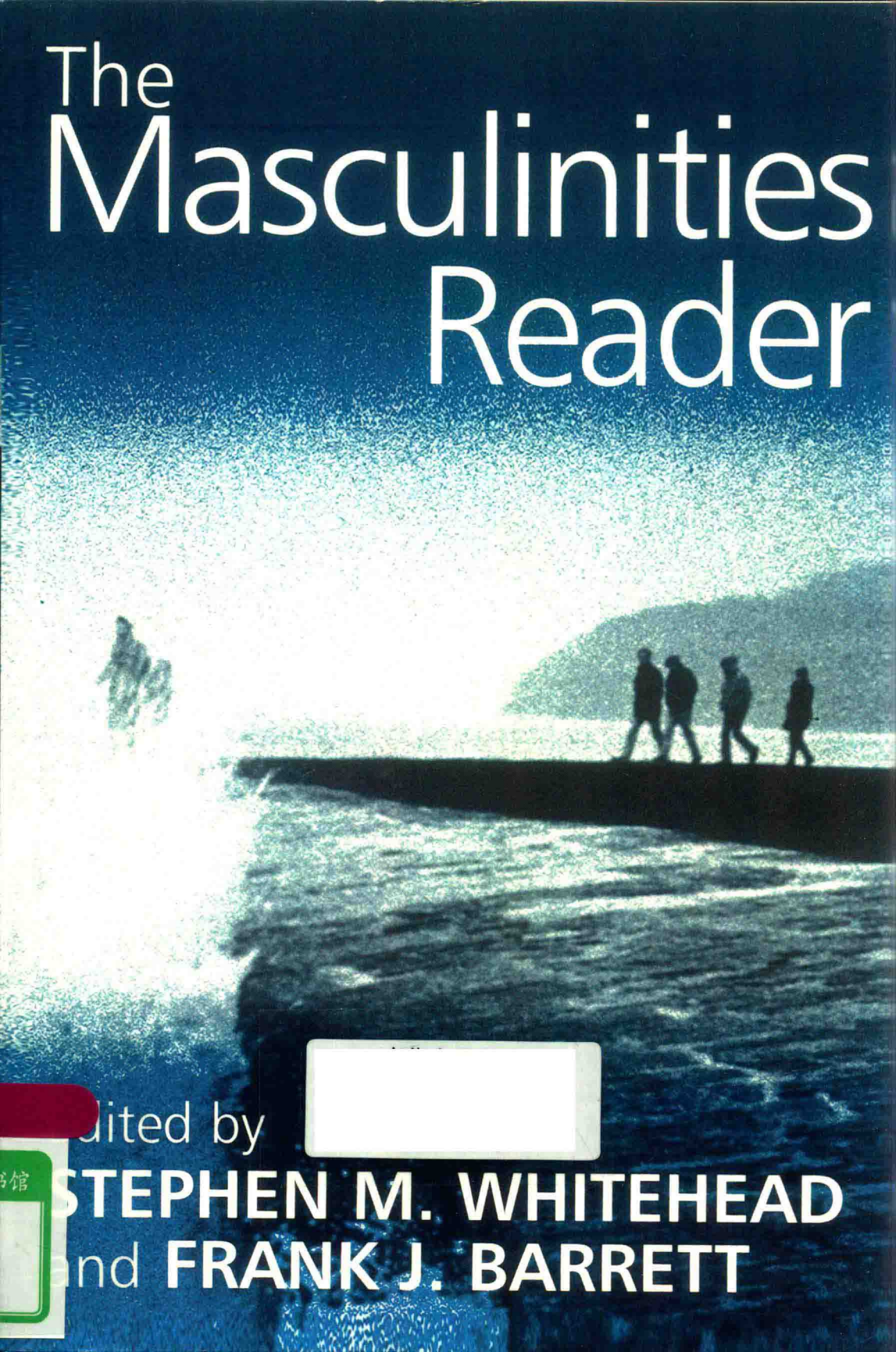
The Masculinities Reader



Edited by
STEPHEN M. WHITEHEAD
and FRANK J. BARRETT

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Apart from the omission of material discussed above, each chapter has been presented as it was originally published. The decision to do this has necessarily entailed inconsistencies of style and spelling between the chapters.

