

MOVING MASCULINITIES AND SOCIAL CHANGE: WHY DO MEN MATTER?

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Abstract

From notions of crises among men to the globalisation of masculinities, current debates on social change suggest we must contend with men. But do men matter? Is the category ‘men’ even useful in the face of emergent ‘female masculinities’, transgender politics and the ongoing dissolution of sexual identities, etc? If we were to give up on the idea of men entirely, would masculinities still hold valency? Where do diversity, embodiment, biology and sexuality fit into this problematic called ‘masculinity’? In the confusion surrounding the notion of men, which men know which way is up? These and other intriguing questions will be explored, and maybe even answered.

Keywords: men, male, masculinity, sexuality, gender, embodiment.

Gender is the extent we go to in order to be loved.
(Robert Glück, *Margery Kempe*, p. 57)

When I started to write this paper I realised that I was embarking on a new journey. I had returned to live in Australia in February 2005, after just over two years teaching at Columbia University in New York, to take up a five-year Victorian Health Promotion Foundation Senior Research Fellowship focusing on masculinity, sexuality and health. This Fellowship provides a unique opportunity to concentrate on an issue that has always been of interest, but which I have not really focused on since researching the HIV pandemic became the centre of my attention twenty years ago. Yet, as that pandemic unfolded around the world, in the back of my mind I sensed that men and men's sexuality and the central place these occupy in the pandemic were poorly understood. As I have noted elsewhere (Dowsett 2003), in HIV/AIDS, men's sexual interests of whatever kind have not been well served by most research and policy developments at national and international level; and that is bad for men and for men's partners, lovers, families and communities.

AIDS was not the starting point of my interest in men—intellectually, I mean. I first wrote about masculinity and schooling twenty years ago (Dowsett 1985), based on a small investigative project I undertook in London on new gender equality programs in high schools. I also knew from my early gay liberation activism that sexuality and gender intersected in complex ways (e.g. Walsh & Dowsett 1976), and that fighting heterosexism could not be done without fighting sexism, and vice versa. And from feminism and gay and lesbian theory I learned that gender does not just affect women; it affects men equally, and not always in our service. Men matter, and they do so in all sorts of ways.

As anyone familiar with the field of masculinity studies knows, the leading masculinity writer in the world happens to be Australian sociologist, R.W. Connell. I started working with Connell in my first research job in the late 1970s on a project on class and gender inequality in secondary education in Australia (Connell et al. 1982). During that project, the terms 'hegemonic masculinity', 'gender regimes' and 'gender order' were coined to describe what we were seeing in gender processes in schools (Kessler et al. 1982). These were part of a configuration of gender as a theory of practice, later elaborated by Connell in a series of books (Connell 1987, 2000, 2002, 2005a[1995]). During that early project, we attended a founding meeting of a men's liberation group in Sydney. If I can capture the prevailing theme of that meeting in somewhat of a caricature, it was that: men were bad, being a man was bad for men too, men's sexuality was mostly bad, and gay men were somehow partly saved from being completely bad because we did not (mis)treat women as sex objects. Finally, gay men were in touch with our emotions and bodies (unlike the bad straight men). It was not a

failure of politics that these sentiments represented; it was a failure of theory and a real misunderstanding of men and sexuality.

Since then, it has become clear that masculinity has become a problem. By that I mean that the very idea of masculinity is now problematised and stands as a category of inquiry and endeavour. Our grandfathers, even our fathers, might never have thought masculinity as problematic, regarding it merely as a set of attributes or a quality that one had more or less of. Yet, in the popular press, in various conferences and, more recently, in the developed world in the health care, education, and welfare and justice sectors in particular, masculinity has become the conceptual framework for long-standing if newly recognised social issues.

This is sometimes termed a 'crisis in masculinity' (e.g. Horrocks 1994; Clare 2001; Taylor 2006), and we hear this framed also as men no longer sure of their role in society, particularly as women gain more equality. This issue comes into sharpest focus in the notion of 'father right' and the conservative effort to regain for men, rights seen as inherently theirs and recently lost to women in relation to marriage, children and family resources. Yet, it is also evident in progressive social welfare activity such as the wonderful 'men's sheds' movement here in Australia. And this is not just a Western or developed country phenomenon, as more recent discussions on globalisation and masculinity have revealed (Connell 2005b; Connell & Wood 2005).

