UNMASKING THE MASCULINE

'Men' and 'Identity' in a Sceptical Age

Alan Petersen

◆ Petersen, A. "", Cap. 1 y conclusiones, Unmasking the masculine: men and identity in sceptical age, London, Sage, 1998.

SAGE Publications
London • Thousand Oaks • New Delhi
Great Britain, 1998

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1. Epistemología
2. masculinidad
3. Identidad masculina

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank all those who have assisted me in the writing of this book, particularly Chris Rojek, from Sage Publications, who has been sympathetic and helpful from the outset, and has offered useful comments on early draft chapters. Special thanks are also due to Ros Porter, Robin Bunton, Lesley Jones, Dorothy Wardale and Don Abbey for their ideas, encouragement and companionship. I am grateful to the anonymous reader of an earlier version of the manuscript who offered useful critical feedback. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the support of Murdoch University which allowed me a period of study leave in which I was able to write much of the book.

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Introduction: the epistemology of 'masculinity'

This book focuses on contemporary constructions of masculinity and masculine identity. It examines the frameworks of knowledge that have shaped conceptions of manhood in the modern West, and it outlines a number of challenges posed to these conceptions by a recent shift in our theoretical understanding of the world. The 1990s saw a rapidly growing interest in men and their lives, as witnessed by a proliferating number of enquiries into men's emotions, men's relationships with partners, parents and siblings, men's health and sexuality, and the 'masculine crisis of identity'. While much research has been generated by academic feminists and gay male scholars, an increasing amount of work has also been undertaken by self-identified heterosexual men involved in what is a highly diverse 'men's movement' and in teaching and research in universities. A developing area of 'men's studies' has found a niche in many universities in the United Kingdom, North America, and Australia, and 'masculinity' and its discontents has become a popular topic of research among postgraduates and established scholars. This work has given rise to some interesting and provocative analyses, helping to highlight many issues long in need of exposition and analysis. However, questions concerning the construction of knowledge about men and 'masculinity' have remained marginal. Relatively few scholars have asked how modern Western societies have arrived at a conception of what constitutes normal masculine identity and behaviour, why certain research questions get raised while others remain unarticulated, and what assumptions about male bodies and selves are embedded in theories. In short, important questions of epistemology have been largely overlooked. This book directs attention to the epistemology of 'masculinity', and discusses the challenges posed to this epistemology by recent trends in social thought. I begin, in this chapter, by outlining my aims, assumptions, and arguments, and providing an overview of the individual chapters.

The recent turn towards deconstruction, postmodernism and poststructuralism in the social sciences and humanities has led scholars to reappraise basic categories of social analysis. Many people have begun to rethink assumptions upon which identities have been constructed, especially the assumption that there exist natural bodies and essential selves. The conventional modernist concepts of identity and identity politics have been critiqued across diverse fields of social thought and this has led to discussions about alternative ways of conceiving the personal and the political, and the

relationship between the two. Recent work has highlighted, in particular, the role of the natural and social sciences in the construction of knowledge of human subjects and in the shaping of people's awareness of themselves *as* subjects – i.e. their subjectivities. Although, in the broader culture, natural knowledge and social knowledge have appeared as mutually exclusive, it has become increasingly clear that *all* knowledge, including biological knowledge, is socially produced and reflects prevailing assumptions about normal embodiment and subjectivity. Feminists, for instance, have recently pointed out that knowledge about 'sex' and 'sex differences' is shaped by cultural constructions of gender. A nature/culture dualism has underpinned a range of expertise over the last 200 years – including biology, biomedicine, sociobiology, phrenology, craniology, anthropology, sociology, psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis – serving to construct knowledge of human subjects and to delineate boundaries between normal and pathological bodies and selves. However, more and more, Western systems of thought have come under scrutiny, raising profound challenges for research and practice in relation to questions of identity.

Given its subject matter, one would expect that 'men's studies' would be a vibrant field of new ideas on questions of identity. However, theoretically, the area has been rather insular and dominated by a few perspectives – notably sex-role theory, gender theory, learning theory, Jungian theory and object-relations theory – that were originally developed in psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology, philosophy, and sociobiology, and then often subsequently reworked by the so-called 'second-wave' feminists. Many texts do not acknowledge feminist studies at all, which is perceived as a discourse parallel to the study of 'men' (McMahon, 1993: 675). Male scholars seem unwilling, in the main, to engage in the kinds of interdisciplinary and critical enquiry undertaken by feminists. Those male writers who claim to be pro-feminist have engaged with only a fragment of the vast number of *feminisms* that have emerged over the last two decades. The field of contemporary feminist thought has become so diverse it defies easy categorisation, but can be seen to encompass various egalitarian and sexual difference strands of thought, spanning virtually all disciplinary areas. Feminist history and philosophy of science, postmodern feminism, poststructuralist feminism, ecofeminism, and lesbian feminism have generated numerous and useful insights into gender, gender relations, and sexuality that have been largely neglected by 'men's studies' scholars. Male scholars often completely fail to address the power relations of sexuality, and their writings are seen to often reflect a strong heterosexual bias (Edwards, 1990: 111). There has been little analysis of how heterosexual masculine identity became institutionalised as the ideal, and the implications of this for non-normative sexual identities (Kinsman, 1993). Most research takes as given, rather than problematises, the dominant epistemology of sexuality and what Sedgwick (1994) refers to as the 'consensus of knowingness' implied by the hetero/homosexual division.

