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# From masculinities back to men: Tracing diverse psychological, social and political threads

Jeff Hearn

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## Introduction: The problem

**S**TUDYING MEN, AND INDEED THE development of policy on men, appear to have become more popular in recent years. Yet studying men is not anything special; it is not new; and it is not necessarily, in itself, linked to any radical project of social or societal change and transformation. Academia, libraries, disciplines and canons are full of books by men, on men, for men!

Similarly, policy on men is not new at all. There have long been national state and related policies on men, perhaps most obviously in conscription, militarism, war-making and killing, but also in fatherhood, marriage, religion, and so on. So it all depends how studying men and developing policies on men and practices of men are done. There are a number of key questions, the answers to which affect *how* such activities are to be done:

- 1 Are they explicitly or implicitly on men, or are they done in passing?
- 1 Are they gendered or gendered?
- 1 Are they related to feminist, gay, queer and other critical gender research and scholarship?
- 1 Are they critical or not? According to what methodology, epistemology, positioning and politics?
- 1 And with different relations, or lack or relations, to the various feminisms?

On the other hand, 'superordinate studies' do have the potential to be radical, in deconstructing, or de-naturalising, the dominant (Hearn, 1996a). This possibility arises as long as the superordinates in question are recognised *as such* as (social) superordinates,

and not just as a naturally and inevitably dominant category. Otherwise they and accounts of them can easily become mystifications.

Such various ways of thinking about and contextualising studies on men (not the misleading terms, 'men's studies' [see Hearn, 1997, 2000]) may begin to explain why the field of studies on men is *not* a coherent field. Certainly not all studies on men are *critical* studies on men. Feminists and Women's Studies scholars have been researching and writing on men, and indeed masculinity/ies, for a very long time. The question of 'men' has long been on feminist agendas (for example, Friedman & Sarah, 1982). Jalna Hanmer (1990) lists 56 feminist publications 'providing the ideas, the changed consciousness of women's lives and their relationship to men – all available by 1975' (pp.39–41). Recent feminist initiatives have suggested various analyses of men and ways forward for men (for example, Gardiner, 2001).

What has happened in recent years is that there has been a relatively rapid expansion of focused studies on men and masculinities. Many of these have been produced by men, but women have also been central actors in this process. These latter interventions have often been neglected by men researchers. There have also been a number of important institutional developments, such as collaborative multi-country EU projects (for example, <http://www.cromenet.org>), regional research and policy collaborations (for example, in the Nordic region), and large handbook (Kimmel *et al.*, 2005) and encyclopaedia collections (Kimmel & Aronson, 2003; Flood

*et al.*, f.c.). It may be that there appears to have been a relatively rapid move to a new 'consensus', in the attempt to recognise plural masculinities. However, there are dangers in arriving at such a too simple and probably false consensus too rapidly.

While not wishing to play down debates and differences between recent traditions in studying men, the broad critical approach to men and masculinities that has developed in recent years can be characterised by:

- 1 a *specific*, rather than an implicit or incidental, *focus* on the topic of men and masculinities;
- 1 taking account of *feminist, gay, and other critical gender scholarship*;
- 1 recognising men and masculinities as *explicitly gendered* rather than non-gendered;
- 1 understanding men and masculinities as *socially constructed, produced, and reproduced* rather than as somehow just 'naturally' one way or another;
- 1 seeing men and masculinities as *variable and changing* across time (history) and space (culture), within societies, and through life courses and biographies;
- 1 emphasising men's relations, albeit differentially, to *gendered power*;
- 1 spanning both the *material and the discursive* in analysis;
- 1 interrogating the *intersections of gender with other social divisions* in the construction of men and masculinities.

While in this article I focus on studying men, some of what I write could also be applied to the development of policy on and around men, and the associated re-evaluation of men's practices in everyday life. There follows an examination of some of the shifts that have taken place in the conceptualisation of masculinity, and the movement to the pluralising to masculinities. I then discuss the place of some psychological and other threads in these debates, including some autobiographical reflections on my own work on these issues. For reasons of space, my focus here is on social science approaches, rather than on the humanities,

literary or media studies – which now constitute a very large body of work in themselves, and have indeed been strongly influenced by psychoanalytic interpretations in some cases. This is followed by a discussion of some difficulties and challenges posed by the recent debates and conceptualisations on masculinities, including those of various discursive approaches, before a concluding discussion.

