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The Field of Masculinity Theory

The theorisation of masculinity as an explicitly political category is a relatively new phenomenon in the social sciences, arising in the 1970s and 80s in response to second wave feminist critiques of social, academic and scientific ‘gender blindness’ (see e.g. Millett 1972; Firestone 1970; Lloyd 1984; Harding 1986). Because these feminist critiques are ‘progressive’ in the sense of aspiring towards as-yet-unrealised social formations and relationships, all theories of masculinity and men arising in response to these critiques address the issue of men and change in some way. However, as several writers show (e.g. Clatterbaugh 1997; Messner 2000; Ashe 2007), not all political theorisations of masculinity aim for change which is progressive. Indeed, a common view is that the 1990s saw a backlash against feminism Faludi 1991, or at least a substantial conservative shift (Clatterbaugh 2000:892).

Nor are all theories of masculinity generated with academic rigor. Indeed, the theories which enjoy the numerically largest support in Australia and the US (Karoski 2007; Ashe 2007), those often called mythopoetic and men’s rights, are primarily directly activist with very little or no academic involvement. This is not to dismiss them as of lesser value; as mentioned in Chapter 1, Karoski (2007) argues that academic engagement with a wider range of men’s activism could be mutually beneficial. This chapter focuses

on theories of masculinity in the social sciences generally, especially on activities since about 1997-8. My chronological categorisation here is not arbitrary; my survey has found a definite shape to the timeline of the development of the field. From the feminist-inspired initial emergence in the early 1970s, the field gradually formed with a unique set of conceptual problematics over the next 20 years, reaching a significant turning point in the mid-90s with the publication of Connell's *Masculinities* in 1995. There can be no doubt that this work and its major innovation, the concept of hegemonic masculinity, is currently the most widely known in academic discussions of men and gender: almost all writing on masculinity published since then refers to it, though not necessarily positively. This work appears to have galvanised the field, stimulating an entirely new flavour of theoretical debate, new connections across social scientific disciplines, and a huge volume of new empirical research. After an initial pause to digest and explore Connell's new encapsulation, theoretical debate and a diversification of critique has been rapidly accelerating. During the same time period there has also been a significant confluence and consolidation of approaches to studying masculinity, to the extent that at least two authoritative omnibuses appeared in 2005 and 2007 (Kimmel *et al.* 2005; Flood 2007). Also in the same period there has been a proliferation of textbooks and handbooks covering the newly crystallised issue of "men and masculinity" in several fields (e.g. Allister 2004; Correia & Bannon 2008; Good & Brooks 2005; Hussey 2002; Janssen 2008; Neal 2008; Shepard 2003).

This recent consolidation within the field has also been accompanied by at least three quite extensive surveys of its contents. Explicitly pro-feminist Whitehead (2002) offers a thorough survey of the main conceptual themes in the field before entering into a project to incorporate post-structuralist theory into masculinity theory. Messner (2000), also explicitly pro-feminist, offers a thorough survey of men's responses to the feminist challenge, primarily though not exclusively in the USA, looking at both literature and activism. (Ashe 2007 updates the USA survey of activist responses.) Finally, from a cultural studies angle, Edwards (Edwards 2006) also thoroughly surveys the field before going on to argue that cultural studies perspectives offer specific and considerable additional benefits to the largely sociological predominant theories of masculinity.

Along with these surveys, the currently predominant theorist Connell frequently includes a condensed history of the field's major conceptual themes and issues in each new major work (1987; 1995; 2000; 2002). Of especial interest here is his recent

assessment of his own theory following nearly two decades of its deployment in the academy (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). Connell's history of conceptual themes is, in my opinion, the most useful in both its brevity and the breadth of its coverage of the main issues, not least because he has been involved in the field almost since the earliest second wave feminist impacts on the academy.

This chapter takes the following path through the field of masculinity theory. After briefly setting its historical context, the sociology of masculinity is introduced as a major development in the 1980s and early 90s which, I argue, reached its conceptual apogee in the mid-90s. I explore parallel developments in two other disciplines whose central concern is change: psychology, which assumes change within individuals; and history, which centralises the theme of chronological change. Psychology, along with feminist theory, is arguably a foundational discipline for masculinity theory. Then I follow one strand of conceptual development since the mid-90s – what I call the post-structural convergence, which moves towards synergies between the strongly materialist sociology of masculinity, and post-structuralist-influenced cultural studies and psychology. Then I briefly cover and respond to some feminist critiques of masculinity theory as indicating part of the boundary of the field.

This pathway admittedly does not pursue developments within the sociology of masculinity itself. Although I strongly concur that the creation of a fully 'sociologized' theory of masculinity (Connell 1987:Ch 2) has been a vital step forward and continues to be a foundational requirement for any serious theorisations of gender, the view I take generally in this thesis and argue for in Chapter 1 is that the current sociology of masculinity, while perfectly satisfactory in itself, needs 'reframing' into a larger picture which is able to also seamlessly incorporate some other vital aspects of social life and social process. Specifically, sociological theorizations need to now be incorporated with political, mediated and personal aspects in order to develop more adequate conceptualisations of gender within social life. Accordingly, the review I undertake in this chapter is primarily oriented towards conceptual resources which point to a potential reframing of the whole existing field. Hence I am drawn towards what is happening at its margins rather than what is happening throughout.

History of conceptual development

Nineteen-seventies feminisms "challenged all assumptions about the gender system and raised a series of problems about men." (Connell 2000:3). The psychological

idea of 'roles' was picked up by some feminists, e.g. Dinnerstein (1976), and incorporated with a social-structural analysis to give the idea of sex roles (Connell 2000:7). The political application of the idea of role led to the feminist proposition that women's sex role oppresses women, which in turn prompted feminist-sympathetic men to examine "the way men's sex role oppressed men" (Connell 2000:8). This produced the 1970s men's liberation burst of writings (e.g. Pleck & Sawyer 1974; Fasteau 1974; Nichols 1975), which was soon rejected as too easily leading to a view that men's oppression and women's oppression were mirror images of each other, thus eliding men's oppression of women.

