capital) governs their lack of action. The logics of helping out a friend in trouble seem subordinate to the structures of power. Considering Bourdieu (1986), the scene with the monkey-performance is an example that depicts the structures of cultural and social capital. The fine dining, and fine people wearing their finest clothes and most expensive jewelry to hold on to their elite positions.

The guests invited to the Beatrix Hubertus Art Award dinner have accumulated opportunities and cultural capital greater than that of the average man. The guests at the dinner gather, whether consciously or not, to maintain or increase their beneficial acquaintances. The structure of power makes people afraid of losing the different kinds of capital that they have accumulated, which prevents them from intervening when someone is in trouble. They rather hide in the herd instead of jeopardizing their positions. The fine dinner with the museum's donors depicts this system of power in many ways, a system built on fear of losing your position, rather than collaborating towards a more diverse, inclusive and warm environment.

Even though *The Square* was made before the #metoo-movement it nevertheless illustrates some of the attitude it grew out from. To approve a performance by a man who can behave as frightening and improperly as he pleases towards the guests (and especially towards women) at a fine dinner is disturbing, and a severe abuse of power. The monkey-scene depicts a society where people are too afraid to speak up and risk their chances of having elite positions by criticizing their own. And women are at higher risk and have a lot to win by gaining more power and better positions, to achieve gender equality in the future. The monkey performance represents a patriarchal system that allows inappropriate behavior towards innocent people right before everyone's eyes, disguised as a performance. With this scene, Östlund seems to ask a legitimate question:

What kind of monkey man behaviour do people tolerate? And again, how much inhumanity do people tolerate before they interfere? The characters in the monkey scene are seemingly too afraid to speak up against injustice, risking their integrity, that they are willing to let other people suffer. The monkey performance continues for a remarkably, uncomfortably long time without anyone interfering.

Nevertheless, an interesting depiction in this scene shows one man who, eventually, finds the courage to help the victim. Subsequently, when he interferes other people follow, as some kind of a herd instinct. Apparently, one of Östlund's intentions with this scene is to call attention to the importance of the one, or, rather, the first person brave enough to do something, to make a change.

#### 4.8 REVOLUTIONARY CHAOS

The "chaos boy" and Anne challenges Christian's moral convictions by standing up for themselves when he treats them disrespectfully, which forces him to reconsider his actions. Eventually, Christian realizes by the end of the narrative that his actions have a negative effect on others and that his moral and social beliefs have influential power. The moral conviction of powerful people is necessary for change and equality in a society. After a lot of pressure from the immigrant-boy who threatens to make chaos for him, Christian eventually apologizes for his actions and asks for forgiveness. He cannot reach the boy when he calls him, so he sends him a video message emphasizing his regrets. He begins by saying that he is sorry, before he continues talking about prejudices, admitting he is a bit afraid of the people who live in these kinds of suburban apartment blocks, i.e. lower-class people and immigrants. He continues saying that he believes that many people have such prejudices, which can only be solved with a different system, rather than individually, he points out. Further, he claims that he knows one of the richest people in the world and that, if he contacted him, he would have the power to "with a snap of his fingers" make changes that really matters. Therefore, by saying that one powerful man can make such changes, he contradicts himself when he says that it cannot be solved individually.

The main problem is, I would argue, for the split society of Stockholm, depicted in *The Square*, the bourgeois elite would have the power to make changes towards a more equal society. Nevertheless, it does not seem that they want equality or justice for all, but rather want more profit and more power. Similar to Christian, initially, wanted to help no one but himself rather than thinking about the consequences for others. Christian's masculine identity is part of the cultural elite in a capitalist society where men are more likely to be heard due to the, among other factors, confidence they posit through a history of patriarchal structures. This is a poignant depiction of how the elite portrayed in *The Square*, the capitalism and power structures, are covered in the beautiful ideals of the art installation, as some kind of play for the museum's gallery with its hidden capitalism. Thus, Christian is part of a patriarchal culture that applauds greediness and sharp elbows.

