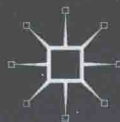




CONSTRUCTIONS OF MASCULINITY IN BRITISH LITERATURE FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE PRESENT

EDITED BY STEFAN HORLACHER

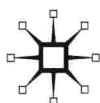


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NOTE FROM THE SERIES EDITORS

In Sweden, a “real man” is one who does child care for his own children, and liberals and conservatives argue not about whether there should be government-mandated paternity leave but about the allocation of time between new mothers and fathers. In China, years of enforcing a one-child rule have led to a population with a vast demographic imbalance between the number of males and females, with consequences yet to be determined. In Iran, vasectomy has become increasingly popular as men seek to take more responsibility for family planning in an atmosphere of restrictive gender roles. In the Philippines, government-supported exports of women as nurses, maids, and nannies to first-world countries alter the lives of boys and girls growing up both at home and in the developed countries, and Mexican-American men adapt to their wives’ working by doing increased housework and child care, while their ideology of men’s roles changes more slowly. And throughout the world, warfare continues to be a predominantly male occupation, devastating vast populations, depriving some boys of a childhood, and promoting other men to positions of authority.

Global Masculinities is a series devoted to exploring the most recent, most innovative, and widest-ranging scholarship about men and masculinities from a broad variety of perspectives and methodological approaches. The dramatic success of gender studies has rested on three developments: (1) making women’s lives visible, which has also come to mean making all genders more visible; (2) insisting on intersectionality, and so complicating the category of gender; and (3) analyzing the tensions among global and local iterations of gender. Through textual analyses and humanities-based studies of cultural representations, as well as through cultural studies of attitudes and behaviors, we have come to see the centrality of gender in the structure of modern life and life in the past, varying both across cultures and within them. Through interviews, surveys, and demographic analysis, among other forms of social scientific inquiry, we are now able to quantify some of the effects of these changing gender

structures. Clearly written for both the expert and more general audience, this series embraces advances in scholarship and applies them to men's lives: gendering men's lives, exploring the rich diversity of men's lives—globally and locally, textually and practically—and the differences among men by social class, “race”/ethnicity and nationality, sexuality, ability status, sexual preference and practices, and age.

MICHAEL KIMMEL AND
JUDITH KEGAN GARDINER

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PART I

Theoretical Framework

Charting the Field of Masculinity Studies; or, Toward a Literary History of Masculinities

Stefan Horlacher

While the question of whether late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century masculinity (or, rather, masculinities) is really ‘in crisis’ is still open to debate, there is no denying that the construction of male identities and the transition from boyhood to adulthood has become a considerable social problem, both in Europe and in the United States, as a brief reference to the headline-making massacres at Columbine High School, Virginia Tech, Northern Illinois University (DeKalb), the Rütli Hauptschule (Berlin), the Gutenberg Gymnasium (Erfurt), and Jokela High School (Tuusula) in Finland amply demonstrates.

As far as literary critics and anthropologists such as Vera Nünning, David Gilmore, and Alfred Habegger are concerned, the problematic of constructing a masculine identity is less one of a biological or genetic ‘nature’ but is instead primarily situated “at the intersection of literary and cultural history” (Nünning 301). From this perspective, supposedly gender-specific behavior, here the apparently inexplicable eruptions of (not only) late-adolescent male violence, is not so much the sporadic manifestation of a specifically male genetic predisposition but rather of a more or less dysfunctional sociocultural complex or process somewhere on a spectrum extending from diminished socialization to excessive inculcation. For many scholars, masculinity is not a biological given but is somehow acquired, which explains why its status has become increasingly contingent and inherently ambiguous and why literary, filmic, and more recent narrative constructions

(e.g., via gaming and/or social media) of masculinity, albeit all of them necessarily fictional and/or performative constructs, have a normative function, directly influencing the character traits and modes of behavior that specific cultures identify as masculine.

However, if Peter F. Murphy emphasizes the role “[that] literature has played in reinforcing the assumptions about masculinity and, at times, [in] helping to establish the norm of manhood,” he also implies that literature can offer alternatives, that is, “other images, other roles, other options for men and masculinity” (1). Nünning puts the case succinctly for the outstanding contribution that literature, that is, fictional constructions of masculinity, can make with regard to male identity formation when she stresses the “immense social and cultural relevance” of concepts of masculinity that are “disseminated and to some extent critiqued” in literature and in nonfictional texts (301). Critics, such as Mark Stein, contend that literature fulfills a performative function, allowing for a variety of new male subject positions that become available through their very conception, while the novels themselves serve as “machine[s] of cultural . . . re-production,” leading—as Stein argues in the context of postcolonial studies via “a crucial literary stocktaking from new perspectives” to “the redefinition of ‘Britishness’ and the modification of the image of Britain by way of the novel” (42). If Stein is right, there is no reason why what holds true for a concept of collective identity such as Britishness should not also work for the concept of gender identity, especially if one thinks of the work of Diran Adebayo, Jackie Kay, Zadie Smith, and Hanif Kureishi (see Winkgens in this volume). Particularly when talking about a potential crisis of masculinity, literary discourses become a privileged site for registering patriarchy’s “loss of legitimacy” and how “different groups of men are now negotiating this loss in very different ways” (Connell 1996, 202).

