1
Men and Change

At the end of the long and narrow dog-legged corridor at my alma mater, the University of New England, bathed in the brilliant high-country light from a stairwell window is a larger-than-life-size poster of the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), with a quote:

> The task is not so much to see what no one has yet seen, but to think what no body [sic] yet has thought about that which everyone sees.

Although of obviously wide application, nowhere perhaps is this more true than in the social scientific study of men. For many centuries the archetypal human being has been portrayed as male, to the extent that maleness was considered to *be* humanness: "[t]he standard case is the study of men as non-gendered subjects and the speciality is the study of women as gendered beings" (Naffine 1996:2).

That this view is losing traction is attested by the burgeoning research on men as gendered beings in response to the profound impact of second wave and later feminisms upon social scientific thought. One of the most difficult topics to conceptualise in this research is the gendered power imbalance which has produced women as second-rate citizens. The most well-known theory of masculinity (Connell 1987, 1995) argues that men overall benefit from this power imbalance, and as a result most men are disinclined to change the current social patterns of gender. The politics of justice and equality, however, demands that existing patterns be changed, so that there appears to be a tension

between most men, who benefit from existing arrangements, and the requirements of fairness.

Connell's theory, called in this thesis the Connellian framework, is so widely known in the gender arena possibly because it is the first that offers a convincing sociological theory which takes men as both its object of inquiry and its target for political action. In contrast, feminist theory perforce theorises men but does so in order to theorise women's experiences and to support women's political activism. Connell's insights about multiple masculinities and a hierarchy amongst them maintained by hegemony have been cited in thousands of articles over the last two decades precisely because those insights offer "what no body yet has thought about that which everybody sees."

In the social scientific study of gender there is no serious dispute that most men unfairly benefit from current gender arrangements, yet this very agreement can blind us to what else is occurring at the same time. Connell's conceptualisation of men's engagement in current gender patterns, and thus his conclusions about men's activism on gender issues, although useful as far as they go, are severely attenuated, this thesis argues, due to a crucial over-simplification in the social theory upon which his view is built. As a result, despite Connell's explicit call for increasing gender activism on the part of men, the Connellian framework is unhelpful for the vast majority of men who are actually involved in change in gender arrangements, and contributes to an unproductive alienation between the intellectual resources of the academy and men's grassroots gender activism.

This thesis identifies how the Connellian framework produces its attenuated view of men and change, and goes on to offer a theory which incorporates the main Connellian elements with a post-structuralist treatment of the concept of hegemony, to arrive at a theory which explains the phenomena described by Connell but also theorises a much wider range of phenomena especially in areas where masculinities are changing and men are involved in gender activism. The political goal of the thesis is to break the consensus which has restrained social scientists from a more engaged examination of men and change, and to provide theory which can inform a wider scope of research into changing men.

Creating new knowledge

An attenuated scope of research arising from a consensus in social scientific knowledge is inevitable. Unlike that of the natural sciences, the role of social scientific

knowledge in social life is permanently paradoxical, since its 'subject matter' can only ever be temporarily separated from its creators. British sociologist and social theorist Anthony Giddens describes it like this:

> The theories and findings of the natural sciences stand in a 'technological' relation to their 'subject matter'. That is to say, the information they generate has practical significance as a 'means' applied to altering an independently given and autonomous world of objects and events. But the social sciences do not stand in a 'technological relation to their 'subject matter… (Giddens 1984:351-2)

Rather, "social beliefs, unlike those to do with nature, are constitutive elements of what it is they are about." (Giddens 1984:340)

> The social sciences necessarily draw upon a great deal that is already known to the members of the societies they investigate, and supply theories, concepts and findings which become thrust back into the world they describe. The "gaps" which can be made to appear between the specialist conceptual apparatus and findings of the social sciences and the knowledgeable practices incorporated into social life are very much less clear than in the natural sciences. (Giddens 1984:354)

Schopenhauer is thus pointing to the essential conundrum, the 'edge' which produces social scientific knowledge as both 'scientific' in the sense of being created according to formal and explicable procedures, and 'knowledge' in the sense of information or views which usefully orient us to our social world: in order to know our social world we must in some way separate ourselves from it. Giddens says that 'gaps' "can be made to appear" between scientific concepts and the knowledgeable practices of ordinary life, and that these gaps are inherent to social science: "All social research presumes a hermeneutic moment…" (1984:328), that is, there exists another meaning of events beyond that which is already known.

For social scientists studying their own society, C Wright Mills (1959) argues such a separation is best available to a sociologist's *imagination* since it is impossible for social scientists to not be part of the social life about which they seek knowledge. The sociological imagination, argues Willis (1995), is of a specific kind; it

> …invites us "to look at our familiar surroundings as if for the first time. It allows us to get a fresh view of the world we have always taken for granted…" (Willis 1995:16; quoting Robertson 1987:4)

So social scientists must imaginatively separate themselves from their social world in order to create knowledge at all. But as Giddens points out, the sociological knowledge so created then becomes "thrust back" into the social world. Social scientists

are then faced with studying phenomena which are at least in part constituted out of the scientific knowledge they themselves have created. Hence in order to create new knowledge which goes beyond existing sociological knowledge, a further twist must be added: not only must social phenomena themselves be studied; in addition the sociological theories which form part of the constitution of those phenomena must also be studied. Failure to incorporate both strands in a disciplined manner leads to a kind of blurred vision common in scientific endeavour, in which there is confusion between the phenomenon being studied and the lens through which the studying is occurring. Indeed, the operation of differentiating between the phenomenon itself and the viewing lens could be said to be the essential epistemological moment – the moment of imagination when the 'gap' may be said to first appear.

