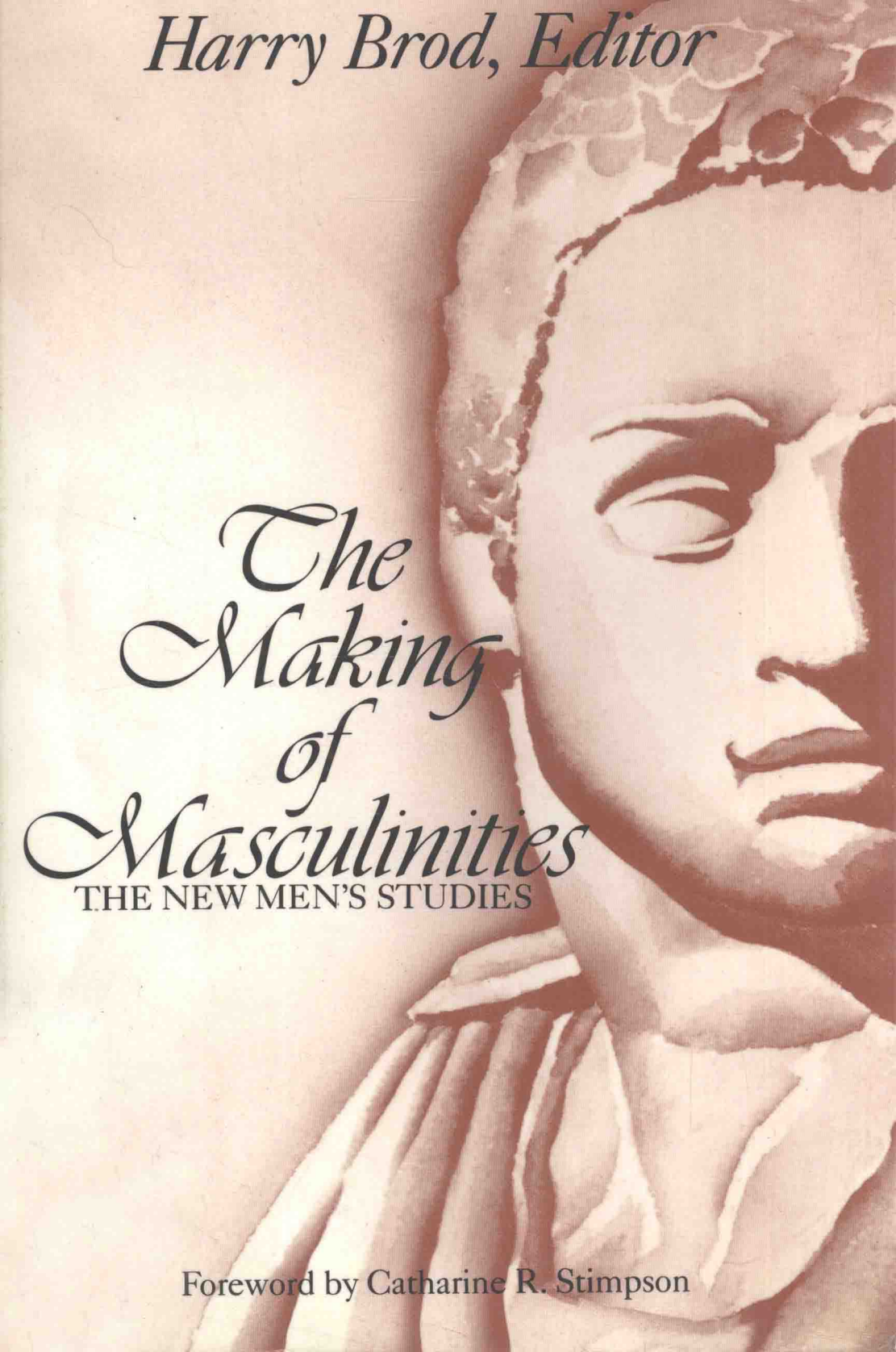
Harry Brod, Editor

The Making of Masculinities

THE NEW MEN'S STUDIES



Foreword by Catharine R. Stimpson

THE MAKING OF MASCULINITIES

The New Men's Studies

Edited by
HARRY BROD

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Foreword

"Man": the word seems as easy to define as "dog" or "stick." Everyone can conjure up a picture of a man. He is an adult, human male. Everyone knows at least one man—at home, school, work, or in the mirror. However, we often do not know what we think we do. This is one of the lessons of the detective stories in which neighbors in a sleepy village suddenly discover a corpse in the church yard and a murderer next door. "Man" is complicated.