The idea that sex roles have a pervasive and uniform reach was disrupted in the later 1970s by "the evidence of diversity and transformation in masculinities provided by history and ethnography", which in turn "leads via institutions to questions of agency and social struggle" (Connell 1995:28, 30). Alongside these themes were inputs from the emerging theorists of gay liberation, e.g. Altman (1972), which further undermined the idea of a single masculinity as well as challenging the conceptual primacy of the men-women relationship, e.g. Tolson (1977). This shift increasingly suggested and allowed for sociological questions of structure and power, and in the late 70s and early 80s sociology was already starting to throw up empirical studies of "local gender hierarchies and local cultures of masculinity" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:832), for example Willis (1981), Cockburn (1983/1991), and Herdt (1981).

Alongside the recognition of variety in masculinities, an already prevailing theme in political sociology in the early 80s was "power structure research ... - focusing the spotlight on a dominant group" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:832), in response partly to the English translation of Gramsci's complete *Prison Notebooks* in 1971. Gramsci's notion of hegemony enabled a more subtle and complex theorising of power than both the notion of elites, which had been thoroughly discredited in the 1960s 'community power debates' (Hindess 1996:66-7), and Lukes' (1974) rather mechanistic 'third dimension' of power. Connell (1983; 1987), in conjunction with others (Carrigan *et al.* 1985) was a major voice in applying hegemony to masculinity, having already explored its possibilities in an earlier work on class relations (Connell 1977).

The sociology of masculinity

It became customary around the mid-80s to talk about a 'sociology of masculinity', which included several divergent strands: "the construction of masculinity

in everyday life; the importance of economic and institutional structures, the significance of differences among masculinities and the contradictory and dynamic character of gender” (Connell 1995:35). A very significant work in this period was Connell’s (1987) *Gender and Power*, which, in a sense, introduced the sociological analysis of masculinity to the broad sociological community: a 1998 survey by the International Sociological Association to assess the most influential books of the twentieth century lists only four books explicitly about gender in the top 150, of which *Gender and Power* is the only one to explicitly address the constitution of masculinity as a major object for analysis (ISA 1998). In the same year, Harry Brod (1987) and Michael Kimmel (1987) edited collections displaying “the new men’s studies” and “new directions in research” around masculinity as a novel theoretical concern. Also in the same year, West and Zimmerman (1987) published a very influential article arguing that gender is not ‘given’ but ‘done’, i.e. gender is as much a pattern of enacted practices as anything else. Shortly after, and building on the broadly Marxist view by Connell (1987), Brittan (1989) proposed that masculinity is the ideology supporting the structural arrangements of patriarchy. And in 1990 Hearn and Morgan edited *Men, Masculinities and Social Theory*, showing a number of works tying the new field into broader theoretical concerns in sociology.

The works cited here demonstrate the emergence across the 1980s of ‘masculinity’ as a principal object of study, giving support to the notion of a ‘sociology of masculinity’. The next major step was the de-massification of ‘masculinity’ as a singularity: Brod and Kaufman’s 1994 edited collection *Theorising Masculinities* displayed the thinking of the early 90s, while Connell’s 1995 *Masculinities* consolidated this thinking. Although I believe this latter work marks a crystallisation of the field of masculinity theory, at the same time vigorous debate amongst a divergence of views continued. Nevertheless by 2002, feminist theorist Judith Kegan Gardiner, in an assessment of the intersection of feminist and masculinity theories, was able to claim a general “consensus” in masculinity theory upon four issues: masculinity arises from “historical and cultural processes” rather than is ‘natural’; masculinity “is not monolithic” but multiple; feminists and masculinity theorists “can and should co-operate both intellectually and politically”; and finally a “methodological... post-structuralist suspicion of universal truths” (Gardiner 2002:11-12).

A notable absence in this consensus is the question of change among men or in masculinity. Gardiner finds that “Profeminist men argued that men should support

feminism because most are harmed by idealising the characteristics of socially powerful men and by defining the masculine in opposition to women and subordinate men...” (Gardiner 2002:5). But my reading is that her conclusion here is overly optimistic. While many pro-feminist writers do mention harms to men, these harms are not articulated into positive political programs for change. For example, Kimmel recognises these harms but in effect ridicules men for pursuing such idealisations (Kimmel 1996:293-321), and arguing that men should abandon these futile dreams while “joining the struggles of others for their rightful share of the sun” (Kimmel 1996:335). Connell also recognises that masculinity is not a bed of roses for men, but he views men’s attempts to directly grapple with these harms merely as a defensive “self-absorption” because of “the profound interest this group has in limiting the revolutionary upheaval in gender relations ... in the early 1970s.” (Connell 1995:211). Like Kimmel, he also believes a progressive men’s politics can only involve helping non-dominant groups.

Amongst the major writers of the 80s-90s period, only Kaufman (1994) and Seidler (1989, 1997) take men’s harms to be of serious political moment. Kaufman argues that “men’s pain ... can help us understand how the majority of men can be reached with a message of change” (Kaufman 1994:143), although he continues to believe homophobia and women’s inequality should be the major political issues for men. Seidler argues that conventional or hegemonic masculinities entail a central theme of self-sacrifice in the form of the Protestant ethic of self-denial, and that “though men had power they were also limited and in some ways oppressed by dominant masculinities” (Seidler 1997:5). These oppressions can be actively engaged and transformed via collective psycho-social practices such as consciousness-raising, which “made it possible to theorize a relationship between consciousness, experience and power.” (Seidler 1989:187). Unfortunately these calls have not been seriously pursued by other sociologists of masculinity. Kimmel’s (2000:267) observation that “Men are just beginning to realise that the ‘traditional’ definition of masculinity leaves them unfulfilled and dissatisfied” unfortunately owes very little to sociological work.

To be fair, however, the field of masculinity theory has emerged in fierce contestation with at least two other already well-established views. Pro-feminist work is constantly fighting a rear-guard action against predominant conservative or reactionary forces, articulated primarily by men but often also by women (e.g. Faludi 1999). On the other side feminists have long viewed with deep suspicion any attempts by men to enter

into the field of gender theory, on the basis that men will find it almost impossible to resist the pull of the conventional patriarchal vortex (see e.g. Jardine & Smith 1987 for a survey of the issues). In a sense, then, it is very understandable that pro-feminist scholars have been concerned to clearly delineate a theoretical nexus which is a clear break from patriarchal strategies of legitimation.