### **From masculinity to masculinities**

The modern analysis of masculinity can be traced back at least to the psychodynamic psychologies of Freud and Adler. Indeed it is important to consider how modern debates on masculinity have been fundamentally psychological, and indeed individualist, since their inception. Psychoanalysis demonstrated 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 masculinised) superego (Connell, 1983, 1994).

Subsequently, anthropologists such as Malinowski and Mead emphasised cultural differences in such social processes and the importance of different social structures and norms between societies. By the mid-20th century, these ideas had crystallised into the concept of sex roles. In some cases psychoanalytic ideas have been used to explore cross-cultural differences and consistencies in the achievement of 'manhood' (Gilmore, 1990).

In the 1960s and 1970s masculinity was understood mainly as an internalised role, identity or (social) psychological disposition, reflecting a particular (often US or Western) cluster of cultural norms or values acquired by learning from socialisation agents. 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 are various formulations of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (for example, Bem, 1974). While in many senses m-f and sex role approaches to masculinity can be seen as a social antidote to purely biological approaches to sex and sexual difference, they also can be interpreted as (re)producing a social essentialism, and indeed continuing the psychologism and individualism of earlier debates.

Such notions of masculinity were critiqued in the 1970s and 1980s for: obscuring differences between cultural ideals and practices, ignoring which gender is assessing which, lacking a power perspective, being biased from using students in their construction, and being ethnocentric, especially US-centric (Eichler, 1980). Both psychologically-derived masculinity-femininity 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 gender orientation, gender ideology and cultural/ethnic sensitivity (Thompson & Pleck, 1995; Luyt, 2005).

These three traditions – the psychoanalytic, the anthropological, and the social psychological – can be said to provide the backcloth to recent debates (cf. Connell, 1995, p.5). 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).

At the same time as sex role theory and m-f scales were being critiqued, in theories of patriarchy, men were analysed societally, structurally and collectively. Different theories of patriarchy have emphasised men's structural social relations to women, in terms of biology, reproduction, politics and culture, family, state, sexuality, economy,

and combinations thereof. By the late 1970s, however, a number of 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 twin debates and 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 both social psychological and social structural accounts, social constructionist perspectives of various kinds highlighting complexities of men's social power have emerged. The concept of masculinities has been used widely over the last twenty years or more. Increasingly, different masculinities are interrogated in the plural, not the singular – in discussions of hegemonic, complicit, subordinated, marginalised, and protest masculinities.

In the debate on masculinities the work of R.W. Connell and colleagues (for example, Connell, 1987, 1995; Carrigan *et al.*, 1985) has been central. This work has been explicitly framed in relation to theorising of patriarchy and patriarchal relations. In a recent article Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p.830) state: 'The concept of hegemonic masculinity was first proposed in reports from a field study of inequality in Australian high schools (Kessler *et al.*, 1982); in a related conceptual discussion of the making of masculinities and the experience of men's bodies (Connell, 1983); and in a debate over the role of men in Australian labour politics'. Within these contexts, hegemonic masculinity can be seen as a political category, an aspiration that can never be fulfilled. Masculinity, hegemonic or not, can be understood as comprising signs, practices and performances, that obscure contradictions.

The first substantial discussion of the idea of 'hegemonic masculinity' was in the paper, 'Men's bodies', written by R.W. Connell in 1979 and published in *Which Way Is Up?* in 1983. Importantly, its background was debates on patriarchy. The paper was

published alongside two others on theories of patriarchy and empirical research on boys and girls in schools. It is also written at a time when Connell was heavily involved in debates on the relations of patriarchy and capitalism (as in socialist feminism), the reproduction of class and other inequalities in education and schooling (as in the work of Bourdieu and others), and conceptualisations of practice (as in the work of Sartre and others) (see Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). From this, the hegemony at issue in relation to masculinities was the hegemony involved in the patriarchal system of gender relations. In a personal communication Connell (2000b) has reported that 'I was trying to direct attention onto the patterns of conduct and emotion involved in men's activity in a patriarchal system, including some of the complexities, division and contradictions – as I was also at the time trying to get a theoretical handle on the process of historical change in patriarchy.'