Unlike the study of *sites* of social life, like schools, hospitals or workplaces, the study of gender is the study of a *category* which pervades all of social life and so impacts upon every individual. Hence the scientific differentiating operation must constantly be present in the study of gender, since there is no socialised person to whom gender is not part of their lives in one way or another. This is especially true when women study women or men study men. Some of the most influential feminist writers have become influential precisely because they have pointed out this difficulty but have been able to alter the lens so as to create new knowledge: women only *appear* to be irrational (de Beauvior 1949/1961) or incapable of moral judgment (Gilligan 1982) when seen from within a specific view of rationality or morality. It is a major contention of this thesis that the Connellian theory of men and masculinity (Connell 1987, 1995) suffers at a specific moment from the lack of differentiation pointed to here: at a critical point Connell's analysis ceases to maintain the distinction between men as phenomenon and the sociological lens being used to study them, with the result that certain key aspects of men's lives become unobservable and hence unavailable as sociologically knowable. Specifically, Connell uses a radical feminist lens through which to view gender but fails to theorise this lens as a significant factor in his theory of masculinities.

Despite my criticism of another sociologist here, I hasten to affirm that scientific knowledge is very much a collective project. New scientific knowledge is built by "standing on the shoulders of giants", as Newton reputedly said. This is especially so in the case of new knowledge about social phenomena since, as discussed above, social scientific knowledge becomes part of social life. But in addition, social life itself is built

upon what has gone before, so that historical social formations commonly continue in one way or another as elements in existing social formations. This means that 'old' social scientific knowledge does not necessarily cease to be useful in the same way which applies to knowledge in the natural sciences. Giddens again summarises this situation succinctly. In commenting upon the continuing relevance of Machiavelli's seventeenth century musings today, he says

> An archaic natural scientific theory is of no particular interest once better ones have come along. [But] Theories which become part of their 'subject matter' (while perhaps in other ways resisting such incorporation) necessarily retain a relevance which antiquarian natural science theories do not have. (Giddens 1984:353)

Hence because of the historical layering of social phenomena the creation of new sociological knowledge of those phenomena can never be simply a matter of "out with the old; in with the new". Here I agree with Edmund Burke (1790/1986), whose considered opinion of the French Revolution from the relative stability of England was that the illusion of change as a clean two-stage process was merely a matter of "replacing one set of villains with another". This is not at all to reject the emergence of transformational paradigm shifts in knowledge such as described by Thomas Kuhn (1962). Rather, it is to refuse what Stanley and Wise (1990:46) colourfully characterise as the "uncharitable academic three-step": "criticising another's work or characterising it as ill-thought-out and inadequate and thereby providing a basis for their own; … [and] setting up this 'bad' 'other' to present their work as both 'superior' and that with which the reader should identify." In this thesis I fully accept the accretive nature of sociological knowledge, and my aim in the critique of Connell is to expand upon that work through an operation I call 'reframing', that is, offering an account in which Connell's work retains its coherence and relevance, but expanding the frame of sociological theory about men and masculinity so as to cause the *specific* relevance and more especially the *application* of Connell's work to become more clearly defined and hence more productively and precisely operationalised as a sociological tool in social life. The Connellian framework is unable to theorise men's relationships with feminism, nor is it able to theorise men's activism around gender or provide intellectual leadership in men's gender activism. However it is useful because it offers a succinct account of the range of relations between men and patriarchal power structures.

Epistemological reflection: 'reframing' knowledge

In the previous section I have discussed two epistemological operations: the necessity for sociologists to differentiate their subject matter from their viewing lens, and my aim to reframe my object of critique. Gaston Bachelard (1980) gives an elegant discussion of these two operations together in what he calls the 'epistemological break'. Bachelard is not as well known to English readers as is Kuhn, but according to Swartz (1997:31-32), Bachelard is one of three teachers whom French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu acknowledges as his formative influences (Bourdieu *et al.* 1991:248).

Like Kuhn, Bachelard is concerned to explain the process of creating new scientific knowledge, which he argues proceeds as a (non-Marxist) "dialectical mode of reasoning" which

> … does not replace one theory by another that contradicts the first. Rather, the movement of thought proceeds from a limited conceptual framework, which is closed to some important aspect of experience, to the development of a broader framework that includes the previously excluded aspect. … Dialectical reason situates the previous theory in a broader conceptual space that highlights both its strengths and limitations. This mode of dialectical thought can include several different theories, which at a given level of logic contradict each other by virtue of their limits, but, when situated within a broader framework, stand in complementary relationships. Former knowledge is not rejected but changed by a sort of realignment in which new fields of knowledge are opened up, forcing a reevaluation of what was previously taken for granted. Such a shift in thought constitutes what Bachelard calls an "epistemological break" with the previous theories. (Swartz 1997:32)

If existing theories become part of the subject matter under examination and so "can actually operate as 'epistemological obstacles' to the progress of science" (Swartz 1997:32), how can these 'epistemological breaks' in the development of knowledge come about? Bachelard responds as follows:

> By refusing to grant existing theories a kind of universal status, dialectical reason offers the dynamic potential for transformation. Further, relevant knowledge for seeking out and overcoming epistemological obstacles goes beyond the conceptual, cognitive foundations of an intellectual discipline to include all the social, cultural, and psychological factors that shape our perception of particular theoretical issues and our theorizing about them. Here Bachelard opens the door to sociological factors as conditions that can shape the processes of reason and scientific discovery. He sees a unique role for epistemology as a necessary reflexive monitoring instrument for increasing awareness of both the cognitive and social conditions that shape and limit existing scientific work. *Epistemological reflection* on previous theories makes it possible to investigate precisely what they assume and to enhance the chances for an epistemological break. (Swartz 1997:33, emphasis added)

I have quoted this work at length because it so ably outlines the methodology I employ in this thesis – "epistemological reflection", as well as introduces the reasons why I have selected that method. I will now explicate how Swartz's general discussion applies to the present task.