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The Sociology of Masculinity

Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett

During the last two decades research into men and masculinities has emerged as one of the growth areas of sociological enquiry. The past decade alone has seen over 500 books published, the introduction of two specialist journals, and a proliferation of websites all providing a particular slant on the condition of men at the turn of the millennium. In the USA there are now some fifty universities offering specialist programmes in this subject. Beyond the USA, and across Australasia and Europe in particular, a similar surge in feminist-inspired writings on men and masculinities has occurred. Whereas only two decades ago critical insights into masculinities were relatively few, today there are no areas of men's activities that have not been subject to some research and debate by both women and men. Whether they study sport, families, organizations, management, media, violence, power, identities, crime, education, ethnicity or sexualities, the social science student and researcher is now required to have some critical knowledge or appreciation of gender, and increasingly men's sense of gender as constructed through dominant representations of masculinity.

The aim of this book is, then, to provide students and researchers with an accessible and comprehensive overview of the key debates in the sociology of masculinity. In so doing, the volume will introduce not only the most influential concepts, but also emergent themes in this field. However, given the depth and breadth of research now available on men and masculinities, the writings chosen for this reader should be considered neither definitive nor exhaustive of the genre. Rather, the chapters in this volume are illustrative of an often complex and still developing area of study. Just as feminist theory has moved through first, second and now third waves of critical enquiry (Farganis, 1994),

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so has the sociology of masculinity. It is an area of sociology that has, since the mid-1950s, drawn on many theories, including structural functionalism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, critical structuralism, and, more recently, post-structuralism and theories of the post-modern (see Whitehead, forthcoming, for discussion). It can be seen then, that unlike feminist theories, which can be traced back at least to the eighteenth-century writings of Mary Wollstonecraft (Tong, 1993; see also Rendall, 1985), the sociology of masculinity is relatively recent, only coming into being in the latter half of the twentieth century. Since the 1950s, the USA has proved to be an especially fertile ground for research into men, with the studies undertaken by Pleck (1976), Hacker (1957), Hartley (1959), and David and Brannon (1976) being particularly influential in the early stages of the genre's development. In recognizing the importance of US scholarship in this field, it is entirely appropriate, then, that over half of the twenty-one chapters in this volume originate from North America.

Despite the exponential increase in research into men and masculinities, there has, to date, been no reader published which draws on key writings from all parts of the globe. In this respect at least, this volume is unique. This is an important point, for it should be recognized that the critical study of men and masculinities is not confined to any particular national border, ethnic group, or identity politics. The sociology of masculinity now draws on a highly pluralistic scholarship, and as a consequence enjoys a vast and diverse audience. A further key characteristic of this volume is the fact that most of the twenty-one chapters remain in their original state. As a consequence, the book provides the student or researcher with the fullest introduction to the debates as is possible, while offering indications of the periodic shifts in this field of sociology.

Given the amount, richness and variety of the writings in this area, it is inevitable that good and influential works have, unfortunately, had to be omitted. While the writings chosen are all excellent examples of the field, several key authors who have made important contributions to the sociology of masculinity have, by virtue of space and design, not been included, though in some instances their publications do provide the vehicle for chapters in this volume. Recognizing this, we would like to acknowledge a number of writers not directly included in this book, but who have made important contributions to the sociology of masculinity. In particular, we would mention Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (1994), Mike Donaldson (1993), Tony Jefferson (1998), Ian Craib (1987), Jonathon Rutherford (1992), Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne (1994), John Stoltenberg (2000), Victor Seidler (1994), Martin Mac an Ghaill (1994), Donald Sabo (1985), Peter Middleton (1992),

Alan Petersen (1998), Joseph Pleck (1995), Michael Roper (1994), David Jackson (1990), and Andrew Tolson (1977).

Feminist parentage

It is increasingly recognized that feminist theories have not only constituted a most influential scholarship within academia, they have also had a profound impact on the subjectivities of countless numbers of women worldwide. This has led to immense personal and political transformations, the consequences and direction of which are still unfolding. Recognizing such, we would go so far as to suggest that feminism was the single most powerful political discourse of the twentieth century, shaping up to have an even greater impact in the twenty-first. For while the dynamic of feminism continues to change across European, American and Australasian countries, its form and impact in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Far East is increasingly powerful, exciting, and certainly should not be underestimated. Indeed, so subversive and political is feminist thinking within and beyond the West, that many commentators consider the rise in religious fundamentalism to be a direct response by men to the changing position and expectations of women. Anthony Giddens describes it as an 'attempt by men to stall the (global) gender revolution' (Giddens and Hutton, 2000: 27).