In accordance to Bourdieu's forms of capital, I argue that in order to gain equality, it is crucial to acknowledge the uneven starting point for different groups of people. *The Square*, and the installation within it, reflect on the structures that make some people more fortunate than others, and the responsibility people with power posit, to make the power gap as narrow as possible. Nevertheless, Östlund does not argue, in the society depicted in *The Square*, that class hierarchy and power need to continue being gendered, despite the profitable self-confidence the male characters have appropriated through a history of patriarchy. The patriarchal notion that men are naturally rational, reasonable

and political beings seems groundless in light of the spontaneous, risk-taking and self-absorbed male characters depicted in *The Square*, and therefore, is also worth challenging.

The chaos-boy is important for the identity of Christian, as he forces him to think twice about his unjust actions, and he eventually accepts responsibility and reconsider his disrespectful behavior and prejudiced attitude, due to his growing qualms of conscience. Perhaps he is eventually able to see his own double standards and acknowledge his power, standing in the museum preaching for humanity, while at the same time threatening innocent and less fortunate people. Fortunately, the immigrant boy succeeds in creating chaos for Christian. The character development of Christian is essential, and the apology he passes on to the chaos-boy indicates change, a turn towards a less prejudiced identity for the city depicted in the film.

Finally, the open ending of *The Square's* narrative makes the audience wonder who will replace Christian as the new art curator at the X-Royal Museum: a man with greater power than Christian, who will pursue the patriarchal structures in an already powerful institution? Or someone entirely different, outside the traditional hegemonic order of succession, a person who will create chaos, in other words, someone who might change the identity of the museum. Moreover, what differences would that make? Thus, I argue, Östlund asks an important political question.

## 5 REFLECTIONS ON SCANDINAVIAN MASCULINITIES

### 5.1 RELATIONAL SPACE

In her article "Geographies of Responsibility" (2004) Doreen Massey asks an important question: "What is, in a relational imagination and in light of the relational construction of identity, the geography of our social and political responsibility?" (2004: 6). I suggest that the answer to her rhetorical question is that every identity is part of a geography, which in sum, with multiple kinds of relations, makes up the identity of "global space", and are, therefore, also personally responsible for the shape of global structures. She argues that:

There is an overwhelming tendency in both academic and political literature and other forms of discourse and in political practice to imagine the local as a product of the global. Understanding place as the product of wider relations has often been read as understanding place as having no agency (Massey, 2004 :10).

Massey continues by emphasizing her concerns with the understanding of seeing global structures as something that is "always produced somewhere else" and refers to it as "a persistent exoneration of the local" (2004: 14). Thus, with her theories I will demonstrate the way that every single identity has an impact on global structures, and thus, influence one another even though the social contexts are different.

I use Massey's geographical theories with Östlund's drama comedies to demonstrate examples from the seemingly unimportant and "innocent" Scandinavian society and argue that it is a small part of a significant global structure, and it delivers considerable consequences to the citizens of Scandinavia, the rest of the western world and their unequal opportunities. Massey describes local places as nodes where "they each have distinct positions within the wider power-geometries of the global" (2004:11). Thus, the attitudes of the depicted characters in the rural Swedish districts in *Involuntary*, the depictions of a single Scandinavian family in *Force Majeure*, not to mention the character



of Christian, with his powerful position in *The Square*, are all identities that influence their local places, as nodes that constitute global structures. Thus, Massey's theory on relational space accentuates the responsibility of single identities, such as those depicted in Östlund's films, and, additionally, it accentuates the influential power Östlund has as a film maker.

