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# Theorising Progressive Change among Men

The previous chapter canvassed four vectors of progressive change among men suggested by the multi-discourse view of social life presented in this thesis. Firstly, the spread of the discourse of masculine authority may become reduced over time, that is, a reduction in the range of social situations in which masculine authority is able to achieve traction. Secondly, the authority attributed to men by the discourse's nodal point could be radically re-formulated over time so as to become associated with new forms of social inclusion. Thirdly, the hegemonic subject position within the masculine authority discourse, that is, its 'men', may be reformulated so as to include practices and forms of human expression previously subordinated or marginalised in that discourse. Finally, at the level of identity the internal marginalisations associated specifically with masculine authority's 'men' may be identified and used to motivate an enrichment of men's

identities. The previous chapter cites evidence suggesting that movement is occurring along all four of these vectors.

These vectors of change could benefit from thoughtful and ordered contributions from academia. Scholarly contribution is vital at least at some point in fostering progressive change precisely because progressive change is, by definition, the materialisation of what does not yet exist. Such creation can benefit from a disciplined and orderly deployment of imagination of the sort Mills (1959) suggests is crucial in sociology. For projects of this nature, Gramsci's argument about the significant role of intellectual leadership in social change still holds today.

It is intellectual leadership in social change which the Connellian framework does not offer, and its incapacity in this regard arises from its theoretical foundations. Connell applies to gender the classical Marxist view that social life arises from one relation – in the case of gender, a single relation of domination between women and men. The associated concept of 'interests' enables Connell to theorize a range of positions people take up vis-à-vis the single hegemony arising from masculine authority or patriarchy. The resulting theorisation of plural masculinities and the power-infused relations between them is unquestionably a major contribution to the field of masculinity theory.

But because of its foundational reliance on a single political relation the Connellian framework offers no theoretical resources to enable orderly examination of the many areas of social life where gender is organised by other relations. It is here that the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) is pertinent and useful. Laclau and Mouffe's forceful argument rejecting the universal reach of any singularity in social life leads to a radical complexification of theories of progressive politics. Their elaboration of Gramsci's insight about the significance of meaning for social life enables them to theorise the process of meaning-creation as integral to politics and thus to the enduring systems and material formations of social life. This leads to the view that hegemony is a momentary closure of meaning maintained by the iterative interaction between material formations and the meaning-frames through which people's actions produce those material formations.

This view is able to encompass the Connellian framework's insistence on the impossibility of ever moving beyond patriarchy, reframing Connell's insistence as coherent within the discourse of patriarchy but not coherent beyond it. A major consequence of this conclusion is the possibility of being able to perceive, and analyse,

areas in social life where the discourse of patriarchy is not pre-eminently able to shape the power relations of gender. Patriarchy is certainly a major discourse dealing with gender, and it is true that historically it has had no serious competitor. However the discourse of feminism has slowly, over at least two centuries, become more and more significant, to the point where feminism has been able to spawn the field of masculinity studies, as well as numerous other valuable and extremely widespread social formations.

Feminism is such a positive benefit for women because its subject position 'women' renders women as fully legitimate in social life. As I argued in Chapter 5, in the discourse of feminism 'women' is the hegemonic subject position, and the gradient of capacities between women and men is the reverse of the gradient in capacities in the discourse of patriarchy (masculine authority). Women benefit when they are able to frame social action in feminist terms, and feminism has established very significant reach and spread in Western social life through hundreds of millions of women acting to achieve that benefit, even in the face of legal, institutional, moral and cultural opposition.

Thus there are now two very large scale discourses dealing with gender issues in Western democracies: the discourse of patriarchy (masculine authority) and the discourse of feminism<sup>1</sup>. For most men in these democracies there are two major subject positions on offer: the 'men' of patriarchy and the 'men' of feminism. These two subject positions do not easily sit side by side. Patriarchy's 'men' is outmoded and regressive, revolving around a narrow prescription of what 'masculinity' means but it has the advantage of connecting men with social legitimacy on the basis of traditional authority. Feminism's 'men' moves beyond the confines of patriarchy's narrow masculinity, but it has the major drawback of being a marginalised subject position in its authorising discourse. On the one hand men are offered legitimacy as long as they aren't progressive, while on the other hand men can be progressive but marginalised.