The separatism of 'men's studies' has been interpreted by some feminist writers as a strategic response to feminism, as a means of preserving masculine privilege (see, for example, Young, 1993: 318). Feminist suspicion of 'men's studies' is understandable. 'Men's studies' has emerged in a context very different to that giving rise to 'women's studies' and, arguably, addresses a different set of concerns. The effort to make 'women' the object of theory has been integral to the effort to unmask the seeming 'naturalness' of women's invisibility. For women, 'becoming an object in theory was the inevitable result of becoming a subject in history' (Guillaumin, 1995: 166). As Mary Evans has recently pointed out, the retention of the label 'women's studies', rather than the adoption of 'gender studies', a commonly suggested alternative, 'is a constant, and constantly politicizing, reminder that women have been, until relatively recently, largely excluded from the academic curriculum both as subjects and as agents' (1997: 13). Although it has been argued that universities have also taught little that was explicitly about men, the human subject has been simply assumed to be male. This is reflected in language where the words 'he' and 'mankind' have often been used to denote a generic human being. Many feminist academics are rightly sceptical towards any attempt to develop a new field of study which focuses specifically on men and 'masculinity', especially when feminists have had to struggle to gain institutional recognition of 'women's studies'. In a context of limited resources, feminists have reason to be anxious about the potential for resources to be 'siphoned off' by men who are keen to 'get in on the act', especially in light of historical experience which shows that white, heterosexual men have been more successful in monopolising the means of academic production (Johnson, 1997: 16). One of my goals in this book is to draw attention to what I see as some major limitations of contemporary approaches to the study of men and 'masculine identity', as manifest in particular in the academic speciality of 'men's studies', and to help shift the focus of thinking and research. In my view, those undertaking research on men and masculine identity have not given enough attention to questions of epistemology, to the analysis of power relations, and to interdisciplinary enquiry. Scholars and activists, I believe, need to be more critical in their use of concepts and categories, and much more attentive to the implications of their adherence to particular perspectives.

The essentialism of 'masculinity'

One of my starting premises is that 'masculinity' has been essentialised and that this has provided a major impediment to theoretical and political work. In order to properly explain what I mean by this, I should first clarify my own use of the term 'essentialism' since it figures prominently throughout this book. Essentialism has a long and illustrious career within Western thought, although its meaning is often left undefined in academic discussions. As Stanley and Wise note, there is no 'essence' to essentialism; it is an invention of social scientists and philosophers (1993: 209). However, it is increasingly used in a rhetorical sense, to dismiss positions with which one does not agree,

which has often lead to polarisation in debate (Fuss, 1989: xi). In his recent overview of the uses of essentialism in the social sciences, Andrew Sayer observes that reference to 'essentialism' in the social scientific literature is nearly always derogatory; indeed it is widely seen as a term of abuse which often silences argument, being tainted by association with racism and sexism (1997: 453). He notes that there are many essentialisms and many critiques of essentialism, arising in different contexts and relating to different issues. However,

> [i]f there is anything common to all the critiques of essentialism in social science, it is a concern to counter characterisations of people, practices, institutions and other social phenomena as having fixed identities which deterministically produce fixed, uniform outcomes. Whether they are talking about cultural identity, economic behaviour or gender and sexuality, anti-essentialists have argued that people are not creatures of determinism, whether natural or cultural, but are socially constructed and constructing. (Sayer, 1997: 454)

According to Sayer, the take-up of anti-essentialism as an emancipatory strategy represents a 'remarkable shift in radical academia' from the 1970s when radicals used to attack pluralists for not recognising structures or essence behind superficial appearances. There are now relatively few theorists who actively defend any kind of essentialism in its own right, although some critics recognise the necessity of occasionally employing essentialist descriptions for strategic purposes (Sayer, 1997: 454–5).

The concept of essentialism has been of central concern to feminists, principally in connection with discussions about the binary categories of sex/gender, women/men, male/female and feminine/masculine, and it is they who have offered some of the most detailed exposés of the term. In Fuss's poststructuralist feminist account, 'essentialism is classically defined as a belief in true essence – that which is most irreducible, unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing' (Fuss, 1989: 2). As she explains, the idea that men and women are identified as such on the basis of 'transhistorical, eternal, immutable essences' has been rejected by poststructuralist feminists on the basis that it 'naturalises' human nature. Poststructuralists dismiss the attempt to find an absolute grounding for knowledge and instead embrace the notion of 'fractured identities', insisting upon the need to recognise differences *among* women and men (Bacchi, 1990). Although poststructuralist theory is widely seen to have inaugurated an anti-essentialist movement within feminism, the foundations for the deconstruction of essentialist categories can be seen to have been laid by 'second-wave' feminists.

'Second-wave' feminists can be seen to have critiqued essentialism in so far as they questioned the assumption that social differences between men and women are rooted in biological or natural differences (i.e. biology-as-destiny), although they may not have used the term 'essentialism' in their own writings. In their efforts to contest the naturalisation of sexual difference, they appropriated the concept of gender from the social sciences. However, in the process, they carried over essentialist assumptions into their own work through the sex/gender distinction; that is, 'sex' was seen to correspond with

'nature', and 'gender' with 'culture' (see Chapter 2). Poststructuralist and postmodern feminists have subsequently problematised that which was left implicitly unproblematised by the 'second-wave' feminists, namely the natural or the biological. However, their critique is not limited to explanations of natural or biological 'essences'. They also focus on psychological characteristics such as nurturance, empathy, support, non-competitiveness, and the like, and 'activities and procedures (which may or may not be dictated by biology) observable in social practices – intuitiveness, emotional responses, concern and commitment to helping others, etc.' (Grosz, 1995: 47). As Grosz explains, essentialism is seen to entail the belief that those characteristics defined as women's 'essences' are shared in common by all women at all times and underlie all apparent variations differentiating women from each other. It is seen to imply a limit on the variations and possibilities for change and thus of social reorganisation, and for this reason has been of central concern to most contemporary feminisms (1995: 47–8).