My account of the field of masculinity theory thus far has centralised the developments primarily in sociology above other social scientific disciplines in order to demonstrate the emergence of the sociology of masculinity. But the interest in men as gendered beings sparked by second wave feminisms was not confined exclusively to the discipline of sociology. Indeed, historically, the discipline of psychology predominated in theorising masculinity (Moss 2006:1187) before the political sociological interest emerged. Psychology's interest in men underwent a political transformation in the 1980s, as did several other disciplinary fields. I will briefly consider this political transformation in some of these other fields in which the broad issue of change is a major preoccupation, though not necessarily change in relation to men. These are the disciplines of history and psychology, and the more diffuse field of cultural studies.

Psychology

The internal landscape of men has preoccupied psychologists ever since Freud, but for most of the twentieth century there has been a distinct gender dimension to the pattern of dispersion of psychological knowledges and practices. While psychological views were mainly applied to women for the purpose of normalising their 'hysterical' behaviours, interactions between men and psychology have primarily occurred via the workplace or the military (Rose 1989). The military-derived interest in measuring psychological attributes extended in the 1930s into measurements of sexual traits, which in turn led in the 1940s to the formulation of the idea of 'sex roles' (Connell 1987:30) which, as I discussed above, were formative in the field of the political study of masculinity.

One of the earliest writers to consider the confluence of the psychological idea of sex role with feminist-inspired politics was Joseph Pleck (with Jack Sawyer 1974). He developed the "gender role strain paradigm" (Pleck 1981) to explain a range of psychological disturbances he observed among men. Pleck notes his original idea spawned research into broadly three areas of strain:

Discrepancy-strain results when one fails to live up to one's internalised manhood ideal, which, among contemporary adult men, is often a close approximation of the traditional code. Dysfunction-strain results when one fulfils the requirements of the male code because many of the characteristics viewed as desirable in men can have negative side effects on the men themselves and on those close to them. Trauma-strain results from the ordeal of the male role socialisation process, which is now recognised as inherently traumatic. (Pleck 1995:261)

Levant (1996), in a seminal article introducing the “new” psychology of men to the discipline, notes that Pleck's paradigm departs from conventional role theory in that Pleck highlights the extent to which the contents of gender roles are socially constructed (Levant 1996:260). This in turn enables the incorporation of a political dimension into intrapsychic processes: the gender norms by which men judge themselves are not invariant, and can therefore be challenged. But although Levant notes several novel strategies arising from this approach to assist men in self-reconstructions, these strategies focus upon individual men rather than groups (Levant 1996:263).

Since its introduction in the mid-90s there has been a small but consistent stream of practical developments upon this political-psychological theme. Some key ideas in this line of development are the recognition that men enter a culturally “foreign” space when they enter therapeutic situations of any sort whether medical or psychological (Brooks 1998); that the internal conflicts experienced by men are not simply personal inadequacies but are closely intertwined with social structural processes (Addis & Mahlik 2003); distinguishing “socio-economic *effect* from psychodynamic *motive*” assists in eliciting men's experiences of patriarchy (Eirik 1998:77); and that men hold a conflicted attitude towards engagement in gender change since they have both “something to gain (e.g. emotional freedom) and something to lose (e.g. male privileges and power)” (Good *et al.* 2005:701).

Overall, the discipline of psychology assumes that change is possible, and in fact change is a major goal of disciplinary practice. But its focus upon the intrapsychic processes of individuals means that, although the psychology of men is concerned to theorise its objects as socially constructed, the field is weak on collective political engagement for its male clients. A more socially engaged strand has been introduced by Jefferson (2002; Jefferson & Gadd 2007), whose background as a forensic psychologist has drawn him into engagements with masculinity theory via criminology. Critiquing the limitations of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ when conceptualising the linkages between intrapsychic and social processes, Jefferson blends work by feminist psychoanalysts

Chodorow (1978) and Benjamin (1998) to develop a concept of social gender formations, especially masculinity, as a strategy among individuals to defend against anxiety. Although a more detailed attempt than Connell in this regard, Jefferson does not address the level of collective action or how politics enter into the space between the personal and the social scales of analysis.

A very interesting development that goes much further in addressing the collective/political level existing between the social at the large scale and the personal at the small-scale is an article by Wetherell and Edley (1999). Their account of identity, explicitly including gender identity, is as a matter of intrapsychic processes which 'take up' positions in discourses, and at the same time manage a concurrent range of positions in concurrently occurring discourses in social interaction. This article marked the start of a new 'discursive psychology' approach to studying masculinity within the psychology field (see e.g. the special issue of *Feminism and Psychology* Vol 11 Issue 1 2001, Willott & Griffin 2004; Wetherell 2007). Because this conceptual approach is at the border between psychology and post-structuralism I will examine this work in more detail below in the discussion about the post-structural convergence.

History

The study of history is perforce the study of change, since history's central disciplinary preoccupation is with the unfolding of events across time. With respect to the study of masculinity in history there appear to be two broad groupings: the study of the unfolding of 'masculinity' as a socially constructed concept and its enacted contents at various moments, and the study of biography in order to ascertain the meaning men place on the experience of coming to be (a particular) male. The first strand highlights the large-scale processes of social formation; the latter focuses on individual men engaging with these processes.

With respect to the first strand, a significant theme in histories of masculinities and of men has been the examination of *representations* of maleness, such as books, magazines, plays, self-help or etiquette manuals and so on. Possibly the most impressive in this line is Kimmel's 1996 classic *Manhood in America* which covers the uniquely American forms of masculinity since the American War of Independence. A well-known Australian work is Crotty's (2001) examination of the formation of Australian middle class masculinities during the period 1870-1920. Both works manage to combine erudition and thorough research with a distinctively pro-feminist cynicism about the

possibilities for progressive change among men. Arguably, of course, Crotty's work covers a much more conservative period, but Kimmel, whose history reaches right up the early 90s, is equally cynical (e.g. Kimmel 1996:330-335).

A seminal example of the second strand is Roper and Tosh's 1991 edited collection *Manful Assertions*. Their interest is in exploring the experience of masculinity embedded in relations of power and also in relations of gender. Although they say their work arises out of historical work from gay history, feminism, and the men's movement, they distinguish their approach from the feminist focus on patriarchy, which tends to portray men as having an inherent drive for domination, because it leaves men's experience unexplored. Their interest is in intersections between representation and structure, intersections of personal experience and meaning with social-level process: "...we explore how cultural representations become part of subjective identity. Conversely, we look for ways in which fears, pleasures and desires may enter the social domain" (1991:14-15) Thus they are interested in what men say about their own experience, and their primary sources are diaries, first-hand accounts, and interviews.