Patriarchal structures are made and maintained by someone and not by the intangible global world. Single actions, embodied by single actors, in other words, the people who in sum makes up 'the local' have the power of 'the global' – they are what *makes* global structures. For, as Massey (2004) emphasizes, the identity of the undefinable global space is made up of specific local places. Thus, global space is made up of the identities of the people living in local places, and the interactions between them. Thus, it is too simple blaming the global, or "the system", for the unjust society, making no one responsible. Massey points out that:

Capitalism too is carried into places by bodies. Indeed, politically it is important that this is recognized, in order to avoid the imagination of that economy (or the market) as a machine, a figuring which renders it unavailable to political debate (Massey, 2004: 8).

Thus, the global influence of Olle, Lefte, Henrik, and the "lone guy" in *Involuntary*, Tomas and Mats in *Force Majeure* and Christian and his associates in *The Square*, in this sense, are significant. Or, at least, they cannot abjure their responsibility by blaming global structures, since they are part of the structures, within their Scandinavian nodes of the global network made by local relations. The characters depicted in *Involuntary*, *Force Majeure* and *The Square* are responsible for their influential actions and attitudes. Nevertheless, people in powerful positions have greater opportunities to make changes. Thus, Christian is responsible for maintaining patriarchal power, along with any other powerful person, and his attitude and actions do matter. Moreover, Östlund's depictions of the powerful character of Christian offers the hope of a more just society, since the immigrant boy who creates chaos for Christian also has the influential power of the global, through the relation between them.

Christian's behaviour then, with his powerful position at a modern art museum in Stockholm, contributes to, or is part of, global structures. Thus, Christian constitutes a considerable part of the Stockholm node, making him personally – albeit partially – responsible for the injustice through his maintaining and strengthening of the tenacious patriarchal structures in co-operation with other powerful individual people in the world. Hence, single Scandinavian character's actions do matter. For what is the geography of patriarchal structures?

Nevertheless, the depictions of the 'laddish' behavior in *Involuntary*, the troubled father figures in *Force Majeure* and the bourgeoisie elite's top-down attitude in *The Square* exemplifies how masculinities depend on relations. This is another point substantiating Massey's theory of the importance of the responsible identities of 'the local', representable for all kinds of unjust systems. This emphasizes the importance of the attitude and moral conviction that makes up the identity of people in powerful positions, because they do have influential power to change the attitude of their herd towards a more respectful society.

At the same time, the monkey-sequence in *The Square* also exemplifies the larger 'local-becomes-global' social structures of Massey (2004), as it in several ways depicts the classed, hegemonic, top-down elite kinds of power (with the absence of Stockholm's

beggars and poor people in mind, who do not belong at this particular party), and the roles played to maintain them.

Now, it is perhaps in these terms, concerning the internal construction of the identity of place, that many of our threads of thinking about ethics have evolved. The old question of 'the stranger within the gates'. Many of our inherited formulations of ethical questions have that particular imaginative geography: the Walled City (and who shall come in), the question of engagement in proximity, the question of hospitality (Massey, 2004: 6).

Single identities form "the local" and through their different relations, they create global space. Thus, as one of the most powerful people in the cultural elite of Stockholm, Christian would have the ability to make changes towards a less capitalistic society. With *The Square*, Östlund calls attention to capitalist structures that threatens the Scandinavian democracy. Nevertheless, Christian and others with influence should realize that they both have the opportunity and the responsibility to make changes towards a more equal society. The current world is, unfortunately, not a "sanctuary of trust and caring", where everyone shares equal rights and obligations. He would probably profit from, according to Massey (2004), acknowledging the responsibility that accompanies his dominant position, contributing making "space" a more equal place. Finally, while the world has never been more "global", I ask whether local politics, the small, seemingly insignificant decisions, and local people with power have ever been more significant?