Following Grosz (1995), essentialism may be distinguished from biologism, naturalism, and universalism – all of which are centred on the question of the nature of women and men, and also figure at various points in my discussion. Biologism is a form of essentialism perhaps the most widely recognised form, in which women's and men's 'essences' are defined in terms of biological capacities. As Grosz explains, biologism tends to involve reductionism in that social and cultural factors are seen to be the effects of biological factors. In feminist analysis, it is commonly seen as tying women to the functions of reproduction and nurturance, although women's possibilities are also seen as limited through the use of evidence from neurology, endocrinology, and neurophysiology. Biologism is clearly evident in recent accounts of sex differences in the brain. However, it is also apparent in explanations of sexual behaviour, such as male heterosexual behaviour and 'homosexual orientation' (see Chapter 3). Naturalism is a form of essentialism in which a fixed nature is postulated for women and men; for example, women are seen as being 'naturally' caring, and men as 'naturally' aggressive (see Chapters 3 and 4). While this 'nature' is usually given by biology, it may be asserted on theological or ontological grounds. Thus, women's and men's natures may be seen to be God-given attributes that are not explicable in biological terms. Or, following Sartrean existentialism or Freudian psychoanalysis, it might be asserted that there exist some ontological invariants that distinguish the two sexes; for example, 'the claim that the human subject is somehow free or that the subject's social position is a function of his or her genital morphology' (Grosz, 1995: 48).

Universalism, although usually justified in terms of biology, may be conceived in purely social terms; for example, the sexual division of labour or the prohibition of incest. As Grosz argues,

> unlike essentialism, biologism, or naturalism, in which not only the similarities but also the differences between women [and between men] may be accounted for (race and class characteristics can also be explained in naturalistic, biologist, or essentialist terms), universalism tends to suggest only the commonness of all women [and men] at all times and in all social contexts. (1995: 48–9)

Universalist explanations posit a unity among women and among men based on ahistorical and cross-cultural qualities. Charges of universalism have been increasingly made against Western academic feminism by women from non-European cultures and of different 'racial' and socio-economic backgrounds whose experiences are at odds with feminist theories. I examine these critiques in more detail in Chapter 2. A similar kind of critique has yet to emerge in respect to 'men's studies', but it is clear that the same tendency to generalise also exists here.

Essentialism is rife in writings on men and 'masculinity'. That is, it is assumed that there exists a relatively stable masculine 'essence' that defines men and distinguishes them from a feminine 'essence' that defines women. Although the essentialism of 'masculinity' often entails biologism, it is also frequently based on psychology or other disposition or practice. This essentialism may be found in both scholarly and 'popular' writings on men, and recent efforts by theorists to avoid charges of essentialism by positing the existence of multiple 'masculinities' (i.e. simply pluralising 'masculinity'), I believe, does not overcome this basic problem. Bob Connell (1993) is right in pointing out that 'masculinity' has been reified, and treated in isolation of particular historical and cultural contexts. As he notes, the area of 'men's studies' has thus far been dominated by psychological accounts, and there has been a failure to take account of global history, comparative and historical perspectives, and power relations. However, in adopting 'masculinities' as a major analytic category in his own work (see particularly Connell, 1995) Connell, too, can be accused of reifying that which is in need of critical deconstruction. Given that most pro-feminist 'men's studies' scholars avowedly reject the idea of a universal masculine 'essence' and argue that there is nothing inevitable about male perspectives and behaviours, it seems ironic that they so frequently reify and essentialise 'masculinity' in their own work. The reification and essentialism of 'masculinity', I believe, is an artifact of the way in which scholars have conceived the object of their enquiries. The tendency has been to use 'masculinity', or 'masculinities', as the basic analytic category in research and writing, rather than to view this category as a specific social and historical construction; as a product of power and knowledge.

The constant and uncritical use of the category 'men' in research and writing also reflects a tendency towards universalism. The unstated assumption is that there exists a universal category of human subject defined by biology and/or common experience. However, none of the concepts of 'men', 'women', 'gender', 'sexuality', and so on, has cross-cultural and trans-historical significance: all are relational terms whose identities derive from their inherence in a system of differences. (On this point, see Parker et al., 1992: 5.) Researchers have failed to deconstruct the category 'men', and to examine how different constructions of 'men' have emerged historically and become inflected with racialised, sexualised, and classist meanings. One of the key arguments of this book is that essentialism and universalism are instrinsic to Western thought and that their elimination will require a radical change in epistemology. Our ways of knowing in the modern West have been limited by

the assumption that the only true knowledge is objective, universal knowledge – i.e. knowledge that is independent of time and place, and of the power relations between the knower and the known. In Chapter 2, I outline some of the key assumptions of Western rationality and some recent criticisms that have been made by postmodern and poststructuralist theorists, and others. Feminist philosophers have been at pains to point out that the drive to develop an impartial, total, view of the world is not only unrealisable but has exclusionary and marginalising effects. Western knowledge is seen as based on a foundation of first principles that involves the ordering of reality into dualisms. The dualistic ordering of knowledge always involves the privileging of one side of the dualism over the other: identity over difference, reason over unreason, being over negation, culture over nature, self over other, mind over body, male over female, and so on. Critics have not found it easy to avoid dualistic thinking in their own work, however, as is evident in recent scholarly work on the links between 'masculinity' and reason (see Chapter 4).

Essentialism and universalism are perhaps most apparent in 'popular' genres of writing on men. These works have been overlooked by more critical scholars as a source of insight into the operations of the epistemology of 'masculinity'. Such works both reflect and generate cultural knowledge of the masculine. They offer simple messages to mass audiences. Their wide appeal would seem to lie, at least in part, in the fact that they are unencumbered by what is seen to be 'high theory' and the detailed (and often complex) qualifications characteristic of more scholarly contributions. They are products of a relatively new and rapidly expanding publishing industry surrounding the 'crisis in masculinity'. Writings are dominated by two main styles of narrative, both of which have their origins in Christian tradition, namely the confession and the sermon. (On the use of the confessional style in recent writings on men and 'masculinity', see my discussion, 'Uncovering the male emotions', in Chapter 4: 88–94.) Each is characterised by strong appeals to 'common sense' (i.e. 'what "we" all know') and tends to offer gross generalisations about men and women, and their relationships. They make liberal use of essentialist and universalist categories. In deploying these categories, many, if not most, are implicitly heterosexist, and often racist. It is not always easy to distinguish these works from more scholarly contributions, however, in that both frequently share similar assumptions and theories, although these theories are usually more implicit in 'popular' works.

