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Masculinity – Illusion or Reality?

In what might be termed the ‘everyday world’, those behaviours of males that are violent, dysfunctional and oppressive are frequently excused or explained away as ‘natural’ masculine behaviour, being understood in common-sense terms as fixed and, thus, as an inevitable aspect of social ‘reality’. A key aim of feminism is to critique and destabilize such notions, the ultimate intention being to challenge those practices and beliefs that contribute to sustaining men’s power (Charles and Hughes-Freeland, 1996). Likewise, central to the sociology of masculinity is a desire to name, examine, understand and hopefully change those practices of men that hinder or confront the possibility of gender equity (Connell, 1987; Hearn, 1992; Kimmel, 2000). In this respect there is an important personal–political dimension to such study, for as an arm of feminist scholarship the critical study of men and masculinities cannot, indeed should not, claim ‘neutrality’ (Canaan and Griffin, 1990). However, as this book will explore, a number of tensions then arise for critical gender theorists, one of which occurs in the attempt to reconcile or straddle the nature–nurture dualism. The dilemma is in how far to go in seeing women and men as biologically inspired gender categories, albeit with material and epistemological differences, or in deconstructing the terms ‘men’ and ‘women’ from any biological or essential basis – in so doing possibly losing the sense of men as a political grouping with particular power effects (for discussion, see Assiter, 1996; Ramazanoglu, 1993; also Segal, 1997, 1999). In short,

how much of masculinity is (cultural) illusion, and how much is (material) reality?

Any critical study of men and masculinity invariably comes back to this relationship between the amorphous character of masculinity and those behaviours of males considered problematic or dysfunctional. In examining the issue, this chapter will open with a discussion of the debates surrounding the biological basis of masculinity. Following a brief examination of the historical variability of dominant social understandings of masculinity, the chapter will consider some of the earliest theoretical influences on the sociology of masculinity, particularly those emerging out of sex role theories and psychoanalytic scholarship, specifically the writings of Freud and Jung. These areas of study have long been influential across feminist and profeminist scholarship, especially so in respect of second-wave feminist theories. While there were few studies critically examining men's practices and experiences prior to the late 1970s, the 1980s was a very significant period for the emergent sociology of masculinity. For it was during this decade that the political and theoretical framework was laid that was to inform much of the future research. However, while many of the writings on men during this period attempted to deconstruct masculinities from any given biological basis, much of the ensuing theory often unproblematically located men and women as unitary identities. In critiquing this perspective, the chapter will emphasize the multiplicity of masculinities, while also recognizing that men's behaviours have a material (often violent) and political actuality, though not one based in biology.

Men's nature, men's history

Natural men?

There is little that is more subject to heated speculation, myth, ideology and misinterpretation, by 'experts' and others, than the debates surrounding nature, nurture and the so-called natural behaviours of women and men. One does not have to look too closely at the fabric of the social web to see that common-sense understandings of natural gender difference play a central role in maintaining power differentials, accessing material wealth, limiting/enabling lifestyle choices,

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and, probably most importantly, structuring language itself. For example, merely talking about women and men as distinct entities contributes to maintaining the nature–nurture dualism underpinning our understanding of ‘reality’ and our individual place within it (Petersen, 1998). Gender stereotypes are rooted in dualisms such as passive/assertive, strong/weak, irrational/rational, gentle/forceful, emotional/distant (Archer and Lloyd, 1985; Edley and Wetherall, 1995) and, as such, form a significant part of our everyday language and understanding. Without wishing to discount the importance of class, ethnicity, race and cultural capital, our sex/gender identity is probably most central to how we see ourselves and how others see us: it transcends all cultural boundaries, is not limited by access to wealth or education and is, other than via the surgical and legal processes of gender reassignment, unchangeable.¹ Yet despite the importance of sex/gender in configuring social and individual experiences, little critical analysis was undertaken on this subject until feminists themselves brought it to the fore in the middle part of the last century. In one respect, this absence of critical enquiry is hardly surprising given that men dominated much of the knowledge production in Western societies up until the latter part of the twentieth century. As feminists and profeminist men have noted, there is little obvious motivation for men to critique themselves either as individuals or as a gender group (for discussion, see Hall, 1990; Hearn, 1994; Heath, 1987). It was this relative absence of women in the production of knowledge that enabled malestream discourse to become so prominent and powerful (O’Brien, 1983).

In developing the sociology of masculinity, critical gender theorists have been forced, then, to confront many powerful myths. These include the notion that gender is destiny; the belief that men are natural knowledge holders; the understanding that women are marginal to ‘his’story; and the idea that a traditional gender dichotomy is a natural state and contributes to a ‘healthy’ society. Such ideologies and myths are rarely absent from any society or any culture (Gilmore, 1990; Hess and Ferree, 1987; Ortner and Whitehead, 1981), and at any one time individuals and institutions will be reproducing such myths, often without being fully aware of doing so. Beyond the world of critical gender theory, research purporting to ‘prove’ a fundamental biological basis to sex and gender differentials continues apace, attracting much media interest (for example, Pinker, 1998; Wright, 1995). One attraction of such research, for the

layperson at least, is that it seems to speak to a readily understandable, accessible and common-sense version of an otherwise highly complex reality. Consequently, the media quickly pick up on such accounts without, however, the desire or capacity to critically deconstruct the notions being presented as ‘truths’. Examples of such reductionist thinking in terms of gender differences are numerous, but are especially apparent in the works of sociobiologists, evolutionary psychologists and some geneticists. In recent decades, researchers into the biological basis of gender have attempted to prove sex differences in brain functioning (Moir and Jessell, 1989); suggest that all sexual behaviour can be reduced to a ‘sperm war’ (Baker, 1996); posit people as ‘robots’ programmed to perpetuate genes (Dawkins, 1976); explain male violence in terms of an ‘aggressive gene’ (Monaghan and Glickman, 1992); suggest that feminism ‘denies female nature’ (Brand, 1996); and provide an evolutionary ‘explanation’ for rape (Palmer and Thornhill, 2000) and male infidelity (Wright, 1995). In a reversal of the biology-as-destiny thesis, some evolutionary psychologists argue for understanding human psychology as unitary, universal and fixed not in nature, but in deeply inscribed cultural, gendered behaviours and attitudes rooted in the Pleistocene; an inevitable ‘human psychological architecture’ (Tooby and Cosmides, 1992: 48).

In short, according to these and similar studies, the ‘key to masculinity’ (and femininity) (Lahn and Jegalian, 1999) lies either in our genetic/hormonal make-up or in prehistory. Either way, whichever perspective one chooses, the fundamental premise is the same: our gender (and race, IQ, psychology and so on) is fixed, universal, inevitable and, thus, beyond our control. Yet despite the continuing proliferation of Darwinian-inspired research and populist writing contributing to the misperception that ‘women are from Venus, and men from Mars’ (*pace* Gray, 1999), the evidence for biologically grounded sex/gender differences is neither convincing nor conclusive, nor even coherent (see for discussion Bateson and Martin, 2000; Clare, 2000; Edley and Wetherall, 1995; Henriques et al., 1984; Hess and Ferree, 1987; Rogers, 2000; Rose and Rose, 2000a; Segal, 1999). As Rogers (herself a neuroscientist) observes, even hormones, the usual suspects in any nature–nurture debate, are not unaffected by environment factors. Similarly, Clare discusses in some detail the ambiguous relationship of testosterone to male aggression, noting that while numerous studies ‘show a *correlation* between levels of

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aggression and levels of testosterone, there is more than one explanation for such a correlation' (2000: 22; original emphasis). This leads to the question of how to explain aggression in individuals with very little testosterone, such as prepubertal boys? As Marilyn Strathern argues, a baby/child is simultaneously biological and social, it is not simply one or the other (Rose, 2000: 119). Women and men have a biological dimension to their sense of reality and formation of subjectivity; not least, as is discussed in chapter 6, through their experience of being *embodied* agents/actors in the social world. But biology is not destiny, and to take it as such is to slip into dangerous assumptions about human potential. As Hilary and Steven Rose put it:

For evolutionary psychologists, everything – from men's propensity to rape to our alleged preference for grassy scenery – derives from our mythical origin in the African savannah. In its prioritising of explanations of, for instance, rape as a device for sexually unsuccessful men to propagate their genes, it is completely unable to explain why most men do not rape. . . . We argue that the theory's all-embracing sound-bites are for the most part not just mistaken, but culturally pernicious [not least because] these new fundamentalists assert that their view of human nature should inform the making of social and public policy. (Rose and Rose, 2000b)

As the Human Genome Project² reveals, the approximately 30,000 genes that make up the human being are insufficient to account for the complexity and diversity of human life. Moreover, the relatively small number of genes we each have may be biologically fixed, but their expression as social action is subject to environmental conditions and external contingencies. The individual is neither passive in the face of his/her genetic make-up, nor, indeed, simply an empty vessel to be filled with ideological material. To suggest otherwise borders on the arrogant, and is at best a blinkered view of human diversity and potential. As Rose and Rose suggest, biologically reductive explanations not only tend to reflect conservative values and forces; they assume that what appears 'real' in terms of human behaviour is what ought to be. This ideological stance produces a form of (gendered) knowledge that is itself then co-opted as 'evidence' for social policy. The reductionists purport to objectively examine the world, but do so from a gender-blind perspective that takes the status

quo at a single point in time as given (also Rogers, 2000). The idea that behaviour cannot alter as a consequence of environmental changes is clearly a misreading of human past and a foreclosing of human possibilities. Such a perspective is untenable in the light of the rapidity and skill with which humans have colonized every corner of the world, are on the verge of colonizing other worlds and yet continue to act in diverse, unpredictable, and often illogical and irrational ways. There are no set patterns of predictable, biologically given human behaviours from which we can assume certainty, though I accept that attempts to construct these can be a ‘comfort blanket’ when faced with human irrationality.

