Introduction: Studying Australian Masculinities

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In recent years, questions about men and gender have aroused media interest, academic debate, and political controversy. In the United States two "Men's Movements" have gained large, if temporary, followings—one new-age therapeutic, the other right-wing evangelical. In Australia we have had explicit debates on men's violence and on boys' education, while subtexts about masculinity are not difficult to find in controversies about motor racing, gun control, the environment, and "political correctness." John Howard could not restrain himself from injecting masculinity politics even into the draft preamble to the Australian constitution.

Concern with these issues is now worldwide. 1998 saw both the appointment of a Scandinavian co-ordinator for men's studies, and a conference in Santiago, Chile, on masculinities in Latin America and the Caribbean—which drew researchers and activists from as far apart as Brazil and Nicaragua (Valdés and Olavarría 1998). There is a newly founded "Men's Centre" in Japan, which publishes a series of papers and books exploring new patterns of marriage and family life, and new forms of Japanese masculinity. The *Journal of Southern African Studies* has just published a special issue of papers on men and masculinities, under apartheid and in the transition; and the South African feminist journal *Agenda* has just published an issue on changing masculinities and new directions for men. In 1997 UNESCO sponsored a conference on the implications of male roles and masculinities for the creation of a culture of peace, which drew participants from all over Europe and some other parts of the world (UNESCO 1997).

Questions about masculinity have also spread into a wider range of fields. Health services and health researchers are noticing the relevance of men's gender to issues such as road accidents, industrial injury, diet, cardiovascular disease, and of course sexually transmitted diseases (Connell and Huggins 1998, Connell et al., forthcoming). Educators are discussing not just the presence of issues about boys, but the practicalities of programs and curriculum changes to deal with these issues (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998). Criminologists have begun to explore the social-structural and cultural reasons for the massive predominance of boys and men over girls and women in crime statistics (Messerschmidt 1997).

We should not exaggerate the impact of this work. Research on masculinity remains, academically, a fairly small enterprise and the impact on policy is still slight. The half-baked essentialism of pop psychologists such as Gray (*Men are from Mars...*) and Biddulph (*Manhood*) has much wider circulation, and probably more current influence. At the same time we should not miss the significance of what has been done. A substantial body of new research is emerging, some potentially important empirical conclusions can be drawn, and some lively theoretical arguments are starting. This issue of *jigs*, the first published collection of research on Australian masculinities, marks the moment in Australian research when we can say a field of study has been mapped out and now must be reckoned with.

To say we have a "field of study" immediately poses the question: what kind of field? What are the intellectual parameters here? Can we speak of a science of masculinity, and if so, what sort of science?

In *Masculinities* (Connell 1995, ch. 1), I looked back at the recent history of Western thought on the issue of men and gender, and suggested that there had been three main attempts to develop a scientific approach to the issue.

The first was inspired, indeed launched, by Freud. Psychoanalytic studies showed how adult personality, including sexual orientations and the sense of identity, was constructed through conflict-ridden processes of development in childhood and adolescence, in which the gender dynamics of families were central. Case studies showed men's character structures to be internally divided, even contradictory; and showed everyday conduct as the product of psychological compromises, which were often unstable.

Some researchers—most famously the Frankfurt School and their collaborators in the "authoritarian personality" research—grafted a social analysis to this psychoanalytic base. This work began to trace alternative paths of masculine development and to debate their political significance as underpinnings of democracy and fascism (Holter 1996). In due course feminist psychoanalysis picked up this form of argument, though focusing on patriarchy rather than class as social structure; and recent feminist psychoanalysis has also been emphasising the diversity and internal complexity of masculinities considered as structures of emotion (Chodorow 1994).