Signs of this complexity are pervasive. Look, to take only one example, at a standard reference work, *The Penguin Dictionary of Quotations*. Though it has no entries for "masculinity," it has 18 entries for "mankind," over 175 for "men," and nearly 200 for "man." The first of these is a ballad about a banished man who goes into the green-wood alone. The last is the famous, even notorious, paternal injunction from Kipling's *Gunga Din*:

> *If you can fill the unforgiving minute*
> *With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,*
> *Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,*
> *And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!*

In part, the word "man" is perplexing because each historical period, every society, and each group within a society interprets the raw materials of existence in its own way. Its interpretative practices help to distinguish a period, a society, a group. A turkey for contemporary Boston is not the same bird as it was for the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The more anthropologists, sociologists, and historians explore the meanings of being "a man," the more inconsistent, contradictory, and varied they become. A Harvard graduate in contemporary Cambridge is not the same "man" as he would

have been in a seventeenth-century American colony. Today, a Harvard graduate might even be a woman.

In part, the word "man" is manifold because of the work of a new intellectual enterprise, "men's studies," a complement to women's studies. Taking shape in the 1960s, women's studies is now a rich body of theory, ideas, and facts. Women's studies argues that our narratives about "mankind" are exactly that, narratives about a kind of man. Deliberately or carelessly, they have excluded women. When we think about women, we realize that their experiences tend to be different, not only from each other, but from those of men. Odysseus has his story, Penelope hers. What, women's studies asks, would Penelope say, about herself, about Odysseus, about ship-building, about Ithaca, if she were to speak by herself? For herself? Of herself? Yet, women's studies goes on. Even if the stories of Odysseus and Penelope do flow through separate channels, they are a part of the same network of social relations, the same social landscape. That terrain has taught Odysseus how to be "manly," Penelope how to be "womanly."

As women's studies brought women into history, men's studies began to ask how men had experienced history *as men*, as carriers of masculinity. To be "masculine" is to have a particular psychological identity, social role, cultural script, place in the labor force, and sense of the sacred. In secular, modern industrial cultures, "real men" should define themselves in at least three ways. First, they earn money in the public labor force and support their families through that effort. Next, they have formal power over women and the children in those families. Being a man means being stronger than women and children. Finally, they are heterosexual. They sleep with the women whom they dominate and bully the homosexuals whose desires openly surge elsewhere.

Postindustrial cultures undercut such a definition of masculinity. They are heedlessly destructive of the industrial jobs that men have traditionally filled; heedlessly generative of the lower-paying service jobs that women frequently occupy. Less problematically, postindustrial cultures also tend to accept the values of egalitarianism within the family and sexual variety. One of the current tensions in the United States is between those who are fighting to retain the older pattern of masculinity and those who are struggling to permit newer forms to emerge.

Like women's studies, men's studies assumes that "masculinity" and "femininity" are the products, not of God, not of nature, but of historical processes. To be sure, both women's studies and men's studies have some practitioners who believe that nature demands that males become masculine; females feminine. For them, the wiring of the brain and the plugging away of the hormones, especially those old warhorses "testosterone" and

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"estrogen," carry out nature's orders. However, most scholars in men's studies have concluded that gender, our sense of being masculine or feminine, is as much a human construct as the pyramids or pewter. Like all human constructs, gender systems can change.

Believing in the possibilities of change, men's studies wants the future to be more generous than the present. Explicitly or implicitly, men's studies asks the future to embody certain values. One is that of fatherhood, in which men will nurture both sons and daughters with tender wisdom. Another is that of friendship, in which men will seek affectionate bonds with both other men and women. Still another is that of flexibility. Boys will grow up to be men, but no boy will think that being a man demands marching in lockstep with other men while women cheer them on from the sidelines.

The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies: its dogged, imaginative scholarship, sticking to its task, is rewriting that deceptively simple word, "man."

CATHARINE R. STIMPSON

Acknowledgments

I could not have formed the conception of men's studies this book embodies without the support of two particular groups of friends and colleagues. I would first like to thank my colleagues on the faculty of the Program for the Study of Women and Men in Society at the University of Southern California for ongoing intelligent, critical, and committed dialogue regarding the issues raised in this volume. In the chronological order in which I came to have the privilege of working with them, they are: Gloria Orenstein, Joelle Juillard, Judith Stiehm, Mark Kann, Lois Banner, Carol Jacklin, Walter Williams, and Helen Horowitz. I also had the great fortune to feel I had a support community spread out over the nation in the persons of the men and women of the National Organization for Changing Men (NOCM). I am particularly appreciative of the work of NOCM's Men's Studies Task Group, in which Joseph Pleck, Sam Femiano, Martin Acker, James Doyle, and Shepherd Bliss have played particularly important roles in creating and nurturing a community of scholars and activists that continues to nourish and challenge me. I have felt a special kinship in the men's movement with Tom Mosmiller, with whom I share a sense of the rightness of certain things.