'Crisis', however, may depend more on the politics of masculinity than on solid evidence of a social upheaval itself (The International Association for Studies of Men 1999). Yet, there *is* evidence of difficulties for and among men. For example, we now have an emerging men's health agenda at national level in many countries fuelled by evidence of particular health problems specific to men, much of it workplace-related (in Australia, see Connell et al. 1999). The World AIDS Day theme for 2000 was 'Men Make a Difference'. This built on a more benign version of a phrase circulating at that time: 'Men are not just part of the problem, they are a part of the solution'. The World Health Organization has a new initiative that has been gearing up since 2005 on 'The Role of Men and Boys in Promoting Gender Equality in Health'. In 2005, as the United Nations reviewed progress on the advancement of women ten years after the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and thirty years after the first International Women's Year, masculinity researchers were commissioned to provide papers and perspectives on men and boys. Certainly, in Health as a sector, men are now on the agenda in a way they have been in the Education sector for much longer.

Beyond these more rarefied places, men's problems are rehearsed in the popular media, particularly women's magazines, including: men's falling fertility rates; increasing impotency; the flight from women; more turning gay; enhanced morbidity and mortality rates in relation to various diseases; higher rates of accident in the workplace and in motor vehicles; a proclivity for domestic and sexual violence; overindulgence in drugs and alcohol; and increasing problems among young men in relation to alienation and suicide. In education, there are research programs and heated, persistent debates

about boys and their schooling successes or otherwise (e.g. Connell 1997; Kenway 1997; Collins et al. 2000). In professional sport, there are scandals about inappropriate sexual and racist behaviour. Even Yahoo has a men's health directory (http://dir.yahoo.com/Health/Men_s_Health/). In the face of all this, your typical Aussie bloke might well seem on a slippery slope and none too certain of where he is heading.

It is not all bad news. We also have witnessed the much-vaunted rise of the 'metrosexual', a term coined by British gay journalist Mark Simpson (1994a), to describe the successful, inner-urban man interested in fashion, food, love and lifestyle—if a tad heavily influenced by gay men, as he described in his earlier book *Male Impersonators* (Simpson 1994b). Indeed, more recently, the phenomenal television success in the US of 'Queer Eye for the Straight Guy' revealed that even 'retrosexuals', i.e. those straight men who cannot bring their lives up to a late-modern speed, can finally be saved by a set of savvy New York gay boys. Beyond finer calibrations in 'metrohetero', 'metrogay', or 'homopolitan', we now have 'ubersexuals' to deal with as well (see Wikipedia for explanations of all these: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page). In Australia, we already had a term 'SNAG' to describe 'Sensitive New Age Guys', those pro-feminist, non-homophobic, open and sharing, environmentally caring blokes that every woman dreams of. Some men are clearly not quaking at the knees in the face of change. Indeed, men are on the move, but clearly not in the same direction and certainly not with similar purposes in mind.

Getting clear thinking on those shifts and changes is harder than it appears. For a start, what does masculinity mean? It is not novel to note that there is a certain irony in the fact that the term masculinity has come to serve as the framework for problematising men and men's issues. The irony derives from the lack of a useful parallel formulation for women. Imagine analysing women's situations in the dynamics of domestic violence as a problem of femininity! Problematising the feminine nowadays seems related more to transgender and intersex issues, and to the debates concerning certain types of men who have sex with men, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, rather than the hook for current feminist theory.

Why is it that masculinity provides the frame for consideration of the situation of men in contemporary society? Surely, masculinity can only mean characteristics or capabilities of men in common, as we have come to know them in our culture and history. There is a long history in psychology of defining and measuring such traits as one kind of way to assess gender roles, but that understanding of masculinity is definitely not what critical masculinity studies is concerned with. Connell defines it as follows (2000: 29):

Masculinity, understood as a configuration of gender practice...is necessarily a social construction. Masculinity *refers* to male bodies (sometimes directly, sometimes symbolically and indirectly), but is not *determined* by male biology...Masculinities are configurations of practice within gender relations, a structure that includes large-scale institutions and economic relations as well as

face-to-face relationships and sexuality. Masculinity is institutionalized in this structure, as well as being an aspect of individual character and personality. (original emphasis)

This is a very useful definition because it profiles the individual and interpersonal as well as the political and structural. It also demands a focus on practice rather than proclivity. It is important in this field not to focus overly on the volitional and to be aware of the structural. For example, men's higher rates of workplace accident and occupational injury are not simply a problem of individual recklessness or bravado; they are, among other things, the by-product of poor occupational health and safety management, regulation and training.

