

Seminario de Masculinidad

- ◆ Brittan, A. "Masculinity and identity", Cap.II, Maculinity and Power, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989.

2

Masculinity and Identity

My intention in this chapter is to examine the preoccupation with identity in current discussions about gender. To be sure, identity is not only a gender problem; it is also important for 'ethnic politics' and for contemporary accounts of class consciousness. Indeed, identity has infiltrated into every kind of popular and academic discourse. To a certain extent, it has become one of those portmanteau terms which purport to illuminate individual experience, but which, instead, end up in a morass of obscurity. Nevertheless, the fact that identity is a highly contentious and ambiguous concept does not mean that it has no value for any consideration of the relationship between subjectivity and social processes.

In the case of gender identity there are three emphases which are relevant to the 'theorization' of masculinity:

- 1 the socialization case;
- 2 masculine crisis theory;
- 3 the reality construction model.

The Socialization Case

The socialization case emphasizes the internal representations of sexual differences associated with the learning of sex roles. Gender identity is acquired through socialization. Unfortunately, in the literature, there is a great deal of confusion in the use of terms like 'sex role' and 'gender role'. For the purposes of this discussion, I use them as interchange-

159
2 Poder
4
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able concepts, although I realize that there are considerable objections to doing so.

Kessler and McKenna (1978, p. 8) define gender identity as: 'an individual's own feeling of whether she or he is a woman or a man, or a girl or a boy. In essence gender identity is self-attribution of gender.' In short, gender identity is the subjective sense that a man or woman has about his or her masculinity or femininity. It can be conceived of as a person's interpretation and acting out of the generally accepted social definitions of what it is to be a man or woman. Hence, a man becomes a man because he learns the required behaviour associated with the male gender role. He comes to define himself from the perspective of those around him who treat him as male.

In Western society, gender identity is considered to be central to a person's biography. The sexual division of labour ensures that from the moment of his birth a boy is not only differentiated from a girl, but that he is also treated differently. From the cradle to the grave, he is inculcated with expectations, beliefs and values designed to make him conform to extant gender divisions. A boy will be expected to do things that boys do, and not things that girls do – he is not encouraged to play with girls' toys, just as he is not supposed to be timid when playing with other boys. At the same time, he learns about his sexuality and how it differs from a girl's sexuality; he comes to know himself as gendered in terms of the internalization of these differences. At any given moment he can locate himself as a 'male' with a biography which is markedly different from that of a female – he can envisage his past as a boy, he can remember his first experience of desire, he can look forward to a future in which he will still be a man. In other words, he regards his gender, his sexuality, as being a bedrock of his life in the world. His gender identity is experienced as though it is certain and unambiguous.

Now this emphasis does assume that society is organized in such a fashion that the sexual division of labour is natural or, if not natural, is permanent for all practical purposes. It also assumes the universality of heterosexuality. It is easy enough to draw the conclusion that gender identity is to a

large degree a reflection of broader sexual divisions. I know I am a man because my parents, my teachers, my friends, my employers, my wife etc. define and treat me as such. And I know these things because I have been exposed to the determining power of socialization processes which give me this knowledge, and also profoundly influence my behaviour.

To be sure I may have exaggerated the socialization case, but there is no doubt that certain versions of role theory come very close to completely encapsulating gender and sexuality in social strait-jackets. The problem with such a view is that it does not enable us ever to be anything other than the roles we have internalized. This means that when I behave like a man this can be accounted for by my identification with some master gender script which lays down the requirements of my role performance – it is assumed that I will conform to these requirements either because not to do so would have negative consequences (I might be punished, ridiculed, ostracized etc.) or because I imitate, model and identify with other men (fathers, teachers, friends etc.). In both instances, the implication is that I experience my maleness, my masculinity, as nothing more than an ensemble of internalized social relationships.

The socialization case assumes that a man's and a woman's body respectively provide *different* foundations on which the social and cultural world builds its gender system. Biological differences are the starting point for the construction of an edifice of gender differences. *Roles are added to biology to give us gender* – and, once this happens, men and women acquire their appropriate gender identities. In a nutshell, the socialization thesis asserts that human beings acquire gender as a result of the social definition and construction of male or female bodies. A man will become a man only when his genitals are defined as having the attributes that belong to men. It is as though he can only testify to his masculinity because others have said this is how he has to be.

Underpinning the socialization case are a number of associated arguments and assumptions. First, there is the assumption that gender and gender identity are acquired in early childhood. Right from the beginning of a person's life there is a systematic attempt on the part of parents and

other child-minders to reproduce the existing gender divisions of society. A boy not only has to learn to behave like a boy, he also has to feel like a boy. So, according to the literature, the foundations of gender identity are laid down at a time when the child is flexible and impressionable. In starker versions of this position, the child is literally forced to acquire the appropriate gender because he or she has no defence against the superior power of parents.

Secondly, the socialization thesis assumes that there is a clearly demarcated sexual division of labour which shapes male and female roles. To acquire a firm sense of gender identity presupposes the ability to distinguish oneself from a complementary, but opposing, identity. If men are breadwinners or hunters, and women are mothers and food gatherers, then it is logical to suppose that these differences will be reflected in the way in which men and women define themselves.

Thirdly, it does not allow for deviance, that is, it treats anomalies as if they were irrelevant, or as being due to some biological defect or psychological problem.