Psychoanalysis, however, was received ambivalently by the social sciences. Around the mid-century a different framework became more influential. The concept of "social role," formulated in anthropology in the 1930s, now became immensely popular as a "lingua franca for the social sciences." A social-psychological version was applied to gender, producing the idea of "sex roles"—coherent sets of social expectations or norms for the behaviour of men and women, which were transmitted to youth in a process of "socialization." A great volume of worthless paper-and-pencil research was produced around this idea, but it also led in the 1950s and 1960s to a few subtle and interesting studies of changing gender expectations for men, and difficulties faced by men and boys in conforming to their role.

In the 1970s the "sex role" concept was radicalized by feminism, the notion of gender-as-conformity becoming an object of critique rather than celebration. Feminist work on women's "sex role" soon led to a discussion, both among feminist women and pro-feminist men, of men's "sex role" and the way it constrained men. This idea underpinned a burst of writing, and even a small social movement, on the theme of "men's liberation." But it led to little new research beyond the existing conventions of paper-and-pencil "masculinity/femininity" scales. A vague concept of "the male role" or "men's role" persists in much recent talk and writing, but it signifies little more than "stereotypes" or "norms."

In the last fifteen years a third approach has matured, whose main academic base is in sociology but with important contributions also from anthropology, history and media studies. Key intellectual underpinnings are the developing feminist analysis of gender as a structure of social relations, especially a structure of power relations; sociological concerns with subcultures and issues of marginalization and resistance; and post-structuralist analyses of the discursive construction of identities and the interplay of gender with race, sexuality, class and nationality.

With ethnographic and life-history methods as key research techniques, and with the popular "men's movement" building up interest, the result has been an outpouring of studies of the social construction of masculinity in various times and places: a traditional community in Papua New Guinea, a school in inter-war England, an Australian gay community, a body-building gym in California, a gold mine in South Africa, official debates in colonial India, and so on. I call this the "ethnographic moment" in studies of masculinity, to register the emphasis on the particular and local, and to mark the dramatic break of this research from the abstractions of role theory and the sweeping universal claims of pop psychology.

Certain conclusions have been emerging from these studies, however, which have more than local significance. The research reported in this issue of *jigs* confirms many points from international research, while pushing ahead on others.

It is clear from the new research as a whole, that there is no one pattern of masculinity that is found everywhere. We need to speak of "masculinities," not masculinity. Different cultures, and different periods of history, construct gender differently. We could expect, in a society as diverse as Australia's, that there are multiple definitions and dynamics of masculinity. The paper by Poynting, Noble and Tabar shows one important dimension of this, the interplay between ethnicity and the construction of masculinity.

Diversity is not just a matter of difference between communities; it is equally important that diversity exists within a given setting. Within the one school, or workplace, or neighbourhood, there will be different ways of enacting manhood, different ways of learning to be a man, different conceptions of the self and different ways of using a male body.

Different masculinities do not sit side-by-side like dishes on a smorgasbord. There are definite social relations between them. Especially there are relations of hierarchy, for some masculinities are dominant while others are marginalized or discredited. In contemporary Australian society the most emotionally powerful line of demarcation—though by no means the only one—is between heterosexual and homosexual masculinities.

There is generally a "hegemonic" form of masculinity, the most honoured or desired. This need not be the most common form of masculinity, let alone the most comfortable. Indeed many men live in a state of some tension with, or distance from, hegemonic masculinity; others (such as sporting heroes) are taken as exemplars of hegemonic masculinity and are required to live up to it strenuously. The media treatment of Ian Roberts discussed in Dowsett's paper depends on both points: the subordination of gay men (as men, in relation to straight men), and the exemplary status of footballers.

The patterns of conduct our society defines as "masculine" may be enacted in the lives of individuals, but they also have an existence beyond the individual. Masculinities are defined collectively in culture, and are sustained in institutions. Rowe and McKay's paper documents this collective process in the most visible and symbolically important case in contemporary Australia, the case of competitive sport.

Men's bodies do not determine the patterns of masculinity, but they are also not blank slates. Masculine conduct with a female body is felt to be anomalous or transgressive, like feminine conduct with a male body. Gender is the way bodies are drawn into history; bodies are arenas for the making of gender patterns.

