UNMASKING MASCULINITIES

MEN AND SOCIETY

Editors

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Introduction

Power, Paradox, and Change

Edward W. Morris and Freeden Blume Oeur

Masculinity is everywhere, at the same time that it is nowhere.

What do we mean by this? Consider that men hold a firm grip on positions of power and influence. Every United States president has been a man. In 2016, the 10 wealthiest people in the United States were all men, and just 4% of Fortune 500 CEOs were women (Zarya 2016). Hollywood also remains a men's club. Coincidentally, only 4% of the top 1,000 grossing films between 2007 and 2016 were directed by women (Smith, Pieper, and Choueiti 2017). Men not only produce these cultural narratives behind the scenes, but do most of the talking on screen.[1] (Even in Disney blockbusters with female lead characters, such as *Mulan* and *Pocahontas*, male characters do the vast majority of the talking.) In other areas of popular entertainment, such as sports, men also dominate and wield enormous symbolic power. Millions of viewers tune in each year to watch the Super Bowl and the NCAA men's basketball tournament. But how many people do you know who host parties or follow tournament brackets for *women's* sporting events? Even fields with higher concentrations of women, such as education, reveal an uncanny male dominance in positions of authority. Men who enter women-dominated professions have the luxury of riding a "glass escalator" to better-paying and higher-ranking positions within those fields (Williams 2013). While 76% of public school teachers nationwide are women, over three-quarters of all district superintendents are men (Superville 2016).

Although there are exceptions, men worldwide continue to control the enactment and enforcement of national and international law; the structure of economic institutions and distribution of capital; and the production and dissemination of intellectual and cultural knowledge. Yet masculinity is also *nowhere*. That is because we rarely understand these facts in terms of *gender*. That is, we evaluate men as individuals and not as members of a gender category. This disassociation of gender from men has important implications. For one, it absolves men from confronting gender privilege and power. For example, the anti-violence activist Jackson Katz explains how the well-known phrase "violence against women" strangely erases men from violent relationships. Men in fact commit the overwhelming majority of gender-based violence; thus we should emphasize "*men's* violence against women."[2] Neglecting to name men implicitly frames gender issues as *women's* issues rather than men's issues. Yet violence against women is a problem perpetrated by men, which must be confronted by men. Bringing men into this discussion is a crucial step toward addressing the roots of violence against women (as well as against other men) and other features of gender inequality.

The detachment of men from gender also perpetuates the idea that men and masculinity are unmarked categories (Kimmel 1997). Take a moment to scan the "Pointlessly Gendered Products" page on the popular teaching website "Sociological Images." There you will find many pictures of

amusingly gendered products that people have come across in stores. There are, for example, *women's* hand tools, *women's* ear plugs, and even *women's* pens.[3] "Normal" hand tools, ear plugs, and pens are for men and boys: the default gender category. This all may seem trivial, but oftentimes the detachment of men from gender has consequences for power relations. For example, children, both boys and girls, tend to sketch pictures of men when asked to draw a "scientist" or a "doctor" (Finson 2002). This reveals how doctors and scientists, like other high-status positions, behaviors, and institutions, are implicitly coded as masculine. What the children in that study assume, of course, is *male* scientist and *male* doctor, but those descriptors go unnamed. Sports fans may have also noticed that it is common for the sports media to explicitly mention *female* athletes and *women's* basketball.

Apart from elite positions, taken-for-granted norms of masculinity circulate throughout societal institutions and ideological systems, from who sits at the head of the table during family dinner, to characterizing god as male in monotheistic religions, to sexually aggressive "locker room" banter among men in workplaces. In order to promote more balanced, equal lives for everyone, it is necessary to expose and question the hidden power of masculine norms in our daily lives. Masculinity can be characterized as a mask, or a narrow set of expectations that harms young men and those around them. We therefore invite readers to *unmask masculinity*.[4]

The language that we use is important, too. While we emphasize the need to reveal what is "behind" masculinity, we recognize that the "mask" metaphor is limiting, despite its captivating imagery. Defining masculinity is a slippery proposition, but researchers have moved beyond the facile notion that gender is something that can be "worn" or taken on or off, to examine how gender is embedded in social relations, institutions, and historical trajectories.[5] With that in mind, this book is intended to be an accessible introduction to cutting-edge scholarship in critical masculinity studies. We begin with the proposition that it is impossible to understand gender and gender inequality without systematically questioning, researching, and confronting masculinity. We invite you to follow us in a journey through this engaging and vibrant field: to explore where masculinity comes from, how it is built, how it maintains power, how it is contradictory and paradoxical, and how it might be resisted and transformed for the better.