This situation is a political impasse for men, a cleft stick with no widely available resolution. As such, it creates considerable tension for men to which, since the 1970s, groups of men have responded in a variety of ways. The range of these responses has been given different names by different authors. More activist-oriented writers frame up these responses as 'men's movement' (Pease 2000), or simply 'men on the move' Karoski

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<sup>1</sup> There are of course a wide range of 'feminisms' but most if not all have some relation to the nodal contention that women suffer inequality. Thus all these feminisms can be said to occur within a single discourse of feminism whose nodal point enables their articulations with each other and with patriarchal formations.

(2007) of which pro-feminism is a part. More academically inclined writers such as Messner (2000), Connell (1987; 1995) and Ashe (2007) talk about them as the field of 'masculinity politics' or 'men's gender politics', claiming that some responses, principally mythopoetic responses, are not really a political response at all.

The conceptualisation of a political impasse, however, offers a broader frame than any of these existing approaches, enabling us to see that all these responses are responses, political or not, and as such they can be analysed in terms of how they respond to the political impasse between patriarchy and feminism which operates for most men at present. This frame, I believe, offers a more comprehensive standpoint for analysis of men and gender than the existing field of masculinity studies, broad as it is.

For example, Beasley (2005: 178-181) suggests that 1970s Men's Liberation, the first response by men to second wave feminism, splintered into three major strands: pro-feminism, men's rights, and mythopoetics. Each of these can be seen as a different response to the patriarchy/feminism impasse: pro-feminism sided with feminism against patriarchy, men's rights is indignant about men's loss of legitimacy and so it sided with patriarchy against feminism, while mythopoetics jumped right out of taking a side and instead pursued a non-political path.

None of these three major responses has achieved widespread traction in Western democracies, and I suggest that this is not because of inadequacies in the responses or, as Connell and others would have it, that men are simply defending their patriarchal privilege. Rather, the lack of widespread traction arises because the core tension in the impasse is not adequately engaged or resolved by any of the proffered responses.

Part of the inadequacy here arises because each response claims it is a complete resolution and hence rejects the other responses. For example an intense conflict exists between pro-feminist advocates and men's rightists as to whether men are privileged or disadvantaged. Clearly the feminist position is that men are privileged, while the 'backlash' forces (Faludi 1991) consider men are disadvantaged. Within the frame that each party employs, each statement is entirely true. Each party can bring forward endless statistics in order to empirically verify its stance.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, then, the issue is not which set of statistics is 'real', or which case is more significant or valuable, or which set of oppressions are more morally disgusting. Rather, we need to understand how *both these*

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<sup>2</sup> For statistics supporting the feminist frame, see Connell 1987 Chapter 1. For statistics supporting the 'backlash' forces, see Farrell 1994.

*stances can be true* – how each fundamentally different stance achieves verisimilitude with actual life as it is lived such that people are able to coherently proceed in social action by taking up a subject position in either discourse.

This pro-feminist/men's rights conflict is easily understood from the view of multiple discourses as a frame dispute (Goffman 1974: 321-324, See Chapter 5 for discussion), that is, as a contestation over which discourse is to be foregrounded in social action. Each discourse draws attention to different aspects of social life and frames those aspects as the relevant way to frame social action. Each side fears being overwhelmed by the other: the pro-feminists fear a return of patriarchy while the men's rightists fear men will be cast into the wilderness. Meanwhile, the mythopoeists refuse to be drawn into direct political conflict but, like the others, feel the tension and deal with it by retreating.

