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ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews empirical and theoretical work within critical studies on men and masculinities (CSMM), drawing on extensive empirical and theoretical studies relevant to psychology and social psychology. The chapter focuses on gender relations and power dynamics, social structures, intersectionality, bodies, practices, and identities, both individual and collective. The chapter first maps the key theoretical developments of CSMM, historically and conceptually, before moving to focus on two important contemporary issues: first, the development of more egalitarian masculinities, and, second, the explanations for various non-egalitarian masculinities, such those linked to incel and Alt-Right movements, both online and offline.

BIOGRAPHIES

Jeff Hearn is Professor Emeritus, Hanken School of Economics, Finland; Senior Professor, Human Geography, Örebro University, Sweden; and Professor of Sociology, University of Huddersfield, UK. He is co-managing editor, *Routledge Advances in Feminist Studies and Intersectionality* book series, and a co-editor of *NORMA: The International Journal for Masculinity Studies*; and was (co-)chair, RINGS: International Research Association of Institutions of Advanced Gender Studies 2014-2020. Recent books include: *Age at Work*, with Wendy Parkin, Sage, 2021; *Knowledge, Power and Young Sexualities*, with Tamara Shefer, and *Digital Gender-Sexual Violations*, with Matthew Hall and Ruth Lewis, both Routledge, 2022; and the co-edited *Routledge Handbook on Men, Masculinities and Organizations*, 2023. Email: hearn@hanken.fi

Sam de Boise is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Music, Theatre and Art at Örebro University, Sweden. He obtained his PhD in sociology from the University of Leeds in 2012 and since then his research has focused on men, affect and embodiment, music and gender equality as well as music and extremism amongst the contemporary far-right. He is the author of *Men, Masculinity, Music and Emotions*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, and is managing editor at *NORMA: International Journal for Masculinity Studies*. Email: sam.deboise@oru.se

Klara Goedecke is Associate Senior Lecturer in Gender Studies at Karlstad University, Sweden. Her research focuses on men, masculine positions, friendships, and the gendered politics of emotions and consumption in neoliberal times. She is the author of *Men's Friendships as Feminist Politics? Power, Intimacy, and Change*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, and the co-editor of *Close Relations: Family, Kinship, and Beyond*, with Helena Wahlström Henriksson, Springer, 2021. Email: klara.goedecke@gender.su.se

MEN AND MASCULINITIES: STRUCTURES, PRACTICES AND IDENTITIES

Jeff Hearn, Sam de Boise and Klara Goedecke

Since the mid-1970s there has been a substantial scholarly interest in critical, feminist, and gender research on men and masculinities, sometimes referred to under the umbrella term, Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities (CSMM) (Hearn and Howson, 2019). CSMM

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involves the critical gendering of men, “naming men as men” (Collinson & Hearn, 1994, pp. 5-8; Hanmer, 1990, pp. 37-38), whilst simultaneously deconstructing masculinities and men. Critical analysis of men and masculinities involves a double move, whereby material social realities and inequalities are recognized, but at the same time assumptions around and constructions of men and masculinity are taken apart rather than essentialized. Whilst much has been written by, for, and about men, the recognition of men as gendered subjects and the influence of gender on men’s own writing was only recognized following the Women’s Liberation Movements. Much of this work has been located within gender studies, sociology, or cultural studies, but there is also a substantial critical literature that is psychological, social psychological, and identity-related in orientation, and in turn orientated to problematizing men and masculinity. Specific empirical studies range across many social sites, including family, work, violence, sexuality, sport, and politics. Reviewing such research necessitates attention to both individual men and masculinities, and men and masculinities more collectively, varying across contingencies.

In this chapter, we review some of this work, drawing on extensive empirical and theoretical studies, and with an orientation towards the psychological and social psychological. This includes attention to gender relations and power dynamics, social structures, intersectionality, bodies, practices, and identities, both individual and collective. More specifically, the chapter is informed by engagement with the following questions: are masculinity, masculinities, and men a problem? If so, how? Indeed, there has long been concern with the problems men create and the problems men experience, for example, in relation to risk-taking, violence, and health (Hearn & Pringle, 2006). The final part of the chapter takes up more focused studies of two important contemporary issues: first, more egalitarian masculinities, and, second, various non-egalitarian masculinities, such as incel and far right masculinities, both online and offline.

In reviewing these issues, we refer to men as a social category, in terms of those who define themselves and are defined by others as such, rather than as a bio-essentialized ontology. In other words, men are not assumed to have an essential being defined by their biology. The social category of men is formed within gender hegemony – whereby gender categories and relations are taken-for-granted as given – in concrete everyday and institutional life, in interplay with other social relations and divisions, within which men act, agentically, both individually and as collectivities. To analyse and engage politically with this means both naming the social category of men, as a lived social reality, and deconstructing that category. Masculinities refer to patterns of gender practice that are structured, institutionalized, relational, embodied, dynamic, contested, intersubjective, performed, and performative. Masculinities are constructed *in relation to* societal definitions of men and males within gender orders, and whilst analytical distinctions can be made between people called men and males, such distinctions, as well as the term masculinity itself, are sometimes not unproblematic. Masculinities can be performed and sustained by men, women, and further genders, and can be understood as comprising signs, discourses, practices, and performances, that obscure contradictions.