The 'Men's bodies' paper is very interesting in several respects. It discusses the social construction of the body in both boys' and adult men's practices. In discussing 'the physical sense of maleness', Connell marks out the social importance of sport as 'the central experience of the school years for many boys' (1983, p.18), emphasising the practices and experiences of taking and occupying space, holding the body tense, skill, size, power, force, strength, physical development and sexuality. In addressing the body of adult men, he highlighted the differential importance of physicality within work, sexuality, fatherhood. The paper also emphasises the psychological and social dynamics of masculinity, integrating psychodynamic thinking into analysis of the patriarchal relations that account for hegemonic masculinity. 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 in the mid-1990s Connell defined 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' (1995, p.77).

There have been many applications of this approach in theoretical, empirical and policy studies (see Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Among the most significant has been Messerschmidt's (1993, 1997) work on masculinities, crime and violence. Though most empirical research on men and masculinities is still produced within the developed countries, couched within the localised 'ethnographic moment' (Connell, 1998), global perspectives are increasing significant (Cleaver, 2002; Pease & Pringle, 2002). In recent work Connell (1998, 2005) has explored how certain dominant versions of masculinities are rearticulated in global arenas as dominant states engulf weaker ones.

To summarise so far: some of the key features of this general framework for examining masculinities are:

- 1 the critique of sex role theory;
- 1 the use of a power-laden concept of masculinities;
- 1 emphasis on men's unequal relations to men as well as men's relations to women;
- 1 attention to the implications of gay scholarship and sexual hierarchies more generally;
- 1 distinguishing between hegemonic, complicit, subordinated, and marginalised masculinities;
- 1 emphasis on contradictions, and at times resistance(s);
- 1 analysis of the institutional/social, interpersonal and intrapsychic (psychodynamics) aspects of masculinities; and
- 1 exploration of transformations and social change.

### **Some psychological and other threads**

As noted above, psychoanalytic approaches –

of different kinds – have been influential, not only in the early development of theorising masculinity, but also as part of the movement to more critical approaches to masculinity and masculinities that developed in late 1970s and early 1980s. The work of Connell and associates developed analyses of masculinities that included intrapsychic processes, including ambivalences, resistances and contradictions. They addressed processes of cathexis, as well as those of labour, power (Connell, 1987) and symbolisation (see Connell, 2000a). Indeed, as an aside, one might note that this favouring of psychoanalytic approaches is one of a number of examples of sociologists preferring this version of psychology over other variants of psychology that are much more established within the contemporary discipline of psychology. This emphasis, amongst the range of approaches within psychology, is even more noticeable in the field of cultural studies.

Various psychoanalytic ideas were present in other ways in this period of developing more critical thinking on masculinities. In the UK object relations theory (following Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott in particular) became influential in the 1980s (Frosh, 1994). Within the realm of sexual politics, this may have been partly linked to moves from group-based consciousness-raising to feminist therapy and thus profeminist group therapy, and then more individual psychoanalytic work. In the case of men's politics, therapeutic influences combined with left and socialist traditions, some anarchist groupings, and various forms of identity politics, in the case of men: gay, anti-sexist, bisexual, black/anti-racist, green, and so on.<sup>1</sup>

A particularly interesting commentary on these issues in the mid-1980s was that by Ian

Craib (1987), in discussing the contrast between the model of masculinity presented by Nancy Chodorow (1978), which tended to emphasise its 'bullying', over-compensatory nature, with an over developed superego, as against the more 'fragile' and under-developed version (also see Gaylin, 1992), according to Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach (1983). The latter's work was influential in the UK at that time. Chodorow's influence was greater on the masculinity debate in the US (see Brod, 1987), but at the same time Jungian ideas were also influential there (Pedersen, 1993). The latter had their own indirect influence and popular manifestations in the work of the mythopoeists on 'deep masculinity', even if some Jungians would wish to distance themselves from that development.

