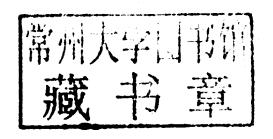


masculinities in transition victoria robinson and jenny hockey



## **Masculinities in Transition**

Victoria Robinson University of Sheffield, UK Jenny Hockey University of Sheffield, UK



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For Katie Picalli (1930–2009), a self-made woman.

For Peace Millicent Hockey (Pat) (1918–2005), in gratitude.

### Preface and Acknowledgements

This book has been designed to meet the needs and interests of a variety of readers, something made possible by the different, though complementary expertise of its authors, Victoria Robinson and Jenny Hockey. For those wishing to explore theories of masculinity, particularly around men's work, embodiment, emotion and intimacy, Victoria draws on her established expertise in feminist theory (see, for example, Richardson and Robinson, 2008) and masculinity theory (see, for example, Robinson, 2008) in three extended chapters which front the book's three parts, framing the data chapters to follow. Her accounts provide critical analysis of contemporary research and theorising, setting it within the context of key debates within these areas. Jenny Hockey trained as an anthropologist and has extensive experience as a qualitative researcher. For those seeking case study examples which give insight into men's and women's embodied experience of everyday and life course transitions, each part provides four lively, case study chapters, each with a distinctive focus.

As Chapter 1 explains in more depth, the book's structure reflects a commitment to transition and it is the mundane materialities of dividing one's time *between* the place one works in and the place one calls home which provides its theoretical heartland. This is not to say that the data utilised in the book were gathered on the buses, trams, and private cars which connect these domains. Chapter 11 does take the reader into pubs, bars and cafes, as well as the bottom of the domestic garden and outside the city for scuba-diving and rock climbing. However, it is the way in which the separation of home and work meshes with the gendering of paid and unpaid work, and how this is reflected in the gendering of work *places*, that concerns us and which we understand to be a key route into the *mobility* as well as the diversity of masculinities. Thus, it is masculinity's fluidity within, as well as between, men that has concerned us (Spector-Mersel, 2006).

The writing of this book has, however, involved more than simply the distinctive expertise of its two authors, the grant holders for ESRC-funded project it draws upon. Alex Hall, Research Associate for the project between 2005 and 2007, devised its structure and provided helpful comments on its first draft. Victoria Robinson also undertook interviewing among hairdressers and estate agents, along with participant

observation in two salons. Her knowledge of the area within which we had chosen to work, and her contacts, were invaluable, as was her launch of the qualitative study and the methods she developed in the process. This aspect of the project was taken on by Alex Hall in 2005. She undertook extended participant observation and interviewing among both estate agents and firefighters. Despite scepticism from audiences to whom we presented our initial research, as to whether a female researcher would be able to access and create trust and rapport among firefighters, Alex achieved this brilliantly, not only spending long days in the fire station where men drilled, cleaned their equipment and, always, waited for a fire call, but also accompanying them on nights out to the pub and community work within the city. The physical and emotional high of responding to a fire call was not something she was able to participate in - for reasons of both insurance and the scarcity of such calls (see Chapter 9). The quality of the data generated by both Victoria and Alex has been key to the theoretical insights and vitality of what it has been possible to include in this book. The richness of their data merited further work, long after the funding had expired and we are extremely grateful to Angela Meah who utilised the coding frame set up by the research team to help develop the content of this book's data chapters. As Chapter 1 explains, the inspiration for the project came from a previous ESRC-funded project on heterosexuality for which Angela was the full-time Research Associate. Angela's contribution to the development of the ideas for work on masculinity, and the proposal through which funding was secured, has been invaluable.

Throughout the life of the project we were fortunate to have an active and supportive Advisory Group who brought a wealth of expertise to our research and helped us with the methodological and theoretical challenges we encountered on the way: Richard Collier, David Jackson, David Morgan, Steve Robertson, Kath Woodward. Their publications have continued to be a source of inspiration and insight, as this book demonstrates. Those to whom we are most grateful are the firefighters, estate agents and hairdressers, and the women they nominated, all of whom found hard-pressed time (see Chapter 4), and were prepared to trust us, as we asked our questions and made our observations. Without their preparedness to reflect, openly, about their everyday lives – and indeed, to include us in them – this book would not have been possible.

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# 1

# Meeting Men on the Move

The forgotten language of breadwinner gags in their pursed mouths.

No work names to prop up lost men.

(David Jackson, Men without Work, 2009)

David Jackson's poem about older working-class men made redundant within a post-industrial landscape of rusted cranes and silted harbours poignantly calls to mind a particular disposition of gendered time and space. Within this public world of paid work, men's 'work names' identify them. Once dispossessed, for them the gender order collapses and they 'get under their wives' feet. / They push shopping trolleys, grudgingly.' Home and the environments which resource it – the supermarket and the launderette – become problematic settings within which these men are now 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 1966).