What links all these groups and stances, however, is that they are all engaging with and responding to the current political impasse between patriarchy and feminism. Arguably many other recent subject positions offered for men, such as media and film formations, can be analysed in the same way. The New Lad could be seen as younger men simply becoming impatient with the lack of resolution and retreating to a kind of parody of conventional patriarchy. The metrosexual can be seen as a parodic co-option of butch homosexuality to offset some of the marginalisation of the old Sensitive New Age Guy. But the same standpoint of exploring responses to the impasse can be used to analyse other more grounded formations and activities. For example, attention to men's health can be analysed as dealing with men's marginalisation in discourses of self-care by offering economic-scientific rationalisations for action which effectively sidestep the political impasse. And inclusive masculinity (Anderson 2009) can be seen as a new articulation of patriarchy's 'men' that expands that subject position's acceptable repertoire of actions. All these formations and social innovations obviously are valid responses to the impasse, employing a variety of resources from other discourses, but none of them is achieving wide traction, at least at present. Arguably those responses which intersect with government, for example men's health, anti-violence programs, and gender in education have a greater potential to achieve very wide reach. At the same time each one still entails unresolved conflicts with patriarchy's subject position 'men'.

Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) theory of hegemony can help to understand the current political impasse for men in terms of discourse formation. Laclau and Mouffe argue that new discourses emerge around a nodal point which both binds together two

positions and distinguishes each position from the other. I have construed 'nodal point' to be a nodal contention about the world, a statement about how things are or should be which acts as a locus of meaning to which all the discourse's subject positions have some relation (see Chapter 4). Within these terms the political impasse for men can be seen as two subject positions from two different discourses which are not yet connected through a nodal point. The meaning-basis from which each subject position arises, that is, the nodal points underpinning each subject position, are incommensurable with each other. The 'men' of patriarchal authority and the 'men' of women's equality inhabit two different meaning worlds, and there is currently no articulation between them – that is, there is no contention about the world which links them together within a single meaning-frame, and in consequence no new discourse of gender can be hegemonised which legitimates all gendered subject positions.

Laclau and Mouffe's theory of hegemony suggests that for all gendered subject positions to be legitimated in a discourse, a contrasting subject position must emerge which is not legitimated. It is not immediately apparent what such a marginalised subject position might entail, since most social struggle around gender currently pits 'women' against 'men' via the discourses of patriarchy and feminism. What could perhaps be a common interest for both these subject positions is the oppressive polarisation associated with current notions of gender, that is, the pattern by which people are forced into only one or the other subject position.

However this is mere speculation – yet another attempt to leap away from the tension inevitable at any moment of impasse. There is an understandable desire to resolve that tension in one way or another, and in consequence the impasse is a site for a great deal of social creativity. It is not possible at this stage to reliably point to which contentions about the world can carry most Western men beyond the impasse, but a very constructive academic response is to attend directly to the nature and quality of the impasse, attend to actual men's experiences of living in it and with it, and especially attend closely to the *whole range* of responses to it.

A wider project of this nature may be outside the ambit of masculinity studies as it is currently constituted. In a comparative analysis of masculinity studies as a subfield of gender/sexuality studies, Beasley (2005) finds that

perhaps the most distinct feature of Masculinity Studies arises in the attitude expressed towards its subject matter. Connell, among others, has distanced the subfield from the development or maintenance of a political 'movement'

on the grounds that this subfield requires of its contributors a critical distance from its subject, masculinity... Indeed, Masculinity Studies theorists decidedly do not take up the cause of masculinity. ... Masculinity Studies stands somewhat apart from the other arenas of gender/sexuality because it examines power from a point of view of some relative privilege rather than starting from a perspective of marginality (Beasley 2005: 183-184).

In other words the field assumes that masculinity is always privileged, and the way to guard against this privilege is to take the field's 'critical distance'. In terms of the multiple discourse view presented in this thesis, Beasley's description is clearly of a field which firmly stands within the feminist discourse framing masculinity as unfairly privileged, and this is the justification for masculinity to be marginalised within the feminist discourse.