Historical-Theoretical Overview

From Masculinity To Masculinities: Psychoanalysis, Anthropology, Sex Roles

Modern analyses of masculinity can be traced back at least to the psychodynamic psychologies of Freud and Adler, each of whom had a different interpretation. Freud (1917/1993) saw identification with parents who shared an outwardly similar sex to the child

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as key to the formation of either masculine or feminine characteristics; thus, those boys and men who identified with their mothers were likely to become too feminine or even overcompensating as too masculine. However, Adler (1927/1992) saw the self as composed of both masculine and feminine components existing in varying degrees within each individual's psyche.

Indeed, in many ways modern debates on masculinity have been fundamentally psychological, and often individualistic, since their inception. Psychoanalytic approaches have argued that adult character was not predetermined by the body but was constructed through emotional attachments to others in a turbulent process of growth. This involved a variety of psychological and social psychological processes, including the Oedipus complex; the gendering of the active and the passive; and the impact of the (socially masculinized) superego (Connell, 1983, 1994).

Subsequently, anthropologists such as Malinowski (1927, 1932) and Mead (1935/1993) emphasized cultural differences in such social processes and the importance of different social structures and norms between different societies. By the mid-twentieth century, these ideas had crystallized into the concept of sex roles, whereby gender is enacted through relatively fixed, socially approved ways of being female or male. In some cases, psychoanalytic ideas have also been used in other contexts and applications, for example, in cultural studies of masculinity and the exploration of cross-cultural differences and consistencies in the achievement of "manhood" (Gilmore, 1990).

As a consequence, in the 1960s and 1970s masculinity was understood mainly as an internalized role, identity, or (social) psychological disposition, reflecting a particular (often US, Western) cluster of cultural norms or values acquired by learning from socialization agents (e.g. Eagly, 1987). In masculinity-femininity (m-f) measurement scales, certain items were scored as 'masculine' (such as 'aggressive', 'ambitious', 'analytical', 'assertive', and 'athletic') compared with other items scored as 'feminine' (such as 'affectionate', 'cheerful', 'childlike', 'compassionate', and 'flatterable'). The most well-known of these scales are various formulations of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1974). Masculine and feminine characteristics were initially seen as mutually exclusive, then in later formulations as overlapping, related to, sometimes determined by, *a priori* sex, whilst being socially learned behaviors. However, while in many senses m-f and sex role approaches to masculinity can be a social antidote to purely biological approaches, they can be seen as (re)producing essentialism, psychologism, and individualism. To put this simply, such approaches have the advantage of allowing consideration of the social, but their disadvantage is that they do not attend sufficiently to social contextualization and social construction.

M-f and sex role approaches to masculinity were critiqued in the 1970s and 1980s for obscuring differences between cultural ideals and practices, ignoring the fact that the people assessing sex roles were themselves differentially gendered, lacking a power perspective, being biased from relying on mostly student samples in their construction, and being ethnocentric, especially US-centric (Eichler, 1980). Across cultural and historical contexts, there were variations in men's behavior and in social expectations of men, so there was no way of defining what counted as a male role. Importantly, both psychologically-framed m-f scales and more socially-derived sex role theory bring together an ambiguous mix of essentialism and context-specific assessment and measurement of gender. Since the 1980s, masculinity scales have been refined, in terms of, for example, gender orientation, age,

cultural context, and ethnic sensitivity (Levant et al., 2020; Luyt, 2005; Thompson & Pleck, 1995). Interestingly, both the psychoanalytic and the social psychological can be seen as presupposing or explaining “a relatively fixed and unitary “normal” masculine personality, the result of a successful oedipal resolution in its psychoanalytic variant, the result of successful “sex-role” learning in its social psychological one.” (Jefferson, 2005, p. 215). These traditions – psychoanalytic, anthropological, sex role, and m-f scales – can be said to provide a backcloth to recent debates (cf. Connell, 1995, p. 5).

From Masculinity To Masculinities: Patriarchy And Power

At the same time as sex role theory and m-f scales were being critiqued, men were being analyzed societally, structurally, and collectively through various feminist theorizations of patriarchy. These theories of patriarchy have emphasized men’s structural, social, power, and often dominant, relations to women, in terms of, for example, biology, reproduction, politics and culture, family, state, sexuality, economy, and combinations thereof. By the late 1970s, however, some feminist and profeminist critics were suggesting that the concept of ‘patriarchy’ was too monolithic, ahistorical, biologically determined, and dismissive of women’s resistance and agency.

The two broad sets of critiques around masculinity/male sex role and patriarchy in many ways laid the conceptual and political foundations for a more differentiated approach to masculinities. Building on critiques of both sex role theory and deterministic social structural accounts, social constructionist perspectives highlighting complexities of men’s social power, of different scales and scopes, have emerged. In debates on masculinities the work of Raewyn Connell and colleagues (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 1995) has been central, framed in relation to theorizing patriarchal relations, with the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” seen as a political category, an aspiration never to be fulfilled. This thinking developed from research on the relations of patriarchy and capitalism, the reproduction of class and other inequalities in education and schooling, conceptualizations of body and practice, and derived inspiration from gay and some queer scholarship that critiqued heteronormativity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The hegemony at issue in relation to masculinities is hegemony in the patriarchal system of gender relations.