Obviously, the socialization thesis is beset by all sorts of difficulty. Is deviance nothing more than an instance of malfunction, a quirk in the operation of the sexual division of labour? Moreover, this image of complete social absorption suggests a society in which there is a perfect fit between the individual and role demands, and this, to say the least, is a dream of social theory, not reality. Where do we find a society where men and women conform to this master stereotype? True, in the nineteenth century it was fashionable for Western anthropologists and colonialists to report back to their European audience on the peculiar sexual behaviour of colonized people, but behind this behaviour they always discovered the 'inevitability' of the sexual division of labour. In the hands of a supposedly more sophisticated social science, the sexual division of labour was described in terms of the inexorable pressure of role expectations and demands. Such a thoroughgoing social determinism makes it impossible to envisage how, for example, we can ever conceive of opposition and resistance to gender ascription and attribution?

Put very simply, if we accept the socialization thesis at its

face value, we would have to give up any idea of subverting and changing present gender inequalities. And perhaps equally important, the thesis does not fit the facts – there never have been societies constructed in this way. This point is put nicely by Connell:

Socialization theory, supposing a mechanism of transmission and a consensual model of what is produced, has been credible to the extent that social scientists have been willing to ignore both choice and force in social life. I would argue, with Sartre and Laing, for seeing them as constitutive. 'Agencies of socialization' cannot produce mechanical effects in a growing person. What they do is invite the child to participate in social practice in given terms. The invitation may be, and often is coercive – accompanied by heavy pressure to accept and no mention of an alternative. (Connell, 1987, p. 195)

In other words, gender acquisition is not smooth, harmonious and consensual. The conventional view of socialization is that children become social to the extent that they absorb and internalize ready-made norms of behaviour. Thus we are bombarded with images of young boys learning to become men in terms of a generally accepted norm of masculinity. Although the literature allows for contradiction in the traditional male sex role, these contradictions are never really decisive. What remains central is the belief that there is a 'male sex role' which inevitably ensures the compliance of most men (Solomon, 1982 pp. 45–76). Although the traditional view makes allowance for force, it does not attempt to account for force, except in so far as it may speak of male aggressiveness as being intrinsic to male power, and this, to say the least, is tautological. We cannot say that boys are socialized to be aggressive and assertive, and at the same time claim that they are intrinsically aggressive.

Connell argues that the entire discussion of socialization in the social sciences has been:

supported by two occupational blindnesses, the inability of sociologists to recognise the complexities of the person, and the unwillingness of psychologists to recognise the dimensions of social power. Both groups have been willing to settle for a

consensual model of intergenerational transfer – playing down conflict and ignoring violence – and for a consensual model of the psychological structure produced. (Connell, 1987, p. 194)

In the case of the male sex role, this has led to a picture of masculinity which is both clear-cut and uncompromising. It is a picture which does not allow for any departure from male gender scripts, nor does it allow for conflict between so-called 'agencies of socialization'. To believe, for example, that there is a degree of consistency between early primary socialization, and the secondary socialization of school and employment, is to argue for a view of social processes which does violence to reality. Although we might agree that in certain historical circumstances socialization appears to work like this (in Nazi Germany for instance), it is also clear that in these circumstances, we are not merely talking about socialization. What we are doing is to highlight the way in which institutions like the state use socialization processes in order to flatten dissent and ensure compliance. Socialization mediates force; it is not coterminous with it. The construction of male gender identity in Nazi Germany, therefore, was not only a matter for socialization agencies. Rather, it was an essential component of state policy.

Yet even in such a totalitarian context, the proposition that all German men were turned into a species of aggressive and intolerant sexist and racist is not in keeping with the evidence. Certainly, German men were strongly invited 'to participate in a social practice' premised on 'strength', 'nationalism' and 'heterosexuality', but this does not mean that they all accepted this invitation, nor does it mean that those who appeared to conform to the Nazi stereotype of masculinity did so without resistance.

The real trouble with the socialization thesis is that it finds it almost impossible to explain the exceptions to the rule. It cannot account for change, either at the individual or the social level. It cannot explain why some men have not accepted the invitation to participate in heterosexuality, nor why others may feel uncomfortable even when playing the game according to the rules.

Masculine Crisis Theory

Masculine crisis theory is founded on the observation that both men and women deviate from the master gender stereotypes of their society. Indeed, this version seems to suggest that gender identity is tentative and fragile, especially in the case of men. Pleck (1981) has analysed and summarized the literature and research findings related to male gender identity which have been dominant in the social sciences since the 1930s. What he calls 'male sex role identity' is a concept which focuses on the crisis of masculinity prevalent in Western industrial societies. The presumption is that this crisis was brought about by the erosion of male power in the workplace and in the home. In the past, men supposedly knew who they were; their roles were minutely specified, and they also knew who women were supposed to be. However, all this has changed – they have lost their gender certainty, their sense of place in a world in which women are challenging them at all levels. Their response has been to over-compensate for this loss of power and authority but, the more they do this, the more acute is their feeling of insecurity and anxiety. Whether or not this is only a phenomenon associated with the emergence of industrial society is not immediately clear. What is certain is that over the past few decades the crisis has apparently increased in severity.

Basically, the problem is that men find it difficult to identify with appropriate male role models. If such models are absent, or partially absent, men suffer from an acute sense of gender confusion. A healthy gender identity requires a proper identification with some kind of father-figure.