This was a point underplayed by "male role" discussions, and is underplayed even in some of the more recent research. It is notable, then, that every paper in this volume raises body issues, from the pleasuring of bodies in sexual relations, through body contact in childhood, to the strenuous use of bodies in sport, and the use and destruction of bodies in violence. We see repeatedly how men's bodies are addressed, trained, given definitions, given outlets and pleasures, by the gender order of society.

Masculinities are neither programmed in our genes, nor fixed by social structure. They come into existence as people act. They are actively produced, using the resources and strategies available in a given social setting. Walker's paper gives a striking example of the collective construction of masculinities in informal peer groups, which not only draw lines to fend off women's intrusion into masculine social space, but draw in a whole technology as part of the definition of masculinity.

One of the key reasons why masculinities are not fixed is that they are not homogeneous, simple states of being. Psychoanalytic research on men has long been aware of contradictory desires and conduct (though the emphasis on this point has fluctuated at different times in the history of psychoanalysis). There is every reason to think men's gender identities and practices are

likely to be internally divided. Tomsen points to an important example, the ambivalences found in anti-gay violence, which help to make such violence a systemic feature of Australian life, not just a matter of individual pathology. Poynting, Noble and Tabar trace another, the contradiction between the claim to authority, and the experience of subordination, under the pressure of racism. Masculinities are often in tension—and it seems likely that such tensions are important sources of change.

There is abundant evidence that masculinities are able to change. Masculinities are created in specific historical circumstances, and as those circumstances change, the gender practices can be contested and reconstructed. Dowsett shows one important reason for this, the inherent instability of categories such as "heterosexual" and "homosexual" and of the social order built on them—an instability which is far more than a question of fuzzy boundaries. Yet the gender order does not blow away at a breath. Donaldson shows a major reason why—the persistence of power and wealth, and the active defence of privilege. Agostino's study of gender relations in the Australian navy demonstrates the important link with ideas of nationhood. The historical process around masculinities is a process of struggle in which, ultimately, large resources are at stake.

These emerging conclusions represent a major advance over earlier understandings of masculinity, and I consider that no account of men and gender can be credible that does not come to terms with both the new empirical evidence, and the theoretical ideas that have accompanied them.

This is not to say that recent work on masculinity is beyond criticism! There are, indeed, acknowledged difficulties in what Hearn (1998), in an important conceptual review, calls "men's theorizing of men," and there is both internal debate and criticism from other standpoints.

One important problem concerns the relation between "men" and "masculinity." For some practical purposes, studying men in gender relations is so close to studying social constructions of masculinity that the differences don't matter. But in other cases the differences do matter. Unless we are to subside into an essentialist equation of masculinity with men, we must acknowledge that sometimes masculine conduct or masculine identity goes together with a female body. It is actually very common for a (biological) man to have at least elements of "feminine" identity, desire, and patterns of conduct—as we would expect, if only from the fact that the upbringing of young children is, in our society's division of labour, overwhelmingly done by women. Especially in fraught areas such as the study of domestic violence, the question of whether one is addressing "masculinity" or "men" involves complex issues of politics, intellectual allegiance, and sometimes guilt.

Research on masculinities has been criticized for a focus on fixed identities, or for a presumption of stability in masculinity. This criticism has mainly come from post-structuralists, who emphasise rather that identities are constructed in discourse and there is only a contingent relation between a person

and a location in a discursive system. I do not find this criticism a very compelling one. Research on the social construction of masculinities has placed a good deal of emphasis on the uncertainties, difficulties, and contradictions of the process. Whether the outcomes are stable or unstable, mostly fluid or mostly fixed, is surely an empirical question, not one to be settled in advance by theory. One can point to cases, both in research and in practice (e.g. in anti-violence work) where patterns of masculinity are actually quite tough and resistant to change—and one can point to other situations where they are indeed unstable. Investigating the circumstances where gender patterns are less or more open to change seems an important task for research; it is the point of the theoretical discussion of "crisis tendencies" mentioned in Dowsett's paper.