Perhaps the most well-known strand of the 'popular' writings is of the so-called mythopoetic variety, of whom the most notorious contributor is Robert Bly, of *Iron John* fame (see Bly, 1990). The authors of the mythopoetic works look to a mythical past to find the models for contemporary 'manhood' – for example, the warrior figure. Drawing heavily on Jungian psychology, they argue that men must reclaim their cultural heritage which has been destroyed by modern society. Men are seen to suffer profound grief at the loss of 'masculinity', which needs to be restored to its rightful and ritualistic place (Young, 1993: 324). In Blazina's (1997) view, during a period of 'masculine crisis', 'myths can become tools for cultural and personal transformation by

giving men alternative ways of conceptualizing "what is masculine"'. He suggests that men emulate generative myths such as Odysseus, the Greek hero who symbolises the emotion of reunion between father and son, and the Green Man, a prehistorical figure who symbolises peaceful coexistence and respect for nature, in order to 'guide them toward a deeper understanding of self and object relations' (1997: 292). The mythopoetic 'men's movement', and Robert Bly's work in particular, has been criticised extensively by feminists and a number of male scholars. Criticisms have included the charges of separatism, 'masculinist nationalism', contempt for the 'other', authoritarianism, and the reinforcement of invidious distinctions between women and men (see, for example, Caputi and MacKenzie, 1992; Young; 1993).

There are other kinds of 'popular' writings which also enjoy widespread commercial success and are equally essentialist. Writings roughly divide between those of the 'men's rights movement' and those of the 'pro-feminist men's movement'. The former seek to expose 'the myth of male power' (Farrell, 1994), and to reclaim and protect masculine power and privilege, and can be seen to represent a reactionary response to feminisms. Writers tend to employ essentialist and naturalist arguments to justify normative hierarchies of gender, while actively ignoring the specificity of the history of relations between women and men, often pitting all women against all men at all times and depicting feminism as strategies 'to get men' (Frank, 1993: 337–8). 'Pro-feminist' writings, on the other hand, generally seek to identify the absences and needs in men's lives and posit 'action plans' (for example, Biddulph, 1995; Stoltenberg, 1989). As mentioned earlier, the term 'pro-feminist' is deceptive in that it often conceals ignorance of the complexities of feminist positions and a reluctance to engage critically with feminist theories. Proponents rarely fully articulate the privileged position of white, heterosexual, middle-class men, or their implicit support for those positions (Frank, 1993: 339). Like the mythopoetic and 'men's rights' advocates, 'pro-feminist' advocates tend to cast men as 'victims of society', effectively side-stepping awkward questions about the power relations of gender and sexuality.

Towards a critique of the epistemology of 'masculinity'

Problems such as these, which are common to some extent to both scholarly and 'popular' writings on men, underline the need for a thorough critique of the epistemology of 'masculinity'. Such a critique should aim to show how the frameworks of knowledge about the masculine have historically evolved and how they structure what is known, and what can be known, about men and their experiences. Such an analysis has been sadly lacking in 'men's studies', even in the more critical works which have been attentive to historical and socio-cultural contexts. As Frank (1993) has commented, in so far as 'men's studies' fails to critically examine 'man-made explanations' of the world, it offers no profound oppositional discourse. Although gender has become an object of enquiry, this is conceived as yet another variable to be

added to 'the already long list of variables to be measured', while business continues as usual (Frank, 1993: 336).

> Even with the awareness of the social construction of gender within patriarchal relations, there is still either the lack of recognition – or the purposeful avoidance – of any analysis of the historicity and the social construction of the actual theories and the methods themselves that produce knowledge. The power of these historical and social products (the theoretical stance and methodological procedures) produced within the patriarchal gaze used to gain an understanding of people's lives and the resulting consequences, are taken for granted, and thus temporalized and depoliticized. In-so-far as these disciplinary practices produce women, and some men, as subordinate, their methods of observation and inquiry and the resulting production of theory do little to reorganize the objectified 'ways of knowing'. (Frank, 1993: 336–7)

To be sure, there is an emerging body of scholarship examining changing definitions of masculinity, showing how conceptions of masculinity are enmeshed in the history of institutions and of economic structures. These histories are highly provocative and provide one source for my arguments: for example, work showing how particular constructions of masculine behaviour and masculine embodiment have been effected through disciplines of the military (see Chapter 3). However, few histories focus *explicitly* and *systematically* on the frameworks of knowledge within which 'masculinity' and male subjects have been constructed. That is, there has been little effort to examine the 'assumptions about the nature of the subject (and hence about *human* nature) and about the relationship between the subject and the "thing" known' (Flax, 1981: 1007; emphasis in original).

Male bodies as objects and sites of power

A critical analysis of the epistemology of 'masculinity', I believe, should include an account of how male bodies have been objects and sites of power, and how this affects the subjectivities of different men. It needs to be asked why some male bodies are invested with more visibility and more power than others, and how natural knowledge is deployed in the construction of difference. Under the influence of Michel Foucault, many writers have challenged the naturalistic view of the body which has a fixed structure and immutable desires and behaviours. For example, the idea of a normal masculine heterosexual desire is questioned by recent Foucauldian-inspired social constructionism (see Katz, 1995). (See Chapter 2.) Rather than seeing bodies as biologically given, or pre-discursive, bodies have come to be seen as fabricated through discourse, as an effect of power/knowledge (see, for example, Butler, 1993). As yet, there has been relatively little detailed analysis of how different male bod*ies* have been constructed in discourse, and how differences between men and women, and *within* men, have come to be seen as *natural* differences. Appeals to natural differences have long been used to rationalise the 'inferiorisation' of homosexuals, as well as other sexual minorities, women, and people of colour.