What Is Masculinity?

At first glance, this question seems straightforward. Masculinity is how men behave. But this explanation loses its simplicity upon closer inspection. A majority of famous visual artists are men, but people generally do not consider art a highly masculine pursuit. Girls now compete in equal numbers to boys in recreational sports, yet people continue to associate athletic power and skill with masculinity. Thus, masculinity cannot be defined simply by pointing to what men do, or what women do not do. Men and boys also vary in the degree to which they signify masculinity. Some men may be seen as effeminate "girly men" lacking in masculinity. Other men may be viewed as overly masculine brutes. The meanings behind these configurations of manhood are further shaped by racial and ethnic histories, as well as other forms of collective identity. Women can express qualities associated with masculinity, such as with female mixed martial arts fighters, or women who present as "butch" (Halberstam 1998). Moreover, what counts as masculinity is volatile and subject to change.

If we start with the basic idea that masculinity refers to a set expectations that guide behavior, it does not follow that all male-bodied people will practice that behavior. It does mean, however, that men and boys can be penalized (ostracized, ridiculed, or denied access to institutions) for failing to live up to expectations. Moreover, it does not mean that women cannot ascribe to masculine expectations. Women may occasionally (but not universally) adopt practices culturally associated with

masculinity, but still be understood as women. In other instances, women may be held accountable or punished for not "doing gender" appropriately (West and Zimmerman 1987). And while masculine behaviors grant power and privilege, they also do great harm to men and women.

Masculinity can be distinguished from the male body and the category of men, although all concepts are closely entwined. Masculinity can be seen as the interactional "work" someone does in order to be interpreted as a man (West and Zimmerman 1987). As Douglas Schrock and Michael Schwalbe (2009) describe in Section I of this volume, a male body is neither necessary nor sufficient to claim status within the category of men (although it is an asset in this endeavor). Some men may possess a male body, but be seen as insufficiently or inappropriately manly. Some biological women may possess a female-sexed body, but present themselves as sufficiently and appropriately manly, such as transmen. Bodies are used as resources or strategies for the performance of masculinity, but masculinity is not itself reducible to the biological body.

Masculinity is, decisively, a *social construct.* This means that masculinity is determined not by biology or physiology, but by the structure of social relations and cultural norms. As leading neuroscientist Lise Eliot (2009) has shown, there are minute differences between male and female brains, but these alone cannot explain differences in power between men and women. Rather, manhood is socially patterned at multiple levels: at the level of face-to-face interactions (e.g., how people talk with one another, and people's quotidian routines), institutions (e.g., regulations, traditions, and cultural rituals), and the global (e.g., international politics and the relationships between nation-states). Or as Lynne Segal (1993:629) has written, masculinity "condenses, above all, the cultural reality of women's subordination," a reality visible in each "institution of social, economic, and political power."

The evidence shows that prevailing definitions of what it means to be a man have varied across time and across cultures. For example, it might surprise you that cheerleading was once considered a manly activity (Adams and Bettis 2003). At the turn of the 20th century, many college campuses were the exclusive domain of white male elites. In fact, women were barred from participating in many American college cheerleading squads until the 1930s. Cheerleading signified school solidarity and male camaraderie. It was only after World War II, as universities began to accept more women and more students from lower economic classes, that cheerleading began to evolve and include women. Cheerleading became more feminine as male sports grew in prominence, which reinforced a clear division of labor on the sports field. Male cheerleaders continue to populate college squads today, but cheerleading, especially at high school and professional levels, is now primarily associated with women.

As with cheerleading, fashions considered indisputably feminine today began as masculine. High-heeled shoes and long hair serve as one fascinating example. In 16th-century Europe, both represented paragons of masculinity.[6] High heels actually originated at this time as something to be worn by the French male aristocracy. Manly power here was tied strongly to social status. High heels, in their impracticality, announced that the wearer did not need to work (with the added benefit of enhancing physical stature). For male members of the elite, this signified their status as the most powerful men (Barber 2016). Women in aristocratic circles eventually took to wearing the shoes as well; but once they did men ceased to do so, and high heels carried status for women but not men. These examples demonstrate that what counts as masculine and feminine is arbitrary, or simply symbolic boundaries drawn to reproduce presumed gender differences. Thus, while there is nothing essential or natural about gender, social distinctions between masculinity and femininity, or among various configurations of manhood, these distinctions are real in their consequences. They become reproduced over time in laws, customs, popular discourses, and memories. When women begin to encroach on manly practices and spaces, this threatens the power of men, prompting reactionary measures against women or the redefinition of masculinity itself (Kimmel 2012; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009).