Firstly, the collection of theoretical works about masculinity by Connell offers itself as a theory about the field of masculinity in general. It claims to be a theory about the entirety of masculinity in "the rich countries" or the "metropolitan countries" (Connell 1995: 203, 201). That is, it posits for itself "a kind of universal status" regarding masculinity and, to a large extent, regarding the even wider field of gender (e.g. Connell 2002). Rather than reject the Connellian framework, I limit myself to rejecting only its claim to universal status, concluding instead that it is a workably helpful description of some specific aspects of masculinity and gender relations, but that it is not the whole story.

Secondly, the "relevant knowledge for seeking out and overcoming epistemological obstacles" that I draw upon to move beyond the parameters offered in the Connellian framework ranges across my own experience with masculinity as a man and as a gender activist, my experience in relating and working with women and other men, empirical data about men not incorporated by Connell, empirical data about men not commonly interpreted as such, theories and perspectives from other fields, as well as the empirical data Connell uses, the theories he employs and the theories he develops. This is not to say that this immense range of "relevant knowledge" is presented in the text of this thesis, though naturally some necessary academic elements of it are. Rather, I draw upon this data as the grounded experiential and empirical basis of the critical perspective I bring to bear upon the Connellian framework, making it explicit where I use it.

Finally, the phrase "epistemology as a necessary reflexive monitoring instrument" implies a clinical and disciplined approach. Nowhere is such discipline more required than in a work of theory, and this thesis is entirely a work of theory. Empirical data can to some extent be employed to 'speak for itself' – which is indeed how Connell introduces his conceptual framework (see Connell 1987: Ch 1). But to my mind empirical data, despite its seeming groundedness, can be, when employed in sociological work, as exceptionally flexible and adherent as the prehensile tails of tree-dwelling mammals. The 'speaking' which data appears to do 'for itself' is a constituting element of the social terrain in which sociologists do our work, and as such, can emerge as an obstacle, as

Giddens and Bachelard highlight. Indeed, a minor argument I make in the body of the thesis is that the data presented by Connell is narrowly selected to affirm the view implicit in the theory he then goes on to develop: most men's sole relationship with gender inequality is to seek its preservation. This is not to say that empirical data is of secondary value to theory. Rather, that if one is to use empirical data as an entry point for theory about such an immense and diverse field as masculinity, then methodological consistency is paramount, and one must seek theory which accounts for *all* the *available* data. In this thesis I sidestep that particular methodological difficulty only to take up another: the necessity to maintain a disciplined reflexivity in order to keep my 'subject matter' and my 'lens' differentiated as clearly as possible.

Returning now to considerations of epistemology, Bourdieu develops Bachelard's account of knowledge-creation to distinguish "three epistemological checkpoints for sociological research", building from "'Bachelard's premise that the *scientific fact is won, constructed, and confirmed.*'", (Swartz 1997:34-5, quoting Bourdieu, Chamberon and Passeron 1991:11, italics original). That is, firstly new knowledge is constructed *against* existing knowledge – i.e. the utility of existing knowledge must in some way be ruptured. "Second, the scientific method involves the construction of formalised models; and third, these models must receive empirical verification" (Swartz 1997:34).

Applying Bourdieu's pattern of checkpoints to this thesis, it will now be no matter for comment that I take the Connellian framework as the existing knowledge. Firstly I carefully analyse the Connellian framework and precisely identify its construction and define some limitations. Secondly I use the post-structuralist elaboration of Gramsci by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) to rupture Connell's theoretical foundation. However because practical social action is not theorised by Laclau and Mouffe, I develop a largely interactionist account based in the work of Goffman (1959; 1974) to theorise the creation and operation of hegemony in social life as contained in discrete discourses. The third of Bourdieu's checkpoints, however, in this thesis remains no more than a quick sketch of ways in which some existing empirical data and social phenomena could be re-read, though I am at some pains to explicate how the specific data which Connell introduces into his framework could be re-framed. I am very aware that the conceptual proposals I make in this thesis are no more than proposals, which must be affirmed, rejected or further developed via empirical verification – and such verification must remain the province of separate work. Nevertheless, I do employ a standard of proof in the thesis, as

follows: ideas are judged coherent and of value if, following what I am describing as a 'sketch' re-reading of empirical data or social phenomena, they appear to offer a view of data or phenomena which potentially expands the conceptual grasp upon such data or phenomena.

Structuralism, post-structuralism and pragmatism

The preceding quote has Bourdieu employing the term "the scientific fact". There is a reassuring solidity to this expression characteristic of the modern scientific enterprise: no more certain a fact than a *scientific* fact! However, even before Bourdieu was elucidating his epistemological guidelines, the certainty associated with scientific facts was being revealed as something rather akin to pomposity by a fellow Frenchman, Bruno Latour (Latour & Woolgar 1986), whose ethnographic research into daily life in scientific laboratories allowed him to identify the process of scientific 'fact production.' Latour's work led me to attend closely to the moment in the Connellian framework where "the global domination of women by men" is made to operate as a particular kind of fact which Connell designates as a "structural fact" (1987: 183). As I shall show in Chapters 3 and 4, this key moment remains possibly the weakest area of Connell's entire theoretical framework, and might best be described as a moment of rhetoric rather than a conceptual/theoretical one. Thus I am no stranger to the illusory appeal of 'facts'.