Whether it be altruism, aggression, alliance or accommodation, the human subject acts in ways that are not, in every instance, reducible to either survivalism or an instrumental pursuit of power. A key aim of this book is to argue that cultural environments are not ‘out there’, somehow existing external to the individual, but are (in)formed by individual subjects, though not necessarily in cognitive fashion. In the very moment that individual action impacts on the social, so a cultural environment is created – local and temporary as it might be. It is this (discursive) moment that is, I suggest, key to understanding something of the complexities of gender relations – and of men and masculinities.

One way of appreciating the continued attraction many have towards simplistic explanations for gender differentials is to recognize that the sheer unpredictability and uncertainty that surrounds us makes ‘readily available answers’ to complex questions highly seductive. Every culture, through each generation, seems to be inevitably required to develop new responses to the changing and inherently insecure environment in which it is situated; a constant reworking of ‘reality’ that is no less apparent in Western³ countries at the turn of the millennium. Indeed, it can be argued that the psychological and existential impact of the millennium has itself significantly contributed to the sense of movement and discord that many commentators note to be pronounced at the end of the twentieth century (for example, Fukuyama, 1997; also, Castells, 1998; Bauman, 1997). An important characteristic of the millennium *Zeitgeist* is the sense that gender relations are undergoing some important and profound reshaping by forces that are only partly understood. One result of such movement is the increased attention being given to the concept of masculinity and, not least, to men’s own sense of being men

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(Faludi, 1999). It is an interesting time, then, to be a sociologist – of either gender. For not only is sociological enquiry being undertaken during a period of intense change, sociologists themselves are also implicated in these discursive transformations. As some feminist scholars have noted, there is no individual who stands outside of the social dynamics that she/he purports to analyse and comment on (Stanley and Wise, 1993; also Game, 1991). Recognizing this raises interesting issues surrounding research methodology, particularly for feminists and profeminist men, and these issues will be explored in more depth in the following chapter. However, in terms of attempting to locate current social movement in a wider context, while reminding oneself of the fact that change is the only constant in the social, much use can be gained by a focus on the historical. Thus in addressing the questions surrounding masculinity as biology and destiny, a glance at the changing nature of the language and cultural representations informing ‘men’ can be enlightening.

Masculinities in history

While the term ‘masculinity’ has achieved a remarkable pre-eminence across the cultural landscape, it has been in use only since the mid-eighteenth century, originating out of the Latin word *masculus* (see Petersen, 1998). By contrast, the terms ‘manly’ and ‘manliness’ were part of everyday vocabulary during Victorian and Edwardian periods. Newsome (1961), for example, describes the relationship that ‘being manly’ had to notions of godliness and Christian virtue during the nineteenth century and early 1900s. Such exhibitions of manliness, which were clearly defined in terms of class and social standing, might come in the form of ‘straightforwardness, manly simplicity, openness and transparent honesty’, all somehow combined with a stoical endurance and intellectual energy (ibid., 1961: 195). Or, influenced by the ‘muscular Christian’ school of Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes, manliness in the Victorian and Edwardian eras was to be more openly ‘not feminine’, and more directly associated with physical strength, muscularity, physical trial, denial (of luxury) and ‘endurance in the face of death and torment’ (Newsome, 1961: 198). Although by the end of the nineteenth century an idealized version of masculinity – encompassing physicality, virility, morality and civility – had emerged to some prominence (see Mosse, 1996), there was

no one clear and absolute definition of what being a man meant. As today, the notion of manliness was always open to conscription by those with wider, possibly ideological, agendas – for example, politicians, church leaders, the military. Nevertheless, there is a sense that a century or so ago manliness was perceived as less fluid, less amenable to individual interpretation, and, importantly, something to be openly strived for and welcomed as an achievement of male maturity (Roper and Tosh, 1991).

These Victorian and Edwardian views of ‘the male’ are not only class and culture specific; they also sit in marked contrast to dominant gender perspectives of even earlier times. For example, the aristocratic Renaissance man of the sixteenth century – the class that ‘set the pace and standards of that century’ (Armitage, 1977: 48) – was typified by King Henry VIII himself. Here was a man, the very ‘symbol of English nationhood’ (ibid.: 49), ruthless and at times brutal, who also displayed an overtly emotional side. He danced, played instruments, sang and composed, and like many men of that period, was apparently not averse to displaying his deeper emotions and feelings. Man as a complex combination of emotional, sentimental, foppish beau and militaristic aggressor reached an apex in the subsequent Elizabethan age, when it was fashionable for males to dress in extravagant, diverse and outlandish garments, eclipsing women in their ‘sartorial splendour’ (ibid.: 50). Such displays, which served to connect manliness with an emotive exhibitionism and hedonism, became less fashionable, if not reversed, in Europe under the class-based puritanical surveillances of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Mosse, 1996). As Kingsley Kent describes it:

... [this] aristocratic, rakish vision of masculinity would [come to] prove incompatible with the values and outlook of a fast-growing bourgeoisie. Their greater confidence in their social position, and their predominance in the life of the nation as a consequence of vast economic expansion, would render them capable of insisting on and imposing a *reform of manners on men and women that dramatically transformed the way men and women looked, behaved, thought, and interacted in the eighteenth century*. (1999: 30; my emphasis)

It is possible, then, to look back on the various terms and descriptions being used in earlier periods to describe ‘a man’ and see something of the malleability of masculinity. Far from being a naturally

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given attribute, masculinity/manliness is revealed as historically variable and subject to change within and across social groupings. Moreover, as many scholars note (for example, Mangan and Walvin, 1987; Newsome, 1961; Roper and Tosh, 1991; Sinha, 1999), there are evident ideological and political struggles connected to the metamorphosis undertaken by the concept of manliness, particularly during the Victorian and Edwardian eras. For example, notions of 'neo-Spartan virility, hardness and endurance' (Mangan and Walvin, 1987: 1) can be traced back to the needs of the British Empire during the late 1880s and leading up to the First World War (see also Dawson, 1991). Similarly, connecting manliness to intellectual endeavour and educational achievement (Newsome, 1961), industrialism and the Protestant work ethic (Morgan, 1992; Roper, 1994), Victorian middle-class paternalism (Mangan, 1981; Mosse, 1996; Tosh, 1991), Christian virtue (Mangan and Walvin, 1987; Walker, 1991) and 'fixed' definitions of race and nationhood (Carby, 1998; Kingsley Kent, 1999; Rutherford, 1997) signals a warning to all gender theorists that notions of 'men and masculinity' are always likely to remain, to some extent, idealized products, representative of both the social conditions of the time and dominant ideological or discursive 'truths'.

To emphasize the variability of masculinity it is only necessary to briefly consider which practices, imagery and symbols best represent 'manhood' at the turn of the millennium: from the 'gym queens' to suited politicians, from Boy George to Arnold Schwarzenegger, from the ageing leathered 'biker' to the ageing hippy 'drop-out', from the gun-toting male LA (or Manchester) gang member to the male nurse, from Rupert Murdoch to the black 'rapper', from 'Masters of the Universe' (*pace* Wolfe, 1987) to the male charity worker, from the Muslim cleric to the atheist househusband, from Mike Tyson to Danny Glover, indeed, from profeminist man to the Christian 'promise keepers' – each is 'real' in its local cultural setting, yet none is able to capture, in any absolute sense, modern masculinity. One important reason for this, as this book suggests, is that no such thing as 'modern masculinity' exists, certainly not in any fixed or predetermined form and as a definite standard for all males to follow. To be sure, there are numerous media-inspired images of 'masculine perfection' (Pope, Phillips and Olivardia, 2000), but for most men such images remain plastic and, thus, distant. As was suggested in the introduction, it is now more appropriate to talk of postmodern

masculinities, a term that allows us to recognize the influence globalization is having upon ways of being a man, while also highlighting the contingency of masculinities and differences between men in terms of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and so on (for discussion, see Gutterman, 2001).