Racism, sexism, and heterosexism operate through the imputation of negative characteristics to the bodies and corporeal existence of different peoples. This is perhaps most evident in the construction of 'race' which has been dependent on the efforts of dominant nations and peoples to classify humans on the basis of corporeal characteristics such as skin colour (Shilling, 1993: 59). However, sexism and heterosexism, too, have relied on the classification of physical bodies into types; for example, there have been numerous attempts to classify and differentiate male and female bodies, and sexual types (see Kaplan and Rogers, 1990). There has recently been a resurgence of interest in biological, particularly genetic, explanations of human differences, for example between men and women, between different racial groups, and between 'homosexuals' and 'heterosexuals' (see Garber, 1995: 268–83; Nelkin and Lindee, 1995). Such theories have appeared with renewed vigour during a period in which there has been a conservative reaction against virtually all minority groups and against the gains made by feminists, gay and lesbian people, and peoples of non-European descent. They have been strategically employed to draw boundaries between Self and Other, to justify rights, and to deny rights. The findings of genetic research can be used by those who believe that education will make no difference to the social status of indigenous peoples; by those who would seek to change homosexual behaviour through medical intervention; and by those who are opposed to equality in general (Nelkin and Lindee, 1995: 399). It needs to be asked why there has been a renewed interest in genetic explanations of human differences in popular culture and science, and how such work is used to argue for discriminatory policies and practices.

Work such as that of Simon LeVay (1994) and Dean Hamer (Hamer and Copeland, 1994) in the United States, which focuses on the biological bases of male homosexuality, and of Moir and Jessel (1991) in the United Kingdom, which focuses on biological differences between men and women, has struck a resonant chord among a broad section of the population. There has also been some interest in the findings of racial science, particularly research pointing to genetic differences in the mental abilities between 'blacks' and 'whites' (see Kohn, 1995).

Research on sex differences and homosexuality has been welcomed by some women and some gay people who believe that it affirms and validates their difference. However, it is important to recognise that it can be used to delineate boundaries between that which is considered normal, and hence superior, and that which is viewed as pathological, and hence inferior, with deleterious consequences for those so labelled. There have been numerous efforts in the past to intervene into the bodies and lives of women on the assumption that their bodies are 'naturally' inferior, and various forms of 'treatment' have been meted out to lesbians and gay men on the assumption that their 'condition' is a result of a failure of some biological function (see, for example, Birke, 1982; Ehrenreich and English, 1979). It is likely that studies of biological difference will continue to be used in these ways so long as science, and biological science in particular, remains a privileged arbiter of the 'truth' on questions of difference. A critique of the idea of the natural body and of supporting discourses is necessary, I believe, if one is to counter essentialism and naturalism and the tendency to control or annihilate that which is deemed to be different.

The research contributions of Thomas Laqueur (1990), Londa Schiebinger (1989, 1993) and Nellie Oudshoorn (1994) illustrate well the value of historical deconstruction in undermining the essentialism and 'naturalisation' of the body – especially in relation to its sexed and gendered dimensions. This corpus of work has been one of the sources of inspiration for this study, and is referred to at various points in the discussion (see particularly Chapters 2 and 3). Such work unsettles a number of deeply held cultural assumptions of people in the modern West about the 'naturalness' of the body, emphasising the particular role played by biological and bio-medical knowledges in the fabrication of the 'normal', 'healthy', sexed and gendered body. Sex, the supposed biological bedrock for the social constructions of gender, is shown to be a social product. It has been constructed in line with cultural assumptions about normal gender and sexuality. Work such as this offers a profound challenge to the epistemology of 'masculinity', based as it is upon the premise that there exist relatively stable bodily 'essences', desires and behaviours. It brings into question taken-for-granted understandings of the normal and the pathological, and the stability of the boundaries that have been erected between normal selves and the abnormal others. Far from having stable, immutable properties and potentialities, bodies are shown to be highly variable – both historically and culturally.

In so far as the body has been discussed at all in 'men's studies', most analyses have been ahistorical and inattentive to the specifics of culture and to the operations of power relations. The body is rarely seen as a product of power/knowledge. Although social constructionism has increasingly influenced analyses of the body, theoretical development has been limited by a discourse about whether the body is a natural or biological given *or* a socially constructed entity. I believe that it is important for scholars to move beyond the terms of this debate if they are to avoid essentialism and dichotomous thinking in their work. Recently, many scholars have claimed that the body is 'socially constructed', without specifying exactly what they mean by this. Social constructionism is an umbrella term encompassing a range of perspectives which suggest that the body is somehow shaped, constrained and even invented by society. Those who take this approach tend to share the view that the 'meanings attributed to the body, and the boundaries which exist between the bodies of different groups of people, are social products' (Shilling, 1993: 70). However, beyond this basic level of agreement, there exists a great diversity of social constructionist perspectives on the body.

The naturalism/constructionism dichotomy is useful in underlining the distinctiveness of recent problematisations of the body in the social sciences and humanities. However, as an abstraction, it cannot do justice to the full range and complexity of contemporary theoretical and political positions in respect to the body. Many writers are guilty of essentialising social

constructionism, overlooking the fact that this is a generic term encompassing a diverse range of shifting perspectives and projects, including but not limited to discourse analysis, deconstruction, and poststructuralism, which have been developed in different ways by scholars at different times according to their own particular theoretical and political purposes. Although all social constructionists may be seen to share a broadly similar epistemology, in that they all claim to eschew essentialism and realism, and view knowledge as historically and culturally specific, they are not of one voice (see Burr, 1995). Some researchers give explicit theoretical attention to the body as an object or site of power, and seek to undertake detailed genealogies of supportive discourses. For example, those feminists and gay and lesbian scholars who have been influenced by Foucault's ideas have examined the ways in which women's bodies and the bodies of 'homosexuals' have been subject to the disciplinary powers of bio-medicine (for example, Plummer, 1981; Sawicki, 1991; Weeks 1985). However, not all social constructionists can be considered poststructuralists, and not all articulate a clear theoretical perspective on power relations. Commentators often gloss over considerable differences in perspective, using 'social constructionism' as a 'catch-all' descriptive phrase, sometimes dismissing 'it' on the basis that 'it' denies biology. For instance, in his discussion of men's bodies in his book *Masculinities*, Bob Connell criticises 'social constructionist approaches to gender and sexuality' (which he simplistically, and misleadingly, equates with the 'semiotic approach') for 'disembodying sex' and for their inattention to 'an irreducible bodily dimension in experience and practice' (see Connell, 1995: 51), effectively dismissing the substantial social constructionist contributions of feminist and gay and lesbian scholars focusing precisely on these dimensions. Postmodernism and poststructuralism have ushered in sophisticated, historically informed approaches to the study of the body, which recognise both the materiality of the body and the fact that that materiality is itself a product of power/knowledge.