The first substantial discussion of the idea of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ was in the paper “Men’s bodies”, originally published in 1979, and republished in 1983 (Connell, 1983). It discussed the social construction of the body in boys’ and adult men’s bodily practices. In discussing “the physical sense of maleness”, Connell marks out the importance of sport as “the central experience of the school years for many boys” (1983, p. 18), emphasizing the practices and experiences of taking and occupying space, holding bodily tension, skill, size, power, force, strength, physical development, and sexuality. In addressing the bodies of adult men, the differential importance of physicality within work, sexuality, and fatherhood were noted. Psychological and social dynamics of masculinity were foregrounded, integrating psychodynamics in analysis of patriarchal relations. Connell stressed that “the embedding of masculinity in the body is very much a social process, full of tensions and contradiction; that even physical masculinity is historical, rather than a biological fact. ... constantly in process, constantly being constituted in actions and relations, constantly implicated in historical change.” (p. 30). Later, Connell (1995, p. 77) went on to define hegemonic masculinity as “... the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.”

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In identifying forms of domination by men, of women and of groups of men categorized as “subordinate” or “marginalized”, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been notably successful, with many theoretical, empirical, and policy applications (see Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Among the most significant has been Messerschmidt’s (1993, 1997) work on masculinities, crime, and violence. Increasingly, different masculinities have been interrogated not as singular, but plural – as in hegemonic, complicit, subordinated, and marginalized masculinities. Here, complicit masculinity refers to masculinity practices whereby men benefit from the social dominance of men, while not actively seeking to oppress women; subordinated masculinity refers to masculinity practices that are subordinated by virtue of gender and/or sexual positioning, identity or expression, for example, gay masculinity; marginalized masculinity refers to practices in which the gender order interacts with other social orders, especially socio-economic, ethnic, and racialized order, as, for example, with black masculinities.

Much work has emphasized multiple masculinities both as ways of being men and as forms of men’s collective and individual practices. There has been strong emphasis on interconnections of gender with other social divisions, including age, class, disability, ethnicity, nationality, racialization, and sexuality. For example, relations of gender and class can mean different class-based masculinities both challenge and reproduce gender relations among men, with both cooperative and conflictual relations between men, and between women, men, and further genders (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013). Such relations are complicated by contradictions and resistances: intrapersonally, interpersonally, collectively, structurally. Much empirical research on men and masculinities has been produced within the global North. However, increasingly non-Western and global perspectives have become significant, as reflected in rethinking hegemonic masculinities in relation to global capitalism, and questions of geography, place, and space (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

To summarize, some of the key features of the framework developed by Connell and colleagues for examining masculinities that have become much more mainstream are as follows. First, the framework builds upon the critique of sex role theory (e.g., as theoretically inconsistent and not dealing with power relations sufficiently), moving to the use of a power-laden, plural notion of masculinities, and recognizing social structures rather than an individualized concept of masculinity. This places as central the insights of feminist, gay/queer scholarship, and sexual hierarchies more generally, including relations between men and women, and between men. More specifically, the distinctions made between hegemonic, complicit, subordinated, and marginalized masculinities operate at different levels of analysis, notably, institutional/social, interpersonal, and intrapsychic (psychodynamics) aspects of masculinities. In addition, this framework emphasizes transformations and social change; contradictions, ambivalences, and at times resistances; intersections of gender/masculinity with other social divisions; and geopolitical locationality.

Having outlined a major and dominant approach to masculinities (plural), as opposed to masculinity, male, or masculine (singular), it must be emphasized that the term, masculinities, has been used in many, sometimes very different, ways; this can be a conceptual and empirical difficulty (Clatterbaugh, 1998). The concepts of masculinities and specifically hegemonic masculinity have assisted researchers, activists, commentators, and policy-makers in having a conversation about “something”, but not always about the same

thing. Definitions and usages of terms have varied, and not all usages are consistent with the masculinities framework outlined here.

Debates on masculinities have raised many more general questions and critiques. These include the dangers of possible idealism and relativism; uncertain connections between cultural representations, everyday practices, and institutional structures; the relations between contrasting and dominating ways of men, notably tough/aggressive/violent, on one hand, and respectable/corporate/controlling of resources, on the other; the implications of broad-based historical, (de/post)colonial and transnational critiques; and the impact of queer, trans and non-binary critiques, as around heteronormative dichotomies. These multiple critiques also provide grounds for deconstruction of the taken-for-granted category of 'men'. In noting such questions (Demetriou, 2001; Hearn, 1996; Howson, 2006; MacInnes, 1998; McMahon, 1993; Moller, 2007; Schippers, 2007), we recognize the need for specification in terminology on masculinities, such as between psychodynamics, practices, structures, discourses, and identities, as well as an openness to taking on board diverse theoretical approaches.

