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# Reflecting on Men and Social Policy: Contemporary Critical Debates and Implications for Social Policy

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## Abstract

To put 'men' and 'social policy' together may still seem a little strange. Yet there are numerous ways in which social policy is about men, in its formulation, implementation, delivery, and inclusions/exclusions. Different men have variable relations to social policy, and are involved and implicated in social policy in a wide variety of ways, as: users, family members, practitioners, managers, policy-makers, members of social organisations, and so on. Likewise, the explicit gendering and naming of men is uneven in different social policy arenas. This article discusses contemporary debates in Critical Studies on Men – *masculinity and multiple masculinities; hegemonic masculinity and the hegemony of men*; *embodiment*; and *transnationalisation and virtualisation* – and in each case considers their implications for social policy, before some concluding remarks.

**Keywords:** age, embodiment, hegemony, masculinities, transnationalisation, violence

## Preamble …

> … men in different parts of the world are spending vast amounts of money trying to kill each other, whilst a large proportion of the world's population (mostly, but not exclusively women and children) are allowed to starve to death. Amnesty International [1991] reports the increasing use of rape of women and children throughout the world as a common instrument of oppression ... Male violence, sexual or otherwise, is not the unusual behaviour of a few "odd" individuals, neither is it an expression of overwhelming biological urges: it is a product of the social world in which we live. (Cowburn et al., 1992)

> The advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men are a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and should not be seen in isolation as a women's issue. ... The [1995] Platform for Action emphasises that women share common concerns that can be addressed only by working together and in partnership with men towards the common goal of gender equality around the world. (United Nations, 2001)

In recent years there has been a major expansion of studies on men and masculinities. While not playing down differences between traditions in studying men, the broad critical approach to men and masculinities of recent years can be characterised by:

- an *explicit and specific focus* on men and masculinities;
- taking account of *feminist, gay, and other critical gender scholarship*;
- recognising men and masculinities as *explicitly gendered*;
- understanding men and masculinities as *socially constructed, produced, and reproduced*, rather than as somehow just "naturally" one way or another;
- seeing men and masculinities as *variable and changing* across time (history) and space (culture), within societies, through life courses and biographies;
- emphasising men's relations, albeit differentially, to *gendered power*;

- spanning both the *material and the discursive*;
- interrogating *intersections of gender with other social divisions* in constructions of men and masculinities.

In this article I reflect on contemporary critical debates on men and masculinities over and their implications for social policy. The relations of men and social policy involve complex interplay of research, politics, policy and practice. My own early ventures in this terrain were in the *Bulletin on Social Policy* and on professionalisation of welfare (Hearn, 1980, 1982). The first major UK book was Pringle's *Men, Masculinities and Social Welfare* published in 1995, soon followed by *Men, Gender Relations and Welfare* (Popay et al., 1998), with the review 'The welfare of men?' (Hearn, 1998c). Key contributions on men, both as practitioners and as service users, include *Men and Social Work* (Christie, 2001) and *Working with Men in Health and Social Care* (Featherstone et al., 2007). My own approach argues for profeminist Critical Studies on Men that are interdisciplinary, historical, transnational, cultural, relational, materialist, deconstructive, anti-essentialist (Hearn, 1997; Hearn and Pringle, 2006a).

Focusing on men, and indeed boys, in social policy debate has become more popular in recent years, including their relations to education, violence, health, and social exclusion. In some ways this is not anything new, and not necessarily in itself linked to any radical project of gender equality, social change and transformation. There have long been state policies on men and masculinity, obviously in conscription and crime, but also in areas such as fatherhood and marriage. What is newer is the explicit *naming* of men in social policy. This has been directed mainly towards men and boys as recipients of social policy, to some extent towards men as practitioners and activists, much less towards men as social policy managers. There have been a wide range of governmental initiatives on men, though typically ambiguous in relation to (pro)feminism.[1] The UK government Home Office has recently provided limited finances to the Coalition on Men and Boys (f.c.) (comprising several leading NGOs working in this field) for a policy report on men and masculinities. Addressing social policy around men and masculinities is an important matter.