This reinforces the assertion of the importance of relationships, Bourdieu (1986), with his theories of social capital, Massey (2004), with her 'relational space', and Connell (1995) describing the importance of masculinities in relation to femininities. Relations are what substantiate the very point of the art installation 'The Square' and the whole narrative as such. Different people relate to each other within groups or classes and, in this particular situation, relations are what influence and shape masculine identities. Nevertheless, some relations, such as relations between confident men and insecure women can be more destructive than it is uplifting for the latter. "Identities are forged in and through relations (which include non-relations, absences and hiatuses). In consequence they are not rooted or static, but mutable ongoing productions" (Massey, 2004: 5)

This, in an ideal world (i.e. power/gender-equality-wise), can eliminate the essentialist view on global structures, making someone responsible, and thus, more accessible for working towards changes. I wish to emphasize the importance of Christian and the other men (Tomas, Mats, Henrik, Olle and Leffe - representable for men in different power relations) and acknowledge their influential power and their ensuing responsibility for global structures. Thus, according to Massey (2004), the so-called global structures can be challenged, or influenced, by local places and the identities they are formed thereby. Further, she argues that, «It is from these local areas that much of what we call the global stems» (2004: 13). Accordingly, with the character of Christian, through new "identity-shaping" relations and by acknowledging his influential power that matters in shaping global structures, and, finally, perhaps, through some more revolutionary chaos.

## 5.2 CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I explored different aspects of Scandinavian masculinities through Ruben Östlund's drama comedies. Initially, I searched for 'Scandinavian lad' behavior in *Involuntary* (2008), and then I investigated 'superdad' issues and Östlund's depictions of what defines an adequate father in a Scandinavian nuclear family in *Force Majeure* (2014). And finally, I examined representations of patriarchal structures, capitalistic perspectives and derogation of responsibility for power relations in *The Square* (2017).

By analyzing representations of masculinities in Östlund's drama comedies, I found that his films both differ from and conform to some of the depictions of masculinities in the postfeminist theories on masculinities that I applied in this thesis. Some of the theorized figures of masculinity are surprisingly similar to the Scandinavian characters, despite the different culture and history of gender equality and economic contexts. Nevertheless, they do not completely conform to the misogynist 'new lad' as depicted in *Involuntary*, but rather obtain some elements of the 'new lads' pubescent behavior. Additionally, Östlund's male characters in *Force Majeure* are not depicted as ameliorating, admirable fathers, as is the case in many Hollywood productions. Thus, Östlund initiates debates on power relations and gender equality, instead of painting a perfect picture of a gender-equal Scandinavia. Nevertheless, several similarities are noted between masculine identities in Östlund's narratives and the postfeminist theories on masculinity, despite Scandinavia's reputation of being more gender equal. Hence, Östlund's male characters are not depicted as better as their female protagonists are, and certainly not as rescuing heroes, but neither are the female characters. However, he meditates upon the problems of male characters trying to be superior.

In Östlund's drama comedies, the behaviors of male characters are critically examined. Thus, they represent various social structures rather than being applauded for their heroic acts or their ability to be affectionate and emotional. Nevertheless, Östlund's representations of masculine behavior also differ from the reputable description of an egalitarian Scandinavia.

As depicted in Östlund's three drama comedies and in line with Raewyn Connell's (1995) introductory definitions of masculinities, different masculine behaviors do depend on class and on their relations, in addition to social structures. The working-class male characters in *Involuntary* are depicted as different from the middle-class male characters in *The Square*. At the same time, Östlund's depictions of Scandinavian male identities conform to a various degree to the Anglophone postfeminist theories on masculinities. Additionally, the male characters' in his films are influenced by the Scandinavian culture.

When I started writing this thesis, I began searching for a definition that would describe the essence of masculinity. My initial plan for the thesis was to look for masculinity in Scandinavian drama comedies. Eventually, I had to change the name of my thesis, from *masculinity* to *masculinities*. Thereafter, I realized that masculinity is also defined by what it is not, and what it could have been if the world were different. A key to understand the various definitions of masculinities I have determined, is that it is defined and shaped by its surrounding cultures, and through its influential relations. Thus, it is also defined by its relation to femininity, as Raewyn Connell (1995) argues. I thought that there were specific, clearly defined (usually male) traits that constituted a particular definition of what masculinity was supposed to look like. Thus, I believed that there were some definitions that would ease the work of revealing the depicted masculinity in my selected films. Nevertheless, I did not find many specific masculinity traits that would define exactly what masculinity is.