Two findings from this work are noteworthy in terms of potential resources for fostering progressive change among men. First, echoing a theme from the psychology of men, is "the fragility of masculinity at the psychic level ... Indeed the very process of acquiring social dominance may be subjectively experienced as oppression" (Roper and Tosh 1991:15) Secondly, "... instances of male dominance may also, at the psychic level, indicate the tenuousness of men's hold over power. Indeed, we might well conclude that the investment of masculinity in power is far from entirely beneficial for either men's psychic well-being or even the efficient perpetuation of their power" (1991:16). This work highlights the disjunctures between discourses legitimating men's power and the experience of taking up the proffered subject positions. The recognition of this sort of complexity has led to a more complex historical understanding of the constitution of power in relation to masculinity, (e.g. Shepard 2003; Harvey & Shepard 2005; Tosh 1994), and also directly complexified the men=oppressor/women=victim dualisms (e.g. Kent 2005).

A number of historians have made the criticism that the masculinity histories of both strands from the 80s and 90s tend to portray the development of situated masculinities and their lived embodiment by men as processes more or less devoid of women (e.g. Parr 1995), and are thus "in danger of restoring men – however

particularised, differentiated and socially constructed – to the centre of our historical narrative” (Ditz 2004:7). I agree this is a potential danger, however given the novelty of studying men as gendered persons rather than the normative standard, it is understandable that such studies will at least initially focus closely on this new category. But more complex analyses are obviously desirable. Tosh (1994:197) argues that history should attempt “to understand a system of social relations *as a whole*”, part of which is “the field of power” in that system. Holter (2006:267) notes a recent trend towards rejecting a “feminist-argument stance” in which “gender is the main thing” in historical analysis. This rejection of gender as the single major explanatory factor enables views of men in positions of extreme power (e.g. Stalin, the Nazis) as only partly shaped by gender forces.

The Post-structural convergence

Moving forward chronologically and in terms of conceptual developments in the field, I will return to Gardiner’s (2002:12) fourth area of consensus, that of “post-structuralist suspicion”. She claims the consensus here is around a methodological issue rather than a substantive one. She argues the consensus around this issue is that “the critique of essentialist categories is politically imperative” since belief in such categories “precludes social change by insisting that change is impossible.” (2002:12). While I concede that this consensus may exist, because my central political concern is with the question of men and change, my view is that the deployment of post-structuralist perspectives must be far more than a simple matter of critical suspicion as a part of methodology. I will argue it is crucial that post-structuralist perspectives be more extensively explored, and that their implications to be actually incorporated into the substance of theory. In this section I will pursue a rough chronological track of the increasing post-structuralist incorporation into masculinity theory, highlighting the conceptual issues in tension.

A little over two years after *Masculinities* (Connell 1995) was published, Alan Petersen (1998) produced a thorough assessment of the extent to which post-structuralist perspectives were utilised in the then-extant masculinity theory. He argued for the need for a critical assessment of the epistemology enabling the study of ‘masculinity/masculinities’ as a reified social object at all (1998:8-9), on the basis that “essentialism and universalism are intrinsic to Western thought and that their elimination will require a radical change in epistemology” (1998:6).

The criticism of the category ‘masculinity/ies’ was already proceeding apace, however, principally by Hearn & Morgan 1996, and Clatterbaugh 1997. Hearn (see also Hearn 2004) argued that a focus on masculinities can lead to an elision of the concrete realities of men’s abusive practices, while Clatterbaugh’s more philosophical argument was about the lack of clear definition of the category (see also Clatterbaugh 2004). Around the same time, MacInnes (1998) argued for an ‘end of masculinity’ but as an androgenising strategy to reduce men’s domination. Refuting this rejection of the usefulness of masculinity as an object of study, however, Connell (2000:16) argues that talking about ‘men’ presupposes another category, ‘women’ – thus we are talking not only about men but also about gender. In addition, I would argue that, given that masculinity is not necessarily aligned with men or male bodies (Halberstam 1998), really the core problem so far in politicised analyses of men is that of the uneven distribution of social resources and the ways in which gender is one vector in this uneven distribution. ‘Masculinity’ is a handy concept in this regard precisely because it *doesn’t necessarily* assume masculinity always refers to men. At the same time I agree with Hearn’s point that prioritising ‘masculinity’ *can* certainly result in the elision of men’s actions – but does not *necessarily* do so; it depends on the design of the project at hand.

Petersen’s criticism, however, is distinctly post-structuralist in focusing on the epistemology/ies enabling the establishment of both ‘men’ and ‘masculinity/ies’ as objects of knowledge. This criticism was evidently not without effect: Whitehead’s *Men and Masculinities: Key themes and new directions* (Whitehead 2002) is an explicitly profeminist response to emergent post-structuralist critiques of universalising categories, while Pease’s (2000) *Recreating Men: Postmodern masculinity politics* utilises a post-structuralist ethnographic examination a group of pro-feminist men’s politics and practices. A major innovation in both these works is a serious consideration of the area of identity/subjectivity, which Petersen argued had been downplayed previously. However from what I might call a ‘fully’ post-structuralist viewpoint, both works remain theoretically limited by their explicit pro-feminist foundations to the extent that, although both take up the epistemological challenge to categories like ‘men’ and ‘masculinity’, they fail to also move beyond the modernist epistemological foundations of the categories of ‘oppression’ and ‘equality’. Indeed, Pease explicitly states that he pursues a ‘weak’ post-structuralism because a ‘strong’ post-structuralist approach has the disadvantage of “totally abandon[ing] the values of modernity and the Enlightenment project of human emancipation” (Pease 2000: 24).