Masculinity also varies across cultural spaces. As you will see in this book, ideals of masculinity vary across nations, and across subgroups within nations. Being a man in rural Appalachia is very different than being a man in urban Japan. For this reason, this book emphasizes a cross-cultural and intersectional approach to masculinity. A cross-cultural lens reveals masculine variance, but also how relations of masculinity increasingly operate within the globalizing context of a world gender system (Connell 1998). An intersectional approach emphasizes how patterns of masculinity interact with other features of inequality and identity, such as race, class, gender, nation, age, and place (Cho, Williams, and McCall 2013). These approaches transform how masculinity is enacted and experienced. For example, while masculinity often serves as an advantage, for urban men of color the picture is more complex. Asserting gender and sexual power may win young men of color status among peers, but authorities punish them unduly for their presumed "hypermasculinity" and perceived criminality (Ferguson 2000; Rios 2011). In fact, police officers may humiliate and emasculate young men of color in a struggle for masculine domination.

Power, Paradox, and Change

Gendered patterns are woven into our social institutions and belief systems. People believe these patterns to be legitimate, or they appear like common sense and people do not think about them at all. Exposing the power and privilege that accompanies masculinity is a first step toward destabilizing it. Yet for men especially, this can feel threatening. As the masculinity scholar Raewyn Connell (2005:1808) has written, "men have a lot to lose from pursuing gender equality because men, collectively, continue to receive a patriarchal dividend," which refers to the various advantages men obtain from the overall subordination of women to men. Recent campaigns have brought attention to what might otherwise appear to be innocuous behaviors, including "mansplaining" and "manspreading," which refer, respectively, to how men speak to others (especially women) in a patronizing manner, and how men spread out their arms and legs to monopolize physical spaces. Men may scoff at such accusations and brush them off as no big deal, but they are examples of how men accumulate a patriarchal dividend without being aware of their privilege. At the same time, protecting privilege can have damaging consequences. White men in varied circumstances—from members of father's groups who are recently divorced, to teenage perpetrators of mass school shootings—express an "aggrieved entitlement" (Kimmel 2013) and lash out at women and feminists for having taken away what they feel is rightfully theirs.

But exposing masculinity can also be transformative for children, women, and entire communities. And for men, engaging in dialogue about masculinity can be liberating. It may require a refusal of privilege, but this refusal opens new windows into developing emotional intelligence, accepting vulnerability, and becoming part of a more egalitarian future. At the same time, a "hybrid masculinities" framework, which various contributors will touch on in this volume, cautions that claims of gender progress may hide the reproduction of deeper systems of oppression and power.

At the heart of masculinity lies a paradox: masculinity is powerful, yet fragile. Men are supposed to be leaders: physically strong, emotionally stoic, financially secure, and successful. Men are supposed to be the smartest, the fastest, the most visionary.

Virtually all qualities conventionally applied to masculinity symbolize power, control, and success. Yet, as several readings in this book demonstrate, this veneer of power masks a hidden insecurity. As Michael Kimmel (2012:5) states, "Throughout American history... men have been afraid of not measuring up to some vaguely defined notions of what it means to be a man." In fact, when men feel the least powerful and the least manly, they are the most likely to hurt themselves and others in attempts to reclaim power and manhood. A key task of this volume is to expose and break the assumptive ties between masculinity and power. Men are the gatekeepers of gender inequality, and thus can help

unlock the unequal gender system that entraps so many. In what follows, we trace the social construction of masculinity and provide an overview of different ways scholars have conceptualized and studied masculinity. Ultimately, we hope to equip readers with the intellectual tools to expose and change the unequal and one-dimensional definitions of current masculinity.

Theorizing Men and Masculinity

Masculinity has only been a vibrant topic of study in the past three decades, but social scientists have tried to explain men and gender for much longer. Among the first explanations emerged from *functionalism*, a conceptual framework that dominated in the first half of the 20th century and should be familiar to most students who have taken an introductory Sociology or Anthropology course. Functionalist theorists such as Émile Durkheim, Robert Merton, and Bronislaw Malinoskwi sought in their work "to relate the parts of the society to the whole" and "to relate one part to another" (Davis 1959:738). Parts and people in society were endowed with just that—a function—and they together formed an integrated whole. The social theorist Talcott Parsons used this basic framework to explain differences between men and women within the nuclear family, in what became the basis for "sex role theory." According to this theory, women possess an "expressive role" that was needed to manage relations within the home, while men possess an "instrumental role" required for managing relations between the family and the rest of society (Parsons and Bale 1955). This theory provided a way of thinking about how families socialize children into their appropriate roles, which become so deeply internalized in individuals—so a part of who they are—that they become something akin to a gender personality.