Yet the dominant way of thinking about men remains locked on the individual, particularly through the deployment of 'sex role and gender socialisation' theory—a mishmash of various theories and measures that clearly are in great need of revision and replacement. These tools are so familiar to us and so endlessly rehearsed in popular accounts of men that sometimes, we can hardly recognise how limited they are, how they narrow our vision and how they hamper our practice. The dilemma with role theory is that it regards male bodies as empty vessels that get filled up to become men. At best, it is cast within a structure/agency argument; but mostly, particularly at the more psychologistic end of the formulation, even structure is merely some miasmatical force that is absorbed through processes unknowable and unnamed, and 'abracadabra' you get men. It all happens at the level of the individual; and, consequently, that is where you try to change it. Masculinity becomes voluntary (even though it seems somehow compulsory) and, therefore, one can fix oneself. In contrast, at the other end of the structure/agency model the agent seems terribly outflanked by the weight of history and culture, making it hard for any male not to become a man: masculinity is inevitable. Yet, we have a great deal of evidence that it does not work like this.

Certainly, the agent is not free to do or be anything s/he chooses. Becoming a man takes a great deal of work in the face of powerful forces. Educational institutions are one example. My high school was one of those exclusive Anglican boys schools, based on the British Etonian model transplanted to the colonies to help create the Bunyip aristocracy. It entitled its school history *The Making of Men* (Cole 1986), recognising directly that part of its task is the moulding of disparate males into ruling-class men through its masculinising practices as well as through educational advancement. Yet, it also produced me, a weedy, intellectual, gay man, with a PhD, a propensity for social criticism and left politics, an out-of-control opera habit, and complete incomprehension as to how cars work! Am I a structural failure? Whatever I am, my example reveals that a framing of gender that grants all the weight to structure is clearly inadequate. Similarly, gender role socialisation theory cannot account for this process either: did my socialisation not work somehow? Is that the only way to account theoretically for all the

failed men like me in the world? Are we structural or socialisation failures? Given there are so many failures, something else must be happening.

One of the great insights into this theoretical quandary is found in Paul Willis' famous book *Learning to Labour* (1977), wonderfully subtitled 'how working class kids get working class jobs'. Willis reveals how the sorting and sifting task of public schooling worked in the UK, as its particular curricular and institutional processes selected the few for university places and relegated the many to wage labour. It achieved these effects in part by producing an oppositional masculinisation in the majority of failing boys, which was commensurable with a kind of resilient if damaged pride. Willis' 'lads', as they are termed, in reaction to the educationally successful 'earholes', were progressively alienated and brushed aside, and they took refuge in rehearsing a resistant working-class masculinity—a triumph for the male stereotype, it would seem. Then, they found themselves back in the factories and workplaces of their fathers. Yet, what Willis revealed is that stereotypical male roles were not simply poured into the boys, but that working-class culture was mined by the boys to find resources to resist the schools' approved ways of being and doing masculinity. Indeed, in this example, it is 'failed socialisation' that actually produces masculine stereotypical behaviour. Surely, a theoretical paradox!

It was Willis' work and others like it that led to that study of class and gender inequality in education noted earlier, and which produced the formulation 'hegemonic masculinity'. During that study, we noticed in the elite boys high schools we researched the way approved manhood and its masculinising processes did not actually achieve a majority practice, i.e. most boys failed to achieve the attributes and actions of the successful and approved male. To use a metaphor familiar to cricket lovers: there are only eleven places in the First Eleven cricket team; everyone else who plays cricket at school is second rate. In other words, the model of successful masculinity held up as the best one might be can only be achieved by the few; yet it provides the yardstick whereby masculinity is measured for all and, consequently, most of us cannot succeed. Not only do the bookish, musical, poofy boys like me fail, no matter how much we achieve academically, but even the sporty, blokey types who would seem to be stereotypically masculine do not measure up either. In this way, most men are involved in a damaged gender project right from the start.

It is important to remember that hegemonic masculinity is a discursive practice, not a dominant stereotype or majoritarian behaviour—it is not about the normative. This concept is not a deterministic view either, if structural in its focus; rather it is an analysis that recognises that gender is hard work. No empty vessels here being socialised, just men struggling with contradictory and impossible measures, through endlessly variable practices, in a rigged race. Here, we also see the beginnings of an alignment with Judith Butler's (1990) notion of gender as 'performative'.