As I will argue (Chapters 5, 6, 8), progressive social change is not inherently precluded by epistemological re-examination of oppression and equality. I would agree with Bauman (1992) that the postmodern critiques to emerge in the 1980s were primarily a 'site-clearing operation' to the extent of being primarily critique. But critique is not at all the same thing as 'totally abandoning' the criticised object. And critique is a necessary precursor to transformative development, although of course the latter does not inevitably follow the former. A thorough-going post-structuralist elaboration of the notion of equality can lead to a substantial reframing of the practical social project for equality as a much more extensive and inclusive one (see Chapter 4). Pease's and Whitehead's works here, although adding useful innovations by highlighting the political and theoretical possibilities opened up by post-structuralist developments around subjectivity and identity, remain anchored in the assumption that the most pertinent aspect of men is their oppression of women, and that therefore the primary goal of men's activism should be change for women's benefit. While of course this goal is perfectly legitimate, both writers simply assert the centrality of this goal without explaining why it is central in social process, or the mechanisms by which such centrality comes about. As a result, the goal of men's change for women's benefit can best be seen as politics rather than theory, in that it does not have explanatory power in terms of understanding social process.

This difficulty is pervasive in pro-feminist academic literature generally. Many of the established pro-feminist writers, such as Kimmell (e.g. 1996), Connell (e.g. 1987, 1995, 2000), Collinson and Hearn (e.g. 1994), Flood (e.g. 2003), Pease (e.g. 2000), and Donaldson (e.g. Donaldson & Poynting 2004) all share this assumption that the major reason for change in gender is women's subordination. It is but a short step from this view to the universalist assumption that women's subordination is the *only legitimate* reason for change in gender. Given the historical roots of the study of men and masculinity in 1970s feminisms (see discussion above), this is very understandable. And the eradication of women's subordination remains a vital driver of political activism and social analysis, as well as being morally imperative. It is perfectly understandable that women will commonly prioritise this project. But the project for women's equality does not inherently exhaust the field of change in gender. And in terms of men's involvements in change in gender, this project for women's equality does not have to be the *only* or indeed even the *primary* driver of progressive change specifically among *men*.

Certainly the existence of women's widespread marginalisation and oppression in favour of men must be explained, but it is too easy to imagine that, because the topic of women's oppression has dominated the conceptual and political terrain in debates about gender, this topic is the most important or the most urgent. It is important, and it is urgent – but this is a different statement to it being universally or inevitably *the most* important and urgent. Understandably it *is* very commonly the most important and urgent *for women*, but such a view is by no means universal among women.

Also for some men, women's equality is the most important and urgent issue. But universalising the primacy of the project for women's equality leads inevitably to bringing to the fore explanations of social process as arising from universalising concepts such as patriarchy. Patriarchal processes, values and social forms certainly exist, and have been more pervasive in the past in Western countries, in addition to currently increasing their reach in some Muslim countries. These patriarchal processes need explanation and, for progressive-minded people, challenging as well. But, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 3 using Connell's work as an example, the pro-feminist tendency is to slide from theorisation of patriarchal processes as significant features of social life into universalising patriarchy as the single explanation for gender relations, and even to a large extent, the single explanation for social life overall.

There is much diversity and innovation amongst pro-feminist masculinity theorists, but for me the defining feature of pro-feminism is this centralisation of the project for women's equality/gender equality/gender justice and the related universalist assumptions about patriarchal relations. A similar universalising theme occurs with respect to feminism: the 'feminism' most pro-feminists refer to is often restricted in scope (Robinson 2003:130), and does not take up the critiques, for example, by bell hooks (1981) of the relatively narrow focus of 'white feminism', or ecofeminist discussions about gender and the non-human (e.g. Plumwood 1993, 1996). A crucial methodological lacuna in pro-feminist work is neglecting to notice what are the main issues *for men* in gender relations. Instead, pro-feminist writers dismiss the majority of activist men as *only* reactionary, rather than seriously engaging with them to understand what motivates such men towards their activism (Karoski 2007). My conclusion here, given the emphasis on patriarchy as the universal explanation, the use of women's oppression as the only proper motivation for change in gender, and the very partial and selective use of feminist

perspectives, is that such approaches are better described as 'patriarchalist' rather than pro-feminist.

To briefly explore some current themes in post-structuralist expansions in masculinity theory, I will review three sources, each of which displays a productive convergence across several disciplines. The first piece was mentioned above in the section on psychology, while the other two works come out of cultural studies.

Wetherill and Edley's (1999) *Negotiating hegemonic masculinity* is a very creative article designed to explore the enactment of hegemonic masculinity by actual male persons. They argue that the Connellian framework is theoretically a big step forward but is weak on "how men position themselves as gendered beings" (Wetherell and Edley 1999:335). Close analysis of the transcripts of group discussions among some men about gender-related topics reveal the participants employing a complex interweaving of strategies of identity-production to achieve "a wide variety of identity positions" (1999:352), some of which support Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity but others which either disrupt it or merely fracture its unitary coherence to produce decided social benefits such as autonomous and egalitarian selves.

Wetherell and Edley conclude that "there is a multiplicity of hegemonic sense-making relevant to the construction of masculinity identities" (1999:351) where 'hegemonic' does not simply mean domination. Nor do all these identities include or always revolve around gender. Rather, "the realm of hegemonic masculinity cannot be sealed off from other hegemonic ways of being a person in western societies, such as demonstrating individuality and autonomy from social forces" (1999:351). These latter of course also underpin the social and democratic advances achieved by post-war protest movements and the more recent identity politics, leading to the possibility that "the familiar and seemingly acceptable repertoires of liberal humanism and heroic individual rebellion might be reworked in combination with other discourses to produce persuasive new imaginary positions for men" (1999:353) as part of "developing feminist political strategies for the ideological domain" (1999:352).

The key conceptual step forward in this article is the recognition that social interaction, identity and the structures of social life are contained in multiple discourses simultaneously, leading to the view that "complicity and resistance can be mixed together" (Wetherell and Edley 1999:352) within individuals and groups. The authors also recognise that discourses are not just a matter of talk but that personal identification

with an 'identity position' "is a matter of the *procedures in action* through which men live/talk/do masculinity, and... these procedures are intensely local (situationally realised) and global (dependent on broader conditions of intelligibility)" (1999:353).

Jefferson (2002:63) criticises Wetherell and Edley's theoretical moves for failing to "produce an authentic inner world". I agree with this criticism, but at the same time Jefferson and other developers of ideas about psychology and men (e.g. Benjamin 1998; Addis and Mahalik 2003; Good *et al.* 2005), while undoubtedly pushing further conceptually the terrain of the inner world of men, at the same time fail to develop a concrete political dimension to psychology. From the point of view of men and change, the great strength of psychology is its disciplinary assumption that change among men is theoretically and practically do-able, but psychology often falters at tying in personal change to collective change and especially to collective political action to foster change. As I will argue in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, the Foucauldian concept of discourse, when developed along specific lines, is a key conceptual move to enable the theorisation of sociology, collective action and personal psychology all together. Wetherell and Edley's work represents a landmark in one very important area of this extended theorisation project.