Jackson's poem provides an initial example of men on the move, from youth and employment into later life and 'the end of doing', as he puts it. We witness not only the transition from one global economy to another, but also find out about these men's individual experiences of a historically situated life course transition. However, Jackson also refers to the 'the forgotten language of breadwinner', signalling that it is not just the materialities of industrial decline and ageing bodies that are in transition: a particular form of masculinity is troubled, its transitory – or mobile – nature revealed. We are therefore dealing with a language, a system of values and beliefs, a culture and an identity.

The 20 lines of this short poem effectively introduce the key themes pursued in this book. As we go on to explain, it is concerned with men's identities and their capacity to shift, as individuals move between differently gendered social environments. So, rather than treating

masculinity as stable and enduring, our work explores its mobility across different domains; in particular those of paid work, where men have for long secured their identities (Whitehead, 2002; Morgan, 1992), and home, where men are thought to find feminised refuge and solace (Davidoff and Hall, 2002). Our focus is therefore on the mutable 'doing of masculinity'. Grounding our perspective in men's embodied experiences of identifying as men has also required us to recognise that other, longer trajectory of change and transition as they grow up into expectations around employment, and grow old, potentially encountering 'the vacuum that the end of doing leaves', as Jackson explains. In the chapters to follow, then, we present the voices and embodied presence of men of different ages, exploring their status as representations of desired masculinity in the eyes of one another – or embodied reminders of how not to 'do' masculinity.

To close this section with a final line from Jackson's poem where he describes how older men 'envy the busy purposes/of younger men who've got to get on', the data we discuss show precisely the interplay of envy, desire, avoidance and ridicule, as our participants of all ages endeavour to 'do' masculinity in relation to those other men, who they emulate, pity, choose as 'top mates', compete with or have sex with. Women's voices are also in evidence, providing another level of interpretation, as they describe the domestic lives they share with our male participants, or witness as family members or friends. Importantly, though, they also provide an insight into heterosexuality's role as an organising principle which informs the doing of 'gender' as a lived, relational, intersubjective dimension of not only men's but also women's identities.

### History

This book has theoretical roots in work from a previous ESRC-funded study of the making of heterosexual relationships within 22 extended families in East Yorkshire that was carried out by Jenny Hockey, Victoria Robinson and Angela Meah (see Hockey et al., 2007). Two aspects of that body of research helped shape the empirical work that informs it. First, the heterosexuality study required Angela, the full-time Research Associate, to recruit participants for qualitative life history interviews within extended families, a method that revealed differences between women's and men's willingness to discuss the making and experience of heterosexual relationships. Although women, often in mid-life, would approach us with an expression of interest, their attempts to recruit

their sons and male partners were often unsuccessful. However, once we were able to recruit men, towards the end of the study, we found that men themselves were much more successful at recruiting both other men in their own families, and men who would then recruit members of their own families, both male and female. The implications of this preponderance of women within our sample, we suggested at the time, were that women appeared to be 'self-defined guardians of their families' emotional lives' (see Hockey et al., 2007: 18). This somewhat speculative interpretation is explored fully in Part III of the current work, where we present data from both women and men, comparing their constructions of potentially shared emotional lives.

The second way in which these experiences shaped the current book concerns the occupational identities of several of the men we finally recruited to the heterosexuality study. They were firefighters and they told us that divorce notices in the local paper often featured male firefighters and that their marriages were well known to be at risk. The reasons they gave for this were threefold: men in the fire service bonded more closely with work colleagues than their families; unsocial working hours meant that their leisure activities were likely to involve even more contact with men working similar shifts; and being a fireman was a passport to sexual conquest.

These two aspects of our previous study raised some fascinating theoretical and empirical questions about the relationship between men's working and home lives. We wanted to explore this link - and to talk to more men than had hitherto been possible. Given that our previous research had asked how the concept of heterosexuality was being lived out, the project we designed adopted a similar theoretical stance and asked how the related concept of masculinity is brought into being, or inhabited. In other words, a central component of this book is a set of theoretical questions about identity, something we understand as processual, always under negotiation, never 'finished', the outcome of ongoing performance (Woodward, 1997; Jenkins, 2004; Lawler, 2008). This led to a consideration of different performances of a masculine identity. While the notion that masculinity might be performed (Butler, 1990), or inhabited, in different ways is well established (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003; Connell, 2005; Whitehead and Barrett, 2001), what interested us specifically was the notion that the practice or 'doing' of masculinity (Morgan, 1992) might vary not just between men, but within the same man as his social context changed (Spector-Mersel, 2006).