It is evident that without a historical perspective as a point of reference, masculinity might appear as some constant, solid entity, embedded not only in the social network but in a deeper ‘truer’ reality. Yet while recognizing the fluidity of masculinity, the question remains as to what extent masculinity is simply a by-product of social and cultural change. For the issue of (male) power can never be removed from the debates surrounding masculinity. Despite the historical evidence revealing the fluidity of descriptions such as manliness, manly and masculinity, the material actualities that surround gender differentials remain depressingly constant. Of course, as is discussed in chapter 3, power can be understood in numerous ways, and one of these is in terms of social and cultural pressure to conform to, for example, gender-appropriate behaviour. And it was this rather limited perspective of power with which the earliest critical studies of men and masculinity attempted to grapple. In so doing, not surprisingly, they tended to draw on and be influenced by the dominant academic theories of the time, which during the 1950s was, most notably, Parsonian structural functionalism. Without engaging from a critical perspective, or indeed, a historical one, the enquirer might be tempted to fall into the trap of seeing masculinity, as many Victorians and Edwardians did, as biologically given: unassailable, singular, discrete and containing natural models of best practice. As has been discussed, at the end of the twentieth century such notions are increasingly untenable, and not only in Western societies, for one advantage of global media and research is that they expose something of the diversity of masculine representations worldwide (see for discussion Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994; Craig, 1992; Gilmore, 1990; Mirande, 1997; Nixon, 1997; Sweetman, 1997). As will now be discussed, for critical gender theorists the process of engagement with and subsequent disengagement from functionalist perspectives took place through the 1950s and 1960s, when it became increasingly apparent in America and other countries that male socialization, far from being a ‘natural’ process towards a ‘good model’, was fraught with tensions, disruptions and oversimplifications.

Functionalism and the male sex role

Gender and functionalism

Talcott Parsons was one of the most prominent sociologists of the 1950s, and his concept of ‘functionalism’ became a key tool in ‘understanding’ how the social web maintained some sense of order, equilibrium and consensus despite ever-present potential conflicts over, for example, material resources (Parsons, 1951). Parsons placed great emphasis on the processes of ‘socialization’, particularly in respect of the family as a ‘factory’ for the production of ‘stable adult personalities’ (Parsons and Bales, 1955; Parsons, 1969). Central to this concept were the roles of men and women, seen by functionalists as naturally different but complementary. Parsons argued that inequality of power between women and men was a natural phenomenon, one that arose as a consequence of necessary social stratification. The divisions of labour and resources, which are manifest across the public and private spheres, are understood, in functionalist terms, to result from the collective goals and identities of various groups. For society to remain effective and orderly, there is a functional prerequisite that dictates that the allocation of tasks and roles must go to those most suited to execute them (see also Davis and Moore, 1967). Thus the surgeon (stereotypically rational, reasoned, unemotional and distant) must be male, while the nurse (stereotypically caring, compassionate, maternal and emotive) must be female. At a wider level it becomes seen as natural for men to be breadwinners and women to be homemakers. Functionalism did not invent the gendered dichotomy; it did, however, attempt to justify and explain the inequalities that arise from it by presenting them as naturally occurring phenomena and, thus, necessary for the smooth operation of the social system.

The idea that women and men function as socialized beings at some subliminal but essentially biological level for the wider benefit of an ‘ordered society’ is, for many, a compelling and seductive notion. It engages with a view of society as fundamentally harmonious, conflict being minimalized so long as individuals come to ‘learn the normative standards of society’ (Lee and Newby, 1984). This perspective is reinforced by Durkheim (1957, 1961), another prominent sociologist to connect social order with human nature. He argues that

socialization is the means by which the greater needs of society are transmitted through generations. Social stability occurs in the ‘collective conscience’ of common belief systems. Social obligation, and the coercive properties of moral codes, have a compelling impact on the personalities and behaviours of individuals, the result being integrated social units. At this point, the relationship between functionalism and role theory becomes quite apparent. However, unlike functionalism, which has experienced a significant decline since the 1960s, role theory continues to exert a powerful influence across both sociology and psychology, influencing a variety of perspectives – for example, symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), Marxism (Dahrendorf, 1973) and social interactionism (Goffman, 1970; Hargreaves, 1967).

Role theorists argue that people are compelled to perform culturally prescribed roles for the benefit of both society and themselves (Komarovsky, 1950; Linton, 1945; Mead, 1934). In so doing, individuals are seen to be engaged in a theatrical-like performance, one that requires them to learn lines, assimilate behaviours and display appropriate social behaviours in a multitude of settings. As actors on the (social) stage (Goffman, 1959) women and men benefit from the sense of belonging that accrues from the recognition that their role performance triggers membership of a given collective. Conversely, for individuals to act in ways that undermine the social – being ‘antisocial’ – brings forth approbation and various forms of censure. This process of socialization acts as a conveyor, (re)producing ‘ideal’ models of behaviour and transmitting dominant stereotypes. When such perspectives are allied with the gender dichotomy and notions of biological difference, then what emerges is a variation of role theory – sex role theory.

Perspectives on sex/gender roles

As a by-product of functionalism and role theory, sex role theory emerged to prominence in the early 1950s, in part spurred on by the impact of the social and economic transformations being felt throughout the Western world. These social shifts were seen by many, especially in America, to have profound consequences for men, particularly in respect of changing patterns of work, the increase in divorce and unemployment, and the demise of traditional industries.

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Thus, sex role theory was enlisted to give some insights into, and make sense of, the changing roles of men and women and the new expressions of masculinity being acted out and ‘forced on’ men following social changes arising at the end of the Second World War (Pleck, 1976). Prior to the 1950s little had been written about men and masculinity, at least in a questioning or critical sense. This started to change as, first, feminist thinking developed, inspired particularly by Simone de Beauvoir’s classic text (1973, [1953]), and, second, the first stages of the ‘disorganization’ of capitalism (Lash and Urry, 1987) began to be felt across the industrialized world. What had hitherto been understood as positive, fixed and concrete – masculinity – quickly took on the appearance of being a problem. In one of the earliest articles on the subject, Hacker (1957) argued that male socialization had become fraught with uncertainty as men were increasingly expected to show more feminine traits, such as emotional expression, while maintaining their ‘natural’ instrumental functions. Similarly, Hartley (1959) described the pressures and tensions surrounding the male socialization of boys; absent fathers; the rejection of the feminine; and the limitations of dominant models of masculinity. Far from being a natural, functionalistic process, the acquisition of ‘appropriate’ models and codes of gender behaviour began to be seen as fundamentally damaging for both females and males. Moreover, the recognition slowly dawned that gender socialization was not a pre-given and predictable process. The possibility, indeed the likelihood, of change within gender roles and expectations was apparent.

In a matter of just a few years from the late 1960s men and male culture came under critical scrutiny in a way seldom witnessed prior to this. Pleck (1976, 1981), David and Brannon (1976), Fein (1978) and Fasteau (1974) were just a few of the writers openly questioning the ‘hostile, devouring (male) culture in which men must adopt an aggressive stance toward the world in order to survive’ (Pleck, 1976: 262). Influenced by a burgeoning feminist critique of patriarchy and dominant patterns of gender socialization (see Tong, 1993), men writers began to publish numerous critiques of the ‘male sex role identity paradigm’ (Pleck, 1981). The inflexibility of the gender stereotypes underpinning sex roles was also heavily critiqued, with Brannon (1976) arguing that the male sex role basically consisted of four core models,⁴ and Pleck and Sawyer (1974) managing to reduce this cluster to just two: ‘stay cool’ and ‘get ahead’. A

fundamental argument in the critique of the male sex role was the cost to men which the ideology of a dominant but dysfunctional masculinity elicited, particularly in terms of fractured relationships, damaged health and inflexibility. As Pleck describes it: ‘masculinity ideology directly creates trauma in male socialization’ (1995: 20).

In contrast to the notion that the acquisition of dominant models of masculinity is somehow a natural and harmonious experience, contributing to the sum of social equilibrium and personal well-being, the male sex role began to be seen as a burden, a trial from which boys, especially, should be spared. This particular critical perspective on dominant masculinities has remained pretty much intact throughout the past few decades, with numerous writers claiming that masculinity does not come without a price, but that it carries costs for both men and women (Levant and Pollack, 1995; for discussion, see Messner, 1992). Indeed, Pleck (1995) has revisited the literature on gender role theory in order to ‘update’ and strengthen the ‘male gender role strain paradigm’.

Despite itself being locked into the essentialist notion that men and women are fundamentally complementary, just so long as men forsake ‘traditional roles’ for ‘modern’ ones (Pleck, 1976), role research did begin to lay the ground for questioning a singular, unchanging masculinity, one that all males, given the ‘right circumstances’, would naturally aspire to and achieve. For it became apparent that not only were sex role models under constant pressure to change, but that as role models underwent transformation, so would associated behaviours. Not surprisingly, as Connell (1995) notes, sex role research became an attractive tool for those with political agendas. For it became assumed that if the behaviours of young people were subject to the impact of, for example, peer pressure, the media and other external influences, then new more ‘positive’ role models could be set up via, for example, educational processes.