Turning now to works coming out of cultural studies, I will discuss two works which stand out because they both thoroughly engage with the existing field of masculinity theory and are theoretically sophisticated. I mentioned above a recent extensive theoretical survey by Edwards (2006), *Cultures of Masculinity*, as preparation to an argument that some cultural studies perspectives can enhance theorisations of masculinity. His review finds that the field of masculinity theory is riven by "a developing set of tensions" between "the culturalist, poststructuralist or media-driven analyses of masculinity" and "those perceiving themselves as pro-feminist, structuralist or empirically driven" (2006:3). He argues for a chronological split between these two groups: the structuralist/empirical group represents a "second wave" of masculinity theorising, and the post-structuralist group as a "third wave" (2006:3).

While this is a handy schematisation, and is somewhat similar to my chronological view above, I would argue that post-structuralist approaches are not confined only to cultural studies, for example Wetherell and Edley's(1999) important article I discuss above. Cultural studies has perhaps been more receptive to post-structuralist perspectives than, for example, sociology, but within the field of masculinity

theory it is more accurate to describe a fracturing and proliferation of critique following the crystallising moment in the mid-90s, in which post-structural cultural studies offers a specific (and highly productive) critical line. But I agree with Edwards' criticism that the field of masculinity theory as displayed in one of its two major omnibuses (Kimmel *et al.* 2005) almost entirely ignores cultural studies. And I very strongly agree that post-structuralist perspectives from *many* disciplines need to be very thoroughly integrated at a foundational level into masculinity theory.

In terms of the main goal of his book, however, Edwards carefully argues that specific sorts of examination of portrayals of masculinities in the media could be immensely productive for understanding processes of social marginalisation and the dissemination of social norms and identities, and processes of social change (2006:137-8). However he points out that the potential gains from such examination require moving away from the mainly psychoanalytic basis of many studies, and incorporating new more complex understandings of 'looking relations' between text and audience. He also critiques Butler's (1990) notion of performativity for tending to highlight the *doing* aspect of identity and so downplay the conceptual significance of the experiential *being* aspect (Edwards 2006:101). Specifically, he suggests three assumptions are required:

first, that representations of masculinity like masculinities *per se* are perceived as social constructs that vary from time to time and place to place; second, that there is then no direct connections of representations of masculinity with the realities of masculinities as lived acts, practices or identities; and third, that there is, conversely, a likely connection with wider prevailing motivations and ideologies concerning sexual, racial and gendered identities. (Edwards 2006:123)

In terms of academic work creating resources to assist transformative change in masculinity, more attention to themes and trends in media portrayals of masculinities along the lines suggested by Edwards would certainly pay off. The highly competitive media industries are continually looking for the cutting edge of change, and hence have developed finely-honed techniques for detecting and staying with that cutting edge. In addition, a primary media function is dissemination of content, so that the media industries are simultaneously active in creating and shaping the cutting edge. More intensive academic engagement with this important area of social life, using conceptual frames like Edwards', could be motivated by a political agenda to foster change in specific directions.

Edwards argues for a specific proposal in his book. A less pointed and more inclusive offering again in the area of a greater utilisation of post-structuralist cultural studies is Haywood and Mac an Ghaill's (2003) *Men and Masculinities*. This work has the clear, concise textbook style characteristic of the British cultural studies school associated with Stuart Hall (e.g. 1997), and accordingly is easy to read while presenting solid theoretical content. Their main task is to introduce the reader to the field of masculinity theory, and they do this by dividing the field into two broad strands – materialist patriarchy-driven theories and post-structuralist cultural studies theories, with their work firmly in the latter. With respect to men and change they argue overall that the post-structuralist post-identity politics developments of queer theory can help with “more recent questions of the body, desire and subjective identity formation” (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003:148) by showing that “masculinity is... an active process of achievement, performance and enactment.” (2003:138).

They very clearly value all the historical developments in masculinity theory to date: “Feminist thinking” has put “masculinity on the gender map”, while “patriarchal frameworks” (e.g. Connell 1995; Hearn 1998; Segal 1990; Kimmel 1996) give “highly insightful analyses of how men’s practices are organised” (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003:147). And they agree with Brittan (1989) that though “representations of what constitutes the masculine have changed historically, ... there has been little change in the power dynamics...” (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003:147) But Haywood and Mac an Ghaill problematize these materialist accounts by juxtaposing them with “emerging approaches that disconnect masculinity from male bodies”, which leads to questions about power: “if the signs of masculinity are free floating, then access to the power that these signs carry also become available.” (2003:147)

This critique leads into a call for a conceptual “shift from monocausal models of power to more inclusive forms of power” which can conceptually place “traditional sociological concerns with conceptions of power and stratification, alongside more recent questions of the body, desire, and subjective identity formation” (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003:148). This work produces the important understanding that “men and boys experience the patriarchal privilege in different ways” (2003:148), echoing and extending the complexifying findings of Wetherell and Edley (1999).

This complexifying trend is not confined to the level of individual persons, however. They also see “the need for a multilevel analysis that incorporates explanations

at the level of state discourses, institutions, social groups and individuals”, in addition to cross-cultural views of masculinities “highlighting multiple, collective, and multi-layered social practices at local and global levels” (Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2003:149) as suggested by Connell (2000). Arguably the creation of multi-level accounts of gender is one of Connell’s most important conceptual criteria, as can be seen in the account of the Connellian framework in Chapter 3. Connell explicitly conceptualises linkages in social process between ideology, the state, institutions, local situations and individual psychology, most clearly presented in *Gender and Power* (1987). However in this regard what marks Haywood and Mac an Ghail’s approach as post-structuralist is their interest in the “shift from monocausal models of power to more inclusive forms of power” (2003:148) – a shift enabled by a particular sort of epistemological reflection into which Connell does not venture.