While such an approach is obviously valid and justified, it simply leaves no room for exploring the places in which masculinity is marginalised, *for example in the discourse out of which masculinity studies arises*. In short, masculinity studies as currently constituted is structurally incapable of examining in any complete way what is happening for most Western men around gender. It is excellent at doing what it does, which is to examine the terrain in which men are privileged – that is, masculinity studies examines from a critical distance the discourse of patriarchy or masculine authority, and examines the many subject positions for men in that discourse. But as it now stands masculinity studies is constitutionally incapable of looking beyond that discourse since to do so is to step beyond its originary subject position into incoherence.

This returns us to Smith's (1987) contention that people can be outside the frame of sociological inquiry. In the field of masculinity studies men are certainly the subjects of inquiry, men are involved in inquiring, men discuss, use and are shaped by the results of inquiry. But the actual lives of most men, the day-to-day issues that they live with, the things which they might inquire into were the field open to them, are outside how the field is currently framed. The 'critical distance' which Beasley notes is characteristic of the field prevents researchers from really getting inside what motivates their subjects or from understanding what men's lives actually are like to live in (Moller 2007; Edwards 2006: 33). Within the frame of masculinity studies men are *silenced as fully legitimate agents* in the project of responding to the political impasse for men – prohibited from bringing their own gender concerns and gender issues to the table, and invalidated when they use their own experience to authorise joining with other groups in collaborative projects to move beyond the impasse.

This silencing is entirely valid, and productive in that it prompts close attention to men from a feminist viewpoint, that is, it focuses research on the issue of patriarchal privilege. But it is worth noting that this silencing is occurring, because what is needed is *academic exploration of the whole range* of men's responses to the political impasse for men – and such analysis needs to occur within a frame which does not silence men and does not simply reduce men to patriarchy, or to 'masculinity', or to an alignment or not with feminism. Masculinity studies is certainly a response within the terrain of the political impasse for men, it is an entirely valid response, and it has valuable contributions to make, *but it is only one response*.

As such, masculinity studies needs to be examined as a response from a specific position within the impasse, i.e. that it stands on the feminism side of the tension. Importantly for promoting progressive change among men, questions can be asked such as what aspects of the impasse is masculinity studies able to see, and what does it offer in terms of new ideas, potential resolutions, new skills or other resources for progressive change? At the same time this same set of questions needs to be asked of the other major responses to the impasse, the most well-known being men's rights/fathers' rights, and mythopoetics. In addition there are also smaller, less well-known and more recently emerging responses which are worthy of similar examination.

Such an approach assumes not just that the impasse exists, but also that it generates a productive tension which has not yet resolved into a widespread move forward by men. It also assumes that the wide variety of responses to the impasse are *all* valid responses and can be understood within the frame of most Western men experiencing an historical impasse between the discourses of patriarchy and feminism. And it assumes that responses are worth trying, since it is not possible to predict the social impact of a new response before it is tried. The aim, for progressively-minded scholars, surely needs to be to come up with galvanising nodal points that inspire men to become actively involved in wide-scale actions towards change. What may galvanise many millions of men cannot be specified in advance; it is a matter of resonating with the zeitgeist – so at present a good strategy is to foster the proliferation of responses to the political impasse in order to keep stirring the pot and keep the tension heightened.

Framing the current situation for men as an impasse between the two discourses of patriarchy and feminism implicitly validates feminism as a powerful and significant social force which irrevocably exists. Again, this is in contrast to masculinity studies,

which seems to believe that feminism can disappear at any moment unless we are very careful, and that men are barely affected by it. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Connellian framework is notable for not including feminism as one of the political forces at work which create its terrain of masculinities. Certainly the discourse of feminism is able to achieve less spread than patriarchy, and it is true that patriarchy is more deeply embedded in all the largest social systems due to its long history, and that as a result feminist programs and projects have and continue to suffer some defeats. But this does not mean that feminism's fundamental impact on the field of gender in Western democracies can be disregarded.