Latour's work joined a growing critique from the sociology of knowledge, strands of which in turn became part of the broader postmodern critique of modernity. This critique has entered the field of gender studies, to the extent that Christine Beasley (2005; 2009) argues both feminist studies and the closely related sexuality studies are by now thoroughly post-structuralist in their theoretical bases (with the exception of most feminist work on domestic violence), but that masculinity studies has not developed along the same lines. Alan Petersen (1998; 2003) has cautioned that masculinity studies' failure to employ more post-structuralist deconstructions of categories like men, masculinity and gender risk sidelining the field's usefulness by narrowing its analytical capacity. However not all scholars see masculinity theory as primarily structuralist. In his own survey of the field Edwards (2006) finds what he describes as "a tale of two halves" (2006:4), "a developing set of tensions …[between] the culturalist, poststructural or media-driven analyses of masculinity with those perceiving themselves as pro-feminist, structuralist or empirically driven" (2006:3), suggesting a chronological progression from a structuralist 'second wave' to a post-structural 'third wave' of theory. Even more

optimistically, Judith Gardiner finds there is a "poststructuralist suspicion of universal truths" among masculinity scholars amounting to a consensus that "the critique of essentialist categories is politically imperative, since belief in traditional polarised genders as static, inevitable universals precludes social change by insisting that change is impossible, deeply undesirable, or both" (Gardiner 2002:12).

The extent to which antiessentialism is "politically imperative" is debateable, however; its absence certainly didn't hold back successful social movements such as classical Marxism, or first or second wave feminism. What these and other more recent social movements all *have* achieved is an 'epistemological break,' a disruption in existing knowledges, in the criteria for membership of the group of authorised knowers, or in the nature or dimensions of what is legitimate knowledge. The methods of achieving this break, the conceptual tools used, must be selected on the pragmatic basis of whether they work in the given situation.

I certainly agree that post-structuralist thinking is more complex because it conceptualises social processes as more thoroughly dynamic, and that grasping this dynamism in social life is crucial to be able to theorise what Giddens (1984) calls post-traditional societies. But post-structuralism also has its limitations. The post-structuralist disruption to modernity's monist pretensions is extremely valuable, but I agree with Connell's (1995:50-1) criticism that in the post-structuralist "emphasis on the signifier, the signified tends to vanish", that is, the materiality of bodies and the emotional constraints in identity can be downplayed.

Chris Brickell (2005) critiques Judith Butler's work along these lines, pointing out that although Butler convincingly dismantles the concept of a 'subject' which exists prior to social process, she fails to adequately conceptualise the materiality of social action and the individual volition which is a key aspect of agency. Here I tend to side with Baumann's (1992:ix) view of post-modernism as primarily a "site-clearing operation", and as such the vacuum it leaves needs to be filled. Brickell does so by employing aspects of Erving Goffman's social constructionist work to "reclaim the socially constructed agency of 'performance' from the mire of 'performativity', with the latter's apparent disappearance of subjective action" (Brickell 2005:24), arguing that social constructionist work shares with post-structuralism an appreciation of the extent to which the reality often believed to be the backdrop in which social life occurs actually emerges from social life itself.

A more extensive example of interweaving post-structuralist disruptions with much earlier social constructionist work is Jackson and Scott's recent work on theorising sexuality, in which one of their aims in theorising is to "recover and develop some of the lost insights of interactionist sociology and to demonstrate their continued relevance for feminist and sociological analysis" (Jackson & Scott 2010:2). Although they point out that "gender and sexuality are phenomena of a rather different order: gender is a fundamental social division and cultural distinction whereas sexuality is a sphere of social life" (2010:2), like Brickell they are concerned about the post-structuralist tendency to evaporate the aspects of materiality and experience, arguing that "the interactionist approach… can offer a corrective to the rather abstract, asocial theorizations of the body deriving from corporeal feminisms…" (2010:139).

Like Jackson and Scott, Brickell, and indeed Connell, I have an interest in what people *do*, especially what *men* do. But I am also very aware that as well as the capacities of agency, the constraints of structures, and the collective construction of everyday life, another crucial element is what all these practical elements of life mean to us, how we interpret them, and especially, as Schopenhauer points out, what is possible to think about them. It is here that the thoroughgoing nature of post-structuralist inquiry proves invaluable in giving license to identify and examine our assumptions about *every* aspect of what we do and what we think, including in academic theorising itself. In this thesis I argue that the theory of masculinity in the Connellian framework (Connell 1987;1995) is based in a classical Marxist assumption that social life arises from a single relation – his "structural fact", and that as a result Connell is unable to effectively theorise change in the more powerful party to that relation, i.e. men. To reveal and disrupt this assumption I employ Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) post-structuralist development of Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which reconceptualises hegemony as a force contained in discrete discourses rather than something which is able to pervade the entire social space. Laclau and Mouffe's theory centralises the element of meaning created in language, and brings to our attention the extent to which meaning-creation processes shape social life via the regularised enactment of specific meanings. But significantly they, like Butler, do not offer a developed account of agency or practical social life. For my purposes this absence risks undoing all Laclau and Mouffe's good work since my primary political goal is to foster practical action among men. Because of this I agree with Jackson and Scott (2010:3) who argue that "sociological accounts of [social life] cannot have any purchase on the public imagination unless they *make sense* of everyday experience". Above all it is

important to me to be able to talk about gender in terms which can help men make sense of their everyday experience of it. Accordingly I take up the interactionist work of Erving Goffman to theorise how discourses occur in social life, what they feel like to be part of and how we manage multiple discourses in social action.