At the same time as identity politics were important within political debates on masculinity, there were also critical academic analyses and deconstructions of men's or male identity. An example of this was Arthur Brittan's analysis of male identity and male crisis, published in 1989 in the book *Masculinity and Power*. This interrogated the notion of identity rather than seeking to advocate specific claims from specific identities. From the late 1980s and through the 1990s the construction of men's selves and subjectivities has become a matter of growing attention. Much of this move has come from detailed feminist and other critical poststructuralist and discourse analyses of men's talk, conversation and self-(re)presentations – and more will be said on this a little later. Some of these could be labelled critical discourse analysis, others have been more psychoanalytical-orientated discourse analysis. This move also represents one avenue of critique of the masculinities framework.

Meanwhile, in own work I remained much more influenced by the experience of

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<sup>1</sup> This combination of personal therapeutic gender politics and broader gender-related identity politics is apparent from some of the contributions in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the anti-sexist men's journal *Achilles Heel*, and the collection *The Sexuality of Men* (Metcalf & Humphries, 1985), which was written largely by members and ex-members of the *Achilles Heel* Collective. I would argue that my own chapter (Hearn, 1985) in this collection, on men's sexuality at work, was one of the few chapters located centrally in societal socio-political analysis on masculinity.

men's consciousness-raising and materialist analysis, rather than psychoanalysis. The short book *Birth and Afterbirth* published by *Achilles Heel* in 1983 drew on political involvement in the politics of childcare and socialist politics and materialist analysis more generally. This led onto the book, *The Gender of Oppression* (Hearn, 1987), which was a much more extended examination of men's relations to patriarchy. This used sociological theorising, in particular the critique of Marxism through the methods of materialist critique and its neglect of reproduction in favour of production. This line of thinking had close resonances with that of Mary O'Brien (1981; also see Hearn, 1999). The impact of sociological debates on the relations of structure and agency within structuration theory (Hearn, 1994), as well as consciousness-raising in the context of men's anti-sexist politics was also evident. Another influence from psychology was from the work of Lucien Sève (1978) in his attempts to produce a Marxian psychology, based on differential forms of practice founded in economies of time-use (see Burkitt, 2005, for a recent sympathetic critique). These particular social emphases persisted in my work, even though I spent four years in intensive psychotherapy in the mid-1980s.

Some similar consciousness-raising influences were also apparent in the development of men's memory work (Pease, 2000) and men's critical life history work (Jackson, 1990, 2001, 2003). Indeed the auto/biographical turn, conducted critically within a political context, represents another strand of theorising on men and masculinities, that in some ways follows the logics of consciousness-raising work (Hearn, 2005). In epistemological terms, such approaches raise the question of how men's or male subjectivities may often be construed and reproduced as 'objectivity', despite the complex historical and political situatedness of those knowledges (Hearn, 1994, 1998a).

Other key influences on thinking on masculinities in the 1980s and throughout

the 1990s came from history, with work by, for example, Michael Roper and John Tosh (1991), amongst others, and from post-structuralism, and subsequently postmodernism too. From late 1983 I was involved for a few years in a reading group, which spent a good time with critical discussions of post-structuralist and other theoretical work, including that of Michel Foucault. These historical and theoretical influences were significant in my own work, from the late 1980s, with a project on 'The political economy of men and masculinities in historical perspective', focused on the period 1870–1920. This research culminated in the book *Men in the Public Eye* (Hearn, 1992). Questions of historicisation of men and masculinities were central, as was the continuation of the structuration debate in a historical frame (Hearn, 1994). Masculinity was no longer a mentalist construction but rather a discursive construction of and by the male/masculine subject. One example of this was the investigation of the historical construction of 'male' 'character', drawing on the work of Ian Hunter (1988) and others. In many ways, I tried in *Men in the Public Eye* to tread a path in-between structuralism and post-structuralism, in-between modernism and postmodernism.

In many ways, for me, this historical work in the late 1980s and early 1990s was the beginning of a questioning of the usefulness of the notion of masculinities. Although I used the term, masculinities, quite a lot, I realised that it was difficult to transplant contemporary concepts back in time to past historical times. Just as manliness might mean different things, even within the Victorian period (Mangan & Walvin, 1987), so might masculinities. In particular, it was difficult, perhaps impossible, to link masculinities to men's (unknown) historical experiences. Instead masculinities, or whatever preferred term used had to be grounded more directly in what men do, did or appear to have done: men's practices. This historical work also highlighted the matter of what are now called intersectionalities, but then referred to as

multiple social divisions/differences or multiple oppressions (Hearn & Parkin, 1993).