Feminist critiques and engagements

The political theorizing of masculinity has been both enabled by and motivated by feminist theory, and hence an important horizon of the field of masculinity theory is its ongoing interaction with its political source. As discussed in Chapter 1, feminist distrust and suspicion of men’s contributions to theorising gender appears to be a permanent theme, and for good historical reasons. At the same time, calls for gender equality/justice inevitably involve men, so that feminism has to some extent an inherent vested interest in engaging men beyond the simple portrayal of men as only oppressive patriarchs. Chapter 1 argued that a practical and constructive goal for relations between feminist theory and masculinity theory is the production of a ‘third story’, in which feminists and masculinity theorists can tell a recognisably similar story of gender relations, but each from their own viewpoint and emphasising quite different issues and events. With all this in mind, I will briefly comment on some major themes in feminist criticisms of masculinity theory after what I might call ‘the Connellian moment’ in 1995.

Jardine and Smith (1987) is a major early work regarding the feminist/masculinity theory interface. In this work the intense anti-patriarchal suspicion of men prevalent in 1970s feminisms is strongly evident, but there are signs also of feminist willingness to work with men when theorising men and masculinity. But over a decade later there is a substantial variety of views. The *Journal of Men’s Studies* published a small symposium on the men’s studies/women’s studies interface in 2000, which, alongside questions of nomenclature and resource allocation, included discussions about the possibility that the

delineation between the two fields can implicitly reinforce conventional dualistic views of gender (Urschel 2000:409), and even “deter academic co-operation” (Kann 2000:411), as well as some discussion about the often divergent interests between women and men scholars due to their different places in the gender hierarchy (Kann 2000:414). Overall, however, all four writers in the symposium argued for greater cooperation and theoretical synthesis between the two fields.

In the same year, and with a more explicitly Australian focus, Terry Threadgold (2000) discusses the relationship between women’s studies and ‘gender studies’, which is not simply a blending of men’s studies and women’s studies but also includes gay and lesbian studies and queer theory. She argues that the new rubric ‘gender studies’ can be used “as a particularly uncritical way of silencing some of the major issues raised by, for example, feminist theory”. Further, the term ‘gender’ is often used as code for only women, and not men, leading Threadgold to argue that “The term gender must come to include both sexes” (2000:39).

My discussion to this point reveals multiple designations for the object of study: men’s studies, women’s studies and gender studies. Further complexifying this is the call to focus not just on men’s studies – which, after all, as Justad (2000) points out can include views ranging from pro-feminist to anti-feminist – but more specifically on ‘critical studies of men’ (see Hearn 2004 for an account of the emergence of this view). Gardiner’s (2002) edited collection of discussions between masculinity and feminist theorists uses the term “masculinity studies” in its title, while “men and masculinity” appears to be a very common object of study. I define my field of study in this thesis as “masculinity theory”, a term which also has some popular currency, perhaps reflecting a current interest specifically in theoretical development. The variety of nomenclature points to the variety of views and of relationships among the views, reflecting the increasingly multiple points of interaction between feminist and masculinity groupings.

However a small but consistent thread of sharp criticism of work on masculinity emerged with Hanmer 1990, from which the ‘critical studies of men’ approach championed by Hearn (2004) developed. Ramazanoglou (1992) also surveyed the then-extant work on men and masculinity, and along the same lines more recently Robinson (2003) makes several criticisms of masculinity work up to about 2000-1: it does not “usually and explicitly address as a main theoretical priority how feminist theory is used, cited and analysed...”; and there tends to be a scholar-based assessment of ‘good guys’

and ‘bad guys’ rather than more content-based assessments of “earlier feminist criticisms of appropriation and misuse of feminist theory” (Robinson 2003:130). She argues especially that radical feminist perspectives have been discarded on the basis that they are essentialist, universalist and ahistorical, a view she strongly rejects, although she notes that there is considerable criticism of radical feminism by feminists themselves (2003:131). But she agrees with Thompson’s (2001) view “that radical feminism has focused on the worst excesses of the social system which is male supremacy, [and this focus] can explain men’s reluctance to embrace this body of thought and self-interest in refusing to do so” (Robinson 2003:132).

More recently, scholar of male violence Melanie McCarry (2007) sharply focuses this line of criticism to identify three distinct problems with current masculinity theory: a) explorations of the “negative consequences for men” of masculinity leads to the view that “men are the real victims of masculinity”; b) studying ‘masculinity’ rather than ‘men’ leads to the disembodiment of masculinity and the elision of men’s responsibility for harms to others; and c) that male masculinity theorists are unacceptably unreflexive about their own actions and politics (2007:409-410). Despite these criticisms, McCarry concludes that understanding the perpetrators of violence is essential to violence prevention.

These criticisms are all cogent, however they betray the same sort of universalising tendencies which I have argued above are characteristic of ‘patriarchalist’ views. I agree with Robinson that male masculinity theorists generally don’t engage specific areas of feminist theory as a theoretical priority, and that if we want more extensive engagement with feminists we need to do this. However Robinson’s attitude towards men is not propitious for constructive dialogue: her view that men are reluctant to engage radical feminist thought out of defensive self-interest (above) closes out the possibility that men might have multiple agendas in engagement, of which defensive self-interest may be only one and a contingent and minor one. Such a dismissal of complexity and multiplicity already prepares the ground for a defensive rejection of an engagement by men which is anything less than entirely positive. In addition she herself notes the feminist-inspired study of men is not nearly as developed as feminist work, meaning that although men clearly have patriarchal advantages in any engagement, it is likely feminists will have theoretical and precedence advantages. In addition, autobiographical commentaries by pro-feminist men (e.g. Connell 1983; Hearn 2008) show that ironically the men who take up serious academic study about men are often horrified by men’s violence, and this

forms part of their motivation for their study. This does not, of course, prevent them accessing patriarchal privilege, but rather, reinforces my argument that persons' motives are multiple rather than capable of being reduced to simplistic accounts.

The same universalist tendency is evident in McCarry's criticisms, although I agree with all of them. Explorations of the negative consequences for men certainly *can* lead to a view of men as victims, and indeed some writers use these explorations in exactly this way (e.g. Farrell 1994; Thomas 1993). This approach is both dishonest and indeed disempowering for men, just as the view that women are *only* victims of gender relations is dishonest and disempowering for women. But if McCarry's view is that such explorations *will inevitably* lead to the view that men are victims, then this is indeed a reductionist universalising. Recognising the personal costs of existing social arrangements is an absolutely crucial step in motivating individuals to actively engage with social change. It has been the task of feminism for women, and must now be the task of masculinity researchers for men, to then show that these personal costs do not have to be borne, and can be assuaged through specific programs of action. The issue here, I argue, is not with theorising the costs to men of masculinity but rather with the political agendas motivating such research.