Further Psychological Threads

As noted, psychoanalytic approaches – of different kinds – have been influential in both the early development of theorizing masculinity, and more critical approaches to masculinities. In the UK and elsewhere, object relations theory (following Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott) became influential by the 1980s (Frosh, 1994; Metcalf & Humphries, 1985). This was partly linked to moves from group-based consciousness-raising to feminist therapy, (pro)feminist group therapy, and individual psychoanalytic work. An insightful commentary on these issues was Ian Craib's (1987) discussion of the contrast between Nancy Chodorow's (1978) model of masculinity, which tended to emphasize its "bullying", over-compensatory nature, with an over developed superego, against Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach's (1983) version of more "fragile" and under-developed masculinity.

Meanwhile, consciousness-raising and materialist analysis (MacKinnon, 1978), rather than psychoanalysis, were evident influences in much writing on men and masculinities. Consciousness-raising has influenced analysis of men's relations to patriarchy, particularly the critique of Marxism through materialist critique and its neglect of reproduction in favor of production (Hearn, 1987), collective memory work (Pease, 2000), and critical life history work (Jackson, 1990). The *critical* auto/biographical turn represents another strand of theorizing on men and masculinities following the logics of consciousness-raising. In epistemological terms, such approaches raise questions of how men's/male subjectivities may be construed and reproduced as "objectivity", despite the historical and political situatedness of knowledges.

Poststructuralist, Discursive, And Psycho-Discursive Critiques

Another major influence, from the late 1980s, on the construction of men's selves, identities, and subjectivities has come from feminist poststructuralist, ethnographic, and discourse analyses of men's talk and self-(re)presentations, providing close-grained descriptions of multiple, internally complex masculinities. Some of these could be labeled critical discourse analysis, others more psychoanalytical-orientated discourse analysis. These represent both development and critique of the masculinities framework as developed initially by Connell and colleagues.

Margaret Wetherell and Nigel Edley (1999), striving to understand how norms are taken up, enacted, and negotiated in men's lives, identified three specific imaginary positions and psycho-discursive practices in negotiating hegemonic masculinity and identification with the masculine positions: heroic, "ordinary", and rebellious. The first in fact conforms more closely to Connell and colleagues' notion of complicit masculinity: "... it could be read as an attempt to actually *instantiate* hegemonic masculinity since, here, men align themselves strongly with conventional ideals" (emphasis in original) (p. 340). The second distances itself from certain conventional or ideal notions of the masculine; instead "ordinariness of the self; the self as normal, moderate or average" (p. 343) is emphasized. The third is characterized by its unconventionality, with the imaginary position involving flouting social expectations. With all these self-positionings, especially the last two, ambiguity and subtlety, even contradiction, are present in self-constructions of masculinity, hegemonic or not. Indeed, one feature of the hegemonic may be its elusiveness: the difficulty of reducing it to a set of fixed positions and practices (Connell, 2001; Speer, 2005).

Key interventions in these debates include Tony Jefferson's (1994) explication of psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and discourse analysis in theorizing masculine subjectivity – clearly influenced by Wendy Hollway's (1989) writing and precursor to their joint work. Since the late 1980s, Jefferson has written, within the field of criminology, on the need to go beyond what he calls "the social break with orthodoxy: power and multiple masculinities" (2005, p. 217-218). Rather, he has favored feminist poststructuralist engagements with feminist psychoanalytical theorizing: "the psychoanalytic break with orthodoxy: contradictory subjectivities and the social." (pp. 218-219). Arguing that Connell has not realized her project of "grasp[ing] the structure of personality and the complexities of desire at the same time as the structuring of social relations, with their contradictions and dynamisms" (Connell, 1995, p. 20-21), Jefferson has made a clear distinction between "the social break with orthodoxy: power and multiple masculinities" and "the psychoanalytic break with orthodoxy: contradictory subjectivities and the social." Accordingly, he placed himself against accounts of crime founded in more structuralist analysis and the accomplishment of gender in social practice, notably those of James Messerschmidt (1993; 1997), and those which he characterizes as of "a purely discursive turn" (Collier, 1998) which may be interpreted as playing down social structures. He re-emphasizes why it is *particular* men that do particular crimes, via pre-discursive psychodynamics that are located more deeply in the body, albeit socially constructed, and the need to acknowledge contradictory subjectivities of individuals within social contexts. This combination of psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and discourse analysis employed by Jefferson has similarities to the combined or composite theoretical perspectives used in some media and cultural analyses (e.g., Nixon, 1997).

The example above illustrates wider moves towards accounts of men and masculinities that span macro-micro, structure-agency, and material-discursive analyses (Bourdieu, 2001; Chambers, 2005; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003; Hearn, 2014). Indeed, distinctions between more micro, post-structuralist and more macro, structuralist, or materialist critiques around men and masculinities are not always so clearcut (Speer, 2001, p. 111; Wetherell & Edley, 1999).

Working Across Boundaries: Material-Discursive Analyses

Over the last 20 years, many further perspectives have gained ground in CSMM, including: de/postcolonial, critical race, body, violence, queer, transgender, posthuman, new materialist, affect, science and technology studies (STS), studies of information and communication

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technologies (ICTs), and ecological/environmental studies. Many of these moves can be understood as part of material-discursive analysis, which is a type of analysis which considers the institutional, structural, societal, material, and discursive contexts and constitutions of men's practices and masculinities. Many of these developments have paralleled broader feminist debates, not least because of the strong presence of feminist scholars in CSMM.