The benefit of the post-structuralist analysis which underpins my theoretical work, however, is that terms such as men, patriarchy and feminism are not used as essentialist categories or *a priori* structures but rather have meanings which are related to specific discourses. The concept of discourse enables a theorisation of the stability and continuity necessary to render meanings practically useful but positions this stability and continuity as contingent upon specific conditions created by collectivities of people in social action. Thus I make an attempt to weave together the inherent open-endedness of language and meaning with the practical constraints of material social life.

In order to make this attempt the selection of theorists in this thesis is based in pragmatic considerations. Connell is widely recognised to be the most well-known masculinity theorist, and as such is a good example of the limitations of current theorising about men and gender. Connell's theory revolves around the concept of hegemony, and Laclau and Mouffe offer a thorough post-structuralist critique and development of precisely this concept, enabling me to explain how and where the theoretical limitation in Connell arises. Goffman's (1974) 'frame analysis' offers an elegant way to illustrate how Laclau and Mouffe's contention about multiple discourses shows up in social action, and I develop a similar interactionist account, loosely based on both Goffman (1959) and Mouffe (1993), of how individuals can incorporate subject positions from a range of discourses into their self identity.

One could argue that this pragmatic approach to theory selection is implicit in the postmodern rejection of the modern era's project to privilege one framework or paradigm over others. One of the most influential post-structuralist thinkers, Michel Foucault, seems to recognise this when he comments:

> I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area... I would like the little volume that I want to write on disciplinary systems to be useful to an educator, a warden, a magistrate, a conscientious objector. I don't write for an audience, I write for users, not readers. (Foucault 1994:523-4)

Indeed, the apparent mish-mash of theorists and paradigms I employ enables me to reframe the academic task of theorising change among men by substantially

reconfiguring the current terrain of gender as being substantially shaped by not only the discourse of patriarchy but also the discourse of feminism. In turn this enables us to see the current moment in gender for most men as an impasse between two incommensurable subject positions, an impasse to which there are a wide variety of responses but not yet any widely accepted resolutions. In this tension-filled historical moment academic research and analysis can be enormously beneficial, if it is able to move beyond the current paradigm in masculinity studies which appears unable to take seriously the presence of feminism in Western democracies or to think about progressive goals in gender outside of equality for women with an already-equal men.

The potential for a proactive sociology of masculinity

The question of who knowledge is for, and the related possibility that sociology could itself be a proactive change agent, has been extensively canvassed and theorised in feminism itself. Because, as Smith (1987:61-69) argues, women were "outside the sociological frame", feminist social scientists have had to intentionally re-shape that frame. This has entailed extensive investigation of the ontological foundations, epistemological criteria and methodological practices of the social sciences (see e.g. Pateman & Gross 1986; Stanley 1990), and I will discuss only a small aspect of this debate. Smith (1987:63) argues that one key means by which the sociological frame comes to exclude women is that women are "largely silent in the discourse that develops the conceptual apparatus, the relevances and themes" of sociology, that is, women are not participant in developing its problematics. Using a Marxist social analysis, Smith argues for a 'standpoint' approach to knowledge creation: sociologies created 'for' a group (in her account, women) should attempt to explain the unseen "extralocal" logics of transformation which shape the everyday experiences of that group (1987:94). But given that existing sociological knowledge of that group renders much of the group's everyday experiences un-knowable sociologically, an important strategic step is to "make the everyday world the locus of a sociological problematic" (1987:89).

In keeping with her scholarly and temporal milieu, Smith tends to render valueless *all* sociological knowledge 'about' women unless it is also 'for' women. The heavy polarisation from Smith's classical Marxist foundation is evident here and, as I show in Chapter 4, it is necessary to reconstitute Marxist thinking beyond single polarities. But I raise Smith's work here because of the valuable notion that the 'frame' used for constructing knowledge can be used 'for' a specific group and can also construct

another group as 'outside the frame', thus creating knowledge merely 'on' or 'about' that 'outside' group. Taking up Laclau and Mouffe's (1985; see Chapter 4) refusal of single binaries as definitions of the social, I decline Smith's argument that creating knowledge 'for' one group *automatically* means that other groups must be either 'against' or 'outside' the knowing group. Rather, I argue for a more modest proposal that by and large men are outside the frame of the sociology *of masculinity* – that is, sociological knowledge about masculinity does not generate its problematics out of the concerns, experiences, agendas, "relevances and themes" of men, and hence existing masculinity theory is not 'for' men. This is for very sound and widely rehearsed historical and tactical reasons, as I discuss later ('Silence and Suspicion'). Nevertheless, on the account offered by Smith, a coherent explanation for men's resistance to progressive change can be that sociological masculinity theory actually does not appear as 'progressive' for most men: it does not take up the problematics around gender that most men live with every day. Instead it speaks to men and about men, but does not speak with men or for men.