With feminism allocated a founding position within the analytic frame which foregrounds the current political impasse for men in gender, examination of supposedly 'non-feminist' (Ashe 2007) responses can proceed without appearing to threaten the existence of feminism. This can lead to entirely new perspectives on men and gender. Two possibilities are briefly discussed here.

Firstly, the men's rights reaction is commonly seen as anger at men's loss of patriarchal hegemony. But if men's rights is seen also as anger at the marginalisation of 'men' in the feminist discourse then this points us to the question of social legitimacy for men and how that might be generated in a world in which feminism unquestionably exists and in which men's equality is seen as a bad thing.

One approach here is to analytically separate legitimacy from hegemony. The patriarchal discourse described by Connell generates social legitimacy for its hegemonic subject position. Social legitimacy is a universally desired social good which is very difficult to argue against, and in fact is generated by all discourses. In other words patriarchy generates a socially valued quality: legitimacy.

More to the point, patriarchy generates legitimacy for a specific social group – i.e. men. This would have to be considered an asset; after all, all social groups seek legitimacy. And patriarchy certainly generates legitimacy for one segment of the population.

So the unfairness, the inequality, the injustice, arising from patriarchy is not because patriarchy *exists*. As we have seen with sovereignty, which has been articulated in forms ranging from tyrannical central control to a precondition for a community of equality, a discourse's nodal point can be articulated in a wide variety of ways. In other words the problem is not one of power as such but of its specific articulation in the

discourse of patriarchy. That is, patriarchy's subject positions 'women' and 'men' effectively enact the nodal proposition that *only* men are legitimate persons. What creates gender inequality, then, is not that *men* are legitimated but that *only* men are legitimated. The legitimation of men is a positive social good. What should be at issue is the *form* in which this legitimation is articulated.

One way to start exploring this issue of men's legitimation is to note that there is a striking difference between the nodal legitimation for patriarchy's 'men' and feminism's 'women': patriarchy revolves around authority – basically a justification from tradition and physical characteristics, whereas feminism revolves around the modern-era notion of equality. To the extent that equality is linked to men by both patriarchy and feminism, men are considered to already enjoy equality. Possibly a way forward, then, is to articulate equality in such a way that reframes both women and men as not yet having achieved it. Such an articulation would offer men some personally beneficial political goal to work towards at the same time as providing a new linkage between women and men around gender issues.

The possibility of newly articulating equality as being as yet not achieved by both women and men is not as unlikely as it sounds. The feminist claim for women's equality arose from the eighteenth century formulation of equality-as-sameness (Jaggar 1990). But in the 1980s feminists were discovering a contradiction in the liberal feminist agenda: that women were inherently different to men in fundamental ways such as child-bearing capacity, so that even if women wanted to be like men (which many didn't) there was never any chance of women actually becoming the same as men. In consequence feminists seek not only to be valued equally with men, but in addition to be valued because they are different to men (c.f. Scott 1990; Snitow 1990).

Such a claim implies a formulation of equality not on the basis of sameness but rather on the basis of something like inclusion. It entails an enhanced "autonomy": a capacity to view and experience difference as a positive experience rather than a source of fear and reason for exclusion (c.f. Friedman 2003; Keller 1985). This capacity in turn relies on a rather different relationship with self, a relationship which Rose (1989) argues is more prevalent among women than men because of the gendered pattern of the dissemination of the 'psy' sciences (psychiatry, psychology, psychotherapy, psychometrics etc) throughout social life during the twentieth century.

Briefly, psy started to disperse through Western democracies in the late nineteenth century through the work of Freud, which was largely deployed as a way to normalise 'hysterical' women, in the process framing women as being essentially deficient. The Freudian view of women was incorporated into conventions of femininity as a requirement to ask for professional help, which resulted in many more women than men interacting with psy professionals and learning new skills of self-surveillance which expanded their sense of having an inner world. In contrast, the predominant interface between psy and men was via its use in the armed forces and then, after WWII, in industry and the workplace to predict and measure functional performance.