Working across the material-discursive boundary has also become increasingly important, indeed obvious, in comparative, global, transnational, and de/postcolonial research and analyses (Hearn & Pringle, 2006; Hearn et al., 2015; Ratele, 2014, 2016). Such approaches make clear the diverse historical social structures operating transnationally between and across societies and national and regional levels, whilst connections are made to levels of individual psychology, identity, and practice. These matters are placed within geopolitical change, such as around the environment, globalization, and neoliberalism (Enarson & Pease, 2016; Garlick, 2016). Intersections of social divisions have been very important in theorizing within critical race studies, postcolonialism, transnational studies, and kindred fields (Morrell & Swart, 2005; Ouzgane & Coleman, 1998; Ouzgane & Morrell, 2005; Pease & Pringle, 2002; Ruspini et al., 2011). Men and masculinities are formed societally and transsocietally across trans(national)patriarchies (Hearn, 2015). Examples here are the impact of history, geography, and social, cultural, and discursive dynamics on experiences and constructions of migration and refugees, racism, nationalism and xenophobia, and transnational popular culture online/offline.

We now turn to this interplay of the material and the discursive, the material-discursive, by way of two more specific, contrasting contemporary developments: first, towards more egalitarian masculinities, and, second, towards more inegalitarian masculinities.

Two Contrasting Contemporary Developments

“New”, Egalitarian Masculinities And Masculine Positions

Parallel to imageries of men as hard, competitive, rational, unemotional, and violent, other imageries appear. Various scholars have in recent years indicated a “softening” of masculinity (Anderson, 2009; Forrest, 2010; Roberts, 2013). The empirical support in Western contexts for this has been based on men's and boys' perceived increasing comfort with displays of physical tactility with other men, media images of fathers active in childcare, and men who define masculinity in terms of “showing” emotions previously theorized as antithetical to Western constructs of masculinity. Scholars have sought to capture developments in how masculine positions are performed and formulated using terms such as “new”, “egalitarian”, “alternative”, “caring”, “inclusive”, “nondominant”, “hybrid” or “postfeminist” men or masculinities (Beynon, 2002; Gill, 2014; Hanlon, 2012; McCormack & Anderson, 2010). What these diverse scholars attempt to capture are changes in expectations, ideals, and to some extent practices in, for example, family life and personal relationships (Goedecke, 2022; Lupton and Barclay, 1997; McQueen, 2017), along with changes in how men are represented (Becker, 2014; Nixon, 1997) and men's views on equality and homophobia (Barrett, 2013; Bridges & Pascoe, 2016).

Those emphasizing change have not necessarily advocated a wholesale rejection of patriarchal norms but rather “a co-existence of persistence and change ... [leading] contemporary masculinity to be somewhat attenuated or softened” (Roberts, 2013, p. 672), but the general explanation offered is a notion of change from “worse” to “better”. Other scholars are more sceptical on how far such practices represent “change”, and are instead critical of a depoliticized tendency to argue for historical novelty (de Boise, 2015; de Boise & Chapter for: Eileen Zurbriggen and Rose Capdevila, editors, *The Palgrave Handbook of Psychology, Power and Gender*, Palgrave Macmillan.

Hearn, 2017; O'Neill, 2015). Understanding power as normative and productive, ever-changing and adaptable (Foucault, 1976), it follows that even “new” and “alternative” positions and behaviors that do not overtly oppress, forbid, or violate must be scrutinized as expressions and products of power.

“New” masculine positions must thus be discussed critically to examine whether they indicate actual change in gendered and other power relations or whether such changes are superficial and are merely ways to make existing gendered power relations more legitimate. Such notions of “new” men have been analyzed as delineated, typically by gaining meaning from being compared to “old” men, associated with tradition, patriarchy, and authority. Indeed, the idea of the “new man” has existed in some form since at least the 1700s, often invoked during periods of social change without necessarily changing uneven distributions of economic or political power (Kimmel, 1987). “New” or egalitarian positions, seen by some as enlightened, modern, and progressive, involve construing other(ed) positions as lesser: a process often referring to divisions along lines of class and race.

Such processes of projecting oppressiveness onto othered groups have been noted by Australian, European, and US researchers (Barrett, 2013; Bridges & Pascoe, 2016; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Messner, 1994; Nordberg, 2005). Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Michael Messner (1994) critically discuss the “new man” in the US context and argue that he is produced through differentiation with, for example, Mexican immigrant men, a distinction built on racist and classist biases and obscuring of class, race, and gender privileges. The creation of new men should, they argue, be viewed as “strategies to reconstruct hegemonic masculinity by projecting aggression, domination, and misogyny onto subordinate groups of men” (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Messner, 1994, p. 215).

Drawing similar conclusions about anti-homophobic statements among Australian men, Timothy Barrett (2013, p. 71) nevertheless points out that rejections of homophobic positions and behaviors “have a political significance at the level of stated attitude”. Changes in opinions and attitudes, such as Barrett’s interviewees’ wish to position themselves as “tolerant” of homosexuality, are not meaningless, but their significance is unclear, and changes in practice are more difficult to find. This has also been discussed in research about fathering, where “new” fatherhood ideals have been shown to proliferate, especially in the middle-classes in the Western world, but where most of the hard, repetitive, thankless work of parenting still falls to mothers.