Sex role identity is the extremely fragile outcome of a highly risky developmental process, especially so for the male. An individual's sex role identity ideally derives from his or her relationship with the same-sex parent. A man's efforts to attain a healthy sex role identity in this way are thwarted by such factors as paternal absence, maternal over-protectiveness, the feminising influence of the schools, and the general blurring of male and female roles that

is occurring now in society . . . the failure of men to achieve masculine sex role identity is a major problem in our culture, one obvious expression of which is homosexuality. A man also reveals his insecurity in his sex role identity by phenomena such as delinquency, violence, and hostility toward women. If we understand the factors that cause role identity problems in men, then we can prevent or reduce these problems in the future and perhaps even provide help now. (Pleck, 1982, pp. 3-4)

In contrast to the socialization thesis, male crisis theory stresses psychological need as being of paramount importance. If a man's needs are not met, then he is likely to be socially and sexually ineffective. In the last instance, the crisis of masculinity is a problem of male psychology. A society which does not encourage the development of strong sex role identities is a sick society.

This argument explains male gender problems in terms of psychological processes, which have their origin in early or primary socialization. It is what happens to a boy in infancy and childhood which determines his sexual and mental future. His initial interactions with his parents, therefore, are responsible for his present discontents. The contemporary family no longer provides a framework in which he can identify with an appropriate father or male figure due to the logic of the sexual division of labour. In the past men worked at home, or in the local community, or they took their sons hunting, but now they go out to work away from home and neighbourhood, leaving women with the sole responsibility for the rearing of children. This is fatal for male gender identity. What is needed is a family context in which boys have equal emotional and cognitive access to both parents, but this is impossible in a world where men are only marginally concerned with their sons' socialization. The assertion that boys have a 'need' to identify with their fathers, and that this need is frustrated in contemporary society, implies that we can actually describe and identify this need. But can we? While commonsense accounts of male gender development presume that those boys who do not have fathers living with their mothers will inevitably be at a disadvantage when compared with those boys who have a 'normal' family life, the evidence seems to be much more

ambiguous and contradictory (Pleck, 1981, pp. 56-8). In fact, this evidence indicates that there is not much difference between those boys with, and those without, fathers. So when we say that a boy 'needs' his father we may be echoing popular opinion and ideology, not reality.

The achievement of men who somehow have successfully negotiated the pitfalls of inappropriate gender identifications can be compared to the runners in an obstacle race. The object of this race is to acquire an unambiguous gender identity. The rules are deceptively simple - in order for a boy to become a man he must not allow himself to be attracted to other paths to adulthood - he must stick to the path taken by other men, especially his father. Before modernization and industrialization, the path and obstacles to manhood were well defined and understood, but this is no longer the case. The old certainties about the male sex role, the fragmentation of social life and consciousness means that old rules are no longer of much use because they are continuously rewritten and reinterpreted, so that by the time a boy reaches adulthood, he is not clear in his mind whether or not he has successfully run a race, or even that a race has been run.

Today, if there is a race, then it is no longer a straight run to the finish. Everybody seems to be under different 'starter's orders'. Everywhere there are casualties, everywhere men are nursing bruised egos, everywhere the course is littered with the debris of their unresolved sexual conflicts. However, even when a man does arrive at the finishing post and appears to have overcome all obstacles, there is still something suspect about this. We do not believe that there can be a successful winner of the race because we have accepted, albeit unconsciously, the proposition that male gender identity can only be achieved or acquired when the psychological conditions are favourable. Now, all we can see is the spectacle of countless millions of men experiencing acute gender anxieties. Something has gone badly wrong in the male psyche.

What I am stressing here is that the dominant orthodoxy in the discussion of masculinity has been heavily overlaid by psychology. The entire spectrum of social and political problems facing Western civilization is explained by reference

to traumas of the male psyche. In previous centuries, the male psyche, although troubled by outbreaks of irrationality, was always brought under control by clearly defined rules and prohibitions. Masculinity was circumscribed by a world in which gender differences were taken for granted. Now, everything is in a state of flux and uncertainty. Instead of the framework which accepted without question the naturalness of heterosexuality, everywhere we see the old regime subverted by other sexualities which make it almost impossible to speak of male identity with any degree of confidence at all. By giving such a heavy emphasis to psychology, the analysis of masculinity moves away from consideration of the social relations of patriarchy by focusing on the subjective experience of men who cannot function properly in the modern world. So men fight wars, engage in the most ferocious competition, play games, rape and live their lives pornographically because they no longer know how to cope with their desires. To be sure, they did all these things in the past, but this was always in the context of an identity which they supposedly experienced as possessing an enduring reality.

Underpinning the research and theoretical arguments of masculine crisis theory is an amalgam of psychoanalytic, role learning and cognitive approaches to gender acquisition. Most of these approaches highlight the extreme vulnerability of masculine identity, although the psychoanalytic version has been most influential in providing the essential ingredient of the thesis, namely that gender identity is the product of a developmental process which has its roots in early childhood. Furthermore, they all, to a lesser or greater degree, assume that gender identity is a necessary dimension of normal personality growth. A person without a gender identity is, by this token, not fully human. As we have already noted, men are more likely than women to be deficient in this respect. Pleck argues that masculine crisis theory retains its influence despite the fact that it has been subject to trenchant criticism. This is due to a number of factors (Pleck, 1981, pp. 156-60).