The emic, or 'folk' theory, that aspects of being a firefighter make men less able or willing to integrate themselves into marriage or domestic life, led us to consider the experiences of men in other occupations. Might they too experience some sense of dislocation between their workplace and domestic identities? Or, as the emic theory implies, did the fire service bring specific demands and opportunities? Drawing on the notion that occupational cultures were potentially gendered, with firefighting being a particularly masculinised environment, we therefore selected three contrasting work cultures; from male-dominated, to gender neutral, to female-dominated.

Alongside the gendering of men's occupational identities, we also wanted to understand more about men's relationships with domestic space. The social changes of the nineteenth century – industrialisation and urbanisation particularly – have been understood to produce a gendering of social space, the public world of work being a male domain, the private world of the home being understood as both separate and highly feminised, a haven in a heartless world (see Chapter 3 and also Davidoff and Hall (2002) for a critical discussion of this view). To what extent, then, do men today move continuously between a public world of employment, which to varying degrees is masculinised, into a feminised home environment? Can we any longer sustain the notion of public and private as 'separate spheres', and can we think of these in terms of gender divisions?

To provide nuanced answers to some of these questions, we chose to address the domestic world through men's age-specific agendas such as leaving the parental home, setting up home independently, establishing partnerships and familial relationships, managing divorce and undertaking retirement. In other words, while we were interested in transitions between home and workplace, we did not treat either of these as static environments which somehow framed 'mobile' masculinities. Instead, we remained aware of major shifts within the occupational environments we selected, even within the life times of our older participants, along with the dynamic nature of the life course itself and its implications for context-specific identification. How men of different ages might engage with masculinity in the workplace therefore provided a link to a potentially different site of performance.

Our aim has thus been to understand the process of identification via empirical work. This has meant engaging critically with the notion of identity as contingent and unstable, realised through performance or practice. In this way, then, we address a lack of knowledge as to how a plurality of gendered identities actually comes into being, asking how social context – the workplace and the home – operates to give particular form to the identity category 'masculinity' – and how

individuals moving between contexts both inhabit and manage their identities. By exploring, with men, their histories of movement across the social, spatial and temporal margins of domestic life and employment, we have sought to discover if and how masculinity might become subject to instability, reinvention or reinforcement. Throughout our study, we have also been concerned to make sense of the diversity of men and their experiences in ways that give theoretical emphasis to individual agency. By asking how men make accommodations in their performances of masculinity, as they shift between settings, what we highlight are both their conscious strategies and implicit negotiations, both their felt experiences of frustration and their unknowing conformity. The concept of transition has been crucial throughout this theoretical endeavour, and in Chapter 2 we introduce this concept as the framing for Part I of the book. In essence, then, our core problematic is to find out how men themselves understand the transition(s) they are experiencing, the extent to which their strategies for managing this change represent reformulations of their masculinity and the degree to which men discover themselves shifting between potentially contradictory forms of masculinity as they move out of and into a heterosexual domestic environment.

#### Identity and the process of identification

As noted, this book grounds itself theoretically in the notion of identity as 'never a final or settled matter' (Jenkins, 2004: 5). In other words, identity is treated as always in process, an outcome of what Jenkins refers to as an internal-external dialectic whereby the way one sees oneself and the way one is seen are profoundly intermeshed. By implication, then, identification is not only something the individual achieves or 'does' independently; it is also contingent, different social environments contributing to an internal-external dialectic in different ways.

This raises the importance of relations of similarity and difference. Thus, with respect to masculinity, it can, on the one hand, be located within heterosexual identification, the requirement for clearly differentiated genders: masculine and feminine. Weston, for example, explains the problem of same-sex desire in terms of 'the territory of difference and opposition' which has been 'ceded ... to heterosexual couples' (2002: 243). With regard to heterosexuality, therefore, masculinity is constituted through difference (Gutterman, 2001: 62). On the other hand, in the workplace, identification's other aspect, the seeking of relationships of similarity (Jenkins, 2004), is evident. Collinson and Hearn, for example, describe the 'unities, commonalities and mutual identifications between men' in the workplace (2001: 163). The relationship between these twin aspects of identity formation – identification and differentiation – are therefore key elements within this book's theoretical project. Jenkins describes them as 'dynamic principles ... the heart of social life' (2004: 5), the privileging of one, rather than the other, being simply a question of emphasis. In comparing men's performances of masculinity as they move across and between public and domestic spaces, then, it is precisely these shifts of emphasis which we aim to capture, so providing a nuanced, situated account of the processes of masculine identification.

#### Meeting men on the move

The empirical work which underpins this book was undertaken between March 2004 and February 2007. In following men's movement between home and work, we addressed what Woodward refers to as

fundamental questions about how individuals fit into the community and the social world and how identity can be seen as the interface between subjective positions and social and cultural situations.