These debates are mirrored in those concerning men and feminism. Men’s (relations to) feminism have been described as “oxymoronic” (Kahane, 1998, p. 214) and “wretched and intractable” (Nelson, 1987, p. 153). Yet, there are multiple examples, historical and contemporary, of men opposing their own gendered privileges and supporting the case of feminist women, and Bob Pease (2000) suggests that men are not only able but obliged to contribute to feminist analyses. Two often-discussed problems are: men’s gains from patriarchy, and their lack of experience needed to formulate feminist thought. Men gain power and advantages from living in a patriarchal society, by virtue of the “patriarchal dividend” (Connell, 2005). Denouncing this – in an absolute way – is only partly possible, as it is given by others reading the person as a man, and the status that accrues, as well as how the individual behaves. Even feminist men gain from being men, which might undermine their feminism. However, pluralist accounts of men show that the patriarchal dividend is unequally distributed among men, as from various racialized and classed groups, which

complicates the argument. Also, patriarchal dividends from being a man in patriarchal society are accompanied by uneven costs, such as health problems, ineptitude in relationships, violence, and incarceration, according to class and racialization, for example. In this view, men's feminism becomes less of an oxymoron, as feminism provides theories and methods for men to confront certain undesirable realities.

Some feminists, emphasizing experience as the base for feminist knowledge and positions, argue that men as a group lack the experiences of gendered subordination, exploitation, and sexual threat and violence that form the base of any feminist consciousness. The centering of experience is important to the evolution of feminist theorizing, knowledge, and analyses of the radical feminist movement but also to feminist epistemologies, which have often discussed women's standpoints as central to feminist thought. However, as Harding (1998) points out, experience is an important source of knowledge but not a short-cut that automatically leads to understanding. Feminist epistemologies hold potential of learning from and listening to others' experiences. This should theoretically make it possible for men to learn from others' experiences and produce feminist knowledge, through strenuous work.

The growth of intersectional and queer theorizing during the 1980s and 1990s, along with poststructuralist gender theories, has complicated many of these arguments. As Cary Nelson points out, discussing "men's" relations to "feminism", "appears to fix[ate] [...] relationships that are plurally and unstably constituted and immensely contextual" (1987, p. 153). Pease argues that poststructuralist understandings and tools, such as developing alternative discourses about what it means to be a man, how to relate to sexuality and to women, may assist in constructing new masculine positions. The question of whether changing gender relations is in men's interests will have to be reformulated; he suggests men's interests are themselves formulated within patriarchal discourses, and that men can reposition themselves and formulate their interests differently (Pease, 2000, p. 142). Poststructuralist perspectives emphasize differences between men along lines of race, sexuality, and class, as well as problematizing taken-for-granted connections between male, masculine, masculinity, and men (Halberstam, 1998), that is, meanings of masculinity may change when not performed by cis men. While such masculine performances may undermine normative articulations of masculinity as well as gendered power relations, they could also reproduce connections between masculinity and power (Nguyen, 2008). This renders arguments about men's positions, costs, gains, and experiences more complex still.

Studying "new" or feminist men or masculine positions is an interesting but complex endeavor. Rhetorical allegiance to feminist or egalitarian values may rely on distinctions between different groups of men, which need to be deconstructed and whose political, material and discursive consequences need to be studied in themselves (Bridges & Pascoe, 2016; Nordberg, 2005). Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner (1994) propose that analyses of masculinities should start in the lives of subordinated groups of men. Such a *modus operandi* would mean that research would be conducted using new groups of men's lives as points of departure, that intersections would automatically be the focus of the research, and that such a focus would be less about lifestyles and instead concern power and politics.

Angry White Men? Alt-Right, Incels, And Anti-Feminists

In direct contrast to the notion of softening masculinity, recent years have seen increased use of the notion of "toxic masculinity", even if, like notions of role, the term does not in itself highlight how masculinity needs to be understood as formed in gender power relations.

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Contemporary media and policy debates around masculinity have often been related to changes in economy, labor markets, loss of or threat to entitlement, and even feelings of powerlessness, alongside positionings of power. Such themes have been offered as an explanation for the rise of the far-right in global Northern countries (Ging, 2019; Gotell & Dutton, 2016; Grant & MacDonald, 2020; Kelly, 2017), as well as a more general resurgence of misogynistic, masculinist, and anti-feminist movements.

Attention has focused particularly on participation in the so-called “Alt” Right movement, beginning around 2012, and tending to attract young, white, relatively affluent men from both Anglophone and non-Anglophone nations. Their most visible manifestation has been the “tiki-torch” marches in the US in 2017, peaking after the death of anti-fascist protestor Heather Heyer at a counter protest in Charlottesville the same year. Here, white men in their late 20s to 40s visibly made up the core of protestors, as well as media spokespeople. The Alt-Right is xenophobic and anti-feminist, with strong links to white nationalist movements. Its popularity has generally been attributed to the architecture of user-generated content as part of Web 2.0 and the “culture wars” backlash against a perceived political correctness (PC) which President Trump successfully harnessed during the 2016 US election (Winter & Mondon, 2020). As Nagle (2017) argues, the appeal of the Alt-Right is indebted to gaming culture and similar contexts where young men and boys are prevalent. Indeed, one of the first orchestrated campaigns linked to the emergence of the Alt-Right was directed against two prominent feminist gamers: the 2012 “gamergate” movement. The term “manosphere”, which has supported the Alt-Right’s development, has been used to capture the essence of online spaces which are so vitriolically misogynist they become largely the preserve of men (Ging, 2019).