First is the current preoccupation with fatherhood and the plethora of both academic and media coverage of the father's

role in child-rearing. Fatherhood is now back in fashion – a child's mental and physical health is now seen to be crucially dependent on the father's participation in nurturing activities. 'Boys need their fathers' has become one of the dominant themes in psychological discussion of male behaviour. A whole range of 'abnormal' behaviours is attributed to the absence of the father, including homosexuality and delinquency.

Secondly, in blaming the absence of the father for the fragility of male gender identity, the emphasis has switched to the mother as the most significant figure in a boy's psychological development. Both Chodorow (1978) and Dinnerstein (1987) have been in the forefront of this change in emphasis. From different starting points they reverse the orthodox Freudian position about the inevitability (given the right conditions) of a child identifying with the parent of the same sex. For Freud, this process always involved a tremendous psychic battle in which boys overcame their Oedipal fixations on their mothers by internalizing their fathers' threat of castration. The successful resolution of the Oedipus complex meant that they became 'men'. Those boys who did not manage to identify with their fathers (from Freud's perspective) are the reserve army of future neurotics and social misfits. Freud's picture of male gender identity was therefore one in which identity was achieved at the cost of giving up one's mother. Admittedly, this achievement is always problematic and often unstable, but given that Freud was committed to a version of family life in which men always assumed the dominant role, and which he thought was both necessary and almost universal, it is not surprising that he saw father-son relationships as being the foundation stone on which all civilized life is built. The price of civilization is the cost of men giving up their desire for their mothers, even though this meant that they would never feel comfortable with themselves. (For Freud there is no such thing as a fully integrated personality in which the different elements of the psyche co-exist in harmony with each other.) Nevertheless, lurking beneath the surface of the masculine ego is an intense irrational emotionality which must be continuously monitored and repressed. Take away the framework that allows a son to identify with his father and then anything can happen.

Historically, this framework began to collapse with the supposed divorce between home and work. The encapsulation of men and women into public and private spheres, respectively, was the first milestone on the road to the disintegration of the male psyche. The absence of the father became the normal condition of family life. The socialization and disciplining of sons were left to mothers who also acted on behalf of the absent father. In other words, instead of a real father-figure, sons identified with the symbolic representation of the father, a representation interpreted and defined by the mother. Mothers punished their sons if they misbehaved; it was they who were left with the task of turning their sons into men. Moreover, it was mothers who were expected to force their sons to reject any kind of identification with femininity. They were responsible for ensuring the channeling of their sons into the appropriate path defined by the sexual division of labour.

any society in which a traditional division of labour exists, that is, in just about all societies, a baby boy inevitably identifies first with his mother and then has to struggle to attain an unavoidably elusive 'masculine' identity defined negatively by the society's rigid denunciation of male participation in female work and especially of even a partial return by the male to anything resembling an infant's closeness to the mother. This being the case, the male invariably comes to devalue typically female work and attitudes in order to protect himself against forbidden wishes and at the same time may well come to harbour a repressed hostility to his mother for denying him even temporary return to that once safe port of call, a hostility which he may come to displace on the female sex in general. Since the male is, of course, a male because he finds himself in possession of a penis instead of a clitoris, vagina, womb and breasts, typically male activities will almost invariably come to be associated with the 'power' of the penis. Since in addition the male may well, at either a conscious or unconscious level, resent being thus forced into elusive manhood through the absence of a womb, he may well come to envy women their reproductive capacity which, while denigrating at one level, he will at another level attempt to emulate or even surpass in the performance of certain of his masculine activities. From this point of view, then, a sexual division of labour brings with it the seeds of hostility

and conflict on the part of men towards women and then of reciprocated hostility and conflict on the part of women towards men. (Easlea, 1983, pp. 11-12)

I have quoted from Easlea's text at length because it seems to me to present the kernel of this thesis. Easlea's discussion is based to a large extent on the work of Chodorow. Chodorow herself owes her theoretical position to Freudian object-relations theory. Although there are various schools and emphases in this approach, in general they all tend to focus on the relationship between the mother and child, especially the bonding of emotion and identity that takes place between them in the infant years. The cardinal question here is how do male children identify with, and then breakaway from, their mothers? Chodorow suggests that from the very beginning mothers engage in an exercise of confirming sexual differences. A mother has literally to coerce the boy into a masculine gender identity. A boy has to give up his mother as an emotional object - he has to reject feminine attributes by becoming something other than feminine, but he can only do this if his mother is there to ensure that he does so (Chodorow, 1978).

So a woman to a large extent colludes in her future oppression. It is she who reproduces the gender system, and it is she who is the creator of an insecure male gender identity. Boys are taught to separate themselves from female tutelage, they are expected to identify with an absent father or, more accurately, the abstract qualities associated with masculinity. In this respect, a mother is the symbolic representative of heterosexuality - the guardian of the gender status quo. Moreover, in Dinnerstein's view, the entire fabric of male-female relationships depends on the overpowering influence that women have in the socialization process. Right from the moment a child is born he is engulfed in maternal care, but this care is always ambiguous and contradictory. It is the mother who has to discipline the child, and it is the mother who is resented because her children cannot come to terms with her power. In the case of male children this means that they spend the rest of their lives trying to escape from the consequences of her awesome

potency. It is a woman's *power* that men resent, not merely the fact that they have lost their 'safe harbour'. Mothers both frustrate and meet their needs – it is this single factor that determines their future hostility to women. Somehow or other, they will get their own back, not only on their mothers, but on their wives, their girlfriends, their female employees. Having been cast out into the world, they make an alliance with other men who have equally suffered at the hands of women. Hence, the subordination of women is guaranteed by the nature of the child–mother relationship (Dinnerstein, 1987).