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 the interconnections of gender with other social divisions, such as age, class, disability, ethnicity, nationality, occupation, 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 co-operative and conflictual relations with each other – in organisational, occupational, and class relations – and in terms defined more explicitly in relation to gender, such as kinship and sexuality. Such relations are complicated by contradictions, ambiguities and paradoxes that persist intrapersonally, interpersonally, collectively and structurally. The intersection of social divisions has also been a very important area of theorising in critical race studies, postcolonial studies, globalisation, (neo-)imperialism and kindred fields (Ouzgane & Coleman, 1998; Morrell & Swart, 2005; Ouzgane & Morrell, 2005). Debate on masculinities and hegemonic masculinity is thus a lot more diverse than is often acknowledged.

### Some confusions and challenges

It is thus clear that the term, masculinities, has been applied in many, sometimes very different, sometimes confusing ways; this can be a conceptual and empirical difficulty (Clatterbaugh, 1998). The reformulation of masculinity to masculinities is not without problems. The concept has served for a wide variety of researchers, activists, commentators, journalists, policy-makers and others to have a conversation about 'something', but it may not always be the same thing. Furthermore, the concept of masculinities has been

used in ways that are often not consistent with the framework of Connell and colleagues. A number of general difficulties can be noted, including:

- 1 the *wide variety of uses* of the concept;
- 1 *imprecision* in its many uses; and
- 1 use as a *shorthand* for wide range of social phenomena that appear to be located in the *individual*.

Over the last 15 years or so, there has been a growing debate and critique on the very concepts of masculinities and specifically hegemonic masculinity from various methodological positions. Debates and critiques on the concepts of masculinities and hegemonic masculinity have ranged from more micro-focused, often poststructuralist approaches to more macro-focused historical, materialist approaches. The latter have emphasised: the possibility of *relativism*, especially if the patriarchal context is ignored; use as a *primary and underlying* cause of other social effects; tendency towards *idealism and anti-materialism/anti-materiality*; neglect of *historical, (post)colonial and transnational differences*; and possibility of reproducing *heterosexual dichotomies* (Donaldson, 1993; McMahon, 1993; Hearn, 1996b, 2004; MacInnes, 1998; Howson, 2006; also see *Feminism & Psychology*, 2001).

In identifying forms of domination by men, both of women and of other men, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been notably successful. There are also a number of more specific set of questions around the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Several other unresolved issues remain. First, are we talking about cultural representations, everyday practices or institutional structures? Second, how exactly do the various dominant and dominating ways that men are – tough/aggressive/violent; respectable/corporate; controlling of resources; controlling of images; and so on – connect with each other? Third, the concept of hegemonic masculinity may carry contradictions, and, arguably, has failed to demonstrate the autonomy of the gender system from class and other social systems. Mike Donaldson

(1993) has pointed out that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is unclear, may carry contradictions, and fails to demonstrate the autonomy of the gender system. For example, does men's greater involvement in fathering indicate an intensification of hegemonic masculinity, or not? For him, in foregrounding (hegemonic) masculinity, economic class remains crucially important, politically and analytically. Fourth, why is it necessary to hang onto the concept of masculinity, rather than being more specific by referring to, say, men's practices or men's identities (Hearn, 1996b)?

Moreover, the idea of multiple masculinities, though certainly a very powerful and creative one, can also bring some problems. This is especially so when one thinks of the possibilities of (almost) infinite and relativised permutations of masculinities, and all the more so if they are seen within a voluntaristic rather than power-laden frame (Hearn & Collinson, 1994; Collinson & Hearn, 2005).

### **Discursive, psycho-discursive and materialist discursive critiques**

Critical debate on masculinities and hegemonic masculinity has also been enhanced by the growing attention that there has been detailed studies of masculinities within social psychology and sociology. Thus we can ask: how does the concept of hegemonic masculinity fit with detailed empirical studies, for example, in how men talk about themselves? Can hegemonic masculinity be reduced to fixed set of practices? In particular, detailed discursive and ethnographic researches have provided close-grained descriptions of multiple, internally complex masculinities.