This expanded sense of inner world among women went hand in hand with a transformation in the notion of intimacy (Giddens 1992), which was also related to the industrialisation of the workplace and the creation of 'home' as a 'private' space. One result of all these forces is a prioritising in conventional femininity of intimate relationships, enabled partly by a relationship with self which is quite different to the relationship with self in conventional masculinity.

The equality-as-inclusion currently enacted by most women (as well as many other marginalised groups) is practically enactable from a relationship with self which is able to support that self in the face of difference. Developing such a relationship with self is a matter of practical skills exercised within cultural norms. It is nothing at all to do with gender, and everything to do with historical circumstance, although given the existence of the patterns in conventional femininities and masculinities, most Western women and men stand in quite a different relationship to equality-as-inclusion.

One principal argument of mythopoetics is that men must do their 'inner work' (Bly 1990) as a first step. Put in the historical context of the gendered spread of psy and its impact upon twentieth century gender conventions such an argument makes a great deal of sense, and validates the marginalisations most men live with around self-care, intimate relationships, affection, and care of others. But it also suggests a fruitful avenue for practical action by men that can be framed as being in men's interests directly personally and also valuing the social contributions from femininity. It casts both women and men as not yet having achieved equality-as-inclusion, though for very different historical reasons and facing quite different issues, and hence constitutes something approaching a common goal around gender and progressive change. And it also reframes

mythopoetics as containing a profoundly political element which can potentially be articulated with other discourses.

These two issues of full legitimacy for men in the face of feminism and the re-articulation of equality are merely suggestions which arise from accepting that other supposedly 'non-feminist' responses to the political impasse for men are examined as legitimate and with something to offer. As such, this discussion is merely a sketch of what could come from substantially expanding the frame of studying men and gender as the study of the current political impasse for men.

I am of course aware that this concluding discussion owes a great deal to structuralist assumptions about social life, and only tangentially incorporates post-structuralist views at one remove, via the deeper levels of my presentation of the concept of discourse. One criticism Beasley (2005), Petersen (1998; 2003) and others have of the field of masculinity studies is its predominantly structuralist perspective. I agree that this is so, as discussed in Chapter 2, but there is an implication in their criticism that post-structuralism is better than structuralism, so that not only is masculinity studies the 'odd man out' in the field of gender/sexuality theorising (Beasley 2009) but in addition that it is somehow falling behind. There is an implication in this that one reason why the field isn't getting much practical traction, i.e. why men still aren't changing, is its inadequate (i.e. structuralist) theoretical underpinnings.

I would certainly agree that post-structuralist theory is more dynamic, is able to conceptually grasp a greater range of social phenomena, does so with greater subtlety, and is able to point to more sophisticated and varied responses to existing phenomena than structuralist theories on the whole. But I think theories must be selected according to the terrain. That such a structuralist concept as Smith's (1987) 'frame' is still useful arises because men face *an accusation of power* which arises from a fundamentally structuralist view of power, and men by and large have not yet found a way to effectively address this. This thesis attempts the difficult task of acknowledging the accusation – it is, after all, so obviously true – and at the same time trying to theorise a way of understanding most Western men as more than simply the embodiment of power and privilege.

I offer a theory to enable a mapping of social life as a landscape of discourses and a mapping of personal identity as a landscape of discursive subject positions to show how men can be understood as both privileged and marginalised. Actual embodied

persons (of any gender) traverse this landscape in social action, privileged in some discourses, marginalised in others.

The principal benefit of the concept of discourse in this account is that discourses are conceptualised as creating and enabling power by containing a specific meaning about social life. Thus power, although ubiquitous in social life, nevertheless practically appears discontinuously in specific shapes contained within specific discourses. Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) central argument is that there is no single shape of power which stretches all across social life, and hence the shapes that power does actually take have edges – there are margins beyond which the traction achievable by a particular shape of power evaporates.