**Debate #1. From masculinity to multiple masculinities**
Modern analysis of masculinity can be traced to traditions in anthropology, psychoanalytic psychology, sex difference social psychology and sex role theory. In the 1960s and early 1970s masculinity was understood as an internalised role, identity or (social) psychological disposition, reflecting particular norms or values acquired in socialisation. Such notions were critiqued in the late 1970s and 1980s for obscuring differences between ideals and practices, ignoring which gender assesses which, lack of power perspective, and ethnocentrism (Eichler, 1980). Since the 1980s masculinity scales have been refined in terms of gender orientation and cultural sensitivity (Luyt, 2005). At the same time as sex role theory and m-f scales were being critiqued, in theories of patriarchy men were analysed societally. Different patriarchy theories have emphasised men's structural social relations to women, in biology, reproduction, politics, culture, family, state, sexuality, economy, and combinations thereof. By the late 1970s, however, several feminist critics were suggesting that the concept of 'patriarchy' was monolithic, ahistorical, biologically determined, and dismissive of women's resistance and agency (Beechey, 1979; Rowbotham, 1980).

These critical debates around masculinity/male sex role and patriarchy laid the foundations for a more differentiated approach to masculinities. Building on social psychological and structural accounts, social constructionist perspectives highlighting the complexities of men's social power have been elaborated. Increasingly, different masculinities, especially hegemonic masculinity, are interrogated in the plural. In this, the work of Connell and colleagues (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 1987, 1995) is central and explicitly framed in relation to theorising of patriarchy. In this context, hegemonic masculinity can be seen as an aspiration that can never be fulfilled. Some key features of this framework on masculinities are:

- critique of sex role theory;
- use of a power-laden concept of masculinities;
- emphasis on men's unequal relations to men, as well as to women;
- attention to the implications of gay scholarship and sexual hierarchies;
- distinguishing hegemonic (legitimating patriarchy), complicit (bringing benefit without effort), subordinated (by gender-related relations, for example, gay) and marginalised (by, for example, class or ethnicity) masculinities;
- emphasis on contradictions, and at times resistance(s);
- analysis of institutional/social, interpersonal and intrapsychic aspects;
- exploration of transformations and social change.

Much recent work in the 1990s and 2000s has emphasised multiple masculinities in terms of ways of being men and forms of men's structural, collective and individual practices, their interrelations, and complex interweavings of masculinities, powers, other social statuses, and indeed violences. There has been strong emphasis on interconnections of gender with other social divisions, such as age, class, disability, ethnicity, nationality, racialisation, religion and sexuality. For example, relations of gender and class can mean that different class-based masculinities both challenge and reproduce gender relations among men and between women and men. Masculinities are placed in cooperative and conflictual relations with each other, in, say, class relations, and in terms defined explicitly in relation to gender, such as kinship and sexuality. There may even appear to be a rather rapid move to a new 'critical consensus' in recognising plural masculinities; this, however, would be premature.

There have been many applications of this approach in theoretical, empirical and policy studies (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). The notion of (multiple) masculinities can be applied in social policy in many ways. Different processes and forms of masculinity themselves present problems or challenges for social policy development, for example, around marginalisation, sexuality, violence. Actual or potential social policy user populations and problems are gender structured in terms of differential masculinities, as are social policy responses, for example, in the gendered interplay of 'caring' and 'controlling' professionalised masculinities. There are now policy studies and practice guides about men and masculinities in most of the main social policy areas. Such interrogations typically construct masculinities as variable within, to use Lorber's (2005) terms, either a reformist or resistance (pro)feminism, which aim to move to abolish gender inequality or patriarchy respectively.

*Men's health*
One obvious social policy arena where different masculinities and their effects can be seen is in men's health (Connell et al., 1999). As Meryn and Jadad (2001) note

'Despite having had most of the social determinants of **health** in their favour, men have higher mortality rates for all 15 leading causes of death and a life expectancy about seven years shorter than women's.' (bold in original). In many countries men suffer and die more and at a younger age from cardiovascular diseases, cancer, respiratory diseases, accidents and violence (enacted by other men) than women. Socio-economic factors, qualifications, social status, diet, smoking, alcohol, drug-taking, unsafe sexual practices, suicide, accidents, violence, hereditary factors, as well as occupational hazards, can be important for morbidity and mortality.