Despite the increasing evidence that women and men were neither passive recipients of socialization processes, nor unitary and reciprocal entities, sex role theory and notions of ‘male role strain’ continued to play a central role in gender research. This was the case certainly through until the late 1970s, when researchers such as Robert J. Stoller⁵ and Sandra Bem⁶ produced influential research on ‘core gender identity’ that threw new light on gender assimilation. Consequently, within the imminent sociology of masculinity the first substantive critiques of gender role theory did not emerge until the

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mid- to late 1980s. Informed in the main by second-wave feminism and theories of patriarchy (for discussion, see Tong, 1993; Humm, 1992), scholars such as Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985), Brod (1987), Kaufman (1987), Kimmel (1987a), Hearn (1987), Tolson (1977), Connell (1987) and Brittan (1989) argued for a new trajectory in the critical study of men. In their emphasis on the social constructionist dynamics of masculinity, these and other feminist and profeminist writers drew attention to the absence of any theory of male power in gender role perspectives, a point that writers such as Pleck (1995) have subsequently acknowledged. Moreover, they noted that sex/gender role theory was erected on a biological determinism, where 'roles are added to biology to give us gender' (Brittan, 1989: 21). As Connell (1987) acknowledges, despite being fundamentally illusory, the idea of a dominant gender role does appear to offer a ready means by which to connect apparent social order with the formation of personality, thus straddling the often incompatible disciplines of sociology and psychology. What it cannot do, however, is provide an explanation for differences between women and men, particularly in respect of power. Nor can gender role theory account for what would otherwise be seen as 'deviant behaviour' in those who do not conform to dominant gender stereotypes. Certainly, the concept of 'gender role strain' indicates that socialization processes are neither uniform nor unproblematic for men. But, nevertheless, gender role theory cannot account for differences within the lived experiences of individuals, nor can it explain the underlying motivations behind the 'socializer' (Connell, 1987). As Connell stresses, how do those left marginal in sex/gender role research, for example, gay men and women and black people, 'fit' into this perspective?

In the final analysis role theory fails to adequately develop an understanding of femininity and masculinity as multiple in expression, invested with power and, as was discussed earlier, historically variable. As this book seeks to emphasize, far from being unitary grounded categories, male and female reveal themselves as ambivalent arenas, dynamic, unpredictable and in a constant state of change. However, the criticisms directed at role theory are also applicable to social constructionism. In drawing primarily on second-wave feminism's developing critique of men's power, second-wave sociology of masculinity can be seen to have failed to adequately develop a theory of masculinity as identity work, beyond, that is, the notion

of men ‘learning gender scripts appropriate to our culture’ (Kimmel and Messner, 1989: 10). In recognizing this hitherto absence of a substantive theoretical exploration of the identity dimensions to men and masculinity, a number of writers have turned their attention to psychoanalytical perspectives. However, as will now be discussed, this combination of (pro)feminist social constructionism and psychoanalysis is also not without its tensions.

Psychoanalytical perspectives

Freud

Sex role theory found some resonance with research being undertaken into sex, sexuality and gender by psychoanalysts. This is particularly so in respect of notions of an ‘authentic’ or ‘real’ self. For example, if we live our lives as ‘actors’ on the social ‘stage’ (Goffman, 1959), then what is the underpinning self that adopts these roles? Where is this inner self located and what are its origins? (How) might this ‘core personality’ be ‘civilized’ or, indeed, ‘damaged’ through immersion in the social world? It is these and related questions that psychoanalysts primarily seek to address, if not answer; in the process they open up the Pandora’s box of human sexuality and the unconscious.

The ‘founding father’ (*sic*) of psychoanalytic theory is Sigmund Freud. His numerous studies into the unconscious state, begun in the late 1800s, have influenced virtually every aspect of social science and to some degree continue to do so. Beyond academia, Freudian terminology has become commonplace, with terms such as ‘penis envy’, ‘Freudian slip’ and ‘Oedipus complex’ coming to signify what many see to be the darker, more profound side to the human condition. Like that of other influential thinkers (for example, Nietzsche and Foucault), Freud’s work is notoriously elusive and difficult to pigeonhole, not least because his theories shifted and changed over the course of his life. Consequently, any direct critique of Freudian theory has something of the ‘straw man’ about it – it depends on one’s perspective and interpretation, and also on the particular theories under discussion (Frosh, 1994; Rowley and Grosz, 1990). As is discussed below, feminists, particularly, have found Freud’s

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work to be both liberating (from male dominance) and oppressive (contributing to malestream accounts of ‘normality’) (for elaboration, see Buhle, 1998). Any critical examination of Freudian theory, or indeed psychoanalysis itself, needs, then, to be interpreted with one eye on the fluidity of the concepts under discussion.

Central to Freudian theory is the idea that children go through stages of sexual maturation, the ‘successful’ outcome of which is their assimilation into the ‘civilized’ world of adulthood (Freud, 1953, 1968). The underlying assumption is that children are not born with a social and cultural identity, but that this comes to be formed as a direct consequence of their contact with others, in particular parents. As infants, boys and girls are neither naturally heterosexual nor homosexual; rather, they are in a stage of ‘polymorphous perversity’ and open to numerous forms of sensual gratification (Freud, 1953). As infants come to recognize their biological sex, mainly through observing parents, so this generalized sexual instinct or drive comes to be shaped and influenced by their identification with their biologically common parent. This process is not one without tension or conflict. Indeed, it requires the child to suppress otherwise natural desires in order to be accepted into the ‘real’ world of adults (see Frosh, 1994). The early stages of childhood were described by Freud as the ‘oral’ and ‘anal’ stages, during which the parents and infant vie for control. Ultimately, the ‘normal’ child will emerge out of these stages having learnt to give up some bodily pleasures in return for more authority and independence. The next stage, from around three years, sees the onset of specific gender development. This period, the ‘phallic’ or ‘Oedipal’ stage, is, according to Freud, the key stage wherein masculine and feminine traits are established. The child discovers the pleasures of the genitals, but because of their different biological make-up (i.e., the boy has a penis and the girl does not), boys and girls resolve the complexities of this phase quite differently. For boys, their first erotic choice is their mother – their primary nurturer. In wanting to possess her he must, however, also symbolically ‘reject’ or ‘kill’ his father, who he sees as a rival for her attention. The fear the boy then has is one of castration by his father should he act on his desires for his mother. In learning to suppress his mother love, the boy comes to ‘be a male’, partly through learning to submit himself to the authority of the father. His ‘normal’ heterosexuality is, then, transferred to the female as ‘Other’ (Beauvoir, 1973). Woman subsequently comes to occupy a fraught dualist identification/rejection

within his subconscious: that of 'whore/Madonna' (see Edley and Wetherall, 1995; also Rutherford, 1992). Thus adult masculinity requires the male both to identify with males and to remain intensely competitive with them, particularly for the attention of females. This positive, indeed 'maleist', view of masculinity is one that sees males as the natural, superior sex. Females, by contrast, are, according to Freud, constantly obsessed by their lack of penis, creating resentment of their mother for having failed to provide one. Girls' desire for their father is desire for a penis. As this 'love object' cannot be resolved, it requires a (penis) substitute. Natural femininity can be achieved by girls turning into women who want babies, a process of development that offers women a new 'love object' (Freud, 1953).

First-wave feminism, which was substantiated from the mid-1950s and through to the early 1970s, saw writers such as Shulamith Firestone (1970), Betty Friedan (1974) and Kate Millett (1970) denounce what they saw as Freud's misogyny, manifest in his notion that masculinity is a secure and stable property, superior to femininity and, thus, women, whom he positioned as unstable and overly emotional. Millett challenged his assumption that women's physicality (mainly their 'lack' of penis) not only results in an essentially different subjectivity to men, but creates different 'ethical norms' (Millett, 1970); women's 'super-ego' being seen by Freud as largely a product of their heightened emotionality, lack of rationality and greater disposition towards disobedience (of authority). Feminist critics of Freudian theory argued that women's position in the world was less to do with their 'penis envy' and more to do with the social construction of femininity, a patriarchal condition that Freud failed to acknowledge (Firestone, 1970) and, moreover, a condition he contributed to as a malestream theoretician (O'Brien, 1983). This feminist critique was supported by psychoanalytical research of the time which noted that it was extremely rare for women to be sexual 'perverts'; it was men who were more likely to engage in necrophilia, exhibitionism, coprophilia and voyeurism (Edley and Wetherall, 1995).