This approach offers a way to say that the power associated with men via patriarchy's nodal contention about masculine authority has limits, even within its own logic. I have been interested to theorise a way to see where that power operates, where it fades out and where it doesn't operate at all. The notion of discourse presented in this thesis enables both analysis at a broad social level and also analysis at the level of individual lives because the subject positions formed in discourses are the same subject positions appearing in individual identity. Thus it becomes possible to follow a very large group of people or an individual person and find where and how they are privileged and where and how they are marginalised, and the discourses in which those privileges and marginalisations arise. The crucial theoretical disruption is to disconnect privilege and marginalisation from actual persons or identities and instead to define them as effects of discourse.

It should now be clear that my use of the term 'patriarchy' refers specifically to the discourse which links social authority and men via its nodal contention that social authority properly resides with men. In this thesis, then, there is no difference between the discourse of masculine authority and the discourse of patriarchy. The significance of meaning in social life, a central theme in this thesis, entails an inference that what is meant by the term 'men' can nowhere be fixed or certain, and instead is contextual to the discourse(s) in use from moment to moment. Throughout the body of the text I have distinguished between men and 'men' through the use of the inverted commas. 'Men' is used to indicate I am discussing a specific subject position arising in a specific discourse, while I have used men (without inverted commas) to refer to the people who take up the subject position 'men' under discussion. Clearly such people do not have to be

biologically male, and indeed there are no criteria limiting who may take up a subject position 'men' beyond the pragmatic question of whether they are able to achieve sufficient verisimilitude to make social interaction workable.

However in addition I use the term men extensively aside from discussions about specific discourses, for example in the title and in this conclusion chapter, and this usage requires some explication. The delineation of a political impasse between the 'men' of the discourse of patriarchy and the 'men' of the discourse of feminism enables me to point to a very large group of people for whom these two subject positions are significant in their ensemble of identity. Most of these people are in Western countries, though not exclusively. Most are heterosexual, most are biologically male, a majority may still be anglo-white, and so on. But they needn't have these characteristics either. So at one level when I refer to men I am not referring to any specified or definable group of people but rather to a common label used by subject positions across many discourses which deal with gender.

The entire feminist project struggles with exactly the same conundrum, elucidated so elegantly by Judith Butler: "Is the construction of the category of women as a coherent and stable subject an unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations? And is not such a reification precisely contrary to feminist aims?" (Butler 1990: 8-9) Indeed whether the political goal is women's equality or, more broadly, gender equality, an inevitable reification of 'women' or 'gender' is involved which can paint its proponents into a corner. However these terms, as does my use of the term men, achieve traction in social life – they come to *mean* something – within specific discourses, and it is the stabilisation and resulting hegemony possible in new discourses which must be the goal of any concrete political action. Men, women and gender can obviously mean a wide variety of things, and it is precisely this aspect of them which enables democratic social change. At the same time, Laclau and Mouffe point out that all democratic formations in which hegemony operates are by definition limited, and hence the only comprehensive progressive goal must be to proliferate discourses, to proliferate the meanings of men and women and to proliferate a greater variety in power relations between them.

The goal of this thesis has been to get out from under the reductionist or one-dimensional meaning of men so prevalent in masculinity studies, i.e. its subordinated position in the discourse of feminism, and to open up a space in which this reductionism can be acknowledged and its historical reasons for existence can be appreciated and

respected so that further development can take place. This is unquestionably a political project, and as Szelinski says, “the subordination of theory to the ends of political practice is the end of theory” (Szelinski 1979:1315). As such, the relatively structuralist application of the concept of discourse to the current situation of gender and men does the job I wish it to do, limited though that job is. In keeping with my avowedly ‘inclusive’ stance (see Chapter 1), my larger goal is to validate all the various ways in which men are responding to the current political impasse for men, in the belief that progressive change among men is both possible and is actually under way – if only, as Schopenhauer said, we can think it.