In this perspective men's health may be linked to forms of masculinities, such as risk-taking and 'unhealthy' behaviour, and especially so for some younger men. Interestingly, some research finds that men are over-optimistic regarding their own health. To understand, and deal with, the dynamics around health problems of some men there is a need to connect those problems to dominant, or even in some cases oppressive, ways of 'being a man', for instance, an almost 'hypermasculine' unwillingness to take one's health problems seriously and seek help. There are, however, signs of emerging, more complex health discourses and practices amongst some men, in which health awareness is heightened, albeit in an uneasy tension or dialectics with more established masculinities (Pietilä, 2008). Even so, policy priorities still include improving men's health practices, more appropriate use of health services, focusing on the negative effects of men's health problems for women and children, and ensuring that such a focus on men's health does not reduce resources for women's and children's health (Hearn and Kolga, 2006).

**Debate #2. From hegemonic masculinity to the hegemony of men**

The term, masculinities, has been applied in many, sometimes very different and confusing ways. The concept has served for a wide variety of researchers, activists, commentators, journalists and policy-makers to have a conversation about "something", but not always be the same thing. The reformulation of masculinity to masculinities is also not without problems. Over the last 15 years, there has been growing debate on the very concept of masculinities, and specifically hegemonic masculinity. Critiques have come from more micro and poststructuralist approaches (Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Whitehead, 1999, 2002; also *Feminism & Pyschology*, 2001) to more macro materialist approaches. The latter emphasise problems of relativism, with almost infinite permutations of masculinities, if patriarchal contexts are ignored; use as a primary or underlying cause of other effects; tendency towards idealism; neglect of historical, (post)colonial and transnational differences; and reproduction of heterosexual dichotomies (Donaldson, 1993; Hearn and Collinson, 1994; Hearn, 1996, 2004; MacInnes, 1998; Howson, 2006).

*Hegemonic masculinity, its critiques and hegemony*
The concept of hegemony has figured strongly in studies on men, especially through the concept of hegemonic masculinity; however, one might argue that what is more hegemonic than this is the hegemony of men. Hegemony addresses relations of power and ideology, including domination of the 'taken-for-granted', and 'commonsense'. It highlights the importance of consent, even if that is provisional and contingent, and even if that consent is backed by force. Hegemony speaks more to complicity than brutal enforcement. It refers to and reinforces what has been called the "fundamental outlook of society" (Bocock, 1986). Understandings of hegemony need to move away

from the notion of fundamental outlook of a *given 'society'*, nation and the nation-state to the growing importance of the transnational. Hegemony encompasses formation of social groupings, not just their operation and collective action. It invokes assumptions of structure, but is not structuralist.

In elaborating hegemony and rejecting economic determinism, Gramsci (1971) saw political economy in the frame of 1920s Italian Marxism. In his view of hegemony the cultural and intellectual realm had greater political impact than as an effect of economic structure and relations. Hegemony encompassed the range of social arenas – economic, political, cultural – rather than prioritising the economic. Donaldson (1993: 645) summarises key features of hegemony as:

> … about the winning and holding of power and the *formation (and destruction) of social groups* in that process. It is about the ways in which the ruling class establishes and maintains its domination. The ability to impose a definition of the situation, to set the terms in which events are understood and issues discussed, to formulate ideals and define morality is an essential part of the process. Hegemony involves persuasion of the greater part of the population, particularly through the media, and the organization of social institutions in ways that appear "natural," "ordinary," "normal". The state, through punishment for non-conformity, is crucially involved in this negotiation and enforcement. (my emphasis)

The notion of hegemonic masculinity has developed from work on gendered processes within patriarchy (Connell, 1995). This process usage of hegemony has been by no means as popular or as influential as the other usage by Connell and colleagues, in linking hegemony to masculinity. In this, 'hegemony' as one key social process mutates to 'hegemonic' as a descriptor of certain masculinities. In this latter scheme, *forms* of masculinity have been recognised, principally hegemonic masculinity. Sometimes there are references to resistant, protest or ambivalent masculinities. In their 1985 paper Carrigan, Connell and Lee write that hegemony:

> always refers to an historical situation, a set of circumstances in which power is won and held. The construction of hegemony is not a matter of pushing and pulling of ready-formed groupings but is partly a matter of the *formation of these groupings*. To understand the different kinds of masculinity demands an examination of the practices in which hegemony is constituted and contested – in short, the political techniques of the patriarchal social order. (Carrigan et al., 1985, 594) (my emphasis).