A key theoretical aspect of hegemonic masculinity is noting the subordination of other types of masculinity, of other ways to live as a man, albeit achieved by dint of

marginalisation. Yet, here might also lie creative resistance, as we saw with Paul Willis' lads. Indeed, as one example, gay community life and the achievement of gay civil and political rights has seen a resistant and resilient population of homosexually inclined men refuse marginalisation and subordination—indeed, persecution—to claim a place as equal citizens. Whatever else, we are seeing something other than simple subordination here. This suggests that one of the ways to account for the struggle of many groups of men organised through forms of marginalisation or subordination can at best be resilience and resistance to, or at the least an energetic improvisation on, the effects of hegemonic masculinity as a discursive practice, rather than as a failure of socialisation or as evidence of a crisis in masculinity or a destabilisation of the male role, as the literature would commonly suggest.

Yet, that struggle has a larger context. One example where we can see this in operation is the world of work. Beyond the gendered division labour and the incremental changes therein, global changes in the nature of labour itself might be more important. In the West, productive work has been rapidly decreasing for nearly thirty years, including the demise of the youth labour market, leaving young men (and women) to see their futures as lying perforce in extended schooling and cultural infantilisation. For Paul Willis' lads, getting a job, even in a factory, once meant earning, contributing to household incomes and assuming early adulthood. This is no longer possible. It is not the male role that has changed here; it is the loss of the material circumstances with which to live a life. Also, the globalisation argument does not often elaborate on the mammoth shift of productive labour to developing countries and does not explore the consequent effect on men (and women) there in pressuring local masculinities and disturbing existing cultural relations and practices. Collaborators in the masculinity research field are exploring these issues locally, but that research is in its infancy in the developing world when compared with research on women.

This line of argument suggests that larger historical and cultural forces might be investigated to produce a more social explanation for a dramatically shifting gender order, one in which both women and men, institutional gender regimes and their underlying value systems, and even the utility of gender as an analytic, are dramatically changing. Herein might lie a more useful, social analysis for what is happening to men that goes beyond gender alone. The issue becomes how gender fits into a mosaic of social forces producing change in daily lives, which together might have effects in gender relations and concerns, rather than determined by gender forces alone.

However, even these material and structural arguments take us only so far as a corrective to a psychologised account, and we need to return to some of the concepts still at work in masculinity. One dilemma for all formulations of masculinity is that the fundamental category of 'male' remains a given. By this, I mean that the body, however mutable in the face of social pressure, remains unchallengeable at the level of its biology. Reduced to a biological male essence, we can only theorise about, and work at, the ways in which the body is deployed, how it becomes 'masculine' and how 'male' human

beings become ‘men’. Sexologists and post-human theorists—strange bedfellows, indeed—are constantly reminding us of the shortcomings of this quarantining of the biological body, and we ignore their warning at our peril (see, for example, Kirby 1997; Ehrhardt 2000). Can we continue to assume that the category ‘male’ (or ‘female’) stands unchallenged or unchallengeable?

This ‘male/female’ binary is reliant on a certainty that we cannot disguise or mask our biological interiors, our ‘natural’ bodies, thus providing incontrovertible evidence of who we really are. Yet, the growing understanding of those born ‘intersex’ with ambiguous genitalia—ambiguous to other people, that is—would seem to shake our certainty about the purity of the male/female binary (see Meyer-Bahlburg 2000). As we drive further inward toward the incontestable truth of biology—and, increasingly, a biological account of psychology—searching for the genetic blueprint of a sex, it would appear that uncertainty increases. It would seem that being biologically male or female is not really a clear distinction after all, but rather like sorting out where one fits in a continuum on which most people eventually find themselves closer to the ends than the middle. Being declared male or female, as Butler (1990) noted, is performative rather than indicative.

Then, what of ‘man/woman’ as a worthy binary, that product of sex assignment? Certainly, the emergence of global transgender politics has challenged the binary division of the sexes into ‘men’ and ‘women’, demanding that a new kind of third gender be recognised. The advent of hormone therapy and gender re-assignment technologies has facilitated this new category of transgender in the West—a dramatically social (that is, technological) intervention if ever there was one. Moreover, there are longstanding traditions of transgender people in many cultures in the world. Some of the most distinctive exist in the Asia-Pacific region (e.g. Jackson 1997; Jenkins 1998; Oetomo 2000), and these confound the comfortable relationship between sex and gender, between the biological and social body, in ways with which we have yet to grapple effectively. It is clear that the binary opposition ‘man/woman’ can no longer hold a privileged place in our understanding of gender.