One of the greatest challenges of writing this thesis has been the interpretations of what defines masculinities in contemporary Scandinavia. For, as Brabon (2013) argues, that there is a melting pot of masculinities in the British culture. The same, I

argue, describes the various Scandinavian masculinities depicted in Östlund's drama comedies, with its variety of masculine identities, with elements of old and new definitions of masculinities. Östlund's various depictions of male characters in his drama comedies indicates that there is a plurality of masculinities, also in Scandinavia. I have also found, through interpreting Östlund's films and examining postfeminist theories about masculinities, that these masculinities are in a state of constant flux. Masculine identities change over time, through cultures, and through relations. What people refer to as masculine is also changing in the same manner.

This thesis is only a brief excursion into understanding masculinities and gender relation issues in Scandinavia. If I were to suggest further writings on Scandinavian masculinities, it could be to combine more popular views on masculinity issues and a broader selection of Scandinavian films to explore the depictions and representations from several Scandinavian film-makers and see how they conform to Östlund's interpretations of masculinities. Another suggestion is to investigate whether there are differences between the three Scandinavian countries' cinematic output of masculinities, in addition to compare Scandinavia with Anglophone postfeminist theories. Additionally, I would recommend completing a historical overview to examine how the Scandinavian cinematic depictions of masculinities have changed over time in relation to changes in Scandinavian society through gender-equality achievements.

One of the most intriguing aspects of writing this thesis has been to become more aware of social norms and social structures and how these are implemented in the lives of the characters and the societies depicted. Additionally, I have become more aware that responsibility for gender equality is a complex matter. Moreover, perhaps most important, is an awareness of the fact that these structures also will challenge further feminist impact through, inter alia, deep-rooted structures that influence power relations. Östlund's depictions of Scandinavian society structures and masculinities, through the international attention of his films, is valuable to keep masculinities, gender issues and social structures on the agenda.

One of the reasons for starting this project was that I have become increasingly fond of Scandinavian drama comedies, as I have noticed that this genre has moved away from a more easy-going kind of humor towards increasingly complex and serious narratives concerning social engagement. This change has served contemporary Scandinavian drama comedies well. Östlund's drama comedies contain many of society's topical and political issues, and it direct a critical gaze to the Scandinavian culture. The fact that *The Square* won the Palm D'or prize in Cannes, in addition to all the attention Östlund's films have achieved, underlines Östlund's relevance as a director. Östlund uses well-known actors in his cast, which makes his films relevant to audiences all around the world through critical representations of Scandinavian culture, democracy, equality and class.

I am not certain whether the depictions of male characters struggling in *Involuntary*, *Force Majeure* and *The Square* indicate or represent a crisis in Scandinavian masculinity. It might, however, indicate a struggle to follow the last decades' rapid changes in the Scandinavian society, as Scandinavian women have become more empowered. Perhaps this notion of crisis rather indicates the male characters' more or less successful efforts of trying to adjust to a changing society. Additionally, Östlund's depictions of masculinities might indicate the need for more knowledge of and insight into Scandinavian gender equality issues. Östlund's male characters are depicted as introvert and reluctant to open up and reveal their feelings. Thus, this thesis is my contribution to start listening. Moreover, I suggest that Östlund's drama comedies do

contribute to a broader understanding of the various contemporary Scandinavian masculinities.

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*Grand Hotel* (Fröhlich, 2016)

*Involuntary* (Östlund, 2008)

*The Pursuit of Happyness* (Muccino, 2006)

*The Square* (Östlund, 2017)

*The Woman in Black* (James Watkins, 2012)

*Truth about men* (Arcel, 2010)