One might argue that there is slippage from the formation of these groupings to the understanding of the different forms of masculinity. As noted, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been subject to various qualified critiques in recent years. A range of questions have yet to be clearly answered:

- Is hegemonic masculinity a cultural ideal, cultural representations, everyday practices or institutional structures?
- Can hegemonic masculinity be reduced to a fixed set of practices?
- How do various dominating forms, such as violence and control of resources, interconnect?

- Should one talk of hegemonic masculinities in the plural?
- How does it deal with contradictions, for example, does men's greater involvement in fathering indicate intensification of hegemonic masculinity, or not?
- Does hegemonic masculinity fit detailed empirical studies?
- How does hegemonic masculinity relate to postcolonial or queer critiques?

*Men's violence to known women*
To illustrate some of these complications let us take one of the most obvious social policy problems and the most pervasive human rights violation in the world, namely men's violence to known women (Renzetti et al., 2001). Men perpetrate most such violence, especially planned, repeated, heavy, physically damaging, non-defensive, premeditated, non-retaliatory, and sexualised, as well as most collective, institutional, organised, and military violence, which are also usually interpersonal. It was in my own research on men's violence to known women that I came to realise how the hegemonic masculinity frame did not work well in dealing with the data (Hearn, 1998a, b). While the hegemonic masculinities model has had powerful impacts, its application to men's violence to known women has been subdued. There are several possible reasons for this. In the well-known definition of hegemonic masculinity, "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" (Connell, 1995: 77), the issue of legitimacy is central. Presumably legitimacy can be through formal law, established "custom" or more general ideologies. However, we may ask, regarding men's violence to known women, for whom is that legitimation obtained, and how is this achieved and maintained? This might be from the point of view of more or less powerful men, more or less powerful women. But for legitimacy to 'succeed', it has to be accepted by the (relatively) dispossessed: women, children, less powerful men. And clearly both less powerful and more powerful men in some circumstances use violence against women. Yet analysis of legitimacy and the mechanisms involved is virtually absent from debate on hegemonic masculinity.

Perhaps the very mixing of "the hegemonic" and "masculinity" is a difficulty, even before introducing men's violence to women. What exactly is meant in the adjectival use of "hegemonic" is less than clear in relation to hegemony of the social formation. Hegemonic presumably means having the character of hegemony or contributing to hegemony. Hegemony has moved from a configuration of political-cultural-economic social forces and power, albeit contingent and contested, and to something (intuited, hypothetically) that informs (adjectivally, yet exactly how is unclear) masculinity as configuration of practice or cultural ideal (even if not achievable) that legitimates gender domination. What this means with regard to men's violence to known women is unclear. In addressing such violence, the focus may shift from men's material power in patriarchies to 'masculinities', and the primacy of that which hypothetically legitimates. Though not intended, prioritisation of masculinity may rather easily be *used* in a reformist agenda to let men, even 'non-hegemonic' masculinities, "off the hook" (of responsibility for violence to women). It may diffuse critique of men. Everyone can be "against" hegemonic masculinity, especially if it is a cultural ideal (that is aspired to and does not exist); critiquing men is more delicate. Indeed much policy on 'domestic violence' still fails to name men (Hearn and McKie, 2008).

*The hegemony of men*

Most importantly, the concept of hegemony has generally been employed in too restricted a way. If we are interested in what is hegemonic about gender relation to men and masculinity, then it is 'men' who or which are far more hegemonic than masculinity. Instead, it is time to go back from masculinity to men, to examine the hegemony of men. This involves addressing the hegemony of men – in both senses. 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*. This perspective raises key social processes, regarding:

- hegemonic acceptance of the category of men.
- distinctions and categorisations between different forms of men and men's practices to women, children and other men ("masculinities").
- which men and men's practices – in the media, the state, religion, etc - are most powerful in setting those agendas of those systems of differentiations.
- most widespread, repeated forms of men's practices.
- men's various and variable everyday, "natural(ised)", "ordinary", "normal", most taken-for-granted practices to women, children and other men, and their contradictory, even paradoxical, meanings.
- how women may differentially support certain practices of men, and subordinate other practices of men or ways of being men.
- interrelations between these elements above: relations between 'men's' formation within hegemonic gender orders, that also form 'women', other genders and boys, and men's activity in different ways in (re-)forming hegemonic differentiations among men. (Hearn, 2004).