What both Chodorow and Dinnerstein emphasize in different ways, is that the emergence of masculinity is not simply dependent on the repression of castration anxiety, on the resolution of the male Oedipal complex, but on the way in which male infants experience their mothers. In the final analysis, men are created by women and until such time as the present child-rearing practices of our society (and most societies) are changed, it is likely that the present male-dominated culture will continue to exist. Men have to be brought back into child-rearing in order to maximize human potential. By a roundabout route we come back to the original proposition, namely that male children need their fathers to achieve a balanced gender identity. The historic domination of child-rearing by women has led (so the argument goes) to an asymmetrical dichotomization of gender. Both sons and daughters internalize the mother as object, but it is only sons who have to give her up. Their separation from the mother sets in motion all those characteristics that we associate with masculinity, characteristics that Simone De Beauvoir and others see leading to the 'male transcendental ego' bestriding history like some out-of-control leviathan (De Beauvoir 1972). From this perspective, patriarchy seems to be expressly designed for the purpose of giving men the power to cope with the powerlessness they experience when their mothers insist that they become men.

Although masculine crisis theory has been subject to attack, it still retains a large degree of influence on both the social science and lay imagination. One reason for this is the importance given to the role of the father in contemporary

child-rearing practices. The emphasis here is on the need for fathers to become participatory members of the nuclear family in order to help their sons find suitable role models. In the case of girls the problem is not so acute because they still mainly identify with their mothers. Despite the undermining of traditional family structures, women on the whole are more likely than men to achieve a satisfactory gender identity (so the argument goes). Male children, on the other hand, are increasingly faced with the problem of finding an appropriate model. The remedy suggested by expert and everyday opinion is that men should somehow or other be involved in the nurturing process. Not only should they take their turn in looking after their children, but they should also be prepared to take full responsibility for the domestic sphere. What is demanded here is a complete role reversal which would allow women to go out to work full-time, while their husbands stay at home and do all the things associated with mothering. In this way, it is believed, male children will have the opportunity to have empathy with and identify with their fathers. Moreover, fathers will eventually lose their hardness, their assertive male egos, because they will be involved in the nitty-gritty of child care which demands complete emotional commitment. There are two points to be made in this context.

First, it is taken for granted that male children do need to identify with the parent of the same sex, and that if they fail to do so, they will have both gender and personality problems. Secondly, it is also taken for granted that women are somehow to blame for their own oppression, because they have been largely instrumental in defining and reinforcing the masculinity of their sons. Now this might not be the intention of those theorists like Chodorow and Dinnerstein who have been active in deconstructing the patriarchal bias of orthodox Freudian theory, but this is how they are often interpreted by some other critics. For example, Grimshaw writes:

It is not always clear how far Chodorow sees her thesis about psychological differences between males and females as depending on the existence of a particular kind of child-care or family life.

or how far she sees it as dependent simply on the fact that women have been mainly responsible for the care of infants. I do not think that Chodorow really intends to put forward a thesis about the psychic development of males and females in all historical periods, and she criticises Freud for example, for failing to recognise the historical specificity of the constellation of family relationships that he saw as underlying the Oedipus complex. On the other hand, there are points at which it is not difficult to read Chodorow as arguing that it is simply women's responsibility for child-care which is the crucial factor in the different psychic development of males and females. (Grimshaw, 1986, pp. 57-8)

The problem is, that in claiming that it is a woman's control of child care which is the determining factor in the development of male and female gender identity, there is a temptation to go much further and say that this control is the cause of all our present discontents. Thus Easlea (1981, 1983) sees the present slide into nuclear madness as being a measure of the instability of male gender identity which not only resents women and sees them as objects, but also attempts to dominate nature itself. On the face of it, therefore, it seems to me that child-rearing is elevated into a master psychological and social process, which assumes the same kind of status as the mode of production does in Marxism. In other words, when mothers force their male children out into the world, they not only unleash a terrible potentiality for mass destruction, but they also reproduce the structure of domination. All domination is derived from this basic relationship.

Now to say this, is somehow to go back to a reductionist version of human behaviour. If the basic human relationship is that between a mother and child, and if that relationship determines all others, then domination and oppression are inevitable facts of life. Historical specificity is dismissed as being irrelevant because of the prior assumption that children 'need' their mothers, and mothers 'need' their children. This is to assume that these relationships have always been like this, and will always remain so. Yet, the entire thrust of most feminist and social constructionist critiques of patriarchy and masculinism takes issue with

essentialistic and reductionist accounts of gender and social processes. While both Chodorow and Dinnerstein are very much aware of the historicity of child-rearing processes, and are also sensitive to the diversity of family and kinship systems, this does not prevent them from abstracting the mother-child relationship as though it exists independently of time and place.

Perhaps one of the difficulties in any discussion about gender and gender identity is that our terms of reference are already defined for us. I have already noted that most discussions of masculinity are informed and often shaped by masculinism, by the prevalent ideology of gender differences and inequalities. Certainly, the discussion of gender identity is not immune from this, especially the assumption that gender and identity are terms which have some kind of reality, some kind of measurability. But what if we argued to the contrary, namely that gender identity is infinitely negotiable, that the specification of masculine and feminine traits was simply an aspect of a continuing process of interactive relationships in which both men and women mutually construct, confirm, reject or deny their identity claims? Why should we assume that identity is predetermined or made in the crucible of family relationships? Both the socialization model and masculine crisis theory have no doubts about the history of gender identity. They both assume that this history has a beginning, a middle and an end. What happened in childhood determines who and what we are now.