Sex role research, with a focus on the "cultural contradictions" between women's "roles" in the workplace and the family, persisted through the 1970s, but by this point feminist scholars had grown skeptical of this framing (for a review, see Hochschild 1973). On the one hand, sex role theory was unable to account for the diversity of social life; it assumed "too much consistency to social expectations, too much homogeneity to social life" (Segal 1993:627). The roles were too neat and tidy, and inappropriately assumed a universal experience of gender. On the other hand, sex role theory fell flat when it came to issues of power. As Judith Stacey and Barrie Thorne (1985) observed, sex role theory focused on consensus among individuals at the expense of how social structures help to perpetuate forms of gender inequality. Or as Tim Carrigan and his colleagues argued in a groundbreaking 1985 article, sex role theory could not account for how roles created conflict: how most men, for example, *fail* to live up to their gendered role expectations, and the often destructive consequences that follow. Moreover, these scholars made clear that theories of masculinity should build on the core feminist observation of relations of domination between men and women.

Research on masculinity took a leap forward with the work of Raewyn Connell (1987; 2005). The Australian sociologist developed a sophisticated theoretical architecture that she and her colleagues have revised over the years, and continues to impact masculinities research far and wide (see Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Connell provided a way of thinking about masculinity as a struggle for power. Building on the concept of *hegemony*, as it was theorized by the Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci, Connell argued that there is a hegemonic, or dominant form, of masculinity that rests atop a hierarchy of *multiple masculinities*. Or as Connell (2005:77) has written, hegemonic masculinity represents "[t]he configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women." Few men ever achieve this cultural ideal or possess the institutional power that accompanies it, but hegemonic masculinity regulates other configurations of masculine practice that are marginalized by race, sexuality, ability, and other lines of

- How does the reading define masculinity?
- How does this study account or fail to account for power?
- How does the reading account for the strength of masculinity? And its fragility?
- How does the study theorize a change in gender relations? Or how might the reading cast doubt on improving gender relations?

The next section, "Representations and Media," includes a set of readings that examines how spaces such as films, commercials, and social media prop up dominant formations of masculinity and often aggravate gender inequalities. You'll read about how popular Pixar movies have pushed a "new man" discourse, and how an online leak of nude photos of female celebrities enabled a virtual community of anonymous Twitter users to engage in a particularly insidious form of masculine domination. The book then switches gears to the topic of "Politics and Nationhood" in Section III. This set of readings will show how presidents to gun-carrying men in Detroit view themselves as protectors of the nation. You'll also read about the unique case of Barack Obama, who faced specific challenges as a black man in the nation's highest office, and who the author provocatively suggests has performed a "unisex" identity.

In Section IV, "Masculine Strategies," you will consider how a diverse group of men use varied strategies to secure a masculine self. They include men in Japan who have seen the decline of a once-dominant "salaryman" masculinity, to self-identified "nerds" who participate in a live-action role-playing club. The next section, "Relationships and Intimacy," includes readings that cover topics such as why well-to-do young men engage in "hooking up" over having serious relationships, to how black men on college campuses navigate gender and racial stereotypes in their interracial relationships. Section VI, "Shifting Masculinities," asks whether gender transgressions constitute real, progressive change in gender relations. While one reading argues that male college players evince more inclusive and physical and emotionally close relationships, a second reading in this section considers how a similar population—young white men—identify with a gay discourse, but in a manner that does little to destabilize gender and sexual inequality. The last section, "Violence and Resistance," links to several other sections in the text, and considers how violence structures masculine identities and gendered relationships. They include a life-history analysis of feminist men who participate in anti-violence work, and a chapter on the work of fighting and preventing sexual assault on college campuses.

Each section begins with a brief introduction that should help guide you through the readings. These introductions also contain a series of "questions to ponder" that cover the readings in that section, and occasionally ask you to make connections across sections. As you move throughout the volume, also try and identify readings that draw on similar theoretical frameworks and define masculinity in similar ways. Each section also lists a number of key concepts that you can be on the lookout for as you read and unmask masculinity.

Notes

1. The success of the woman-directed *Wonder Woman* in 2017 is a notable exception that proves this rule. Among the top 100 films in 2015, only 32 featured a female lead or co-lead, and only 31% of the characters with speaking roles in these films were women (Smith, Choueiti, and Pieper 2016). The "Bechdel test" has been used to measure sexism and gender inequality in films. To pass, a film needs to fulfill three requirements. It has to feature (1) at least two women (2) who talk to each other about (3) something besides a man. According to a website dedicated to tracking and testing these films (http://bechdeltest.com), 40% of some 7,000 films fail the Bechdel test (Friedman, Daniels, and Blinderman 2017).