The hegemony of men is a dialectical formulation, highlighting social essentialism of the gender class of men, yet also critiquing how the taken-for-granted category of men obscures intersectionalities. This raises several issues. First, men are now longer a taken-for-granted base to masculinity, but an object of social critique. This involves *naming men as men* (Hanmer, 1990; Collinson and Hearn, 1994), but not to speak and claim social space *as men* (Stoltenberg, 1989). Naming men as men do not construct masculinities as simply variable within given reformist or resistance (pro)feminism, but seek the abolition of gender as power, including 'men' as a social category of power, within the frame of rebellious (pro)feminism (Lorber, 2005).

Second, what is interest is how in different national or other contexts various areas of social policy are explicitly or implicitly or not named as "about men". This provides a frame for comparative analysis of the social problem and societal problematisation of men and masculinities (Hearn and Pringle, 2006a, b). Such namings of men in social policy look very different from different national viewpoints; in the UK, young men, fatherhood and crime figure strongly in policy; in Finland, 'men's misery', alcohol and mental health. Interestingly, some actions, such as rioting, are rarely understood as gendered, even when performed largely by young men (Power and Tunstall, 1997). In contrast, focused *explicit* policy areas on men include:

- men as breadwinners and 'heads' of family and household;
- fatherhood, paternity and paternity leave;
- family statuses in immigration and nationality;
- gay and transgender issues;

- crimes of sexual violence;
- programmes for men who have been violent to women and children;
- reproductive technology and reproductive rights;
- men's health education programmes (Pringle and Hearn, 2006a: 81).

Third, as noted, in gendering men in social policy it is more usual to focus on policy recipients, while in fact gendering occurs throughout, including in policy design and delivery. Dominant features of the gender order privileging men and men's agendas also apply to governments, policy managers and senior state officials. Gender relations constitute governments and policy-making institutions: policy institutions are, or rather produce, both social policy problems and solutions. In such situations much of how 'men' are or are defined and what men do is dominantly not seen as gendered at all. Much of men's practices in social policy, in policy work, politicking, lobbying and so on is not seen as gendered, as contributing more or less to gender equality, or inequality. They are generally done and perceived as (if they were) 'normal'. They are not usually gender-conscious activity: they "just happen"! Gender-absence in social policy is part of men's gendering (Hanmer and Hearn, 1999).

**Debate #3. From disembodied analysis to lived embodiment**
Gender hegemony is maintained by intersectional relations, as well studied in terms of class, sexuality, ethnicity and racialisation. Indeed the theme of intersectionality is part of the focus in multiple masculinities. Even so, dominant uses of the social category of men have often been restricted by class, ethnicity, racialisation, and sexuality. Less examined still as part of the hegemony of men are: lived embodiment, (*'hierarchy of the social'*); transnationalisation (*'extension of the social'*); and bodily absence (virtuality) (*'form and transformation of the social'*).[2] These neglected issues may appear to be some way from the usual concerns of social policy, but are indeed germane to gendered intersectional welfare. For the remainder of this article, I take up these critiques: first, embodiment, then transnationalisation and virtualisation.

The question of embodiment – the experience of, effects on and social construction of the body – has been unevenly present in developing debates on men and social policy. In one sense, embodiment is always an issue, both in the production and experience of social policy problems, especially around 'bodily integrity'. Interestingly, in the first published use of the term, hegemonic masculinity, by Connell in 1979 in the paper, 'Men's bodies', republished in *Which Way is Up?* in 1983, the focus was on the social construction of the body in boys' and adult men's practices.

*Ageing and older men*
Questions of embodiment and bodily normativity seem less avoidable in policy and practice around (men's) ageing. Though both age and gender are generally understood as grounded in biology, age is seen as less fixed and less dichotomous than gender. Ageism is faced by all, though severity varies between individuals (Calasanti, 2005). Feminist theories have brought gender relations centre stage in studying age and ageing (Hockey and James, 2003; Arber et al., 2004). Gendering ageing means gendering both women's ageing and older women, and men's ageing and older men, and their relationality. Across Europe demographic changes include lower birth rate, increased life expectancy, and ageing of the baby-boomer generation. The European

Commission Green Paper, *Confronting Demographic Change* (2005), estimates future changes in population structure and increases in of older people as follows:

|  | PEOPLE 65-79 | PEOPLE 80+ |
|---|---|---|
| **2005-2010** | +3.4% | +17.1% |
| **2010-2030** | +37.4% | +57.1% |
| **2005-2050** | +44.1% | +180.5% |