(1997:1)

Echoing Jenkins' (2004) internal-external dialectic of identification, Woodward's framing of identity led us to choose methods that would allow us to get at different dimensions of identity. Our research design combined three kinds of data: interviews with 54 men from the three occupational cultures which asked them to reflect on how home and working life might differ or be linked; interviews with 54 women, chosen by the men (partners, friends or children) which asked how the men do masculinity at home; and participant observation at each workplace that explored how embodied identity emerged within social practice. The three occupations chosen reflected a continuum from stereotypically masculinised work (firefighting) to a feminised work setting (hairdressing) (see Irving, 2008: 166-7). For example, although equal numbers of boys and girls overall were recruited to the Modern Apprenticeship scheme between 2002 and 2003, boys made up only 7 per cent of those undertaking apprenticeships in hairdressing (EOC, 2004). Less obviously 'macho' and becoming increasingly feminised, estate agency represented our mid-choice and a more ambiguous, if not gender neutral, work place.

Our sample also encompassed three age cohorts: young men beginning their careers, men in mid-life and older men around retirement age. Not only age but also class separated these men. Our study was located in a city in the north of England, where, like similar northern cities, previous scope for employment in heavy industry that had been available to working-class men was no longer available. Such industries were associated with the forms of traditional, 'macho' masculinity that Donaldson (1991) describes, and for some of the men we interviewed, this had been the social environment they had grown up in, their fathers and uncles recalled as men who worked with their hands, who had been apprenticed into occupations for life. Some of them were therefore the 'younger men who've got to get on', who were envied by older working-class men made redundant in a post-industrial city, those in whose mouths the 'forgotten language of breadwinner/gags' (Jackson, 2009). For younger men in occupations such as estate agency, however, wealth and status sufficient to transcend social-class distinctions was represented in the careers of their successful peers (see Chapter 5).

What men described to us about their working lives during interviews fell into categories such as how they came to enter a particular occupation and what settling into that occupation involved; how they understood their identity within that occupation, for example, in terms of success and how they might measure this; how their job might have changed over time; and whether they felt they 'fitted in' to the social environment of the workplace and what media resourced or undermined the experience of 'fitting in' (for example, dress, attitudes and values, styles of interaction, degrees of closeness and disclosure, shared leisure). When they and a female partner, family member or friend, spoke about their home lives, they described, for example, life course transitions which involved moving out of or into particular accommodation; the nature of their life as a partner and parent, including leisure, domestic labour, conflict; how they experienced the relationship between their domestic and working lives. These data also gave us a sense of men's worldviews, their values, hopes, ambitions, worries and regrets.

We found that men responded well to opportunities to reflect upon different aspects of their lives and how they understood themselves and those with whom they shared their working and domestic lives. However, in treating identification as a process we have concerned ourselves not only with the play of social interaction as the site of an internal-external dialectic of identity formation, but also with the body as the location at which the experience of oneself at particular points in time is *felt*. Thus, it is through and within embodied engagement that identification occurs; not only with colleagues, friends, clients, and family members such as parents, partners and children, but also with the materialities of the workplace, its setting, the tools and equipment one utilises and those of the home, whether experienced as some kind of refuge from the demands of work, or a set of recurrent demands which are, perhaps, never satisfactorily met.

Moreover, the body is not simply the receptor of externally generated demands and definitions; it is also the vehicle through which men exercise agency, whether by manifesting their sense of themselves in the way they dress, walk or speak, or by more directly acting upon the social and material world through which they are moving. Jenkins sums up this perspective when he says: '[t]he self participates in an environment of others .... like mind, selfhood does not stop at the skin. But it always begins - literally and figuratively - from the body. There is nowhere else to begin' (2004: 46). Moreover, in our desire to understand men's experiences of themselves within and in relation to varying social contexts, the concept of embodiment, as understood phenomenologically, is key. Woodward argues that such an approach 'seeks the meaning of experience as it is embodied and lived in context rather than looking for essences so that the subjective and objective merge, thus emphasising both the primacy of people's own experience and the routine practices in which the embodied self engages' (2007: 75). The body, she explains, 'is not only composed of perceptible qualities; it perceives, that is it is seen and it sees' (2007: 75).

It was the methodological implications of this theoretical approach that led us to look beyond men's testimonies, however self-aware they might be, and to consider ways of getting at their embodied enactment of 'being a man' in different settings. This, we argue, cannot simply be extracted from what men put into words since it constitutes a tangible, materially grounded practice of engaging with both the body one has, the object body, but also the body one is, the subject body, and indeed the bodies of those who share particular spaces and activities (Turner, 1992). As such, 'being a man' encompasses body-based knowledge and emotion which may be difficult to articulate, even partly. For this reason, then, we undertook participant observation in all three workplaces, so making ourselves part of the environments within which men 'did' masculinity. Adopting this strategy within the private sphere is, however, challenging and, within the more confined social context of a couple or family's home, disruptive. What we decided, therefore, was to utilise the proxy access that women, who in