Unlike Smith, however, I reject the idea that knowledge can be for only one group at a time. It seems perfectly possible, and in fact widely practiced, that knowledges are created for multiple groups: the finely blended cynicism of the advertising industry, for example, enables the creation of effective knowledges simultaneously for its clients and for target markets. Nor am I proposing a simple dichotomy that if knowledge is not for men it must be against them; it can simply be about them. Knowledge's ownership can also be re-assigned or freshly claimed: for example the gay rights re-appropriation of the term 'homosexual'. Finally, that feminists create knowledge for themselves about and/or even against men is completely legitimate, just as it is completely legitimate to create knowledges from any other epistemological position(s). My point here is only that there is not yet sociologically recognised knowledge about men which is also *for* men – and such knowledge is needed at present, as I discuss below.

Smith's recommendation for action is, with minor modifications, relevant to the case of masculinity theory: the many activities most men are already involved in can be seen through new eyes as "the locus of a sociological problematic". I make a number of suggestions in this regard in Chapter 8. By taking men's existing activities as inputs to masculinity theory's problematic there is a chance that the sociology of masculinity can get ahead of the game, so to speak – that is, sociology can become much more proactive and effective in fostering change and influencing the direction of change.

Politics and strategy

The problem is not that knowledges might be partisan, partial or targeted; they are *always* at least partial. Rather, there are two important considerations; an epistemological one and a strategic one. Epistemologically, knowledge's position or 'standpoint' in relation to its subject matter should be explicit (Cook & Fonow 1986), so that the issue becomes an explicit part of the knowledge itself – and I am arguing in this thesis that this is not yet the case with sociological masculinity theory. Strategically, this lacuna in masculinity theory most often alienates its subjects – the very reverse of the effect desired by many sociologists, myself and Connell included.

This strategic difficulty with the Connellian framework arises from its foregrounding of material social formations by rendering the non-material to the background. The focus on structural equality as the linch-pin for programs of gender change results in Connell's conclusion: "the predominant social group cannot be liberated" (1987:276). In other words, in Connell's definition of gender equality men themselves have nowhere else to go because they already enjoy equality. Such an approach is effectively "politically immobilising" (Connell 1983:140) for men, and hence strategically dumb, in my view. Even such an august body as the United Nations (UN) (2000:par. 6) is now calling for men to "involve themselves and take joint responsibility with women for the promotion of gender equality", but this goal is essentially not a project 'for' men. This is not to say that men cannot or should not be involved; on the contrary, it is vital that men *are* involved, for several very good reasons. But such a project *when it is the only one* called for simply reiterates the attitude among men that 'gender' is an issue or area of social life which is not really men's business – in effect, men are outside of the project.

Connell himself calls for "a widespread sense of agency among men, a sense that this transformation is something they can actually share in as a practical proposition" (Connell 2005:1818). Although I am fully supportive of the general sentiment expressed here (see my own formulation below), the specific formulation Connell offers is epistemologically a mirror-image of the 1960s liberal feminist call to 'add women' to existing social structures: the intention appears to be to 'add men' to a project in whose structure, intent, content and programs men *en masse* have had no participation. To apply Dorothy Smith's argument to a fresh subject, in this case it is *men* who are outside of *this particular* sociological frame. Men are simply being asked to "share" in the project, or even more pointedly "take joint responsibility" for it, but essentially the project is not of

men's own making. This is certainly a step forward from the earlier rather facile radical feminist claims for men to 'give up power' so that women can have some, but it is still profoundly unsatisfactory in terms of treating men with the dignity of being full participants in the project.

The point here is that such participation must be *meaningful* for men, both personally and collectively. Certainly, individuals and isolated enclaves of men can and do find meaning in active participation in Connell's and the UN's specifications. For instance Pease (2002) develops an argument from ethics for men's collective participation, while Connell lists a range of very cogent and personal reasons that already motivate individual men's involvements (1987:xiii; 2005:1811-1814). While I agree with these offerings, and note that some men already do find meaning in such participation, at the same time the pro-feminist approach manages to de-value or marginalise the enormous amount and variety of activism that men in the rich countries are already involved in on terms which step right outside of the narrow definition of the issues at stake in gender offered by Connell, pro-feminists generally and the UN. As Edwards (2006) rightly points out, there is a huge amount of restlessness, creativity and change going on in masculinity and among men which is clearly visible in cultural studies but apparently remains obscure in sociology – or, as I argue in this thesis, even if it is empirically *visible* to sociology but not yet *theorised*. Not all such change is necessarily progressive activism, but it is nevertheless clearly meaningful for its participants.

For me possibly the best litmus test regarding the potential traction of knowledge in the field of gender is if it is *both* for women *and* for men. Perhaps at this level knowledge could be said to be for 'gender', so that we might perhaps start to consider something like 'gender theory' as if gender itself is a figure or social entity, in the same way that queer theory has emerged as a useful body of work. This notion of being for both major poles in the gender landscape mirrors the notion of the 'third story' proposed by Stone et al (2000), in which two parties in a relationship come to be able to recount relational formations via a unified story which each party can tell from their own viewpoint but at the same time validates the other's viewpoint as well. The process of creating this 'third story' emerges out of active collaboration which necessarily relies upon receptive respect of and active listening to the other, as well as fierce insistence of the validity and dignity of one's own experience and perceptions.

This mixture of receptivity to other alongside a fierce upholding of one's own worldview is dynamic enough to be a realistic possibility at the broad scale in the future. Such a process clearly requires that each party has capacities for both receptivity and self-authorisation. At present it might be said that feminism has enabled women a greater capacity for self-authorisation upon an established cultural insistence on femininity as receptive, but that men's capacity for self-authorisation is still closely tied to dominatory universalising discourses of Man and hence unattached to capacities for receptivity. Although clearly this generalisation does not always hold true at the individual or local level, nevertheless I think this account is helpful in explaining McMahon's (1999:206) claim that women are "waiting for men", and in explaining why increasing numbers of men are attracted to sites such as mythopoetic activities at which receptivity skills are being learned. At the same time it is necessary to shift the basis of self-authorisation for masculinity away from the universalising discourses of Man and towards a more situated and relational constitution. Importantly, it would be helpful to link these two movements for men – and this is where the breadth of academic research and sophistication of academic theorisation could be of inestimable value, especially in the latter movement, since discourses of Man are so deeply entwined in validating both the violence and the freedoms of Western democracies.