Such population ageing is likely to bring greater change in the ageing of men than women, with some closing in gender differences in life expectancy, and impact and social visibility of older older men likely to grow. The numbers of older old men, say in their eighties, are likely to increase proportionately more than those of younger older men in their fifties or sixties. In this situation, various categories of 'old' and 'older' are subject to greater relative social change, the older the age cohort concerned. There may also be greater separation of older men as an age-set, through longer life, geographical mobility, and changes in work and family. Greater recognition of an age-set of the older old may be complicated by composite intersectionalities among older men. Blurring age categories of men – young(er), middle years, old(er) men – may increase, alongside change in older men's activities, consumerism and representation. Dominant ways of being men may become less closely linked to youth, and how younger and middle years men are assumed to be.

In social policy contexts (older) age is a contradictory source of power and disempowerment for men, with intersections ageism and sexism. Hegemonic masculinity is insufficient a theoretical framework for addressing all the complexities of ageing (men): how men may be granted status with ageing but at the same time marginalised is difficult to conceptualise fully within that frame. Working with older men presents contradictions and challenges (Ruxton, 2006). Being an older man may be becoming more open to contestation. The hegemony of men, what it is to be a man, and masculinities, hegemonic or not, are likely to be problematised, with fraility, disability, leakage, dependence, death less hidden. Jackson (2001, 2003) has taken up these themes of older men's loss of bodily control and fragmentation of embodied standpoint knowledge. He advocates "gaining a more precise knowledge of my bodily limits and boundaries. Learning to recognise my body's specific, warning signs when I've been pushing myself too hard. An urgent need for gentleness towards my self." In foregrounding embodiment, broader traditions from phenomenology, sexual difference and queer theory become especially relevant (Hearn and Sandberg, 2008). Older men, like boys and younger men, need 're-enfleshing' (Thomas, 2002), highlighting embodiment and bodily normativity in social policy.

**Debate #4. From nation to transnationalisations and virtualisations**
Social policy and the welfare state have been strongly nation-based. In addition to embodiment, recent applications of hegemony to men and masculinities have neglected the growing importance of the "transnational", relations of hegemony to patriarchy, and the (changing) form of the social, as in the virtual. Limiting patriarchy or hegemony to a *particular* society, nation or culture is increasingly problematic. Debate on hegemony has largely been framed in terms of a given society, yet there is now greater recognition of moves from the "fundamental outlook of society" towards transnational hegemonies. Similarly, the concept of patriarchy, or rather patriarchies, in relation to which hegemony is framed, has largely been nation-based, reflecting

methodological nationalism (Beck, 2000). Global transformations and regional restructurings are part of the changing hegemony of men. Historical shifts to transnational patriarchies or transpatriarchies (Hearn, 2008, 2009) are indicative of complex transnational intersectionalities. Key issues include: transnational corporations' gender-segregated labour forces; almost total dominance of men at top levels of transnational corporate management, military, arms trade and international organisations; masculinisation of capital market trading floors and business media; sexualisation of women in global mass media; internationalisation of sex trade; gender segregation of international sports industries (as listed in a conference presentation by Connell, reported in Esplen and Greig, 2008).

Though most empirical research on men and masculinities is produced in the developed countries, couched within localised "ethnographic moments" (Connell, 1998), global perspectives are increasing significant (Cleaver, 2002; Pease and Pringle, 2001). Social policy though often firmly national in orientation is increasingly transnational. Since the 1995 The Platform for Action adopted at the 4th World Conference on Women, gender issues have been increasingly being taken up in the UN and its various agencies and in transgovernmental policy discussions. In 2003 the UN's Division for the Advancement of Women organised a worldwide online discussion forum and expert meeting in Brasilia on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality in preparation for the 48th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, with the call: "the achievement of gender equality is now clearly seen as a societal responsibility that concerns and should fully engage men as well as women." (Division for the Advancement of Women, United Nations, 2003).