Even if ‘man/woman’ or ‘male/female’ could be easily pinned down in some abstracted pre-social body, does it matter? From the moment that body is placed into real life everything is up for grabs. We can dress it up, mask it, cut bits off and create others, chemically change it into something else, and even add new things when and where we please. As we add more metal, plastic and chemicals to the mix, as we pursue our diversifying gender projects, as we change to meet new social challenges, and as we age, the bodies we count on to hold fast in the face of change are the things that change quickest and become less certain. That very body upon which we pin our hopes for masculinity can be questioned, manipulated and re-made into anything we want. Men can even become women. It may be that we need to ask more about how the body actually relates to ‘male’ or ‘men’, as well as ‘masculinity’.

However, one challenge to social theories of gender and sexuality is the increasing knowledge of biological difference and how to account for it. We can no longer refuse the body or deny the part the material body plays in enabling lives to be lived. The body teaches. This argument does not amount to an elevation of biology to cause, but to constituent, and is a call to juggle with embodiment as performative, not just with bodies as vehicles for performance. Embodiment is a project, much like a gender project: we have to respond to its sensations, to its particularities, to its ever-changing nature. We become who we are as we do, and we do what we can. One example should suffice: think about what being double-jointed might enable you to do sexually that others cannot do, and how such a person's sexual adventure throughout life might progress!

Perhaps a less challenging example is to try to understand the ageing process as part of the embodiment project. For men, ageing is represented mostly as a loss, a loss of strength, loss of capacity, loss of libido, loss of fertility for some, loss of respect, loss of social value and loss of social standing. Of late, it is also represented as a loss of looks, of increased vulnerability to disease. These are real losses of biological capital as well as social worth. And, in a twist worthy of Faust, ageing rather than being an inevitable biological process has become a disease, an illness itself. Male sexual dysfunction, for example, problematises men's ageing processes in relation to sexuality and reproduction. Men are now heading toward the same framework in terms of testosterone therapy as women face with hormone replacement therapy; yet, there is far less debate concerning men of the kind concerning women.

The challenge to think harder about this example of the medicalisation of ageing is not some naïve desire to return to the notion of a natural body and its natural processes—biology is not destiny here; rather, we need to reconceptualise embodiment and engage in a critical social debate with medical science and technology about where we are to head increasingly as 'cyborgs', as Haraway (1991) presciently termed it. As cyborgs, we have capped teeth, hip replacements, heart valves, use eyeglasses and dildos, wear make-up. We chemically control body processes, for example, blood pressure, cholesterol levels, fertility, and so on. We are permanently connected to machines that have become part of our bodies: watches on our wrists, cochlear ear implants and pacemakers, telephones in our hip pockets with Bluetooth earpieces in our ears or microphones strapped to our heads, keyboards glued to our fingertips for hours each day. We witness life happening live through plastic, glass and metal boxes beaming digitised images. The idea that we are simply natural bodies engaging the natural world, or that we can return to that, is nonsense. The body is a material resource, and we have moved our bodies vastly beyond the biological but brought them with us; hence our cyborg status, part flesh, part machine, incontrovertibly not just of nature but also of culture.

For men, embodiment brings particular kinds of problems. Embodiment is not simply filling one's own body but the struggle to occupy social space, the space allocated to a man whether it be on a football field, an executive office, a hospital bed, or sitting

legs akimbo on a bus seat. One's measure of oneself as a man is to occupy one's allocation of space and, therefore, claim one's rightful place as best one can, and as judged appropriate by the apportionment hierarchy of masculinity. Space is not neutral or simply material; it is highly symbolic. What is less often noted is the work that goes into this occupation and the costs and benefits that result. As just one example, bodybuilding among young men has become very important, and even in pop video clips young men lift their t-shirts to display a six-pack to ogling girls. For those without a six-pack—the chubby cherub type, or the painfully thin strip of rope that teenage boys can be at moments—it is a painful experience to have one's own body betray oneself. Further, there would appear to be a rise in stress fractures among boys and young men who push their fast growing bones beyond their capacities in bodybuilding and other such sports. Not good. Perhaps not surprisingly, Androgen use would also appear to be on the rise (Egan 2002), but so are reports of anorexia and bulimia among teenage boys (Vincent & McCabe 2000). What is happening here? Boys and young men would appear to be desperately working at dangerous embodiment practices to make their bodies achieve some ideal. Is this just hegemonic masculinity winning again in every renewing ways? However, refusing to feed oneself would appear some kind of resistance to pursuing manhood very different from the resistance of Willis' lads.