It is appealing to frame young men’s ideas of being inherently subversive through their rejection of a more general cultural zeitgeist against “PC culture”, as an anti-feminist backlash (Faludi, 1992) indebted to the rise of Web 2.0. However, younger men tend to be more drawn, quantitatively, to radical political movements of almost every shape (Immerfall, 1998; Messner, 1997), and white nationalist groups attract men in far greater numbers than women. Xenophobic and racist movements have often increased during economic crises (Mellström, 2016) and far-right movements have always had direct links with a patriarchal conservatism and essentialist notions of gender. This means that there is often a good deal of overlap between anti-feminist and far-right movements by virtue of the types of behaviors that fascist movements emphasize (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2012). Empirical studies, based on big-data, have shown significant overlap in the users of anti-feminist and white nationalist communities (Horta Ribeiro et al., 2020; Mamié et al., 2021) as well as the importance of essentialist ideas of masculinity on white nationalist forums (Sunderland, 2022).

Far-right movements have often made recourse to an idea of some “eternal masculine” (Ferber, 2000) whereby the idea of strength as a form of moral right, indelibly linked to masculinity, is desirable as a male character trait (Mosse, 1996). By extension, essentialist beliefs around the inherent immutability of masculine and feminine characteristics entail notions that being able to physically “protect” women (often as wife or mother) is what men should strive for. This encompasses notions of hierarchies between men dependent on their relationship to heterosexual reproduction and physical strength, most clearly in the language of “alpha” and “beta” males in their web-fora (Ging, 2019); everyone in Alt-Right circles wants to be, or claims to be, alpha male. Such individuals tend to prioritize group dominance

behaviors and espouse notions of demographic threat to white populations (Forscher & Kteily, 2020).

To this end, the explanations for the popularity of the Alt-Right amongst young men are no different from theories about men's attraction to previous far-right incarnations. This suggests that technologically deterministic arguments about social media as the main driver behind the popularity of the current far right are wanting. The current incarnation invokes many of the same ideas as Mythopoetic and Promise Keeper movements of the 1990s (de Boise, 2023) which plays off of broader forms of cultural misogyny. As Faludi (1992) noted, visible gains made by feminist movements are often met with a rise in counter-progressive tendencies. However, against economic determinism, it should be noted that anti-feminist movements have existed in some form since the early 1900s and their recent resurgence as a global political force has occurred across the world (Chowdhury, 2014; Johansson & Lilja, 2013; Wojnicka, 2016) rather than only where the 2007/2008 global recession hit hardest. Transnational cultural factors surrounding notions of masculinity undoubtedly in part shape the form that Alt-Right politics take and its success amongst young men at this point in time. In this respect, the specific historical conditions which have seen the increased visibility of feminist arguments online at a time of profound technological change where male-dominated subcultures have flourished online (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016), should be taken into account.

However, whilst conservative “culture warriors” and anti-feminist tendencies have a long history, incel (“involuntarily celibate”) subcultures represent a contemporary online manifestation of misogynistic violence not easily explained by concepts of patriarchy or hegemonic masculinity alone. Incel-subcultures have been defined largely through a self-belief that they are on the lowest rungs of any imaginary sexual hierarchy and embrace an inward-directed self-loathing at their perceived inability to fulfill normative expectations of masculinity (Ging, 2019). This has resulted in self-harm, including suicide, and also violence, specifically towards women (Grant & MacDonald, 2020; Scaptura & Boyle, 2020). Such online communities have exacerbated problems of self-harm and suicide more prevalent amongst men in many societies.

The concept of “aggrieved entitlement” (Kimmel, 2013) has sought to explain the motivations of white men in particular in participating in white nationalist groups in the 21st century. Young men's tendency to become involved in “identitarian” movements is explained as stemming from notions of socialized privilege that are implicitly an extension of patriarchal norms. This suggests that “masculinity” is not a structural position-taking at all but operates as an imaginary construct which leads to feelings of rage stemming from an ideal that becomes an obstacle to personal fulfillment. Again, notions of masculinity, in the singular, as either aggrieved entitlement or “cruel optimism” (Allan, 2018, p. 175) suggest a caricature of how men experience gendered socialization. Whilst incels and the Alt-Right spring from similar worldviews, the way in which they express gendered behaviors are often, though not exclusively, very different.