Margaret Wetherell and Nigel Edley (1999) have 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 the 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 emphasised. The third is characterised by its unconventionality, with the imaginary position involving flouting social expectations (p.347). 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 (see *Feminism & Psychology*, 2001, especially Speer, 2001a, 2001b on a more conversation analytic alternative; also see Speer, 2005).

A key intervention in these discursive politics was Tony Jefferson's (1994) explication of psychoanalysis, poststructuralism and discourse analysis in 'theorising masculine subjectivity' in the lead chapter in the book *Just Boys Doing Business* (Newburn & Stanko, 1994). This was clearly influenced by Wendy Hollway's (1983) earlier work in this mold, and was a precursor to their joint work together. Since the late 1980s Jefferson has written, within the context of criminology, on the need to go beyond what he calls 'the social break with orthodoxy: power and multiple masculinities' (2005, pp.217–218). Rather, he favours feminist and poststructuralist theorising: 'the psychoanalytic break with orthodoxy: contradictory subjectivities and the social.' (pp.218–219). Arguing that Connell has not realised his own 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, pp.20–21), Jefferson makes a clear, perhaps too clear, distinction between 'the social break with orthodoxy: power and multiple masculinities' and 'the psychoanalytic break with orthodoxy: contradictory subjectivities and the social.' One

might well dispute the firmness of this separation, in view of the genealogy outlined here. He has placed himself against those accounts of crime founded in more structuralist analysis and in the accomplishment of gender in social practice, notably those of James Messerschmidt (1993, 1997), and those which he characterises as of 'a purely discursive turn' (Collier, 1998). Instead he re-emphasises why it is *particular* men that do particular crimes, via the pre-discursive psychodynamics of men/maleness, and the need to acknowledge the contradictory subjectivities of individuals, albeit within a social or societal context.<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly, the macro-micro, structure-agency and discursive-materialist distinctions in studying men have themselves all come under critique from a variety of perspectives (Hearn, 1992, 1998b, 2004; Bourdieu, 2001; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003; Chambers, 2005). Distinctions between more micro, post-structuralist and more macro, structuralist critiques on masculinities and hegemonic masculinity have not always been so clearcut (see, Wetherell & Edley, 1999; Speer, 2001b, p.111). For example, Stephen Whitehead (1999), writing from a post-structuralist perspective, argues that: '...the concept of hegemonic masculinity goes little way towards revealing the complex patterns of inculcation and resistance which constitute everyday social interaction. ... it is unable to explain the variant meanings attached to the concept of masculinity at this particular moment in the social history of Euro/American/Australasian countries' (p.58). While this may be a harsh verdict, it points to possible empirical limitations, as well as the need to subject concepts to

scrutiny in changing historical contexts.

These kinds of debates were also important to me from the late 1980s in conducting detailed research on men who were and/or had been violent to women. This was reported in the book *The Violences of Men* (Hearn, 1998b). Significant theoretical influences here were feminist, especially radical, materialist and structuralist, analyses of men's violence, along with (non-psychoanalytic) poststructuralism or what I would now call post-post-structuralism, in emphasising materiality and bodily effects – especially those of violence, violent acts and violent words. A crucial question in this research was the relations of men's talk (present) and men's actions/violences/body (past). The political focus was on violence, stopping violence, and policy development: it was practical research, though heavily theory-driven. Perhaps above all, this research on violence brought me to understand the limitations of the concept of masculinities: it just did not seem to assist the explication of the forms of men's practices, for example, when being violent to women was coupled with being relatively less powerful in relation to other men. So in that sense at least I share some of the concerns identified by Jefferson for the limitations of the notions of masculinities, multiple masculinities and hegemonic masculinity, despite our different theoretical perspectives. From then on, I have preferred to focus, where possible, on men's individual and collective practices rather than the unclear 'masculinities'.

In this move to materialist-discursive analysis,<sup>3</sup> it has been very important to consider the institutional, structural, and societal contexts of men's practices, and indeed those structures themselves. This is

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, this combination of psychoanalysis, post-structuralism and discourse analysis employed by Jefferson has remarkable similarities to the combination of theoretical perspectives used in some media deconstruction, notably that by Sean Nixon (1997) in analysing advertisements for men's clothing. The difference is that while Nixon addresses images, Jefferson (1994, 2005) seeks to address men's psycho-social processes. This latter approach has in turn been extensively critiqued by James Messerschmidt (2005) for its neglect of power relations.