2. See Katz's Ted Talk at https://www.ted.com/talks/jackson_katz_violence_against_women_it_s_a_men_s_issue.

difference. Connell's framework therefore helped to bridge the study of masculinity with intersectional research aimed at interrogating the interlocking nature of oppressions.

In 2009, the sociologists Douglas Schrock and Michael Schwalbe took stock of the first two decades of research on masculinities. As they saw it, the field had made important advances, but suffered from what they call a "men *and*" pattern. Wide-ranging research had examined topics such as men *and* sexuality, men *and* aging, and men *and* crime. But in doing so—in categorizing the seemingly endless groups of men, or what they call the "problems with plurality"—the field of masculinity research had lost sight of a key contribution of early studies: that masculinity is about securing and protecting power. Schrock and Schwalbe have asked scholars and students to focus again on what men and boys *do* (West and Zimmerman 1987). This "doing" they termed "manhood acts," which "are aimed at claiming privilege, eliciting deference, and resisting exploitation" (2009:281). A number of readings in this volume make use of this framework to show how men compensate for injured masculine selves with particular forms of manhood acts.

Just as Schrock and Schwalbe sought to re-orient the field with their concept of "manhood acts," a new way of understanding masculinity emerged. "Inclusive masculinity" posed a challenge to both hegemonic masculinity theory and manhood acts (Anderson 2009; McCormack 2013). According to this framework, more and more young men have demonstrated "inclusive" behaviors in the past several decades. For instance, they reject homophobic sentiments and are more accepting of gay classmates and teammates. In a period of declining "homohysteria," or strong anti-gay sentiments, young men also demonstrate more of a willingness to be emotionally and physically close (for example, hug and kiss) other young men. Researchers in this area of work have argued that team sports especially have come to reject "orthodox" forms of masculinity grounded in homophobia, aggression, and violence.

One final theoretical framework is important for this volume. Just as inclusive masculinity has challenged previous frameworks and asked readers to consider a more optimistic view of gender relations, a "hybrid masculinities" framework has been quite skeptical of inclusive masculinity (Bridges 2014; Bridges and Pascoe 2014). According to these researchers, transformations in men's opinions, attitudes, and appearances may not necessarily signal real change. Instead, men may draw on elements of marginalized and stigmatized others (e.g., a gay identity, femininity) and softer forms of expression (e.g., emotional expressiveness) in order to *maintain* gender inequality and (heterosexual) men's power over others. A hybrid masculinities perspective, therefore, asks readers to consider how masculine power does not operate as in a top-down and clearly authoritative fashion, but recruits many men to act in strategic and subtle ways that disguise the ongoing reproduction of hegemonic masculinity (Demetriou 2001).

What to Expect in This Book

The 35 readings in this volume include classic texts in the field; several innovative, cutting-edge readings; and a number of exciting original contributions. The readings are broken up into seven sections. Section I, "Theories of Masculinity," expands on our brief discussion above, and includes readings on several theoretical frameworks in the study of men and masculinity, including hegemonic masculinity, manhood acts, inclusive masculinity, and hybrid masculinities. The remaining six sections include readings that adopt, build on, and challenge these theories. Keep these general questions in mind as you read:

- How does the author or authors use a particular conceptual framework to explain the case study at hand? How might another framework help to illuminate or even challenge the reading's data?

3. See https://www.pinterest.com/socimages/pointlessly-gendered-products. Of course, many products today are marketed to both men and women, and boys and girls. Often these products use stereotypical images and colors, and are intended to "toughen up" a product for men. Why drink sangria when you can drink mangria? Have a donut when you can eat a bronut? But there are, quite literally, important hidden costs to the consumption of gendered products. A product targeted to women (e.g., face moisturizer) often costs more than the equivalent product for men. This has been called a "woman tax" (Willett 2015).

4. See Jennifer Seibel Newsome's 2015 documentary *The Mask You Live In*. Seibel chose a title that sounds like "masculine." Michael Kimmel, the author of readings no. 14 and no. 21 in this volume, is interviewed in the film. Kimmel describes how the preeminent emotion associated with masculinity is anxiety. Never secure, boys and men feel constant pressure to prove their masculinity.

5. The idea that individuals wear masks in face-to-face interaction with others has its roots in the influential sociology of Erving Goffman (1970). A dramaturgical approach claims that people often attempt to conceal their authentic self behind masks.

6. See Lisa Wade's post "From Manly to Sexy: The History of the High Heel" (February 5, 2013) at https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2013/02/05/from-manly-to-sexy-the-history-of-the-high-heel.

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