Such a threatening reaction from men to women's new-found sense of power and self should not be too surprising, for one of the direct consequences of feminist thinking and action has been to expose and highlight the power, position and practices of men. In so doing, feminism has explicated the continuing inequalities between women and men as they exist across ethnic groups and cultural and social borders. Feminism is political inasmuch as it is about seeking change towards what Bob Connell describes as 'gender justice'. In pursuit of this aim, feminism puts men and masculinities in a critical spotlight, in the process centring on the practices of men in ways many men would prefer it not to, not least because there may well be costs to them as a result. Certainly in terms of sustaining unequal material advantage, opportunity, status and privilege, men have much to lose with the rise of feminist thinking. Conversely, we would also argue that men have much to gain, not least in achieving emotional well-being, empathy with others, quality of relationships, reflexivity, and balance in their lives. For the sake of this and future generations it can only be good that men recognize they have a gender, rather than perceive gender to be about women and, thus, peripheral to

how they experience the world. In this respect, men are central to the gender transformations that characterized the late twentieth century and continue into the twenty-first. However, as feminists have long argued, the historical centrality of malestream writing, philosophy and political practice has served to make men invisible, particularly to themselves. As Whitehead in chapter 20 illustrates, it is a condition that continues for many males.

Yet despite many men's propensity for self-denial in the face of direct and obvious shifts in women's subjectivities, large numbers have responded to the challenges posited by women's movements since the 1960s. The contrasting responses of men to feminism have been well charted by Clatterbaugh (1990) and Messner (1997). Briefly, these responses range from the avidly anti-feminist men's movements, increasingly flexing their political muscles in the West via groups such as the Christian Promise Keepers, through to a possibly more accommodating mythopoetic movement (see Kimmel, 1995, for discussion), and on to the pro-feminist response typified by the writings in this book (Gutterman in ch. 3; Connell in ch. 21). Across this gendered political terrain lie the increasingly important gay men's movements (see Nardi, ch. 16), and the black (see Majors, ch. 11) and Chicano/Latino (see Mirandé ch. 19) men's movements.

The point to stress, then, is that writings in this volume originate from both women (feminists) and men (pro-feminists) and, as such, declare their feminist parentage and affiliation quite openly. In this respect, the volume has a clear political dimension in that each contributor has a personal/political alignment with women and 'Other' men in their fight for gender, racial, and sexual justice.

The state of men

The notion that women still have equality battles to fight at the start of the twenty-first century would strike some as quite odd. For is it not the case that women now 'have it all'? Do we not live in a 'post-feminist era'? Are not men the ones now 'in crisis'?

In order to have an understanding and appreciation of the state of men at this point in history it is important to first address the above assumptions. The idea that women 'have it all' is beguiling, but before assuming it to be the case one must put it in context of both social movements and cultural differentiations. Taking the latter point first, it is obvious to any observer that acute structural gender inequalities exist across the globe.

For those of us who live in the West, it may be less apparent that women in other countries suffer physical and mental hardship, violence, abuse, political disenfranchisement, inequality in law and material disadvantage, are frequently denied educational opportunity, and are in many cases treated in every respect like an underclass. But such is the daily reality of life for millions of women, and not only in openly misogynistic countries such as Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan. However, Western societies themselves are in no position to pontificate on gender inequalities in Asia, Africa, and the East. Men's abuse and violence towards girls and women is endemic across the West, with male aggression remaining the 'dark side' of masculine role performance in all 'modern' societies (Bowker, 1998; see also Wood and Jewkes, ch. 7). In terms of employment, Western women have made significant progress yet still receive lower wages for the same job as men and can expect to pay a substantial 'gender forfeit' in terms of loss of salary over a working lifetime in comparison to men (Creighton, 1999; Office of National Statistics, 2000). Similarly, over the past decades women in countries such as the United Kingdom have made great strides in educational achievement, yet leave education for work only to suffer discrimination in respect of both comparative incomes with men and opportunities to progress to the highest levels of organizational life (Collinson and Hearn, 1996; see also ch. 8). While wider economic and social changes have combined to provide women with work and lifestyle choices unimagined by their mothers and grandmothers, women still carry the burden of multiple roles, a situation that has become more acute as work intensification pressures combine with the continued stereotypes many men hold about housework, childcare, caring roles, and emotional labour (Hochschild, 1989; Franks, 1999).

We would argue that so long as the above situations exist in any part of the globe there can never be a 'post-feminist era'. Furthermore, it is salutary to look more closely at those changes that have benefited Western women over the past five decades or so, and to place them in wider contexts. For example, many of the freedoms and opportunities now available to women have come through science and technology (i.e. the Pill); economic transformations (i.e. the rise in service industries); educational opportunity (i.e. the emergence of the knowledge economy); and greater political pressures towards equality in law (i.e. the European Court). None of these changes is a direct result of men changing. The social, economic and political transformations outlined above have come about in spite of, not because of, men. Such changes as we have seen have been driven by financial imperatives, not so much a desire for equal opportunities. Increased opportunity for women has, in some areas, been a consequence, but not the original intention. In that respect, any

notions of a so-called 'post-feminist era' are dangerously premature. For if the financial imperative ever changes, and there are always pressures for it to do so, then women could well find themselves having to re-fight battles many had thought long won.