Maria Papacostaki remains the first and foremost reader of all my writing. As the person who knows me best, she has on numerous occasions saved me from speaking against myself. She and our children, Artemis and Alexandros, have also immeasurably increased my understanding of men's issues related to fathering.

The contributors to this volume deserve special thanks. They committed themselves to this project before I could guarantee any rewards. The Introduction to the volume has been improved by comments several of

them made, and the brief introductions that precede each section are in most cases simply compiled and edited by me from abstracts written by the authors themselves.

The entire manuscript has benefited from comments by James Doyle, Martin Acker, and anonymous reviewers. The enthusiasm and support for the book shown by Lisa Freeman-Miller, my editor at Allen & Unwin, have also contributed greatly to what success I hope this volume may have, and certainly to my peace of mind in assembling it.

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Introduction: Themes and Theses of Men's Studies

Harry Brod

DELINEATING THE FIELD

In the call for papers that led to this anthology, I described it as one "designed to analyze the depths of and exemplify the best of the deconstruction and reconstruction of masculinity emerging from the new men's studies." This purpose has been achieved. The essays in this volume can legitimately claim to demonstrate the state of the art in men's studies. They are wide ranging in scope and finely nuanced in detail. They appropriate useful insights and methodologies from existing literature, as well as initiate innovative directions. Using the essays collected here as exemplars, in this introductory essay I articulate some of the principal characteristic themes and findings in men's studies. I do not summarize each article individually; instead, I highlight salient connections among them. Men's studies is a recent and, by comparison with more established fields, still relatively small addition to the academy. Nonetheless, it is a growing field, and it has matured sufficiently to allow for some evaluation.

Throughout the essays in this collection is a shared sense of the project of men's studies, a sense that men have been seen "through a glass darkly," a sense that there is a need for men to be re-cognized in some fundamental way. James Riemer, in "Rereading American Literature from a Men's Studies Perspective: Some Implications," writes: "To borrow a term from feminist criticism, the aim of a men's studies approach to American literature is re-vision: a revision of the way we read literature and a revision of the way we perceive men and manly ideals." Peter Filene, in "The Secrets of Men's History," writes that the distinctiveness of men's history "has to do with *how* more than with *what*," and speaks of early men's historians as

"(literally) reconnaissance men." One finds, throughout, a sensibility that combines two strains of thought: an acceptance of the obvious fact that most scholarship, in the conventional sense, has been about men, and the contention that such scholarship, in perhaps a more significant sense, has not really been about men at all. In my attempt to make "The Case for Men's Studies," I offer the following formulation:

> While *seemingly* about men, traditional scholarship's treatment of generic man as the human norm in fact systematically excludes from consideration what is unique to men *qua* men. The overgeneralization from male to generic human experience not only distorts our understanding of what, if anything, is truly generic to humanity but also precludes the study of masculinity as a *specific male* experience, rather than a universal paradigm for *human* experience. The most general definition of men's studies is that it is the study of masculinities and male experiences as specific and varying social–historical–cultural formations. Such studies situate masculinities as objects of study on a par with femininities, instead of elevating them to universal norms.

Men's studies questions assumptions that have passed beyond the horizons of usual scholarly inquiry to bring them back under critical purview. These assumptions about masculinity are so widely shared that they cease to appear as assumptions. Much of Joseph Pleck's "The Theory of Male Sex-Role Identity," for example, traces the historical processes by which the seemingly simple idea (but, as Pleck demonstrates, actually a complex conglomeration of distinct ideas) that a sense of masculinity is a positive desideratum of male personal identity entered into and came to dominate professional and popular discourse, thereby obscuring fundamental difficulties with this view and hiding its pernicious effects.