Here, acting as canaries in the mineshaft, are Western gay men again. There is a growing suggestion that gay men differ from their non-gay counterparts in the desire for certain body shape and size: gay men want to remain thin but with a clear body definition and a certain level of muscle development, in contrast to the larger bulkier style of muscly body sought by non-gay men. How do we account for these emerging differences? What are those pop videos telling us? Does masculinity provide the best viewing frame here? Might sexuality need to be more central to the analytical gaze, not just for gay men but for the question of embodiment in general? How might masculinity, embodiment and technology intersect here to service desire?

The increasing popularity of men's magazines like *Men's Health* certainly indicates a growing concern with men's bodies for, despite the titles, such magazines are largely concerned with body development and fitness in a blokey, boofy kind of way! These magazines also reflect a nagging concern with being a man or, as it could be better configured, with doing masculinity. For among the regular items in such magazines is managing to cook for oneself—particularly simple, low fat, tasty treats. *Men's Health* magazine (US) even has a regular column entitled 'A man, a can, and a plan' designed to turn kitchen klutz into culinary commando. Is this only about role change or shifts in the domestic demographics of the gender order? For men are also told that if we please the little woman with that neat Thai beef, broccoli and black bean sauce concoction, you might also 'get your end in'! This is because the real pre-occupation of men's magazines is sex—getting sex, more sex, better sex, giving her better sex (it is always 'her', never 'him' or 'them'), or figuring out why you are a benighted sexual misfit relegated to a miserable life of solitary masturbation, mistimed ejaculations and mangled relationships.

Another year's subscription to this or that magazine and another three-thousand hours in the gym should fix that! More than masculinity, it is the abiding sense of the *sexual* that overwhelms in such magazines.

The solution is that men are also regularly exhorted to become better consumers. Technology becomes the solution. I read recently (yes, I read them too) that by mixing and matching twelve well-chosen pieces of clothing I can have eight new, cool outfits, bringing me right up to date. However, as a rather thin bloke, I should avoid pleated trousers. A Swiss Ball can turn my study into a gym and me into a god in no time. As for moisturizers, a small trip to an expensive department store to invest in that new cream that promises to sandpaper years off my face will solve the problem for now. Then, I too will look like the bloke on the magazine front cover who is always under thirty-five, built like a brick shithouse, still actually does go to the beach, and you just know never ejaculates prematurely. For men, 'Viagra' is no longer just a pill; it is our destiny.

There are more important issues at stake. And this is where the question arises about whether 'masculinity' theory can carry the conceptual freight we ask of it. Mostly, the masculinity framework subsumes desire; it relegates sexuality (in the Foucauldian sense) to a supporting actor in a gender order largely determined by institutional and experiential heterosexuality for its generative moment (cf. Dowsett 1996). What might a privileging of sexuality offer to such an analysis? If we threw sexuality into the mix with more force, what might we gain in understanding male, men, masculinity and social change? Might it be that sexuality is voraciously colonising not only gender, but also increasingly more of the social world?

When sexuality comes into the argument, it becomes difficult to know whom to include. I noted a long time ago (Dowsett 1993) that most analyses of men, by both the men's movement and masculinity studies analysts, and by feminists, can usually only deal with men by leaving out gay men. Things have not changed much. Indeed, in the developing world, this glaring omission of gay or other homosexually inclined men has been a tragedy of neglect in the face of HIV/AIDS. The same is largely true for indigenous and minority ethnic men and for boys too.

Let me offer what appears at first to be a flippant example to illustrate: gay men's relationships with women. An email attachment circulating a while ago entitled '100 Great Things about being a Gay Man' noted the following items: (1) gay men are good pals with women other people cannot stand; and (2) gay men's women friends will tell them everything they want to know about the women's boyfriends—and that means everything (straight guys find that one a bit scary). Yet, when it comes to more sophisticated discussion about men and women's difficult relationships, gay men's renowned capacity for close female friends is either ignored or left uncomprehended. If one attributes this capacity for close relations with women to some notion of gay men having retained their 'female' side or some other similar trope (not uncommon in role or psychologised gender trait theory), then the category 'male' must expand to take into account the retained feminine, thus destabilising itself and opening up masculinity to less

certainty. If one argues that gay men's relations with women are products of a complex, ongoing struggle within the field of sexual politics, then the category 'men' in the binary opposition 'men/women' must also accommodate more contestation than it usually does—it becomes 'gay men/women/men'. (And I hear you ask, where do lesbians then fit in?)