In 2006 the Council of the European Union passed a variety of positive conclusions and recommendations on men and gender equality. This theme was a priority in the 2006 Finnish EU presidency (Varanka et al., 2006). In Europe transnational social policy issues include: EU expansion; conditions of application and accession; migration; and trafficking, including men as consumers.[3] Transnational perspectives raise key questions on what count as the (gendered) boundaries of social policy (see Boulding, 1967). Two arenas that are often neglected in social policy but which seem more obvious in terms of the hegemony of men are: militarism, and sex trade and virtualisation.[4] Both involve large numbers of men, the taking for granted of men, and damage to welfare of women, children and other men.

*Militarism*
Turning first to militarism, there is increasing recognition of the central place of men and masculinities in the collective violence of militarism and war, and the apparent increased use of rape and sexual violence by men in war. To address men's violence necessarily means addressing militarism. To do otherwise is to place militarism outside of violence, and even if unwittingly, condone violence. Interestingly, while policy around 'domestic' and interpersonal violence is well recognised as part of social policy, this is not so for collective, military violence:[5] there are in effect key separations in the social. Military activity is one of the most clearly gendered and clearest examples of the hegemony of men, with or without conscription. Militaries are part of the state and organised in association with political, economic, administrative power in the highest reaches of the state, including policing, security services, foreign policy, and economic interests. They are concerned with both

national offence and defence. They are specifically geared to the ability, actual and potential, to inflict violence and other forms of harm.[6]

Militarism and militaries are the most clearly gendered of government activities. Men are the vast majority of active members of the military, trained to inflict violence and other forms of harm on others, and overwhelmingly dominate higher ranks of military management (Higate, 2002). In war and through militarism individual men, like women and children, may suffer, even be killed, but men's collective structural power may be undiminished, even reinforced (Enloe, 1998; Goldstein, 2001; Moser and Clark, 2001). The impact of the military, and military men and masculinities, upon women, men and children is huge, raising massive welfare concerns. However, there are complications in that, first, the exact connections between men and militarism are various and plural, and, second, these connections should not obscure the significance of women's military activity, including in key servicing or administrative positions.

The UK has a long elaborate history of militarism. Along with France, the UK has fought most international wars since 1946, followed by the US and Soviet Union/Russia (Human Security Centre, 2005).[7] It has been a strong ally of the US which has engaged in many further wars in that period. Spending on militarism worldwide is huge.[8] According to the CIA and Stockholm International Peace Research Institute estimates (*SIPRI Yearbook*, 2008), the UK has the second largest military expenditure in the world, after the US, just above China and France. The UK is probably the second largest spender on military science, engineering and technology. In 2007 the UK became the world's largest arms exporter, according to government figures, overtaking the US which normally leads (Fidler, 2008).

Another social policy issue is the links between militarism and domestic violence (Mercier and Mercier, 2000). There have been some interventions in this arena, for example, the EU DAPHNE project 'Developing best professional practice for reducing sexual abuse and trafficking in militarised areas of peace-time Europe' (http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/funding/2004_2007/daphne/illustrative_cases/illustrative_cases_en/09_military_en.pdf). Other effects of military service include injury and mental health problems, especially after active service. About 10% of UK troops airlifted out of the Iraq war zone between January and October 2003 suffered primarily from psychological problems (Iverson et al., 2005). Reluctance to engage in help-seeking behaviour is one pattern of young veterans (van Staden et al., 2007), as part of difficulties in adjusting to civilian life (Higate, 2001). Up to 8,500 former members of the armed forces are serving sentences in UK prisons. The UK Probation union NAPO said its figures suggested about one in 11 prisoners have been in the armed forces (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/wales/7589953.stm). Soldiers aged under 20 are 1.7 times more likely to kill themselves than civilians of the same age, according to figures from a 2004 Ministry of Defence Report (Hall, 2004).

*Sex trade and ICTs*
Virtualisation processes, through information and communication technologies (ICTs), are means of reinforcing and contesting hegemony in terms of bodily presence/absence of men. They create potential for extensions and reinforcements of the hegemony of men, yet may also make some men and women dispensable. This is clear in the sex trade. ICTs have been hugely successful in making historical transformations in promotion of pornography, trafficking and sexual exploitation of

women, supplying encyclopaedic information on prostitution, and (re)organising sex trade operations (Hearn and Parkin, 2001). The 1990s were a period of major historical change in the sex trade: the annual number of hardcore pornographic video rentals rose from 79 million to 759 million in the US 1985-2001; in 1997 there were about 22,000 websites with free-of-charge pornographic content, by 2000 about 280,000 (Hughes, 2002). Live interactive videoconferencing facilitate buying live sex shows, in which the man can direct the show in some cases, with real time global communication possible. Pornographers are leaders in developing Internet privacy and secure payment. DVDs increase possibilities for videos with scenes shot from multiple angles, so the (man) viewer can choose that preferred; viewers can interact similarly to video games, giving the man a 'more active' role. The 'real'/bodily and the 'representational'/textual converge; sexual commodification proceeds apace.