Leaving the vast field of literature aside for a moment, we can state that, notwithstanding the progress made in the field of masculinity studies over the last few decades, problems related to the construction of male identity remain an unsolved issue and the focus of regular media attention. Thus, the headline of the German newspaper *Die Welt* on June 2, 1998, reads “Psychiatrist: ‘America’s Boys in Crisis’” (12 [trans. S. H.]). With reference to William Pollock from Harvard University, the subsequent article explains that there is a national crisis among male adolescents and argues that, after decades during which special support had been given to girls, statistics reveal truly disastrous results: “During puberty, five times more boys than girls commit suicide; boys are responsible for 90 per cent of criminal offences and drop out of school four times more often than girls.” (Ibid. [trans. S. H.]

In the years following the above-mentioned article, and with regard to the killing spree at American and German schools and universities referred to above and to male violence in general—domestic or public, self-inflicted or perpetrated against others, and often linked to drug abuse and/or binge drinking—the problems related to the construction of male identity have truly become an everyday issue. According to a Canadian study published in *L'Actualité médicale*, significantly more men than women suffer from disabilities and ailments such as slow mental development, behavioral disorders, states of anxiety, schizoid tendencies, transitory or chronic spasms, stutters, enuresis, and encopresis (cf. O'Neil). Grown men have—comparatively speaking—a heightened tendency toward personality disorders such as paranoia, neuroses, and antisocial behavior. Four times more men than women suffer from alcoholism or drug addiction, and men are three times more likely than women to succumb to suicide and high-risk behavior.

Some experts see an important reason for these conditions in what they call the 'inherent frailty of masculinity,' meaning the lack—and the increase of this lack—of a stable foundation for the formation of male identity. Even though, from a biological perspective, survival for males seems to be more difficult than for females, we should not jump to the conclusion that the lower life expectancy for males, which in industrial societies is up to eight years less than for females, is a simple biological given. On the contrary: together with the actual violence male adolescents are notorious for, role models, concepts and stereotypes of masculinity—which are propagated by the mass media generally and by popular and more traditional literary discourses—strongly suggest that masculinity, as a notion, is in transition, if not inherently unstable, that it is not a simple fact but has to be acquired through struggles, painful initiations, rites of passage, or long and often humiliating apprenticeships. The risks that have to be taken during this time are inestimably high, and the higher these risks are, the greater is the manhood they confer. Very often, however, the inner strength necessary to succeed in this competition, which is chiefly aimed at material success as a symbol of manhood, is not preexistent but rather has to be learned during a period of indoctrination (cf. Gilmore; Habegger). Being a man has thus become—and has always been—a serious matter that has to be taught and learned. But this, of course, always implies the risk of failure, of not being man enough:

Man is a kind of *artefact* and as such always runs the risk of being found wanting. A construction error, a substandard piece of the male machinery, to cut a long story short: a loser. The result of the enterprise [of

becoming a man] is so uncertain that it has to be stressed if it is successful. In other words: In order to praise a man it is sufficient to say: "He is a man!" Formula of the *illusio virilis*. (Badinter 15 [trans. S. H.]

If at least some of the problems arising from the construction of male identity have been addressed so far,¹ the question remains to what extent the emergent field of masculinity studies has been able to come up with solutions for these problems. While masculinity studies is well established and probably at its most advanced in the United States and Australia, in most of Europe it is still exceptional in the humanities (cf. Murphy 1) and, in comparison to the importance of gender studies, represents a minority interest in the field of gender research.²

Yet, even in the United States, only 15 to 20 years ago critics argued that "literature on men and masculinity [was] hopelessly at odds with itself" (Clatterbaugh 1990, 1f.), undertheorized, and wrought with contradictions. The whole issue was regarded as 'unsurveyed territory' both in society at large and among academic circles, as the following examples make clear: in his *Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity*, Kenneth S. Clatterbaugh concludes "[that s]o much of the current writing about men and masculinity is anecdotal" (1990, 159), and in the same decade, R. W. Connell in *Masculinities* criticizes the fact that "the most popular books about men are packed with muddled thinking which either ignores or distorts the results of the growing research on the issues" (1996, ix). Furthermore, in an article together with Tim Carrigan and John Lee, Connell states "[that t]hough most social science is indeed about men, good-quality research that brings *masculinity* into focus is rare" (1987, 64). In addition to this, Murphy argues that researchers are only beginning "to articulate a critical analysis of masculinity in contemporary culture and in modern literature. More recent, and sometimes more radical, books have been written by sociologists, psychologists, and historians, *not literary or cultural critics*" (4 [emphasis S. H.]).