Silence and suspicion

The most tenacious difficulty I have found with the Connellian framework is not that it is wrong, or not a productive or necessary direction for action. Patriarchal social formations clearly exist, and many men, myself included, gain advantages from those formations. Rather, my criticism is restricted only to its claim to a "kind of universal status" (Swartz 1997; see above) – i.e. the part of it which claims that it completely exhausts the possibilities for legitimate or progressive change in gender relations: change in gender should be all about equality and equality should be restricted to what is important only for women. As Ashe (2007) characterises it, any responses that are not pro-feminist are thereby non-feminist. You are either with us or against us.

Such an approach has the impact of silencing men's speech about gender issues unless they say approved things – "biting their tongue" as Gough (2001) has found. This inevitably produces men as *meaningless* in projects for change in gender, that is, rendered as incapable of creating meaning autonomously or incapable of creating legitimate meaning independently from the oversight of feminists or pro-feminists. It is this

presumption that the meaning-making process for progressive gender politics is now closed which I endeavour to highlight and address in this thesis. To do so I construct a theoretical framework that locates the role of meaning-making in social process and explicates a mechanism by which meaning is constructed in social process and concretely taken up in social life (Chapters 4-6). I then use the constructed theory to re-frame the Connellian framework (Chapter 7) in preparation for discussing the involvement of men in gender activism (Chapters 8).

Of course the disruption of men's speaking is not without a history which can make sense of it. I fully concord with the extensive research that has found women's inequality, subordination, disenfranchisement, and marginalisation over centuries in favour of men as agents of universal Man (e.g. de Beauvior 1949/1961; Firestone 1970; Friedan 1963; Millett 1972). In this context it is perfectly understandable that there will be a period when men's speech and actions must be de-legitimated, brought into question, scrutinised, and frequently ruled immoral, or unacceptable for other reasons. Along the same lines, I completely accept the extensive research showing men as a group are reluctant to change (e.g. Connell 1995; Heath 1989; Kimmel 1994; McMahon 1999; Segal 1990; Stoltenberg 1989). On this account the suspicion and distrust of men which is evident in some areas of feminism and the current pro-feminism are perfectly understandable, and indeed have been immensely productive.

But although I can sympathise with suspicion and distrust as very human and explicable emotions, these are qualitatively different to the disciplined differentiation necessary for the social scientific project. The issues *du jour* are not *that* men are reluctant to change but *why*, and what they are to change *to*. Connell is undoubtedly right that men seek to protect their privileges. But although it is clear what men's privilege means to women, what do these privileges mean *to men*? What other motivations might men have to resist change? This, once again, is where theory comes into play, since it is theory which shapes the viewing lens. For example I argued in my Honours thesis (Bloodwood 2005) that a theory of agency and subjectivity different to that implicit in the Connellian framework enables the view that men protect privilege not necessarily or only because it is privilege as such (though that is part of it), but more importantly and extensively because it is *familiar*, in the same way that the familiarity of the slave's position will *to some extent* incline him to stay there. On this account beating men over the head with the claim that all they are doing is protecting their own privileges is both factually inaccurate and

strategically stupid. Certainly, for some men some of the time this undoubtedly *is* their most immediate motivation, but that is quite another matter from the claim that the protection of privilege is most men's primary or sole motivation, and that this therefore constitutes a determining element in the future of gender relations, as Connell does (1987:276, 1995:235-237).

'Inclusive' activism

From another angle, succumbing to suspicion and distrust of men when studying them means that researchers miss crucial information. Intentional activism among men, including supposedly "non-feminist" (Ashe 2007) activism, is surveyed fairly thoroughly via its literature by Messner (2000) in the USA but through empirical interviews by Karoski (2007) in Australia. One of Karoski's "significant findings… is a large gap between men's movement activities and academic analysis of them." (7) Karoski points to the potential role academic research could play for activist men, observing that

> …activists in the men's movement often lack a language and theory to give meaning, representation and purpose to the… experiences of men. On the other hand, academics with conceptual skills to analyse the men's movement lack a clear sense of the… experiences of men's movement activists at the grass roots. Some men's movement activists… even argue that academics lack the inclination, commitment and patience to spend sufficient time researching and understanding men's movement activism. (Karoski 2007:7-8)

Unlike Connell, who contends that most men act in "bad faith" in gender relations and especially in most men's activism (1987:213), one of the fundamental assumptions I bring to the present work is that *all* forms of masculinity activism (including pro-feminism) are a response *in good faith* to the circumstances men find themselves in, and as such offer the academic researcher potential insight into those areas of social life and operations of social process which the researcher is unable or unwilling to enter into themselves. This does not require researchers to empathise with their subjects, agree with their subjects' worldviews, enter into their subjects' politics, or support their subjects' actions. Nor does it mean that such men's activism is necessarily rational, co-operative with women, coherent or even effective. Indeed, Karoski (2007) points out that a greater academic engagement with men's activism could help generate "language and theory" for activists. Rather, it requires no more and no less of researchers than that they maintain the disciplined differentiation between subject matter and viewing lens I discuss at the start of this chapter. The result is better theory – which is potentially beneficial for activists and academics alike.