PROBLEMATICS OF SEX ROLES

Men's studies scholars repeatedly face a problem in explaining their task. Many people find readily understandable and intuitively congenial the accurate claim that the necessity for women's studies lies, in large part, in the need to rectify the injustices done to women in having been "written out of history" and systematically ignored by traditional scholarship. Women's lives have been so privatized that they have been pushed outside the range of public discourse, outside the mainstream — some feminists call it the "male-stream" — tradition. Men's studies has no such immediately appealing claim to make, since men have clearly been the subjects of scholarship. Yet, men's studies has a task corollary to that of women's studies. The nineteenth-century German philosopher Hegel wrote that what is familiar *(bekannt)* was often not really known *(erkannt)* precisely

because it was so seemingly familiar. One is reminded of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter," in which a particularly clever thief realizes that the best way to hide something is to keep it in plain view. Paradoxical as it may seem, some of the essays in this collection argue that men's public lives in an important sense represent a retreat and escape from their personal lives, a shrinkage rather than an enlargement of their spheres. More significantly, at least in terms of the potential influence of men's studies in the academy, they argue that the concepts and methodologies of traditional scholarship have perpetuated these misunderstandings of masculinity precisely because they share the same male biases. Filene argues that, in their criteria of significance, "the histories that men have written about themselves, then, contain the same bias as the histories they have written about one another." Public events and achievements, not personal feelings and experiences, are what count. Riemer cites criticism of Ernest Hemingway as an example of how a fundamental acceptance of patriarchal values can influence the interpretation of a text in which ideals of manhood are a central concern.

In much the same vein, Richard Ochberg, in "The Male Career Code and the Ideology of Role," demonstrates how the concept of sex roles, a core concept that "might serve as a shorthand description" of both women's and men's studies, can aid in denying the subjectivity of the experience ostensibly under study, a denial crucial to the pretensions to objectivity of the male construction of experience. Ochberg writes: "Men may attempt to escape their private troubles by migrating—like souls fleeing diseased bodies—from their private lives into public ones." He argues that in viewing and experiencing themselves as acting in a role, men lose the ability to experience *themselves* outside the role. He cautions: "Men's studies, which takes as part of its disciplinary mandate the critique of cultural forms that deprecate male subjectivity, should be careful not to find itself passively acquiescing in this deprecation by an uncritical acceptance of pure role theory."

Ochberg's point illustrates the finely nuanced character of many of the analyses presented here, and the enormous debt men's studies owes to the women's studies scholarship of the past two decades. While acknowledging the importance and centrality of sex roles, a concept introduced by Talcott Parsons and developed by women's studies, several essays take up criticisms of sex-role frameworks, criticisms also developed by women's studies scholars. Thus, in addition to Ochberg's criticism, we find Michael Kimmel, in "The Contemporary 'Crisis' of Masculinity in Historical Perspective," arguing that simplistic formulations of sex roles "posit masculinity as a fixed and definable set of behavioral norms, a static and universal box into which all men must fit." He writes:

> Not only does the male sex-role paradigm ignore historical and cross-cultural dimensions to the social construction of masculinity, but it ignores how much of masculinity is a product of the interaction between men and women, that is, how much of the normative behaviors of both women and men has more to do with gender relations than either does with a fixed and isolated role to which individuals are socialized to adopt. Further, the focus on sex roles minimizes our analytic ability to specify the ways in which relations between men and women are derived from the power men as a group maintain over women as a group.[1]

Kimmel's "interactionist" perspective, in which men and women "negotiate" changes in gender relations, emerges from recent trends in women's and men's studies toward deeper examinations of the social processes of engenderment, whereby gender dichotomies are first created, instead of simply assuming gender differentiation and then proceeding to analyze its ramifications on each gender in isolation. Such trends are historically situated and analyzed in my essay, which in this regard complements Pleck's historical account of the development of the theory of male sex role identity. Kimmel's essay attempts to rectify the deficiencies he perceives in the sex-role paradigm by comparative analysis of three periods during which a "crisis of masculinity" was discerned by contemporaries: England in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the present. Significant parallels emerge in "transformations in the social organization of work, the structure of social mobility, and changes in family and gender relations . . . in which the meaning of masculinity is itself brought into question." Significant parallels also emerge in male reactions to these changes, which Kimmel analyzes as falling into three categories: antifeminist backlash, promale backlash, and profeminist men. The most strident criticisms of the sex-role model are in Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell, and John Lee's "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity." They speak not of inadequacies or misdirections in the sex role model but of the "theoretical incoherence built into the 'sex role' paradigm," flatly stating that "the 'male sex role' does not exist." They criticize the ahistorical, conservative functionalism of sex-role theory and remind the reader that "we do not speak of 'race roles' or 'class roles' because the exercise of power in these areas of social relations is more immediately evident."