Freudian theory strikes an uneasy 'balance' between the biological and the social. On one hand there is his emphasis on biological sex as a fundamental determinant of 'normal' gender behaviour; the penis, or lack of it, being seen as the starting point of gender construction. Yet Freud's understanding of 'normal sexuality' is itself not grounded in 'objective' scientific research, but is clearly an

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outcome of his own cultural and gendered assumptions, reflecting dominant Western thought of the early twentieth century (Friedan, 1974). Freud appears to equate ‘normal’ human psychology with male development; women and femininity being a deviation from this ‘norm’ (Segal, 1997). While he did not write directly about masculinity, Freud presents ‘normal’ male development and subjectivity as a complex process of denial, contradiction and suppression of feelings and inner emotions. That which is required to be denied or repressed is ‘weakness’, homosexuality and those ‘awkward things’ (such as women) which ‘lie hidden in the repressed unconscious’ (Winnicott, 1986, quoted in Segal, 1997: 72). Yet despite the constant presence of ambivalence and fragility, Freud did view male maturation as less problematic than female maturation, with men and masculinity being presented as central to the continued operation of society. In this respect, Freud’s perspectives are very close to Parsonian functionalism in so much as they rest on gendered dualisms of public/private, rational/irrational, order/disorder. Freudian theory starts from the premise that there is a ‘natural’ (thus biological) state of affairs, in which ‘primitive’ sexual desires (manifest only by infants and ‘perverts’) are, in the main, controlled and ultimately subsumed under civilizing pressures, all for the common good. Yet as feminists have since pointed out, ‘over 50 million have died at the hands of psychiatrically normal males since 1900’ (Miles, 1992: 15). However, as is discussed below, despite these criticisms, Freudian theory can also be interpreted as an attempt to explain the socially constructed character of sexuality and gender, thus providing a form of critical gender theory, a point not lost on many feminist and profeminist writers.

Jung

Freud’s work has, arguably, had more impact on gender theory than that of any other single psychoanalyst, and his theories are regularly referred to in contemporary literature on the subject. However, the work of one of Freud’s most famous disciples, Carl Jung, is of equal significance for the sociology of masculinity, particularly in respect of his notion of gender balance. Freud had always emphasized that women and men have both masculine and feminine traits as part of their inner self. However, Freud saw these gendered dualisms as the

outcomes of childhood to adulthood psychic construction, a process fraught and contradictory certainly, but, nevertheless, with a final state that is stable and balanced for most people. Jung spotted the ambiguity in this theory, notably that masculinity somehow, for men, unconsciously prevails over feminine ‘instincts’. Jung questioned the extent and ease with which the masculinity/femininity tension might be resolved for males. The basis of Jung’s reasoning was that masculinity and femininity were ‘rooted in the timeless truths about the human psyche’ (Connell, 1994: 21) and in notions of a public self (the *persona*) and a private self (the *anima*). This dualism was itself gendered in so much as Jung saw the ‘natural’ expression of these different selves as gendered archetypes, representing, for example, men’s inner and outer psyches, a condition that, far from being easily ‘resolvable’, often leads to ‘unnatural repressions’.

No man is so entirely masculine that he has nothing feminine in him. The fact is, rather, that very masculine men have – carefully guarded and hidden – a very soft emotional life, often incorrectly described as ‘feminine’. A man counts it a virtue to repress his feminine traits as much as possible, just as a woman, at least *until recently*, considered it unbecoming to be ‘mannish’. The repression of feminine traits and inclinations clearly causes these contrasexual demands to accumulate in the unconscious. (Jung, 1928/1953, quoted in Connell, 1994: 20; my emphasis)

At the heart of Jung’s thesis are the issues of social order, functionalism and gender-appropriate roles discussed earlier. And again, as was highlighted above, the temptation to slip into essentialist, or mythological-inspired, notions proves too much for the theorist. In the above quote Jung reveals his concern at the social shifts he perceives as taking place within Western societies, that is the tendency for ‘modern’ women to adopt ‘mannish’ traits. For Jung, such a trend appears to have an element of disorder about it, for it signals that the feminine is being dominated by the masculine, when what is needed is for ‘modern men’ to ‘carefully guard’ their feminine side. As will be discussed in chapter 2, it is a notion that has had a profound impact in certain areas of ‘men’s studies’, in particular in the mythopoetic men’s movements (see, for example, Bly, 1990). Jung stresses that all men have a feminine essence within them, which can, he argues, be reached and ‘healed’ through therapy, through talking

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to one's anima. What remains vital is that the masculine prevails as the dominant persona of men, with the feminine repressed, to varying degrees, as a consequence. The alternative, as Jung saw it, was for men and their masculinity to be subordinated to women and femininity. Similarly, for women to become 'mannish' signalled a similar imbalance in their gender psyche.

The lack of any clinical study to underpin his theories pushed Jung into searching for archetypal figures in mythology and world religions in order to 'prove' his thesis. Jung needed 'evidence' of gender archetypes, seen to exist somehow at the core of the social world, to make his point that such archetypes come to accumulate in the collective and individual unconscious. Basically, as Connell (1994) notes, Jung's thesis is an early attempt at a theory of masculinity, but one founded in a given system and constitution of gender. Rather than question the very idea of an essential, inner self – an archetypal being – Jung attempts to present the concepts of masculinity and femininity as rooted in some 'timeless truths'. One outcome of such reasoning is that femininity and masculinity become seen as so fixed and given that no change is possible. All that can alter is the balance between these two conditions. Contemporary Jungian theorists have taken this notion to a certain logical, but I would suggest flawed, conclusion by arguing that modern feminism is, for example, '*tilting the balance too far the other way* and suppressing the masculine' (Connell, 1994: 22; original emphasis). A contemporary example of such thinking is given by Guggenbuhl (1997), who suggests that one means by which a 'natural polarization' of women and men can be achieved is, in Jungian terms, for women and men to lead more separate lives and to inhabit different 'retreat zones', territories where men can 'get back in touch with their masculine qualities'.

Connell's long-term study of Jungian theory in the context of the sociology of masculinity is probably the most thorough and comprehensive of its type (see also Connell, 1987, 1994, 1995).⁷ Of particular interest is the way in which Connell traces the connections between Jungian theory and the more recent antifeminist backlash as represented by the 'men's mythopoetic movement'. As Connell puts it, '[Jungian theory] is enthusiastically received in the North American 'men's movement' as an explanation for men's troubles with feminist women' (1994: 22). Such an approach is exemplified in Robert Bly's *Iron John* (1990), which is little more than a plea for modern men to 'heal their grief' and renounce

contemporary images of adult manhood in favour of a mythological 'Wild Man'; an Arthurian warrior figure, connected with the earth and an inner mysticism. As this book reveals, despite a proliferation of theories deconstructing such notions, myths of masculinity and accompanying 'truths' remain firmly implicated in the politics of gender.

Moving from first- to second-wave (pro)feminism

Despite the many critiques, not all feminist scholars felt affronted by psychoanalytic theories. Indeed, many saw Freud's ideas as highly liberating for women. The first wave of feminist theorizing had largely been concerned with issues of equality and equity; laying stress on men and women being equal in ability, while pointing out that women were being denied their potential by traditional relationships, male-dominated work environments and patriarchal settings. Liberal feminism, typified by the work of, for example, Betty Friedan (1974), was seen by many to be a call for gender equality, while, however, accepting some aspects of gender difference as given and, in functionalist terms, complementary. In part inspired by the social, educational and economic changes occurring in Western societies from the 1960s onwards, liberal feminism seemed to capture the sense that many women had of being able to 'have it all', emulating men's power in the public sphere and exercising their maternal instincts, while also remaining, fundamentally, 'feminine'. The challenge to men in such theorizing was to make space for women, particularly in work and organizations (Kanter, 1977), whilst, as legislators, introducing and enacting laws that enabled women to become assimilated, on equal terms, into (masculine) work cultures and environments. Similarly, Marxist feminists, who consider women's oppression to be a direct consequence of capitalism's system of exploitative power relations, place emphasis on improving women's experiences as workers and on women receiving practical recognition of the economic value of their housework (Barrett, 1980; MacKinnon, 1982). In calling for fundamental changes in the system of production, Marxist feminists, like liberal feminists, imply that gender equality can be achieved, but without men, as individuals and as a gender group, necessarily having to change.