What seems to be clear is that both versions of gender identity acquisition assume that certain things are done to children by their parents and other socialization agencies, and that once done, nothing can reverse or subvert what is done. We say, for example, that 'he' is sexually aggressive because of childhood experiences, or we say that 'he' joined the army because everything in his history makes this inevitable. Not only was his father a war hero, but his mother encouraged him to follow in his father's footsteps. However, in the case of masculine crisis theory, we also assert that a man's present psychosexual insecurity is understandable as a direct result of his ambivalent attitude

towards women arising from his relationship with his mother. From this point of view, therefore, the present is always determined by the past.

The Reality Constuction Model

The reality construction model is an alternative to this biographical and developmental view of gender. It argues that gender has no fixed form, and that gender identity is what I claim it to be at this particular moment in time. Although all the indications are that most people do not question the dichotomous view of sex and gender as given, this is not to say that such a questioning does not take place. All that one can say at the present is that I see myself as a 'man', but this may be simply an interpretation of myself in a specific context. Usually such an interpretation is considered to be unproblematic because on inspection I find myself to have the appropriate sexual organs which are associated with 'maleness'. Also, I presumably display secondary sexual characteristics which are taken to be a sign of my membership of the community called 'men'. The point about this is, that in inspecting myself and coming to the conclusion I am a man, I am not simply replicating automatically what everybody else has told and taught me about men, I am also accomplishing or doing 'maleness'. Every time I see myself as a man I am doing 'identity work'. Although, it may appear that I take my masculinity for granted, in reality I only do so because I work at it. Every social situation, therefore, is an occasion for identity work. Of course, it may well be that all the 'identity work' I do will prop up the dichotomous view of gender, but this is merely another way of saying that gender is always a construction which has to be renegotiated from situation to situation.

The idea that gender has to be accomplished, rather than considering it a finished product, runs counter to both the socialization thesis and the masculine crisis theory. Most socialization theories are premised on the assumption that a person's life story can be seen in developmental terms. Hence, gender identity is regarded as being some kind of

internal snapshot that men or women may have of themselves at any point in their histories. What the snapshot will show reflects the particular experiences of the individual. In any event, the traditional view is that gender identity is always the result of forces that have entered into its construction. These forces determine, mould, shape and define the gender pictures we have of ourselves. They do not allow us much leeway in the way of experimentation and role reversal.

Take as an example the person who knows he is gay. Such a self-attribution may not be supported by the people he comes into contact with. His family may not know, his co-workers may not know, his friends may not know. Some people may know, perhaps other people who define themselves as gay. The point of this is to suggest that a great deal of work goes into the presentation of an acceptable image of gender. Although everybody else (except those in the know) accepts without question the reality of external manifestations of straightness, a gay person may have to work hard at maintaining and presenting himself as such. Moreover, he may also have to do identity work in the gay community. To be sure, a great deal of the evidence for this perspective comes from the observation and analysis of trans-sexuality, but the conclusions to be drawn are the same. Gender is not static – it is always subject to redefinition and renegotiation.

It may be objected that the evidence used for the claim that gender has to be accomplished comes from atypical instances. What about so-called normal gender identity? Surely a heterosexual male does not have to engage in identity work? Kessler and McKenna argue that what happens in so-called 'violations' of normal gender behaviour may illustrate the operation of identity work in general. They write:

Garfinkel's assumption (which we share) is that something can be learned about what is taken for granted in the 'normal' case by studying what happens when there are 'violations'. Transsexuals take their own gender for granted, but they cannot assume that others will. Consequently, transsexuals must manage themselves as male or female so that others will attribute the 'correct' gender. It is easier for us to see that transsexuals 'do' (accomplish) gender than it is to see this process in nontranssexuals.

The transsexuals' construction of gender is self-conscious. They make obvious what nontranssexuals do 'naturally'. Even though gender accomplishment is self-conscious for transsexuals, they share with all the other members of the culture the natural attitude toward gender. The ways that transsexuals talk about the phenomenon of transsexualism, the language they use, their attitude about genitals, and the questions they are unable to answer, point to their belief that though others might see them as violating the facts, they, themselves believe that they are not violating them at all. (Kessler and McKenna, 1978, p. 114)

The implication of this is that even though we take our own gender identities for granted, even though we naturalize sexual differences by giving them the status of facts, we are nevertheless always in the business of putting together our sense of gender. What is taken for granted can be subverted and threatened by interruptions and violations which test our confidence in our perceptions and attributions. If I have construed myself as a 'normal' heterosexual male, and then I am confronted by a situation in which all my own certainties appear to be nebulous and insecure, then I may have not only to make adjustments to my behaviour, but also begin partially to redefine my gender identity. For example, a man going into a 'gay' bar might think that the experience could be amusing, but if the 'regulars' begin to treat him as a member of their community he might not only find this uncomfortable, he may begin to understand that his own sexual commitments need some justification. Admittedly, such a justification may not mean that his belief in the security of his gender identity is in any way compromised, but it does put him into the position of having to be reflexive about a reality which previously he thought was inviolate and immutable. What is being suggested here is that this immutable reality is an accomplishment which, like all other human accomplishments, is tentative. Of course, this begs the question why so many people seem to make the same attributions about their own and other people's gender. How is it that most members of our society accomplish gender in more or less the same way? Why do the majority of men and women living in contemporary industrial society (and most

other kinds of social contexts) operate on a dichotomous view of gender? Why is masculinity opposed to femininity? In short, why does gender attribution appear to have such long-reaching consequences, so that its everyday accomplishment is never seen as an accomplishment, but is taken for granted as natural and inevitable?