Rethinking the concept of identity

The anti-essentialist trend within contemporary social theory has had a profound impact on thinking about 'identity'. This is reflected in the proliferation of academic writings in the 1980s and 1990s on 'the question of identity'. Much of this writing has originated in the areas of feminist theory, anti-racist and post-colonial theory, and gay/lesbian/queer theory where academics have debated the possibilities of developing a new or reconceptualised identity politics. This work challenges some basic premises underlying the dominant epistemology of 'masculinity'. Scholars have tended to leave 'identity' unproblematised, uncritically adopting conceptions originally developed in the social sciences in the 1950s (Gleason, 1983, cited by Epstein, 1993/94: 28). As Epstein (1993/94) notes, social science conceptions of identity lean towards either one of two oppositional views, one a psychological reductionism, the other a sociological reductionism. The first view treats identity as a relatively fixed and stable characteristic of the person. It reflects the notion that we can know who someone *really is*. The second conception treats identity as 'acquired', involving 'the internalisation or conscious adoption of socially imposed or socially constructed labels or roles' (Epstein, 1993/4: 28–9). According to the 'acquired' definition, identity is not so deeply inscribed in the psyche of the individual, and so there is scope for changing one's identity. It reflects the belief that the individual can voluntarily 'choose' to 'identify as' a such-and-such (Epstein, 1993/94: 28–9).

Of course, these are ideal-type conceptions, and 'men's studies', like the social sciences in general, has been characterised by attempts to mediate between these positions. For example, psychoanalytic explanations of identity posit a complex interaction between 'intra-psychic' processes and social expectations. However, the above two basic conceptions have dominated thinking about 'identity' up to the present, and have influenced the development of so-called 'identity politics', whereby one bases one's politics on a sense of personal identity – as gay, as Jewish, as black, as a male, a female, and so on (Fuss, 1989: 97). As Fuss argues, the tendency has been to assume that there is a causal relationship between 'identity' and 'politics', with the former determining the latter. Thus, there is the expectation that the individual will 'claim' or 'discover' their 'true' identity before they elaborate a 'personal politics'. This is especially evident in both the gay and lesbian literature, where there is a familiar tension between a view that identity is something which is always present (but has been repressed) and that which has never been socially permitted (but remains to be created, or achieved). This has often led to the reduction of the political to the personal, and the limitation of political activity to 'self-discovery' and personal transformation (Fuss, 1989: 99–101). (See Chapter 5.) In feminist psychology, in particular, the dictum 'the personal is political' has usually meant that the 'political' is personalised, as can be seen in the use of the notions of 'empowerment', 'revolution from within', and the focus on 'validating' women's reality (Kitzinger, 1996).

The essentialism of identity mirrors the essentialism of the self, seen within the Enlightenment tradition as 'a stable, reliable, integrative entity that has access to our inner states and outer reality, at least to a limited (but knowable) degree' (Flax, 1990: 8). The 'search for identity' and concerns about 'identity crises' can be seen as contemporary manifestations of the preoccupation with the 'essential' self. These themes are widespread in both scholarly and 'popular' writings on men and 'masculinity', and are a preoccupation of the mythopoetic and a number of other strands of the 'men's movement'. The concern with the link between identity and selfhood is reflected in recent sociological writings, such as in the work of Anthony Giddens who has explored the dilemmas posed to the question of 'self-identity' in a context in which tradition increasingly loses its hold. Giddens' view is that in the post-traditional order of modernity, 'self-identity' becomes a reflexively organised endeavour in which there is a multiplicity of available options for shaping one's own identity (Giddens, 1991). According to Giddens, this extends to the

most personal aspects of one's existence. Thus, even one's 'sexual identity' involves an element of choice and, with the severing of the link between sexuality and reproduction, a growing number of possibilities for intimate relationships has emerged (Giddens, 1992). (See also Chapter 6.)

Some of the harshest critiques of identity as a category of knowledge and politics have been offered by non-heterosexual people, people of colour, and peoples from the 'Third World' – those who have been most excluded and marginalised by modern categorising and naming practices. Academic feminism has not been immune to criticism in this regard. Lesbians, women of colour, and women in the 'Third World' have been among those who have questioned feminist categories, which are seen often to be underpinned by an implicit heterosexism (see, for example, Phelan, 1994; Richardson, 1996a), racism and Eurocentrism (see, for example, James and Busia, 1993; Mohanty et al., 1991). (See also Chapter 2.) Black feminists and black male writers have also pointed to the tendency for writers to essentialise black and ethnic male identities. This essentialism is seen to affirm white European notions of manhood and masculinity, while denying the historical and social contexts of domination within which identities have been forged (hooks, 1992; Julien, 1992; Mercer, 1994; Mercer and Julien, 1988). The trend to 'de-essentialise' 'identity' is an important one in the social sciences and humanities and, as I will point out at various points in the chapters that follow, has significant implications for how one views the masculine self.

Increasingly, 'identity' is seen as a discursive construction – one that is arbitrary and exclusionary, and acts as a normative ideal for regulating subjects. This is not to deny human agency and the possibility for the self to fashion itself (on this point, see Chapters 5 and 6). However, to view 'identity' as fabricated disturbs the widely held assumption that 'identity' is relatively stable and is 'made up' of various fixed components, particularly gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity, conceived as relatively independent aspects of one's being. As Edwards (1990) points out, there has been a tendency to treat 'sex' and 'gender', and 'sexuality' and 'gendered identity' as separate entities, or aspects of 'identity'. Moreover, 'race' has been either totally neglected or viewed, like 'sex', as a natural category. The separation of these categories in 'men's studies' reflects the aforementioned dualism between nature and culture that has been part of Western thinking since the nineteenth century (Edwards, 1990: 111). One of the legacies of this dualistic thinking is that 'male identity' is seen to be simply a composite of various natural and socially constructed attributes. Thus, one is a 'homosexual man', a 'black man', a 'white heterosexual man', an 'able-bodied young man', and so on. The problem with this so-called additive model of identity is that no matter how exhaustive the description, there will always be exclusions, and disjunctions between imposed identity labels and personal experiences. There is literally an infinite number of ways in which the 'components of identity' can intersect or combine to 'make up' masculine identity. There is an arbitrariness about any identity construction, which will inevitably entail the silencing or exclusion of some experiences.