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In laying the ‘blame’ for women’s oppression at the doors of, respectively, legislative injustices and the capitalist system, many feminists consider, however, that liberal and Marxist feminisms fail to adequately challenge the everyday practices of men themselves (Humm, 1992). Again, the tension that arises for feminists in attempting to straddle the nature–nurture dualism is evident, for the implication in much of first-wave feminism is that gender differences, while unjust, have to be negotiated alongside an implicit acceptance of the inherent biological factors that construct women and men as different. The next question of course is, ‘How can men (and women) change if their behaviour is biologically given?’ Freudian theory appeared to offer a way through this particular conundrum by positing male and female behaviour as a ‘natural’ outcome only in respect of particular social experiences, notably family relationships. Represented in particular by the writings of Nancy Chodorow (1978) and Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976), feminist psychoanalytic theorists then argued that women’s social and economic condition is a direct consequence of men’s practices, an example being their absence from the processes of parenting:

It is central to my argument that our sexual arrangements are part of a wider human malaise. By ‘sexual arrangements’, I mean the division of responsibility, opportunity, and privilege that prevails between male and female humans, and the patterns of psychological interdependence that are implicit in this division. The specific nature of such arrangements varies, often dramatically, under varying societal conditions. Their general nature, however, stems from a core fact that has so far been universal: the fact of primary female responsibility for the care of infants and young children. (Dinnerstein, 1976: 4)

Both Chodorow and Dinnerstein reject any biological assumptions that posit women as destined by nature to be mothers. Furthermore, they also reject any social determinism that suggests that women are conditioned to be mothers. Drawing on Freud’s Oedipal theory, Chodorow, for example, traces the contrasting psychosexual development of boys and girls and the points of separation and symbiosis that, she argues, occur during their maturing and changing relationship with their mother and father. An important and, for feminists, significant outcome of the sexual and familial division of labour is that ‘women’s mothering produces asymmetries in the relational

experiences of girls and boys', one outcome of which is that 'the basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate' (Chodorow, 1978: 283).

In their respective accounts of how sexuality and gender are constructed in favour of male dominance through the gendered processes of mothering, second-wave feminists, particularly psychoanalytic feminists such as Chodorow and Dinnerstein (also Miller, 1978; Mitchell, 1976) opened up a new critique in the study of men. Whilst some feminists have pointed out that aspects of female biology may lead daughters to identify more with their mothers than fathers (Rossi, 1977), the point remains that the sexual and familial division of labour works to men's material benefit. Equally importantly, this cultural arrangement cannot be divorced from a public and private divide; organizational practices (for example, equal opportunities policies, (un)paid paternity leave); the continued imbalance in women's wages when compared with men's; and the exploitative and oppressive conditions that directly result for many women in their attempt to manage multiple roles across both the public and private spheres (Franks, 1999). In short, while much of first-wave feminism championed 'women's rights', second-wave feminism began to challenge the 'cultural arrangements', male power and maleist assumptions increasingly recognized as sustaining gender injustice.

Feminist psychoanalytic theory also gave credence and substance to the idea that women's sense of being female, while a 'reality', was one born of a particular gendered subjectivity created out of their lived experiences as women (for example, see Lennon and Whitford, 1994). This understanding of a feminine subjectivity offers some potential for developing in a political context by exploring (and potentially changing) the gendered power relationships that serve to influence if not determine the 'gender order' (Connell, 1995) within which women's and men's subjectivities are constructed. Not only that, but once gender politics is connected with female subjectivity, particularly through epistemological formations, then the ground is laid for a 'women's standpoint' perspective (Harding, 1991; Smith, 1988). In developing such a perspective, writers such as Harding and Smith (also Gilligan, 1982; hooks, 1984) suggest that women's ways of knowing and being are not only different, but can be celebrated as interpretively and epistemologically privileged in a masculinist world (for discussion, see Assiter, 1996; Holmwood, 1995; Lennon, 1995; Whitehead, 2001b).

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Feminist utilizations of Freudian theory have been employed to good effect within second-wave sociology of masculinity, particularly that work which has sought to connect men's power and the problematic behaviour of men with theories of male identity. Prominent examples of such studies include Connell (1994, 1995), who traces the progression of Freudian theories through the work of, amongst others, Alfred Adler, to highlight both the complexity of masculinities and the compelling yet oppressive character of dominant cultural notions of heterosexuality; Craib (1987), who draws on Freudian theory to emphasize the centrality of gender to identity, and of masculinity to male dominance (also MacInnes, 1998); Middleton (1992), who explores Freud's 'Rat Man' essay as a study wherein both Freud and his patient 'Rat Man' are seen as duly implicated in the formation and enaction of a particular vehement form of masculine symbiosis – traumatic, defensive, violent and fantastical; and Rutherford (1992), who uses various psychoanalytic theories to explore mother–son relationships, men's violence and the repressed dimensions of masculine performance.

Whatever the possibilities of integrating Freudian and Jungian perspectives within gender theory and the sociology of masculinity – possibilities that are certainly not exhausted (for discussion, see Buhle, 1998) – they are, however, ultimately in tension with a notion of masculinity as variable and fluid but, importantly, politically implicated. Thus, while appearing to subvert gender and sexual difference, it can be argued that Freud and Jung merely serve to reinforce the difference. Frosh, for example, in one of the most detailed studies of masculinity and psychoanalysis, acknowledges the many 'masculinist assumptions [that are] endemic to psychoanalytic theory' (1994: 13) and inevitably corrupt the possibility of employing most forms of such theory in any neutral or objective fashion. Probably the most telling critique of both Freud and Jung is, then, the combination of the misogynistic thinking that pervades their work and their reliance on gender dualisms of, for example, rational/irrational, framed within a notion of an inner and outer (masculine/feminine) self. In short, the psychoanalytical theories of Freud and Jung rely on a gender(ed) reductionism that is partly concealed behind a complex and polymorphous analysis. Whilst being pliant, and, thus, susceptible to often quite opposing understandings, interpretations and utilizations, the theories of Freud and Jung remain problematic for

critical gender theorists. Nevertheless, despite these reservations, I would argue that opportunities do exist for employing certain psychoanalytical concepts within both a critical and deconstructive context, and these are discussed in respect of masculinity and identity in chapter 7.

Multiplicity, materiality – and illusion

Multiple masculinities

While the works of, for example, Parsons, Freud and Jung offer diverse, sometimes compelling, interpretations, they commonly draw on an understanding of masculinity and femininity as rooted in timeless ‘truths’, often connected to some deeper, almost spiritual, mythology. As such, these scholars and their works remain firmly rooted in malestream thinking. However, as has been discussed, the influence of these writers on the developing sociology of masculinity has to be recognized. In serving to strengthen the notion of men and women as unitary identities – problematic only in respect of the individual’s ability to assimilate, act or represent dominant social and cultural gender codes and symbols – functionalism, gender role theory and Freudian and Jungian theories speak to the dualism that underpins what Connell (1987) terms the ‘gender order’. Despite this inherent weakness, such theories have contributed, often indirectly, to both feminist and profeminist scholarship, not least because the categorical assumptions that inform gender dualisms have a political resonance for many critical gender theorists. Assiter (1996), for example, makes a strong case for maintaining the gender dualism in order to focus attention on women’s uniqueness as an ‘epistemic community’, a grouping formed by their universal experiences (as women) in a gendered political class (also Stanley, 1997).

Despite the argument for seeing women and men as political categories – and this is discussed in more detail in chapter 2 – it remains the case that any notion of fixed or final gender roles or definitions is implausible. Similarly, it is no longer tenable, given recognition of the multiplicity, historicity and dynamism of gender representations, to talk of masculinity in the singular. Rather, we can see that mas-

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culinities are plural and multiple; they differ over space, time and context, are rooted only in the cultural and social moment, and are, thus, inevitably entwined with other powerful and influential variables such as sexuality, class, age and ethnicity. Yet in purporting to speak of the practices, behaviours and attitudes of males – boys and men – masculinities are very powerful, for they have ideological or discursive elements that appear to embed given ‘truths’; the same ‘truths’, as we have seen, that scholars such as Parsons, Freud and Jung found so seductive and elementary to their thinking, and to which many psychoanalysts and sociologists are still drawn (see, for example, Clare, 2000).

At the level of, for example, biology, the brain or genetics, masculinity does not exist; it is mere illusion. Masculinity is not a product or an entity that can be grasped by hand or discovered under the most powerful microscope. No amount of cultural representation can make masculinities biologically real (Threadgold and Cranny-Francis, 1990). Any sense of masculinity’s embeddedness in men’s ‘inner selves’ comes only from fictional and superficial accounts of what a ‘man’ is. Yet there is also the fact that masculinity, while in this sense illusory, remains fixed by one important consideration, that is, it exists in relation to femininity. Indeed so long as the notion of femininit(y)ies exist so will masculinit(y)ies (Brittan, 1989). It is a dualism that remains fundamental to Western societies and beyond (Petersen, 1998). Consequently, despite being basically illusory, masculinity is not so ephemeral as to be dislocated from the social web; it is not a free-floating entity that inhabits men’s subjectivity in some ad hoc or randomly happenstance manner. On the contrary, masculinities are implicated in the everyday practices of men – and women. In this respect, Freud and Jung were quite correct to centralize gender and sexuality in the everyday lives of females and males. However, their use of the masculine/feminine dialectic was not one that was gender critical. Both theorists, as with Parsons and sex role theoreticians, assume the presence of some underpinning gender essence at work on the subjectivities of women and men. In so doing, they not only reify that which has no biological basis; they clearly fail to recognize the issues of power and politics at work in this dualism. As Brittan observes: ‘How men behave will depend upon the existing social relations of gender. By this I mean the way in which men and women confront each other ideologically and *politically*’ (1989: 3; my emphasis).