This brings us to the third assumption – that men are in crisis.

Of all the current discourses surrounding transformations in gender relations, that of a male crisis is particularly potent and apparent. The male crisis, or 'crisis of masculinity' thesis, has assumed, for many, almost the status of a defining characteristic of Western societies at the turn of the millennium (see, for example, Faludi, 1999; Clare, 2000; Horrocks, 1994; Bly, 1990; also MacInnes, ch. 17). The common theme within this debate is that the displays of manhood considered appropriate prior to, say, the 1950s, are socially stigmatized and debased fifty years on. Many men still yearn to perform and validate their masculinity through 'conquering the universe', but the aggressive, dominant, emotionally repressed behaviour that such yearnings engender are increasingly seen as (self)-destructive, if not derisible. Various views are put forward as to why such a comprehensive shift in gender perspectives has come about, but most writers in this area draw on three key social markers for evidence. They assume that men are being reduced to this confused, dysfunctional and insecure state through a combination of, firstly, rampant, soulless consumerism; secondly, women's (feminism's) successful assault on male bastions of privilege; and thirdly, more widespread social and cultural disapproval of traditional displays of masculinity.

Such ideas have a popular appeal in that they appear to provide an 'answer' to the complex changes that have occurred between women and men and to many men's apparent inability to accommodate women's new-found confidence. However, like the idea of a 'post-feminist era', the male crisis discourse requires putting in context in order to achieve a better purchase on its veracity. Each of the main three social conditions enlisted to prove the male crisis thesis can be argued to exist in some form in Western societies. But do we then take them as combined evidence of a larger crisis in men? Hardly, for as social phenomena each is conditional and contextual. For example, few would argue against the notion that since the end of the Second World War consumerism, as a way of being, has permeated Western culture, if not inspired globalization itself. Following this, it can be accepted that consumerism constructs its own pressures and social consequences, not least a widening poverty gap between rich and poor. But women are equally seduced or, if you like, put at risk by rampant consumerism. Indeed, given most women's less secure material circumstances, they are probably more at risk than men, and certainly there is recent evidence from the European Commission to

support this view (European Commission, 2000). Taking the issue of women's successful assault on male privilege, as has already been recognized, during the past three decades or so feminism has become a powerful political discourse impacting on women's subjectivities in numerous ways and with unpredictable consequences for both women and men. But as feminists have long argued, men retain a capacity to resist and threaten this challenge. Even those sociologists not normally associated with pro-feminist scholarship, such as Anthony Giddens, are coming to recognize that many men are now actively resisting women's burgeoning demands for equal rights, and doing so increasingly through recourse to discourses of religious fundamentalism, not only Islamic, but also Christian and Jewish.

The issue of changing masculinities is, however, probably the key one in terms of understanding changing men and a possible crisis in masculinity. One can find numerous examples of how traditional notions of masculinity have moved out of fashion across the Western world. But then, masculinities have always been subject to fashion. Indeed, it can be argued that perceived notions of how males should perform their gender have never been more subject to media and popular interpretation than they are in this global, post-modern age (see Gutterman, ch. 3). Yet, as the studies undertaken by Segal (ch. 10), Wood and Jewkes (ch. 7), Barrett (ch. 4), Donald (ch. 9), and Messner (ch. 14) highlight, despite the evident multiplicity of masculine expression, traditional masculinities and associated values still prevail in most cultural settings. Countless numbers of men still act dominant and 'hard', deny their emotions, resort to violence as a means of self-expression, and seek to validate their masculinity in the public world of work rather the private world of family and relationships. Moreover, such performances not only often go uncriticized, they are in fact lauded by many, both women and other men. There is little evidence yet of the demise of 'laddish culture' in the West, and popular media expressions of this, exemplified by 'hard men' such as Vinnie Jones and Mike Tyson, continue to validate a form of masculinity which not only black and/or working-class men aspire to. Indeed, one only has to look at the increased incidence of Nazi memorabilia being touted in American schools, of the macho posturing of Northern Ireland paramilitaries, and the organized mass rapes of women in former Yugoslavia, to recognize that, in many places, aggressive masculinity is alive and well. Of course, behind the hard veneer of the male 'Nazi', paramilitary, or militiaman, there usually lies a fragile identity and an equally fragile confidence, but nevertheless, the actual performance of such radical masculine expression results in damage to all who come into contact with it. In this respect, while such men may be in some form of emotional or existential crisis, there is little new about this.

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