These questions have traditionally been answered in terms of the mechanical interaction of social and biological factors which, together, produce a sense of gender in male and female bodies. Men and women become gendered at the moment they begin to define themselves in terms of sexual attributes. Sexual differences are thus written into the socialization process, so that by the end of infancy the child finds it almost impossible to question his or her gender. So, I 'know' that I am a man because I 'know' there are other people (women) who have different bodies, with different sexual characteristics.

How this all happens, of course, is the subject of various theories of child development but, whatever the theory, the end result is always couched in the language of 'stage irreversibility'. By this I mean that gender is considered to be the product of the intersection of a number of specific inputs which, together, force people into the dichotomous heterosexual world. Gender, from this point of view, is compulsory (with apologies to Adrienne Rich) – there is no possibility of negotiation. Yet, presumably the whole thrust of the contemporary analysis of gender by feminist theorists has been to argue for a social constructionist view of gender acquisition and sexuality. This is not to say that we must understand 'construction' in the sense of a rational decision to put together some kind of appropriate gender identity for this or that child; rather, it is to point to the possibility that the parties to the construction are not simply representatives of forces over which they have no influence or control.

Put differently, when it is claimed that the traditional account of gender acquisition and identity is premised on the notion of 'stage irreversibility', what is meant is that children are not in a position to resist the imposition of social and cultural controls, that they accept their gender ascription in a totally passive way. This is true of the socialization

thesis, and it is partially true of masculine crisis theory in that the acquisition of an insecure male gender identity is attributed to key events in a man's childhood, which continue to determine his behaviour. In both cases, it is taken for granted that a child cannot influence the outcome of his socialization, that he has not contributed to his own identity construction.

It is this fatalism is challenged by writers like Kessler and McKenna. Of course, gender attribution is not a haphazard process in which there is a labelling 'free for all'. The attribution process must not be confused with crude versions of labelling theory in which the naming of people gives them an identity. This is far too mechanistic – a label is only experienced as an aspect of self-definition when it is accepted as such by the object of the labelling attribution. In other words, when one treats a male child as a boy, when one says to him that little boys do not cry, or when one indicates to him that his sexual organs are the sign of his difference from females, this cannot be a one-way process in which parents simply turn organic material into a gendered being. The male child also makes his own attributions, he does his own identity work – he is also a party to the negotiation and construction.

In opposition to the accepted orthodoxy in the discussion of gender identity, this position denies 'stage irreversibility'. Gender is an accomplishment – moreover, it has to be accomplished in every situation. Every encounter between men and women, between straights and gays, is an occasion for identity work. Note that it is not being claimed that each episode evokes a potentially new gender identity – gender identity is not something which can be discarded at will; rather, it is seen as a set of reflexive strategies which are brought into play whenever gender is put on the line. In everyday life most heterosexuals do not have to do too much identity work because they tend to function in contexts in which heterosexuality is taken for granted. It is only when they are confronted with the unexpected that they have to put a lot of effort into their gender commitments. Furthermore, even when they do interact with people who have different and alternative gender identities, they do not

usually suddenly accept the idea that gender is an accomplishment; they may feel uncomfortable or hostile, but they do not immediately change their sexual allegiances. The point is that their discomfort is a sign that identity work is going on, that they somehow have to defend their own position. To be sure, such a defence may only serve to confirm and reinforce their original self-attributions, but in so doing they also may have an intuition of the tentativeness of all gender identities.

Conclusions and Difficulties

In this chapter I have been concerned with the problem of gender identity. I have looked at three emphases in the contemporary debate about its relevance to the explanation of masculinity.

The first emphasis located the construction of male gender identity in the inexorable workings of the sex-role system. The prognosis for the future here is pessimistic because it assumes that socialization operates in such a way as to ensure complete gender and behavioural conformity.

The second emphasis derives from all those studies which see male gender identity as problematic. Coupled with this is the evidence deriving from those feminist writers who have used 'object-relations' theory to account for the dominance of the mother in identity acquisition. The hypothesis here is that until child-rearing practices are no longer the responsibility of women alone, there will be no dismantling of patriarchy. Patriarchy is made possible by the near universality of mother-dominated nurturing which continuously reproduces the sexual division of labour.

The third emphasis questions the validity of gender identity (and gender) as a real object of analysis. It states that gender is a construction, an accomplishment depending on the attributions of both children and parents who together construct gender by giving it a sense of reality. The important thing to note here is that it is both parties to the interaction who sustain the belief in the naturalness of gender. However, the difficulty arises, as in the case of transsexuals, where there is a discrepancy between self-attribution

and the attribution of others. Yet even here, the original self-attribution is rooted in the intractability of the dichotomous gender system. Trans-sexuals usually define themselves as either male or female, not in terms of some third gender or transitional state. Gender constructions reflect the current generalized definitions of gender in the society of which one is a member. In modern Western society, the way that people accomplish gender is more or less guaranteed by the naturalization of heterosexuality, by the belief that biological differences are crucial in all matters relating to sexual and gender behaviour.