The materiality of men's violences

Whether gender politics, as with all power plays, is acted out, resisted and/or engaged through ideologies or discourses (or both) is a matter of some debate (for discussion, see Purvis and Hunt, 1993), a point that is explored in more detail in chapter 3. However, what is clear is that there is a material actuality to masculinities, frequently underpinned by violence or its threat (Archer, 1994; Bowker, 1998; Dobash et al., 2000; Hatty, 2000; Hearn, 1998b; Miles, 1992). As Bowker puts it, violence represents the 'dark side of masculine role performance' with 90 per cent of violence being perpetrated by men (1998: xiii). It is important, then, to recognize that masculinities are not necessarily benign, but are directly implicated in those practices of men that are oppressive, destructive and violent. Directly arising from this recognition, research into men's violences has developed into a key field within the sociology of masculinity. Yet as Jeff Hearn (1998b) notes, the study remains problematic, not least because of the diverse range of such research, encompassing disciplines such as criminology, history, social policy, education, sociology, psychology and cultural studies. Similarly, in highlighting the materiality of men's violence it is important to recognize both the plurality of its expression and its often unseen character. For example, research by Edwards (1989) and Dobash and Dobash (1992) signals the violent character of home and family life for many women and children. As Edwards puts it: 'The safest place for men is the home, the home is, by contrast, the least safest place for women (1989: 214, quoted in Hearn, 1998b: 4). Men's violences towards those women to whom they are in close relationship is endemic across many societies, and yet it is frequently codified through everyday cultural practices and legal systems, thus rendering such behaviours 'invisible' other than to sustained critical (usually feminist) enquiry. An important element in feminist and pro-feminist research into men's violences is, then, to prise open those hitherto dark sides of men's behaviour and associated masculinities that are oppressive and violent in their construction and expression, in the process naming and focusing on 'the problem of men as the major *doers* of violence to women, children, each other' (Hearn, 1998b: 5; original emphasis). A further aim is to illuminate the inter-connections not only between masculinities and men's violences, but between different forms of men's violences. For example, men's asso-

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ciation with violence extends beyond the private sphere into the public one, coming to characterize the organization and control of weapons and means of violence (see Barrett, 1996, 2001 for examples); the control of state-sponsored violence (for example, the police); violence by corporations; and violence undertaken by organized criminal gangs (see Bowker, 1998; Newburn and Stanko, 1994). Within the public sphere there is also the random violence, sexual or otherwise, perpetrated by individual men and groups of men on strangers, be they women, children or other men. This latter aspect of men's violences is particularly corrosive to the well-being, security and comfort of those who are, or perceive themselves to be, at risk from such aggression. For it should be recognized that, whether it be in the public or private spheres, the constant threat of violence is, itself, an aggression, a form of violation of human dignity. In short, to recognize the extent and range of men's violences is to face the depressing and disturbing realization that men's propensity for cruelty and violence is probably the biggest cause of misery in the world.

Within the sociology of masculinity, and feminist scholarship generally, there is a paramount need to expose and examine not only the singular violence undertaken by individual men within both the public and private realms, but also the cultural condition of violence itself. Suzanne Hatty discusses the example of serial killing (a crime invariably perpetrated by white males), which, she argues, is marked out as a 'cultural formation', rooted beyond individual psyches and into the core of societal values. Hatty argues that such values sustain and validate the conditions under which men may be violent to women, children and other men.

Today, serial killing can be regarded as a cultural formation typical of the late twentieth century. As such, it is emblematic of the motifs of machine culture: the mass-produced images, the multiple representations and simulations, and the retreat of the ideals of humanism. The insertion of graphic violence at the heart of society and its replication in numerous visual forms provides the optimum context for the generation of the 'logic of killing for pleasure' (Seltzer, 1998: 7). (Hatty, 2000: 197)

Hatty is stressing that men's violences are neither simply nor usefully compartmentalized as either legitimate or illegitimate, for they are

frequently acted out and performed in a wider cultural theatre wherein what it means to be a man is inextricably connected to the perceived ability and opportunity to (re)act violently towards others. Such violent acts should not be seen solely as an aberration by psychologically damaged males. There is a deeper root to men's violences. Or, to put it another way, the root of men's violences is anchored as much in social and cultural values as in individual pathology (see Archer, 1994). Obvious examples of the connection between individual violence and masculine culture would be acts of violence, sexual or otherwise, by men while they are supposedly carrying out 'legitimate' functions and activities for the state or other organizations (for example, as members of the armed forces, educators, carers, sports coaches, prison warders, policemen). These men are, in the main, entrusted with the means and opportunity for violence by virtue of their jurisdiction over others, but they subsequently abuse this freedom by either transgressing the boundaries laid down for appropriate physical response, or by undertaking planned, routine acts of violence on those under their care and administration. The violence undertaken by men in such positions frequently exposes the deeper culture of violence at the heart of the organizational setting (see Bowker, 1998 for examples). Such organizations, for example a care home, may not be self-evidently masculinist in orientation, but they may have a deeper-rooted value system that serves to legitimize violence and abuse and/or hides its practice.

In summarizing the challenges facing feminists in coming to explicate, understand and challenge men's violences, Jeff Hearn raises a number of key questions:

To put this rather bluntly, to focus on men and men's violence to women unsettles, makes problematic, the way men are, not just in the doing of particular actions of violence, but also more generally. It raises question marks against men's behaviour in general. For example, how is it possible that men can be violent to women, perhaps over many years, and this can be part of a socially accepted way of being a man? How does violence relate to the social construction of different forms of masculinity in school, in sport, in work, in the media? What is the link between violence and dominant forms of masculinities? What is the connection between men and violence, men's violence? In raising these questions, two major themes need to be stressed: power and control; and the taking apart of what is usually taken for granted. (1998b: 6)

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As Hearn goes on to recognize, although central to the continued well-being of women and children – and other men – none of the issues and questions surrounding men's violences are reducible to simple biological, genetic or deterministic solutions. There is a social dimension to men's violences that pervades most cultures. Therefore, following Hatty (2000), I would argue that a particularly persuasive and insidious discourse of violence is at large in this new millennium, be it articulated through the media, social and state organizations, 'machine culture' or the practices of individual men. It is a discourse that is particularly powerful in that it serves to legitimize male violence as voyeuristic entertainment and through forms of state security. This discourse is not simply one of verbal communication, but also, fundamentally, a set of practices, attitudes and belief systems that render men's violences as 'normal' and, thus, inevitable. Consequently, men's violences have assumed the status of a cultural arrangement across most societies, in as much as the matter of violence itself, if examined at all, is invariably done through a gender invisible lens. For example, while politicians and policy makers may seek to reduce the levels of violence in society, they invariably fail to subject to critical scrutiny the masculinist culture that feeds and validates the violent practices of men. In this respect, the work of feminists and profeminists is of particular importance in that it not only serves to highlight the connections between men and violence, but it keeps these connections in the public eye. Feminism makes explicit the materiality of gender differentials. The political categories of man and woman are not confined to intellectual discourse but played out in the subways, in organizations, on the sports terraces and on the streets at night, by men, often violently. When you wake at 3.00 a.m. having caught the sound of movement downstairs, it is not usually a woman you fear wielding gun or knife.

Men's violences, of whatever dimension, can be seen, then, as important and influential material actualities directly arising from those dominant discourses that serve to reify men as 'masculine beings' (see also chapter 7). In short, if we are to have some understanding of otherwise inexplicable acts of violence by men, whether it be serial killing, sexual assault, rape, child abuse, mass violence, random violence or torture, then we must recognize that dominant forms and codes of masculinity serve to legitimize, to some degree, that which is, arguably, the major social problem of our time.