<sup>3</sup> Connell (2001, p.7) both opposes the attempt to see all as discourse, and at the same time more specifically seeks to separate the discursive and the non-discursive, '...gender relations are also constituted in, and shape, non-discursive practices such as labour, sexuality, child care, and so on' – [as well as discourses or discursive practices].

clear in organisational contexts (Collinson & Hearn, 1996, 2005), but from the mid-1990s onwards this has become increasingly obvious in terms of comparative and transnational research and analyses on men. The transnational perspective has been the main focus of my attention for the last 10 years or more, mainly through European research (Pringle *et al.*, 2006; Hearn & Pringle, 2006), but also in terms of global and trans-national approaches more generally.<sup>4</sup> Such broad approaches make clear the presence of different historical social structures between and across societies and national and regional levels, even when connections are made to levels of individual identity and practice, as is being done in a growing number of studies.<sup>5</sup> 'Men and masculinities' are formed societally and transsocietally, in what I would now call transpatriarchies.

### Some ways forward

The range of conceptual and empirical debates points to more fundamental problematics. Both masculinity and masculinities have been used in a wide variety of ways, often rather imprecisely, and serving as shorthands for various social phenomena. Sometimes their use may reinforce a psychological model of gender relations located in the individual, or represent masculinity/ies as a primary or underlying cause of other social effects. The concepts can lead to an anti-materialism, that may not reflect historical, cultural, (post)colonial and transnational differences. They can reproduce heterosexual dichotomies. There is also increasing scholarship on the separation of masculinity/ies from men, as in female masculinity (Halberstam, 1998), within

queer studies.

In discussing these concepts and questions in this way it is not my intention to dismiss the masculinities debate, indeed far from it. But it is an attempt to be more precise about it. For example, if we mean to refer to men's practices or men's identity or ways of being men in some way, we should say so, and not 'hide behind' the gloss, masculinities. Such various critiques provide the ground for the deconstruction of the social taken-for-granted-ness of the category of 'men' and its own hegemony.

There are several recent trends and tendencies that I would identify: questioning of the usefulness of the concept of masculinity/ies; a move to focus more specifically on men's practices, individual and collective; a recognition of the need for greater theoretical rigour and reflection on methods, positionality of researcher, and relation of researcher and topic (men); and fuller engagement with transnational, global, comparative focus on men.

More particularly, in my view in analyses of men and masculinities in the 1980s and 1990s the concept of hegemony has generally been employed in too restricted a way; the focus on masculinity is too narrow. Moreover, if the interest in masculinities and hegemony masculinity is in men's practices, then we should say so; it is at the very least confusing to use a psychological term if something quite different is meant. Instead, it is time to go back from *masculinity* to *men*, to examine the hegemony of men and about men. The social category of 'men' is far more hegemonic than a particular form of masculinity, hegemonic or not. The hegemony of men seeks to address the double

<sup>4</sup> It is important to appreciate the extent of structural gender variations, even within Europe. For example, gender economic inequality as measured by the ratio of male:female income is for the UK 167; this is a somewhat above average figure for European countries, and well below the ratios of 222 and 255 for Italy and Ireland respectively. The ratio of the male:female 'economic activity rate' ranges up to 169 for Italy and 189 for Ireland. UK stands at 133 for this ratio, significantly different to, say, Norway at 118 or Finland 115 or Sweden at 112 (UNDP, 2004). Another fundamental issue is the level of violence. Here again, there are very large variations, as in rates of homicide. Rates in Estonia (10.61 per 100,000), Latvia (6.47) and the Russian Federation (22.05) are markedly higher than those in Western Europe and other parts of Eastern Europe. Relatively low figures are in Denmark, Germany, Norway and Sweden (Barclay & Tavares, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Recent examples include Lavikka (2004) in Finland, Burkitt (2005) in the UK, and Weis (2006) in the US.

complexity that men are both a social category formed by the gender system and dominant collective and individual agents of social practices.