The social construction of gender and the attribution process are a part of reality construction. No member is exempt, and this construction is the grounding for all scientific work on gender. The natural attitude toward gender and the every day process of gender attribution are constructions which scientists bring with them when they enter laboratories to 'discover' gender characteristics. Gender as we have described it, consists of members' methods for attributing and constructing gender. Our reality is constructed in such a way that biology is seen as the ultimate truth. This is, of course, not necessary. In other realities for example, deities replace biology as the ultimate source of final truth. What is difficult to see, however, is that biology is no closer to the truth, in any absolute sense, than a deity; nor is the reality which we have been presenting. What is different among different ways of seeing the world are the possibilities stemming from basic assumptions about the way the world works. What must be taken for granted (and what need not be) changes depending on the incorrigible propositions one holds. The questions that should be asked and how they can be answered also differ depending on the reality. (Kessler and McKenna, 1978, p. 162)

The observation that different cultural realities have separate ways of construing gender is not remarkable in itself. After all, this has been the claim made by social and cultural anthropologists ever since they started examining the sexual lives of pre-literate societies. It is the starting point of most 'relativist' dissections of human diversity. However, what is being claimed here is that scientific discussion of gender is mostly predicated on the 'natural attitude' of the practitioner. Now, while I find myself having

some sympathy for this view, what I think is missing from such a perspective is any consideration of the political implications of gender attribution. Granted that our society makes dichotomous sex distinctions on the basis of biological criteria, and granted that other societies use religious and other criteria, this does not help us to understand why these distinctions are also critically important for patriarchy, for the prevalence of the masculine ideology. Why should a dichotomous construction of gender differences also be associated with gender inequality? Is gender inequality also an accomplishment? In one important sense it is, but it is not a neutral accomplishment; like all historical constructions, it is an expression of human interests and intentionalities. Gender inequality has its being in the historical construction of sexual differences. Why this should be so cannot be answered in terms of the attribution process alone. Why should most men start from the 'incorrigible proposition' that their biology gives them greater power than women? A very simple answer to this is that it is in men's interests to do so. Garfinkel's incorrigible propositions about reality and gender do not in themselves tell us why gender inequality and patriarchy exist.

Perhaps it would be appropriate to end this chapter by retreating from a too cavalier dismissal of an embodied gender hypothesis. Although I accept the notion that gender is an accomplishment, this does not mean that 'incorrigible propositions' do not have a deadly effect on human behaviour. The construction of male gender identity is enmeshed in a network of emotional and political processes. As such, it is experienced as real. It is this experience of its substantiality that gives various alternative accounts of gendered subjectivity their power, especially those which attempt to catch the real or imaginary potency of desire. It is in this respect that the next chapter deals with the problem of male sexuality, not simply as an accomplishment and a construction, but as lived experience. Whether or not psychoanalytic explanations of the origin of desire are rooted in the natural attitude is, of course, a relevant question, but it may be that we cannot deconstruct masculinity without examining the kind of evidence deriving from psychoanalytic sources. It

--- could well be that male sexuality (and sexuality in general) is nothing more than a construction, but if this is the case then it is a construction that has real consequences. Although we may deplore the essentialistic tendencies in psychoanalytic theorizing, this does not mean that we can dismiss psychoanalysis as being irrelevant in any discussion of gender and sexuality.

Accordingly, to assent to the notion that masculinity is an accomplishment is to ignore the peculiar way in which this accomplishment often saturates male existence with feelings of anxiety and rage. The attribution process cannot explain the 'depth' of a man's desires and feelings. It cannot, in other words, tell us why it is that so many men feel themselves to be the playthings of hidden forces which somehow make them do things in the name of uncontrollable desire. Why have men come to believe in the waywardness of their sexuality? How is it that men 'objectify' women? I would want to argue that the answers to these questions are not simply to be found in the fact that gender is a construction or an accomplishment, but also in the manner in which this accomplishment is 'embodied' in men.

Reference was made earlier to Connell's point about the way in which both psychologists and sociologists are 'blinded' by their own professional commitments in their discussion of socialization. Sociologists operate with a very bland and uncomplicated view of gender acquisition, while psychologists find it almost impossible to come to grips with 'social power'. The notion that a man's gender identity is learned without trauma is just as misconceived as seeing his aggressiveness in terms of overwhelming 'drives'. The sociological view of gender acquisition can be described as being too complacent, too conflict-free. It assumes that individuals go through life without ever facing difficulties and traumas. It assumes that, in the final analysis, everybody will find his or her niche in society. It assumes that men and women acquire gender in more or less the same way that other roles are acquired. We learn our gender identity in the same way that we learn to play the piano or swim. In other words, it denies intentionality to the person. So when I talk about the social being 'embodied' in men, what I am stressing is the political

construction of male gender identity. Thus, socialization is not simply about the acquisition of roles, but rather it is about the exercise of power by one group over another group.

Initially, it is parents who exercise power over children, especially over gender behaviour. Socialization can be seen, therefore, as the process whereby children acquire an ideology which naturalizes gender. It is also the process in which the 'body' becomes objectified in discourse, a discourse which takes for granted the 'reality' of sexual difference and inequality, and which assigns a particular kind of potency to the male body, and denies potency to the female body. This is the theme of the next chapter.