Material actualities – a global perspective

As a critical focus on men's violences reveals, masculinities may be fundamentally illusory, but the consequences of men's practices and gender myths – and the underpinning belief in the supremacy of men contained in, for example, some religions, organizational sites, work practices, political systems, cultures and divisions of labour – has a very real material/physical consequence. These material dimensions are complex, often being concealed behind notions of 'tradition' if not plain ignorance and stereotype. For example, biological reproduction may, at first sight, appear to be the province of women (as carriers of the unborn child and as, predominantly, midwives). Yet, as Hearn (1987) argues, there is a social organization to conception, pregnancy, birth and childrearing that is not gender neutral but invested in relations of male control and power (see also Shorter, 1984). Similarly, in the public sphere, the fact of whether you are a man or a woman will have a direct bearing on your chances of becoming, for example, a company director, politician, surgeon, senior manager, army officer, detective, professional athlete, priest, judge, high-ranking civil servant, economist, professor and so on (EC, 1998; EOC, 1999, 2000; IoM, 1998). Moreover, the limited number of women who do achieve their career aspiration in many of the above jobs can expect to be paid significantly less than men for the equivalent work (ONS, 1998, 2000; Reskin and Padavic, 1994). Indeed, recent research undertaken in the UK on behalf of the government reveals that most women, regardless of their experience and qualifications, will suffer a 'female forfeit' in terms of lower lifetime earnings than men (Cabinet Office, 2000; EOC, 2000). Also, if you are a woman in paid employment you are more likely than a man to be in temporary, non-unionized, part-time, low-skilled, lower-paid work (Ginn et al., 1996; Hakim, 1996; Pilcher, 1999). As a woman, you are more likely than a man to be holding down two jobs, and, if a parent, to be doing this while engaged in multiple roles across both the public and private spheres (Franks, 1999; Hochschild, 1989; Rubery, 1998). If you are a union member, it is likely that union will be male-dominated and masculinist in its expression of solidarity (Cockburn, 1991; Creese, 1999; Mann, 1992). As an employee, a woman is more likely to suffer sexual harassment than a man (Hearn et al., 1989), and, as a single parent, a woman is more vulnerable to

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poverty than a man single parent (Creighton, 1999; Halford, Savage and Witz, 1997; Irwin, 1999).

In sum, material advantage, autonomy and opportunity remain gendered, despite the notion of a postfeminist era and more than a century of Western feminist discourse (see also Singh, 1998). And if this is the case in Western societies, where feminism has been largely sourced and energized and women's aspirations publicized and politicized, the situation is even more marked in other parts of the world. The material inequalities that arise from gender politics and dominant understandings of masculinity are explicit, unapologetic and deeply embedded in the social relations and nationalisms of most African, Middle Eastern, Asian, Caribbean and South American countries (see, for example, Alumnajjed, 1998; Fisher, 1993; Green, 1999; Hensman, 1992; Karam, 1998; Sweetman, 1997). Perhaps it has become too easy for many, men especially, to look at the absolute increasing material prosperity of the advantaged 40 per cent in the West (Hutton, 1996), to make a connection with women's heightened visibility in employment, the media industry, politics and education, and to conclude that previous gender inequities have been 'resolved'. Such notions require to be put into a global perspective. From Afghanistan to China, from Kuwait to Brazil, from Turkey to Thailand, from Sudan to Pakistan, women's rights, and women's opportunities for security, education, financial well-being and political power – indeed, many of women's most important life choices – remain significantly constrained by the attitudes and practices of men. Some fifty years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, male discrimination and violence remain everyday realities for millions of women: 80 per cent of the victims in male-led wars are not men but women and children; and the vast majority of the one billion people unable to read or write are women (Amnesty International, 1998a). In countries such as China and India traditional attitudes place a higher value on the male than the female, with female infanticide being the grim reality of such ideas.⁸ Yet, despite experiencing this severe material and physical oppression, to be a woman seeking equal rights with men is, in many countries, to risk at the very least social marginalization, if not imprisonment or worse (see Abdo, 2000; Afshar, 1998; Green, 1999; Hensman, 1992; also Amnesty International, 1998b, 2000).

However, it is evident that often the only difference between Western societies and many other countries is that, in the West,

feminism at least has a public voice and some political presence, though the extent and degree to which such progress translates to equality in practice and material change is, as discussed above, much contested and less evident (Burke, 2000; Godenzi, 1999). Moreover, in recognizing what progress has been made in the West for women's rights, one should not assume that women's political and social enfranchisement in other countries is dependent on Western societies or Western feminisms. Indeed, many women fighting for equality in so-called Third World countries reject Western feminism in favour of indigenous alternatives that allow for their particular religious or cultural positions (see for discussion Mohanty, Russo and Louides, 1991). As recent research has shown, although they may reject the label feminism, many women from developing countries are evolving a feminist consciousness to the extent that women's rights has become a powerful momentum within even the most reactionary cultural spaces, and in so doing they are creating localized resistances to patriarchal conditions (Afshar, 1998; Alumnajjed, 1998; Fisher, 1993; Green, 1999; Karam, 1998; Paya, 2000). Such movements and resistances are not confined to developing countries but are also apparent in those spaces in the UK and other Western societies where the changing aspirations of ethnic minority women (for example, Muslim) meet male intransigence and resistance (see, for example, Shain, 2000). Indeed, one can speculate, as does Anthony Giddens, that contemporary expressions of religious fundamentalism are, in part, an 'attempt (by men) to stall the gender revolution' (2000: 27) – though in saying this it is necessary to recognize that for Islamic feminists and Muslim feminists the very term 'religious fundamentalism' is imbued with imperialist assumptions and fails to capture the cultural, political and religious alliances that exist across and between groups of women and men (for discussion, see Karam, 1998).

Conclusion

In exploring the question 'masculinity – illusion or reality?', this chapter has charted some of the transformations and trajectories in the developing sociology of masculinity, doing so from a perspective that draws on a historical recognition of the shifting representations

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of manliness and masculinity and on the contemporary diversity and fluidity of what it means to be a man. In the same way that feminist scholarship has moved through first, second and now third waves of academic critique and investigation, so is the developing sociology of masculinity. The first wave was represented by those writings that drew attention to the problematic dimensions of masculinity as a culturally privileged or idealized form of male behaviour. The work of Pleck (1981) was particularly significant at this stage, for it provided the basis of a theory of masculinity that challenged the notion of masculinity as functional and socially stable. Importantly, Pleck and others drew attention to the ambiguities and discontinuities in any male socialization processes, describing this as ‘male gender role strain’ (see also Levant and Pollack, 1995).

The absence of any theory of power in sex/gender role theory was, however, a primary concern of those theorists who contributed to the second-wave sociology of masculinity. Largely influenced by second-wave feminism, writers such as Connell (1987a), Kimmel (1987a), Hearn (1987) and Brittan (1989) made important contributions to our understanding of gender power relations by developing profeminist social constructionist understandings of men and masculinities. Recognizing that such theoretical perspectives, while illuminating of hegemonic processes, provide little insight into the identity dynamics of men and masculinities, Connell (1994, 1995) and others have since looked to the work of Freud, Jung and feminist psychoanalysts to shed light on masculinity as an outcome of identity work. In so doing, Connell in particular has made yet a further substantial contribution to the burgeoning sociology of masculinity. However, despite the important developments occurring in this sociology since the 1970s, the influence of structural functionalism, particularly in respect of unitary notions of men and women, remains. The nature–nurture dualism continues to bedevil not only the ‘everyday world’ but also many of the sociological and psychoanalytical explorations of men and masculinities.

Back then to the initial question: is masculinity illusion or reality? To put it succinctly, masculinity is *both illusion and reality*. Thus it is coming to understand how this apparent paradox is sustained that is the key to appreciating the social, political and individual importance of masculinities. One can have some sympathy with those who wish to see an underpinning logic or causality to masculinities. For this perspective seems to speak to our common-sense and everyday

experience of gender relations and gender difference. When we turn and face the violent and dysfunctional behaviour of males and the material inequalities of gender, it is easier to excuse them as biologically and functionally determined rather than as the material outcome of some complex sociological process or psychoanalytic illusion. Similarly, to explore the construction of sexuality and gender, as many functionalists and psychoanalysts do, in terms of the fraught but inevitable outcome of a tussle between essential truths, primary instincts, sexual urges and a necessary ‘civilizing process’, while a seductive notion, is only part of the story. Order, functionality, roles and certainty may appear, to many, to be what sustains the ‘everyday world’, but that world is not given; it is highly contingent and in a constant state of flux.

Interestingly, this social contingency is also apparent to those who are concerned with the demise of ‘gender traditions’ and what they see as an ensuing ‘social disruption’ (see, for example, Fukuyama, 1997). Increasingly these writers, and others of a similar conservative persuasion, turn to the world of science for ‘answers’. However, science itself is not inevitably neutral, for its practices and assumptions are invested in discursive properties. Nevertheless, science beckons to us as a new ‘religion’, the new font of ‘truth’ and knowledge, the new legitimizing order (Lyotard, 1994). As such, it is not surprising that when geneticists and sociobiologists examine sex and gender they assume the possibility of finding ‘objective’ answers and solutions to the inconsistencies that surround us, and themselves, as gender beings. I suggest that there are theoretical tools that can be used to better understand how men and masculinities exist as simultaneously illusion and reality without recourse to mythology or scientism, and these ideas are developed further in this book. However, in undertaking any critical examination of men, it is important not to lose sight of the material consequences and political dimensions to masculinities and their associated myths and ideologies. With violent crime by men on the increase across the Western world (Hatty, 2000) and men’s violences taking multiple forms (Dobash et al., 2000; Hearn, 1998b), it is evident that, while masculinities may be illusory, the material consequences of many men’s practices are quite real enough.

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FURTHER READING

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