Man/men is a social category, just as is woman/women. To understand, analyse, critique the category, we have to thoroughly de-naturalise and deconstruct men, just as postcolonial theory deconstructs and de-naturalises the white subject. There is a danger in focusing primarily or only on masculinities that we re-naturalise men, in de-naturalising masculinities. The category of men is used and operates in society in many different ways: as individual men, groups of men, all men, the gender of men, in official, state, medical, religious discourse, and in other discursive or conversational ploys. This is why I favour linking hegemony to men.

There are several major aspects to this agenda. First, there are the *social processes by which there is a hegemonic acceptance of the category of men*. This includes the unproblematic taken-for-granted categorisation of people as 'men' through biological, often medical examination (principally privileging of presence/absence of a penis shortly after birth); conduct of state, population and statistical classifications, organised religion and education; and the many other organisational and institutional ways in which particular men are placed within the social category of men.

Second, there is the *system of distinctions and categorisations between different forms of men and men's practices* to women, children and other men (and what are often called masculinities). This is closest to the current use of the term, 'masculinities', though as noted the term has been used in a wide variety of ways in recent years. However, greater attention to the social construction of the *systems* of differentiations of men and men's practices rather than the social construction of particular 'forms' of men, as masculinities would be advisable.

Third, the question can then be asked *which men and which men's practices – in the media, the state, religion, and so on – are most powerful in setting those agendas of those systems*

*of differentiations*. It is these practices and general ideas that are hegemonic, rather than a particular form of hegemonic masculinity that is hegemonic.

Fourth, there are *the most widespread, repeated forms of men's practices*. In this, those which are called 'complicit' are likely to take a much more central place in the construction of men and the various ways of being men in relation to women, children and other men. If anything, it is the complicit that is most hegemonic.

Fifth, we may consider *the description and analysis of men's various and variable everyday, 'natural(ised)', 'ordinary', 'normal' and most taken-for-granted practices* to women, children and other men and their contradictory, even paradoxical, meanings – rather than the depiction of the most culturally valued ideal or the most exaggerated or over-conforming forms of men's practices.

Sixth, there is the question of *how women may differentially support certain practices of men*, and subordinate other practices of men or ways of being men. This brings us to the place of women's 'consent' with the hegemony of men.

Seventh, there are various interrelations between the elements above. Perhaps of most interest *is the relationship between 'men's' formation within a hegemonic gender order, that also forms 'women', other genders and boys, and men's activity in different ways in forming and re-forming hegemonic differentiations among men*.

Critique of the hegemony of men can bring together feminist materialist theory and cultural queer theory, as well as modernist theories of hegemony and post-structuralist discourse theory (Hearn, 2004). This involves placing the study of men more centrally within political economic societal analysis, while at the same time deconstructing both the very category of men and those very political economies. This approach foregrounds many under-studied questions, especially so when considering men on a global or transnational scale, within what I would call transpatriarchies. Many urgent studies and actions are needed

in relation to men and such fields as: militarism; international finance; multinational corporations; oil and energy policy; sex trade; the global circulation of representations; and trans-governmental machineries. This is not to diminish the importance of psychology, but rather it is to contextualise the psychological, the discursive and the rhetorical (Speer, 2001b, p.127).

Studying men critically implies drastic rewritings of academic disciplines, including psychology, and the usual mainstream ignoring of how their 'science' has been dominantly by men, on men, for men. Many men social scientists still forget that their studies are difficult to understand without explicit analysis of men and gender relations. A commonplace silence persists on the gendered reflexivity of the author and the constitution of theory (Hearn, 1998a). Changing this involves problematising silences on both the social category of men and men's theorising practices. It may also mean dealing with difficult, sometimes uncomfortable, questions: trying to be accurate, or more accurate, than the pre-scientific writing masquerading as '(social) science' that dominates. Naming men as men and deconstructing and, in due course, abolishing 'men' as a powerful social category are both scientific and political aims.

*Note: This article is a development of the keynote 'What's the use of masculinities? Back to the*

*problem of men', at the British Psychological Society, Psychology of Women Section Conference, 'Masculinities, Relationships, Sexualities', University of Huddersfield, 7 July 2005.*

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