If you are not convinced, then note another of the '100 Great Things about being a Gay Man': unlike most straight women, gay men have no problem being treated solely as a sex object! This quip actually represents one of the major points of strong disagreement and debate between women and gay men, a debate that non-gay men have quite a stake in but rarely engage. As the marketing of men's bodies to sell everything from underwear to sport gains ground, the challenge of an objectified masculine sexuality—a kind of 'phallic passivity' (Dowsett 1996)—is a significant one. Maybe gay men have something to offer on this one already (see Simpson 1994b) to teach straight men about the re-aligning of masculine sexuality as it is being constituted day by day. Maybe, gay men, inheriting the primal moment of creation in sexuality, reveal the limits of gender as an analytic?

If the challenge to include gay men is taken seriously, then other differences between men become important to note and not neglect. Two such differences are race and ethnicity. In particular, indigenous men and their lives are important (not just in Australia but elsewhere), and the politics of including indigenous men fully in the discussion on masculinity continues to be a challenge. I mention this group of men first because in my experience in international health research work, when issues of race and ethnicity are prioritised, they mostly neglect indigenous populations. And there are serious issues here, as the growing concern with domestic and sexual violence among Indigenous Australian communities exemplifies (Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations 1998; Jopson 2001; Rintoul 2001). Certainly, the situations for different races and minority ethnic men in many countries challenge us all to rethink the situation of men, their health and socio-economic circumstances, their sexual interests, their dreams and futures, and how we understand each other. For example, how do we work with the pride that draws on sexual privilege when Middle-Eastern men struggle with degradation in the world's refugee detention camps? How do we deal with the hypermasculinity of omnipresent African-American Hip-Hop? What of the many effeminate masculinities in the Asia-Pacific region? And, as an aside, what do we do about the claims to female masculinities (Halberstam 1998)? Men with disabilities should not be forgotten either. Sure, with the rise of the Paralympic Games that now follow Olympic Games, it has become easier to praise wheelchair-bound, gold medal-winning athletes; but have we made the same gains in dealing with intellectually disabled men as men? What of their sexual desires and rights (see Hillier et al. 2003)? As for boys, there is an urgent task to hand in ascertaining how to include them *in* our deliberations, rather than merely deliberating *on* them as infantilised pre-humans.

These differences between men are not listed merely as some kind of menu to choose from, or a claim for taking note of 'diversity'. There is a certain poverty to the notion of diversity for all its claim to foregrounding a liberal plurality and providing a not too challenging alternative to hierarchy and subordination. Instead, we need to recognise that it is largely the embodied relations between men rather than our diversities that determine our relationships and experiences. This means *power relations*, not merely diversity. It registers not only a pecking order of masculinities, but also a multi-layered discrimination based on differences other than gender hierarchies, differences deeply etched not just in bodies and spaces, but in relations determined through historical and institutional practice. These relations between men are also deeply sexual, even when sex itself is not occurring. In other words, we need a better analysis of subordination, one that takes into account the resilience of Willis' lads, the creative construction of community by gay men, the challenge of postcolonial analyses of masculinity in developing countries, and also in the developed world as occurs, for example, among African American sexuality activists, which imbricate sexual expression, with cultural pride, historical forces, material resources and social processes.

We also must move our thinking outside the confines of the West and take regard of other regions of the world and what they offer to any analysis of men and masculinity. As just one example, in the field of HIV/AIDS, understanding men's sexual activities and desires is going to be central to HIV transmission and the containment of a still rapidly growing pandemic (see Dowsett 2003). Does the hegemony/subordination model map onto other cultures in the same way? Is the structure and practice of relations between men and women always the generative moment in gender in other places? Does sexuality play a different part in the ordering of daily life elsewhere? There is a great need to pursue and share the products of these inquiries beyond the West and beyond the English language, for the answer does not lie in one place only.

For often in the West, other places produce 'othered' people. How else can we account for the sheer lunacy of the recent circumcision trials in sub-Saharan Africa, as one scientific approach to HIV prevention (Auvert et al. 2005)? Mutilating bodies is hardly good public health! I suspect we can only contemplate such actions through the othering of African men. For all the work done exploring sexuality and gender throughout the world, the othered are more than a bit confusing to Western eyes, imposing as we often do not only the clear distinction between male and female, but also the safety of that fine line between heterosexual and homosexual, and the belief that we got it right. This is why we have for so long failed to see the pandemic as a sexual phenomenon as distinct from simply a gendered one, and we witness the legacy of Western homophobia enacted in the defence of 'indigenous' principles, such as in President Mugabe's statements on homosexuality in Zimbabwe.