A more convincing criticism has been directed at the concept of "hegemonic masculinity," at least in some of its uses. Critics have pointed out a tendency to reify this term, so that it becomes effectively a fixed character type, something like the once-famous "Type A personality." Given this tendency, all the nasty things men do—rape, assault, environmental degradation, dog-eat-dog business practices, etc.—can be loaded into the bag of "hegemonic masculinity." And the more extreme this image becomes, the less it has to be owned by the majority of men. To put it more formally, there is a tendency in many discussions towards a psychologization of problems arising from gender relations, and a drift away from concern with institutions, power relations, and social inequalities. It may be helpful to recall that the term "hegemony" was introduced into discussions of masculinity to deal with relational issues—most importantly, the connections between the differences and hierarchies among men, and the relations between men and women (e.g. Connell 1983).

In what directions should research on these issues move now? There is no one issue which is obviously "the next move"; but there are, I think, several issues which have high priority, given the state of research globally.

The first is to consolidate the analysis in relation to class, race and ethnicity, and other issues of power. Poynting, Noble and Tabar rightly argue that ethnicity is not an add-on; that the practices of ethnicity are present all the time in constructions of masculinity. This applies to the masculinities of the dominant ethnic group as much as to the masculinities of minorities—though there are different problems in understanding "whiteness" or Anglo-ness or Aussie-ness, only now emerging as an important topic in ethnic studies.

Similarly with class. Donaldson's exploration of the making of masculinities in settings of great wealth should not be seen as a study of an exotic minority, but as a key move in understanding social dynamics as a whole.

Second, there is a need to move beyond the "ethnographic" level of most recent research—productive as it has certainly been—to think about gender relations on the larger scale, on the level of world society. Feminist researchers have been discussing the position of women globally for a considerable

time (Bulbeck 1998), and if we can recognize the global dimension of gender relations we must think about how men are positioned globally. We need to consider how particular masculinities were produced by globalizing forces, throughout the history of imperialism and neo-colonialism; and we need to study the constitution of masculinities and the gender politics of men under contemporary globalization.

I have made some suggestions about both these questions in another paper (Connell 1998), so I will not pursue them here; but I will note how an international dimension keeps cropping up in the studies in this volume—from the effects of international labour migration, to the global circulation of sexual identities. The "car culture" that is the context for Walker's young men is precisely founded on a global industry, constituted in the circuits of global technology and communications. Their story would be inconceivable as a local story, however intimately their motorized masculinity is felt in the body.

Understanding bodies and body issues, nevertheless, is another task. Not that there is a lack of information or debate here. Body issues (sport, violence, health, sexuality) were important to women's liberation and men's liberation debates in the early 1970s. When my colleagues and I recently examined the Australian research on men's health, we were impressed by the sheer volume of information that is available—though also impressed by how much it needs re-thinking in the light of masculinity research.

As Rowe and McKay put it, the masculine body is not just an object, it is a body "charged with emotion." Thinking through the body-reflexive practices of sexuality, as Dowsett has done; of violence, as Tomsen has done; and a range of other issues, such as boys' physical growth and development, is a key theoretical task now.

Finally, I would suggest that understanding the process of change in masculinities is a task of both theoretical and practical importance. Research has established comprehensively the mutability of masculinities, the possibility of change; and historians have gone a considerable distance in mapping the fact of change, at least in representations and discourses of masculinity. But we have not got very far beyond the sex-role-reformers of the 1970s in the practical capacity to achieve change, or in the techniques with which we attempt it—contesting stereotypes in public, group work to re-evaluate relationships and conduct, individual therapy, and the like.

I think an important reason for the current limitations of practice is the limited usefulness of theory—and I include my own theoretical work in this. Developing models of change which bring together collective processes with individual experience, and use the full range of our understanding of gender processes, would be an important contribution not just to gender studies but also to the solution of pressing social problems.

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