ICTs not only act as media for sexualities and sexualised violences but increasingly can be constitutive of them; they can in effect reconstitute sexualities, and may do so in new ways in the future. Sex is increasingly constructed in the context of disembodied social institutions, the state and large corporations, their laws, controls and ideologies. However, sexual activity, without any payment, on one's own or with another or others, is possible in many embodied forms in the privacy of 'one's own home'. The same or similar sexual practices can be enacted forcibly or non-forcibly, with or without payment (as in 'DIY' Web pornography). These possibilities are ever more at hand, are likely to increase, and exert effects on what sexuality *is*. Sexual categories are likely to become defined, even blurred, in complex ways. Interplays of virtualities and surveillances, and changes around (cyber)sexualities mediated by new technologies, constitute historical changes with contradictory implications for men and women (Hearn, 2006). These are likely to bring new forms of virtual neo-colonial exploitation alongside direct non-virtual neo-colonialisms, as in use of ICTs to facilitate global sex trade. The sex trade is a clear social policy issue in constructing men's sexualities and violences, and severely limiting possibilities of moving towards gender equality in both social policy and society (Jeffreys, 2008).

**Concluding remarks**

In this article I have reflected on contemporary critical debates on men and their social policy implications. Understanding men and social policy is assisted by a concept like hegemony that engages with both force and consent, and material and discursive power relations. This also demands engagement with embodiment, transnationalisations and virtualisations. Differentiations of men suggest multiply differentiated transpatriarchies that are stable, changing, flexible and contested. While to some extent some of the issues raised could be understood as 'more micro' (embodiment) or 'more macro' (transnationalisation), they are better seen as interconnected, as in virtualisation and the sex trade. Each of the debates noted – masculinity and multiple masculinities; hegemonic masculinity and the hegemony of men; embodiment; and transnationalisations – has clear social policy implications. This is not only in terms of men as practitioners and service users, but also men as policy-makers, gendered boundaries of what counts as social policy, lived experiences of social policy, and extensions of social policy transnationally and virtually.

**Notes**

1. The longest continuous governmental apparatus on men and gender equality is the Finnish Subcommittee on Men's Issues established 1988 (following Men's Research Group established 1986), as part of the Council for Equality between Women and Men.

2. In each case these can be seen as forms of *absent presence* (Hearn, 1998a), by marginalisation by age/death, by disembodiment, and from nation respectively. Each contradictorily both reinforces hegemony of men and potentially subverts that hegemony: absence acts as both power and a means of undermining power. In reviewing critiques of hegemonic masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) suggest that reformulations of the concept include more attention to both social embodiment and the geography of masculinities.

3. Recently, there has been some revival of profeminism in some European contexts, for example, European Profeminist Network; the *Ending Gender-based Violence* project (Ferguson et al., 2004); the EU Critical Research on Men in Europe (CROME); International Network for the Radical Critique of Masculinities.

4. The extent to which these issues are seen as part of what is seen 'global social policy' is especially interesting. Sex trade, virtualisation and militarism are all still generally neglected, even in the journal *Global Social Policy*, and despite the long-established welfare-warfare state debate (Gouldner, 1970).

5. Whether and how militarism should or should not be included in the Coalition on Men and Boys (f.c.) report proved to be the only divisive area between those concerned in its preparation. I was one of the external experts, along with Malcolm Cowburn, Brid Featherstone and Keith Pringle.

6. WHO (2002) estimated that in 2000 520,000 were killed through homicide, 310,000 from war-related acts.

7. The Human Security Centre, University of British Columbia, is funded by the Canadian, Norwegian, Swedish, Swiss and UK governments.

8. Military spending worldwide was c.$1000 billion in 2002: 20 times development aid to relieve poverty. In 2002 the *increase* in US military spending was about the *total* poverty aid from rich to poor countries (de Vylder, 2004).

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