Yet, even here in our late-modern Western culture, there are changes are happening in sexuality. To date, that fine line between heterosexuality and homosexuality has actually been a cordon around the anus, and theorists like Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick

(1990) have argued for some time that Western patriarchy is sustained by a homosociality between men that relies on homophobia as its cornerstone. Lee Edelman (1995) goes further and argues that male heterosexuality can only be sustained by the refusal of the anus and its erotic potential. If that binary is actually structurally fragile, might the so-called crisis in masculinity be traced to a sexual transitioning by men from an unsustainable heteronormativity to a new erotic future?

After all, women seem quite aware of men's anal erotic capacities. In women's magazines articles on pleasing men sexually frequently contain suggestions for stimulating men's anuses. I have yet to see similar advice for men in the pages of *Men's Health*! Yet there are other changes afoot: one colleague reminded me a year or so ago of the huge shift of interest in the US to anal sex in heterosexual pornography over the last few years. This starts to look queer. The newest growth in the heterosexual pornography market, I am more recently informed by the same colleague, is 'pegging', i.e. women using a strap-on dildo for anal sex with men. Anuses are no longer beyond bounds, and even straight men's anuses are becoming available for penetration. To engage the idea that all men might experience anal pleasure suggests that gay men are not 'other' at all; rather, to borrow from Jonathan Dollimore (1991), gay men are merely 'proximate', and men's sexual pleasures, if not our proclivities, are a capacity we share. We have to reckon with the body again. This fear of the anus and, therefore, of homosexuality, for a long time acted to police all men's sexuality and structure heterosexuality; but once breached, how does men's homosociality survive? The growing use of the term 'bi-curious' (1.3 million items in a Google search at the time of writing) suggests that sexual interests are shifting for both women and men. Whither heterosexuality as we have known it as a consequence? Then, what becomes of masculinity?

Conclusion

To conclude, I would argue that it is these kinds of analyses that point the direction toward re-conceptualising masculinity. Rethinking the concept of masculinity requires that we embrace the ambiguities in the very terms to which gender and sexuality theory is so attached, challenging man/woman, male/female, heterosexual/ homosexual, rather than relying on them as we try to get around them. We need to engage biology actively and work with the body and the practices of embodiment to capture lived experience as daily social transformation. We need to recognise resilience and resistance as creative, not just as subordinated. In the social sciences, we need to grapple more with popular culture and with social theory about it developed outside our narrow disciplinary frameworks. We must embrace power as productive of/in sexuality as Foucault (1978) argued, and understand its capacity for generating change. This is the way we can best understand what is happening in sexuality and what is driving the rapid social change that alarms so many, for here we might find some real disturbance in masculinity.

Yet, when I pause for breath, I am always amazed at how the traumatic urgency of intellectuals can be so readily handled by other reflective and creative forces. Go no further than advertising for this. They make it all seem so simple. Let us take but one example. A recent edition of *Men's Health* (Australia) ran an ad that sums up how sexual uncertainty among men is the new state of play. The full-page ad, on the inside back cover, was for 'Aussie Bum', a new, very up-market and rapidly growing brand of swimwear and underwear, trying to capture its place as authentically Aussie through a claim to the mantle of the 'Speedo'. Its products are sexy, often revealing, and use incredible men's bodies to advertise. 'Aussie Bum' even sponsors a number of surf lifesaving clubs by providing beautiful, brief, revealing and colourful new club togs. To use the name 'Aussie Bum' itself is challenging enough when you think of the once tightly cordoned anuses of your average Aussie bloke! Kylie Minogue even recorded a single featuring men in these products, and that is certainly bordering on the proximate!

This particular ad is for a range of underwear called 'Tutti Frutti' that utilises a tropical floral motif in a tight-fitting hipster brief. A big muscly tanned man with a shaved head, naked save for a coral necklace and his tight, hot pink knickers, sits half leaning out of a front-seat car door, genital bulge clearly profiled, looking perplexed and dejected, a hand rubbing his forehead. Behind him in the car is an attractive woman, not a girl, who is re-touching her lipstick in the rear vision mirror and clearly looking very happy with what has just occurred. The caption reads: 'Guys are just sexual objects to abuse'. The ambiguity of men's estate is thus declared; so it just might be that, contrary to what I have written here, men might not matter very much after all!

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