The utility of 'identity' and of 'identity politics' continues to be debated. I examine these debates at various points in the book, but particularly in Chapter 5 where I examine the challenge posed by queer theory to 'identity', and to 'sexual identity' in particular. At this point, it should be emphasised that contemporary theorists do not necessarily disavow identity, as some writers have suggested. Rather, their aim has been to draw attention to the fictitious character of identity, to the dangers of imposing an identity, and to the necessity to resist attempts to replace identity with something else, especially with a 'new identity'. They question the imperative to have coherent identities, and the notion that political identities must be secure in order that one can do political work (Fuss, 1989: 105). In introducing these often complex arguments, I do not aim to propose a clear resolution, but rather to highlight what I believe are some important challenges to prevailing conceptions of men, masculinity and masculine identity, and to emphasise the need to rethink basic categories of analysis and critique. I see this book, then, as offering a synthesis and assessment of recent trends in social thought as they impact on contemporary understandings of the masculine and masculine identity and, hopefully, as serving to stimulate further thinking and research.

Outline of the book

In Chapter 2, I examine the context shaping contemporary concerns about 'masculinity' and 'masculine identity'. The so-called 'crisis of masculinity' can be understood as an aspect of a broader 'crisis of modernity', involving the critique of the mode and categories of Western thought. Belief in objective knowledge has been undermined, and scholars across the social sciences and humanities have begun to interrogate all categories and concepts, including 'the body', 'the self', 'society', 'reason', 'community', and 'history'. The ideas of writers such as Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, and Foucault emerge and find a receptive audience in this context, influencing established disciplines and inspiring new critical enquiries. As I argue, within the humanities and social sciences, identity is increasingly seen as a normative ideal that is assured through the use of categories such as 'gender', 'sexuality', 'sex' and 'race', rather than as a descriptive aspect of experience. In the chapter, I focus on challenges posed by a growing 'gender scepticism' within feminism and the recent impact of social constructionism on our understandings of heterosexuality and of 'race'. Work generated by poststructuralist and postmodern feminists, gay and queer scholars, and anti-racist/post-colonial theorists offers new critical and historical insights into the bases of masculine privilege and unsettles some of the key assumptions upon which constructions of the masculine have relied. I conclude this chapter by noting that the wide range of responses to the 'crisis of masculinity' is indicative of the extent to which political positions have polarised in the current sceptical climate. In so far as writers retreat into various forms of essentialism, none of the recent responses proves satisfactory. I contend that if one is to open up possibilities for

conceiving new ways of being, it is strategically important to critique and expose the operations of essentialism. In respect to the study of men and 'masculinity', I believe it is important that one appreciates how these categories have been sustained, historically, through various exclusions.

It is in light of these observations and beliefs that I develop my perspective on male bodies in Chapter 3. As I have mentioned, in so far as the body has figured at all in 'men's studies', it is rarely viewed as a product of power/knowledge. An examination of the ways in which male bodies have been constructed and of the implications of these constructions for different subjects, I would argue, is integral to the ongoing effort to expose the operations and implications of essentialism. Starting from the premise that the very materiality of bodies is an effect of power, I examine the processes through which particular male bodies, or bodily qualities, come to matter more than others. Clearly, some male bodies are more visible, powerful and valued than others and, since the nineteenth century, the bodies of white, European, middle-class, heterosexual men have been constructed as the standard for measuring and evaluating *all* bodies. I explore the role of science, particularly biological science, in constructing knowledge of male sexuality and male identity. The categories of 'sex', 'race' and 'sexuality' have been extensively employed in the construction of human differences. These categories have interacted in various and complex ways in different contexts and at different times, each helping to constitute the others. Historically, 'race' has been a major division of body classification and evaluation and, in the mid to late eighteenth century, when racial theories were beginning to be developed, both women and non-Europeans were defined as being inferior species within the great chain of being. Theories of 'race' and sex have been used to construct, marginalise and stigmatise particular male bodies. Various physical markers of sex and race (for example, skin colour, skull capacity, circumcision) have been employed as the basis for identifying and stigmatising male Jews, 'black' men, and other groups. In this chapter, I explore the impact of Darwinism on the disciplining and shaping of male bodies from the late nineteenth century. Darwinism is seen to provide the master metaphor for thinking about categories of difference, and in particular for thinking about male bodies and their capacities, and its influence has extended to the training of male bodies and male minds, and to theories of natural male aggressivity and a natural male sex drive. One of the themes explored in this chapter is the stigmatisation of the homosexual body, which came to be seen in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century as an 'inversion' – a pathology – and as the binary opposite of the supposed normal, heterosexual male body. Biological theories of difference continue to hold sway in scientific and popular discourses, as evidenced by the recent search for the 'gay gene' and in a number of studies of sex differences. I examine some of this work and its attendant dangers. The chapter finishes with a plea for greater recognition of the ways in which the corporeal body is 'made' and 'remade' in various contexts, and of the implications of this for subjectivity and for social action.