1. An extended version of Kimmel's argument may be found in his Introduction to the special issue he edited on Researching Male Roles, *American Behavioral Scientist* 29, no. 5 (May/June 1986): 517–529. For a similar criticism of the sex-role paradigm, see Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, *Breaking Out: Feminist Consciousness and Feminist Research* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), pp 97–105.

Michael Messner's "The Meaning of Success: The Athletic Experience and the Development of Male Identity" also stresses the historical nature of questions about masculinity in its exploration of the rise and role of organized sports. Moreover, Messner attempts to answer a question he argues is not raised by a simplistic or mechanistic employment of socialization theory. The perspectives he criticizes consider solely the effects of sports on men, with some praising sports for their alleged character-building function and others condemning sports for their alleged character-debilitating function. Missing from such analyses, argues Messner, is the logically prior question: What is it about masculine identity that first attracts young males to sports? His answer meshes well with the analysis of male friendships given by Drury Sherrod in "The Bonds of Men: Problems and Possibilities in Close Male Relationships," as well as with Ochberg's analysis of the male career code. They point to a male need to construct relationships of intimacy and friendship bounded and defined by articulated rules. Examples would be what Ochberg refers to as the need to achieve a "detached collegiality" in relationships with coworkers in hierarchical settings, and what Messner refers to as the need to establish "work-related (or sports-related) positional identity" before "exploring close friendships and intimate relationships."

In their work, one sees emerging an important men's studies methodological strain that incorporates into studies of men critical examinations of the nascent gender identities with which men come to many traditional socializing institutions. This creates more dynamic, multidimensional frameworks for understanding the relationships between men's selves and men's roles than exists in much gender scholarship.

BEYOND ONE-DIMENSIONALITY

One finds repeated calls throughout this volume not simply to substitute one reductionist understanding of masculinity for another, as when Filene writes that the investigation of the personal dimensions (i.e., the "secrets") of men's lives is not a matter of "digging up skeletons in heroes' closets. . . . The point is not the secret but the interplay between the secret and the rest of his behavior and attitudes"; or when Riemer argues that the men's studies rereading of American literature he proposes does not commit one to the flaw of "reducing literature to sociological resource." One also finds a determination to listen to the voices of men themselves, whether they be friends (Sherrod), businessmen (Ochberg), or

athletes (Messner), to capture the "ephemeral side" (Sherrod), "subjectivity" (Ochberg), and "personal–existential level" (Messner) of masculinity. In inverse fashion to the struggle in women's studies to establish the *objectivity* of women's experiences and thereby validate the legitimacy of women's experiences *as women,* much of men's studies struggles to establish the *subjectivity* of men's experiences and thereby validate the legitimacy of men's experiences *as men.*

This difference follows logically from the differential and complementary effects of the public–private dichotomy on women and men. The commitment to take as one's point of departure and legitimize men's experiences as men leads in some cases to a critique of the use of female norms to categorize male experience, a critique analogous to the women's studies critique of the generic use of male norms. For example, Sherrod questions the equation of intimacy and verbal self-revelation, arguing that although on this measure of intimacy men are judged to have less intimate relationships than women, this judgment may result from an inappropriate imposition of female norms on males. On this line of argument, perhaps men are not quantitatively less intimate but qualitatively differently intimate, in nonverbal ways.[2] Perhaps male intimacy is not face-to-face intimacy, but occurs side by side, as when engaged in some joint activity, or even back to back, as when backing each other up.[3] Such a contention has mixed implications. Its validating attitude toward men's experiences in their own terms may well be more effective in encouraging men to develop their own styles of intimacy than simply berating them for failing to meet female norms. But if one extends the idea to the point where it posits the existence of incommensurable modes of intimacy by gender, it suggests a kind of separatism that augurs poorly for the possibility of cross-gender intimacy. In other cases, the commitment to reexamine male experiences may lead to a call for greater attention to informally structured relationships, such as Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow's examination of "Gilgamesh and the Sundance Kid: The Myth of Male Friendship." Their argument suggests that in its inattention to the study of male friendships in our society, the tradition of male anthropology incorporates and is limited by the same male needs for clearly bounded relationships addressed by others in this volume.

2. In *Intimate Strangers: Men and Women Together* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), Lillian Rubin differentiates intimacy from male bonding largely by this criterion. The explicit argument that intimacy requires self-disclosure is one of the virtues of her treatment; often this is simply assumed.

3. The imagery is from Shepherd Bliss, "Men Are Such Interesting Creatures," *Twin Cities Men's Center News* (Minneapolis) 10, no. 4 (August and September 1986): 13–15.

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