A similar comment can be made with respect to McCarry's second criticism, that the focus on 'masculinity' rather than 'men' can elide men's responsibility for their actions: this focus *can* elide men's responsibility but *does not inevitably* do so, although I am fully in accord with McCarry that this is something that does occur occur. McCarry displays a focus on men's behaviour (2007:410-411), and it is very understandable that those who are working with victims of violence simply want the perpetrators to stop. While behaviour modification is an excellent and appropriate short-term solution, it definitely has limits in regard to transformative change, exemplified in the joke "inside every Sensitive New Age Guy there isn't one." Theorising social processes to bring about long-term change such that masculinity and violence become divergent to each other also inevitably involves larger and less precisely focused theoretical forays into labels such as 'masculinity' and the cultural/political processes forming it, and such explorations do not always lead directly to McCarry's desired outcome.

But I am fully in agreement with McCarry's third criticism, that male theorists tend to be relatively unreflexive about their own actions and politics. This view is echoed

by Moller (2007) who, referring to the popular notion of hegemonic masculinity, argues that the concept

... conditions researchers to think about masculinity and power in a specific and limited way: that masculine power is possessive and commanding and that it is exercised by an identifiable few who can then be rightly (even righteously) criticised. (Moller 2007:268)

Moller refers to Bordo (1994), who suggests examining men and masculinities through their vulnerabilities rather than through their power:

Bordo insists that richer, more interesting and challenging understandings of masculinity and their intersection with men and power will result if we explore the lived reality of male bodies as 'place[s] of shame, self-hatred and concealment' (Moller 2007:271; quoting Bordo 1994:266).

He concludes that the pro-feminist approach can very easily produce a distancing of the researcher:

I have yet to come across any male masculinities scholar who entertains the notion that he might enjoy the privileges of hegemonic masculinity himself. (Moller 2007:274)

But here I suspect my politics, and perhaps Moller's, are rather different to McCarry's. Where we would agree, is in most men's (including academic men's) chronic active participation in a range of violences and marginalisations which largely go unnoticed except by their victims. However the divergences beyond that point are, I think, profound. Moller's study of football team supporters finds that extant masculinity theory just doesn't enable him to theorise men's deeply felt and often emotionally expressed loyalties, and the evidently positive community-building and politically radical effects of those emotions. Moller points to how extant masculinity theory can easily position researchers as external to their ostensible subject, i.e. men, and as a result misleadingly simplify both men and the results of men's actions. In line with Moller's critique here, I believe it is important to theorise not only men, power and vulnerability all together, but in addition in theorising more extensive terrains of violence: the extent to which all affluent peoples/nations rely upon violence to produce that affluence; men's violences towards each other and towards women; women's violences towards each other and towards men; and also the many violences we, men and women, chronically commit towards ourselves. This approach implies that we are humans and as such we are variously powerful and vulnerable, and this is an ontological condition of humanness. It also implies a Foucauldian approach to power: that power is productive, and produces both desired and undesired outcomes.

This is not to deny the large-scale patterns of the domination of men over women, or other large-scale inequalities along many vectors. Nor does it deny the terror and trauma involved in men's violence towards women. Academics, both women and men, in line with Western culture generally, can very easily deny our own individual powers, as much as we deny our vulnerabilities. These various denials certainly have distinctively gendered patterns and produce distinctively gendered outcomes. Although McCarry's argument about male theorists' paucity of reflexivity is almost certainly motivated by her interest in (academic) men behaving differently, I would add that academic men's theorising about masculinity would undoubtedly be enriched by more reflexive investigation of the complexities of power and vulnerability which we ourselves habitually enact and experience on an everyday basis.

This section on the intersection between feminist and masculinity theory is intended to bring into play some of the more critical feminist views both of men and of masculinity theory. In terms of my stated goal of feminists and masculinity theorists eventually being able to create a mutual 'third story' about gender, at this stage given both the trenchant nature of the feminist criticisms showcased here and the relative underdevelopment of the field of masculinity theory, it seems such a third story is some way off. I certainly can see Robinson's (2003) point, however, that engagement between the two fields requires that already proffered detailed feminist criticisms must be addressed in detail, and that specific pieces of feminist theory will need to be engaged by masculinity writers, rather than, as at present, the general overall feminist contention about women's inequality.

In terms of this thesis, however, I do not directly engage feminist theory in any significant way, except in Chapter 1 to use Smith's (1987) argument about political influences on sociological problematics, and to argue that pro-feminists tend to utilize only specific portions of feminist theory. My main project is to open up the field of masculinity theory towards a more fluid, complex and less universalising ontology, with the long-term intention of motivating men to move beyond the oppressive and limiting restraints of current masculinities and notions of power, and so enrich their own lives and the lives of those around them.

This chapter has portrayed the field of masculinity theory as emerging from the political challenges of feminisms and from the primarily psychological concept of sex roles, into a more ‘sociologized’ theory, that is, theory which seeks to jettison its essentialist roots so as to theorise gender as socially created. I argue this emergence had a moment of crystallisation in the mid-90s, and subsequently has been increasingly shifting towards post-structuralist complexifying views. At the same time I have tried to show that this process of emergence has never been as clear as my artificial portrayal suggests, and that right from its inception the field has been hedged about by several major antagonistic forces: not only the inevitable academic discipline-based turf wars, but in addition the extremely powerful social/political forces of feminism on one side and reactionary patriarchy on the other. In addition my use of the metaphor of ‘crystallisation’ is intended in a process sense: a moment of clarity which almost instantly fractures because that moment is enough to enable new insights and new directions.

I have not argued or demonstrated that the Connellian framework currently predominates in the field, since evidence of this seems to be everywhere, but I *have* argued that Connell’s 1995 work marks a major moment of crystallisation. This is far from saying that the Connellian framework is the only theory in the field. Rather, I see it more as a handy point of reference since it is so widely known. In the chapter that follows I make a detailed analysis of the Connellian framework in preparation for my own addition to the post-structuralist development of the field that I identify in this chapter.