Chapter 4 examines some critiques of the cultural link between 'masculinity' and rationality, as articulated in the work of various feminist scholars and 'pro-feminist' male writers. The privileging of the 'mind' over the 'body' is widely seen to be characteristic of 'masculinist' rationality, and to be implicated in the domination of men over women, of culture over nature and of Europeans over non-Europeans. In the chapter, I examine the areas of feminist psychoanalysis, feminist theories of moral development, ecofeminism, and 'pro-feminist' men's writings on male emotionality, focusing on the contributions of a number of key authors. As I explain, the works that are examined should be seen as more than simply critiques of 'masculinist' rationality. In different ways, and to varying degrees, they reflect and contribute to the maintenance of the very discourse which their authors claim to challenge. One of the key aims of this chapter is to emphasise the difficulty of escaping the dichotomous, hierarchical, and essentialist thinking that is characteristic of Western rationality. Given the dominance of scientific rationality in modern culture, it is hardly surprising that scientific institutions, methods and practices have been subjected to sustained criticism by feminists and other critical scholars. The insights of the feminist critics of science have informed my arguments at many points in this book. In this particular chapter, however, I draw attention to some difficulties encountered by feminist critics in their analyses of 'masculinist' rationality. Continuing commitment to rational science, an implicit heterosexist bias in some influential versions of some theories (such as psychoanalysis), and dualistic and essentialist thinking are among the problems identified. A number of these problems, and others, are also evident in the work of 'pro-feminist' male writers who have critiqued men's emotionality. I conclude the chapter by emphasising the need for scholars to remain reflexive in their use of *all* categories and dualisms and alert to the challenges involved in developing 'situated knowledges' in a context profoundly shaped by the drive to achieve 'logocentric knowledge', or the generic human viewpoint.

In Chapter 5, I examine some important challenges posed to understandings of identity and identity politics by the recent development of queer theory. The emergence of queer theory, I argue, is indicative of growing disenchantment with the modern proclivity to name and categorise, and of recognition of the dilemmas of basing one's politics upon the assumption of a fixed identity. The chapter examines the context giving rise to queer theory and the particular problems it addresses. It asks such questions as: what does it mean to mobilise around men and 'masculinity' when the ground upon which these categories are constructed has been de-stabilised? Is it possible to base an identity on something other than an 'essence'? Should one abandon the concepts of identity and identity politics? As I point out, queer theory does not constitute an homogeneous body of thought. Although there is broad agreement among scholars regarding problems with the essentialism of identity, there are divergent views on the strategic value of an appeal to essentialist categories. While some scholars emphasise the strategy of deconstruction, others advocate the deployment of 'strategic essentialism' in order to protect basic rights. In the chapter, I outline these debates, and

indicate some problems with translating queer theory into practice, evident, for instance, with the practice of 'outing'. Despite its problems and unresolved dilemmas, queer theory raises some important questions about the sexual and its relationship to the social. Importantly, it focuses attention on the production and effects of the putative norm, and on processes of marginality and power relations that tend to be neglected in conventional analyses of sexuality. Queer's critique of gay identity politics raises questions about the meanings of non-sexist and gay affirmative work as promoted by many 'men's studies' scholars and by sections of the contemporary 'men's movement'. Queer theorists have exposed the heterosexist biases of those disciplines that have produced knowledge about the masculine, such as psychoanalysis and sociology, and the implicit heterosexism in theories of gender. In brief, queer theory's particular approach to the sexual unsettles some deeply held assumptions about men and identity, and poses significant challenges for future theoretical and political work.

In Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, I draw together the main themes of the book and discuss some implications and questions arising from the analysis as a whole. In a postparadigmatic context, characterised by scepticism towards all categories and concepts and a focus on the politics of representation, the meanings of the concepts 'men', 'masculinity' and 'identity' should no longer be simply assumed. As I argue, an opportunity has been presented for rethinking the question of identity, and for developing ways of being that are less constrained by the sex/gender system. Many people, it is clear, are receptive to rethinking traditional assumptions about manhood and about relationships between men of different backgrounds and between men and women. In this chapter, I outline some likely directions of change that are suggested by developments in those societies where there has been a substantial redefinition of gender roles. Although it is unlikely that established ideals of manhood will suddenly vanish, and that changes will be abrupt, uniform and without resistance, the conditions of late modern society would seem to be ripe for the emergence of reconceptualised models of identity.

2

From essentialism to scepticism

As a number of writers have recently pointed out, over the last two decades, 'masculinity' is seen to be in 'crisis' (see, for example, Badinter, 1995; Horrocks, 1994; Rutherford, 1992). Although there is by no means agreement about the exact nature of this 'crisis', or indeed about whether this is the most apt description for the changes afoot (on this point, see Connell, 1995: 84), there is a widely felt sense that the contemporary period marks a decisive point in terms of thinking about established cultural understandings of the masculine and about the possibilities for reshaping male identities on the basis of radically new conceptions of the person. In recent years there has been a proliferation of discourses on men and 'masculinity', as evidenced by the rise of new academic specialities of 'men's studies' and enquiries into men's lives. And at least some men have shown a preparedness to explore their own lives and relationships. There has been an increasing number of conferences and seminars organised around such themes as men's health, men's violence, and the sexual abuse of men; men's festivals (including gay men's festivals); residential workshops for men; psychotherapy groups and counselling services for men; and Internet discussion groups on men. Many men, and women, it would seem are confused about 'what makes a man', and while some men have begun the search for a 'lost identity', others see new opportunities for recasting the masculine script.

According to both Badinter and Kimmel, there have been at least two earlier such 'crises in masculinity' in modern history, such as in France and England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and in Europe and the United States at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Badinter, 1995: 9–20; Kimmel, 1987: 126–53). As Badinter and Kimmel argue, such crises, involving a radical questioning or redefinition of the meaning of 'masculinity', have occurred in countries where there have been great ideological, economic, or social upheavals precipitating changes in social values, including the creation of greater freedoms for women. According to Badinter, the first crisis involved a questioning by the French *précieuses* ('ladies "refined" in sentiment and language') and English feminists of the institution of marriage and the demand for dignity, education, the possibility of social ascension and, in the case of England, the demand for total sexual equality and the right not to be abandoned when they became pregnant. In both countries, women demanded not only the equality of desires and rights, but also that men 'be gentler, more feminine'. This led to an inversion of roles involving the emergence of the new 'feminised' man who adopted behaviour