I am personally inclined towards the mythopoetic styles of activism and personally find pro-feminist activism frequently insulting to men, and men's rights activism frequently violent to women. At the same time mythopoetic activism is endlessly frustrating because of its lack of political engagement, while pro-feminism is at least intellectually thorough and orderly. But as a masculinity activist and theorist I maintain genuine and profound respect for activism that I hold in personal aversion, and indeed recognise that in order to live a fulfilling human life and be a well-rounded member of the academic community I rely upon these other views, experiences and feelings in order to inform me about the world beyond my own predilections and concerns. In keeping with this view I identify strongly with an emergent strand of Australian men's activism Karoski (2007:59-67) labels "inclusive", which, although it appears the most comprehensive in its views is also the least well articulated. This thesis is intended to at least partly address that shortcoming. I would like to think that the 'inclusive' project Karoski refers to attempts "to include several different theories, which at a given level of logic contradict each other by virtue of their limits, but, when situated within a broader framework, stand in complementary relationships" (Bachelard, above), and, as such, presages a looming epistemological break in masculinity theory.

To continue to enact my claimed 'inclusive' position, then, I wish to explicate the enormous and multi-faceted debt this thesis owes to pro-feminism generally and Connell particularly. Grazing widely across her oeuvre, I have been witness to the unfolding of a great intelligence, and thereby been assisted to articulate a large number of my own stances, values and views – obviously not always in agreement with her but the similarity is close enough that my conflict with her ideas seems to me more internecine rather than oppositional. But whereas we both strongly feel that men should be more involved in gender issues, Connell seems to feel this involvement should be 'for' *women*, while I argue that, although this is a constructive motivation, what is currently damaging the field by its absence is theorising men's involvement *for themselves*.

Fostering progressive change among men

This divergence effectively highlights the level at which my criticisms of Connell are primarily levelled. Naturally the Connellian framework has limitations, as any conceptual framework has, including mine. This is all in a day's work for sociology and is indeed one of its core workaday tasks. My indignation arises precisely when the Connellian framework renders men as improperly autonomous creators of collective

meaning because of the historical conflation of maleness with ultimate sources of social legitimacy. As I have argued, it is of course perfectly proper to create knowledge *about* men, and create such knowledge *for* women, or indeed for any group. But denying the validity of knowledge *for men* positions most men as some sort of social pariah, as though they are dangerous or capricious power objects which can't be trusted as legitimate participants in progressive social change.

This leads me to the formulation of my research question. The core issue *du jour* regarding masculinity is 'change' – not just any change but change of a specific sort. Change is constantly occurring anyway, but I am interested in the more deliberate or targeted and contested change – activism as intentional engagement with some sort of project in mind. Connell helpfully defines this as 'masculinity politics,' in which

> … the meaning of masculine gender is at issue, and, with it, men's position in gender relations. In such politics masculinity is made a principle theme, not taken for granted as background. (Connell 1995:205)

Although it is implied in Connell's emphasis upon 'masculinity' rather than 'men', I will clearly state my interest is at the collective level of change, since at the individual level millions of men are already extensively involved in individual ways, and one of my principal arguments of this thesis is that existing theorisation of the collective is patchy. As I note above, Connell (2005:1818) calls for "a widespread sense of agency among men" about gender "transformation." Note however that in this formulation he does not restrict men's involvement to projects for 'gender justice' or 'gender equality' but instead leaves the project as a more open one of 'transformation'. I completely concur with this formulation, and note that such sense of agency can be fostered: it can be championed, theorised, discussed, argued for, sketched, imagined, and rehearsed. Obviously such fostering need not remain the province of the social sciences, but in this thesis my question is limited to how sociology especially can actively foster men's involvement at a collective level in intentional change in gender relations. Throughout the text I abbreviate this as 'how to foster progressive change among men.' This formulation intends to validate other projects of change which may not be progressive, and other projects which may be only about men or even against men. The use of 'among' here is intended to convey a focus upon change within, between and across men as individuals, within, between and across groupings of men, and within, between and across the partial identity fragments and subject positions which may meaningfully link people's lives with men. At a political level, I hope I have made clear that I believe one

answer to this question is to foster change 'for' men. But this can never be a complete answer, and I would like to think that the question has wider utility.

I leave entirely open the question of what I mean by 'men' – which in any case has been a consistently slippery theme across my fifteen years of academic study. I myself am biologically male, white, middle class, educated, a native English speaker residing in a Western country, able-bodied and middle aged. My audience, at least in this thesis, is not especially 'men' at all. Rather, I seek to address academic researchers of masculinity in whatever guise they and their subjects come in. Today it is no longer possible, thankfully, to assume any links at all between Man, men, biological sex, maleness and masculinity. Hence I prefer to leave the issue as one of utility: the label 'men' clearly has some purchase on social life as evidenced by the existence of the word itself. In some situations 'men' is relevant and meaningful, so that perhaps the clearest statement I can make is that my work is intended to be of assistance in such situations.

In reference to the decreasing utility of assumptions about men and gender, a note on gendered pronouns here. I am in the delightful position of engaging with a theorist of masculinity who has not only changed their name (which is not unknown) but also their gender. Throughout most of this thesis I refer to Connell as 'him', and do so deliberately because she explicitly introduces herself as male in the two works I primarily refer to. In the absence of established convention upon the matter, in this thesis I follow the policy of using the gendered pronoun relevant at the time of first publication of the work under discussion.