This is one of the reasons why Mechthilde Vahsen argues, with a view to the contemporary situation of masculinity studies in Germany, that "the interdisciplinary link with other categories of analysis such as class or ethnicity" is missing and that the "exchange of new research trends... is still only beginning" (249 [trans. S. H.]). And, in her 2002 anthology, *Masculinities—Maskulinitäten*, Therese Steffen from the University of Basel, Switzerland, speaks on behalf of many other critics when she states that

in the last fifteen years...the Anglo-American world has witnessed an exponential growth of interest in 'Masculinities.' This deficit has

been belatedly and only hesitantly articulated in the German-speaking world, the reasons being that one does not want (yet again) to deal with the subject of violence or position oneself as a whipping boy, or that women's studies is reluctant to concede any hard-won ground, or that Europe is reluctant to follow developments in the US, or that it is simply lagging behind. (270 [trans. S. H.])

However, the picture is not all that bleak: in Europe, research on masculinities has been gaining momentum over the last ten years, and if we consider the work that has been done outside of Europe, we can say that research in masculinity studies, especially when linked to literary studies, cultural studies, history, or sociology, has made significant progress.

Since the mid-1990s, R. W. Connell's concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' has become one of the, if not perhaps *the*, most influential set of ideas in masculinity studies. Connell defines masculinity as "the pattern or configuration of social practices linked to the position of men in the gender order, and socially distinguished from practices linked to the position of women" (2004, n. pag.). She further argues that "[m]asculinity" ... is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture" (1996, 71). Thus, masculinity is "substantially a social construction" that "refers to male bodies (sometimes symbolically and indirectly), but is not determined by male biology" (2004, n. pag.),³ just as men's "bodies do not determine the patterns of masculinity, but ... are still of great importance in masculinity" (1998, 5). If Connell stresses that the body "is inescapable in the construction of masculinity," she also stresses that "what is inescapable is not fixed" (1996, 56) and that "[m]asculinities and femininities are best understood as gender projects, dynamic arrangements of social practice through time, in which we make ourselves and are made as particular kinds of human beings" (2004, n. pag.).⁴ Thus, instead of resorting to biological essentialism, Connell favors an understanding of masculinity as part of an ongoing gender project, constantly shaped and (re-)negotiated by "the processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives" (1996, 71), by power structures, production relations, emotional bonds, and the connected system of symbols.

As far as the practices that shape the dominating patterns of masculinity and the relations among masculinities are concerned, Connell distinguishes between hegemony, subordination, complicity,

and marginalization, with hegemony playing a particularly important role as a “historically mobile relation” (1996, 77) that controls the relationships not only between men and women but also among individual groups of men. Hegemonic masculinity, then, is the “form of masculinity which is culturally dominant in a given setting” and “can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (ibid.). Moreover, it is important to note that

‘[h]egemonic’ signifies a position of cultural authority and leadership, not total dominance; other forms of masculinity persist alongside. The hegemonic form need not be the most common form of masculinity. . . . Hegemonic masculinity is, however, highly visible. It is likely to be what casual commentators have noticed when they speak of ‘the male role.’ Hegemonic masculinity is hegemonic not just in relation to other masculinities, but in relation to the gender order as a whole. It is an expression of the privilege men collectively have over women. The hierarchy of masculinities is an expression of the unequal shares in that privilege held by different groups of men. (Connell 2004, n. pag.)

Within the current world gender order, Connell subsequently identifies a transnational business masculinity—which has risen to prominence since the late twentieth century—as a specific form of hegemonic masculinity that is “associated with those who control its dominant institutions: the business executives who operate in global markets, and the political executives who interact (and in many contexts, merge) with them” (1998, 16). Transnational business masculinity is “marked by increasing egocentrism, very conditional loyalties (even to the corporation), and a declining sense of responsibility for others (except for purposes of image making).” Furthermore, it is “characterized by a limited technical rationality . . . which is increasingly separate from science” and “differs from traditional bourgeois masculinity by its increasingly libertarian sexuality, with a growing tendency to commodify relations with women.” Finally, transnational business masculinity “does not require bodily force, since the patriarchal dividend on which it rests is accumulated by impersonal, institutional means” (ibid.). Nevertheless, this kind of masculinity, or rather these kinds of masculinity—since “[t]ransnational business masculinity is not completely homogeneous” (2000, 54)—are shaped not only by “the immense augmentation of bodily powers by technology (air transport, computers, tele-communication),” a fact that