Crucially, both cultures are similar in their identification of a feminism which they see as having become a dominant ideology and unfairly giving women more sexual freedom, control, and choice. They also divide men into “alpha” and “beta” subcategories (incels refer to alphas as chads) and the rise of both cultures can be attributed to belonging to the same user-spaces such as 4Chan and 8Chan. They differ inasmuch as, despite popular opinion, incels appear to span different racial groups and political persuasions¹ whereas Alt Right

adherents are more deeply steeped in white nationalist and right-wing ideologies (Hawley, 2017). Furthermore, incels self-identify as “beta males” and often emphasize their lack of sexual success as related to their own weakness in the face of a society which privileges strength. Alt-Right proponents, by contrast, identify as dominant and treat society as privileging weakness as a result of feminism.

These differences speak to one particularly important issue in the face of the current anti-feminist and misogynist backlash; namely the way that online misogynist, Alt Right, and incel cultures use psychological arguments and the genuine social problem of taking men’s mental health seriously as a tool to appeal to young men especially. Jordan Peterson, a clinical psychologist from Canada, whose bestselling *12 Rules for Life* became a touchstone within the Alt-Right and amongst young men generally, blends self-help advice with anti-feminist and conservative polemic. In part, its success can be located in the more general neoliberal imperative which emphasizes mastery over one’s emotional life as a project for which the individual is solely responsible (see Illouz, 2007). However, the book also draws from Jungian notions, which treat order as masculine and chaos as feminine (Peterson, 2018) whilst arguing for men to reclaim the former. In this respect, his method builds off of similar tactics to those adopted by Mythopoetic men’s movement writers such as Robert Bly, in appealing to the notion of strength and domination as inherently masculine virtues whilst dividing the human psyche between masculine and feminine components (de Boise, 2023). Whilst the book clearly resonated due to its simple self-help guidance (e.g., treat yourself as you would advise others to do), it lays the blame for what Peterson argues is men’s denigration and men’s mental health problems generally, at the feet of left-wing liberalism, feminism, and increasing cultural “decadence”.

Similarly, more recently, social media influencer Andrew Tate’s popularity amongst young men cannot only be explained in terms of his extreme misogyny, which is well-documented, but must be understood through the perspectives of his followers as focusing on men’s mental health issues (Ging, 2023). Tate’s arguments, as with Peterson, rely on the same kind of combination of firmly gendered, rationalist solutions – self-mastery through the application of will alone – with quasi-sociological assertions about how men are disadvantaged in society because they do not feel powerful. These arguments appeal because they provide easy targets and straightforward solutions. Nevertheless, they do a huge disservice to men in their denigration of the gains made in addressing men’s mental health as a result of feminism, as well as neglecting the disproportionate power and wealth accumulated by men worldwide.

Concluding Discussion

Given these emergent, clearly gendered, forms of misogynistic and white nationalist violence, tendencies toward explaining a singular masculinity or various masculinities as either “softening” or “toxic”, or as more egalitarian or definitely not so, may create some confusion. How can men be becoming “softer” according to some, and, on the other hand, increasingly attracted to more extremist ideologies? The co-existence of both discourses speaks more broadly to theoretical and conceptual issues in how to define masculinity in the singular, namely, that multiple contradictory ideas about what masculinity is and how men should behave may exist in a given society. This is indeed a central tenet of hegemonic masculinity.

Yet against hegemonic masculinity theory, these diverse supposedly “softer” or toxic behavioral patterns do not necessarily map neatly onto structural inequalities or intersections of class, race, or sexuality; arguably, how men are labelled by such intersections is

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increasingly fragmented in academic discourse and public perceptions. Theories which pin down masculinity into neat, discrete traits, which offer taxonomies of different types of masculinities in the plural, or resort to apolitical discussions of archetypes, are inadequate in helping to think through complex intersections of power and privilege. Whilst masculinity may operate as an imaginary discursive construct which may motivate some men's attachment to certain ways of behaving, it is less useful as a way of explaining empirically why men do what they do.

In this case, it is more useful to think of the "hegemony of men" (or even *hegemonies*) (Hearn, 2004, 2012) rather than only hegemonic masculinity or to proclaim a wholesale or one-way shift in the architecture of some cohesive historic bloc. The social category of "men" is far more hegemonic than a particular form of masculinity, hegemonic or not. Focusing more explicitly on the hegemony of men seeks to address the double complexity that men are both a social category formed by the gender system, and dominant collective and individual agents of social practices. Critique by way of examination of the hegemony of men can bring together feminist materialist theory and cultural deconstructive queer theory, as well as modernist theories of hegemony and ideology, and poststructuralist discourse theory.

To conclude, it is necessary to both name men as men, as both a powerful societal structural reality and a social category, and de-naturalize and deconstruct men, to make the familiar strange – just as postcolonial theory deconstructs and de-naturalizes the white subject. There can be dangers in focusing primarily or only on masculinities, and de-naturalizing masculinities in such a way that men are re-naturalized. Studies of men and masculinities need to be placed within political, economic, societal, and biological/natural/ecological analysis, while also giving attention to the importance of the psychological, the social psychological, and matters of identity. Thus, the psychological may be contextualized and elaborated in the process of deconstructing men and masculinities, and their material contexts and constitutions.

Note

1. A poll carried out by moderators of incel.co in 2020 found that 55% identified as white caucasian but 45% identified as another racial(ized) category. Though the accuracy of this poll is obviously dubious and cannot be treated as fact, it gives some indication as to ethnic and political diversity. <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/online-poll-results-provide-new-insights-incel-community>

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