

## Live Fast and Die Young: The Construction of Masculinity among Young Working-class Men on the Margin of the Labour Market

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### ABSTRACT

Life-history method offers a way to explore the politics of change in contemporary masculinity. The life histories of five unemployed young men are studied, and compared with three men from similar backgrounds but different positions in class and sexual politics. The labour market (rather than labour process) and the state play a major part in framing the development of a 'protest' masculinity, a stressed version of hegemonic masculinity, sustained as a collective practice in milieux such as bike clubs. But dramatic rejections of masculinity, as well as a low-keyed 'complicit' masculinity, emerge from the same social context by different class/gender praxes. Contrasting political prospects are raised by these differing trajectories.

### WORKING-CLASS MASCULINITY

Over the last two decades, in counterpoint to debates about the changing position of women, there has been a subdued but persistent discussion of changes among men and the idea of a 'new masculinity'. Most of this discussion (e.g. Kimmel, 1987, Brod, 1987) has focused on Anglo, middle-class men in the United States adopting feminist ideas and attempting a benign reform of 'the male sex role'. This process is indeed historically important. But it is not the only politics of masculinity, nor the only kind of change in masculinity. Changes are produced in dire conditions as well as comfortable ones, and may be far from benign. Change may also be more complex than 'sex-role' literature assumes. Working-class men are commonly presumed to be conservative, if not outright reactionary, in gender politics. This is often true. Yet working-class politics and labour parties, with all their contradictions, have generally been more progressive in gender terms than conservative parties drawing their bloc votes from the affluent (Segal, 1990, 294-319).

Accounts of working-class masculinity have been offered by a few writers, usually outside the 'sex role' tradition and influenced by socialist ideas. Partly because of this genealogy their arguments have emphasised manual labour, the workplace, and the wage. Tolson in Britain, who produced the first general formulation of ideas on 'working-class masculinity' (1977, 58-81), argued that 'in our society the main focus of masculinity is the wage'. A little inconsistently, he made shopfloor struggle the centre of his analysis of masculine emotion and politics. Donaldson (1987), reviewing accounts of working-class men from four English-speaking countries, argued that 'the consciousness of male labourers is crucially formed in the experience of the family-household and workplace', with masculinity both created and undermined in the interplay between the two.

These theoretical ideas are now supported by a small but valuable body of research on the construction of masculinity in manual workplaces. Willis (1979) describes a masculine shopfloor culture among factory workers in the British midlands which helps personal survival but also reproduces class subordination. Lippert (1977) describes the production of an alienated sexuality through work in the American motor industry. Cockburn (1983) traces the construction of a collective, virtually institutionalised masculinity among compositors in the British printing industry, centering on the barring of women from the trade. Metcalfe (1988) traces two styles of workplace class struggle and two styles of masculinity among Australian coal miners, one more formal and institutional, the other wilder and more casual.

Clearly, conditions in the capitalist workplace have a powerful influence on the construction, or at least the expression, of masculinity for the men employed there. But capitalist workplaces do not guarantee employment. In the wake of the economic downturn in the 1970s, it was estimated that 31 million people were out of work through the mid-1980s in the OECD countries. In less developed economies unemployment or under-employment is chronic.

Therefore we cannot presume that the experience of 'labouring men', as Donaldson calls his workers, is the same as 'working-class masculinity'. Large numbers of youth are now growing up without any expectation of the stable employment around which traditional models of working-class masculinity were organised. Instead they face economic marginality in the long term and often severe deprivation in the short term. In such conditions the patterns traced by Tolson and Donaldson are potentially open to major change. This reasoning led me to include a group of young working-class men, most of them unemployed, in a study of changes in contemporary masculinity.

## THE RESEARCH AND ITS METHOD

In most discussions of masculinity the topic is taken to be a 'role' or an 'identity'. These concepts have serious weaknesses (examined by Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1985): a more powerful theoretical approach is needed. I take 'masculinity' to be a socially constructed form of life or project in time, which appropriates the bodily difference of men from women into a social process of gender. (For the theoretical bases of these concepts see Connell, 1987). This project is found in social practice at several levels: in personality, in culture and institutions, and in the organisation and use of the body (e.g. in sexuality). In any given society there are likely to be multiple masculinities. It is important to distinguish the *hegemonic* form of masculinity (see Connell, 1990b), which is socially dominant (though not necessarily the most widespread), from subordinated masculinities which are discredited or oppressed (such as homosexual masculinity in our culture). The dynamics of masculinity concern the relations among these forms as well as the overall gender relations between men and women.

To study a process of historical change in masculinity, the conventional methods of sex role research are inadequate. Methods are needed which give information about practices, and about contradictions in practice, situated in time; which draw on both personal experience and on social interactions, collectivities and institutions.

One method which meets these criteria is the life-history. It has drawbacks, including the limitations of conscious memory (Rubin, 1986), difficulties of corroboration, laborious data-gathering, and a time consuming process of case-by-case analysis. At the same time it is flexible in design and application and enormously productive of information located in its context. The life-history method's champions (e.g. Plummer, 1983) have emphasised its virtues for documenting subjective experience. This underestimates its potential. For the analysis of masculinity, life-history method is particularly relevant because of its capacity to reveal social structures, collectivities, and institutional change at the same time as personal life. It is the interplay between structural fact and personal experience that is the centre of a social science that will admit the interests and perspectives of women (Smith, 1987). And precisely this interplay is illuminated by classic life-history analyses such as Abel (1938) on the Nazi movement, Dollard (1937) on race in the US, or Sartre (1963) on Flaubert. Where the research is based on a theory of social process we may speak of the *theorized life history* as a specific method.

The interviews for this project were designed on the basis of theoretical analyses of gender as a structure of social practice (Connell 1987). In asking for an autobiographical narrative, we specifically sought descriptions of concrete practices (e.g. what a boy and his father actually did in interaction,

not just how the respondent felt about his father). We used institutional transitions (e.g. entry to school, entry to the work force) as pegs for memory, and asked for accounts of interactions in institutions, particularly families, schools and workplaces. We sought material on each of the three major structures within gender relations: relations of power, production/reproduction relations, and cathexis (the social structuring of emotional attachment). We sought to understand the construction of gender as a project in time, e.g. exploring the sequence of a man's relationships with women in different settings. To gain clues to emotional dynamics we sought accounts of early memories, family constellations, and relationship crises.

The project used this method to investigate several groups of men among whom crisis tendencies in the gender order (Mathews, 1984) and the production of masculinity might be focused. Young working-class men on the fringe of the labour market were one of the groups chosen. Others were men in the environmental movement, men in the therapeutic counter-culture, gay men, and men in occupations based on technical knowledge but not backed by traditional professional prestige. (For other reports from this project see Connell 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1991). The interviews were conducted in urban and rural New South Wales in 1985-6. They ranged between one and two hours, were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed. In analysing them I have used both the transcriptions and the tapes to get a full picture of personal style and emotion.

How narratives are analysed is crucial in life-history research. The goal of this study is to trace a historical dynamic of gender. Accordingly, the interviews have been analysed intensively both as personal histories and as sources for a collective history. In the first phase, individual case studies are prepared. These studies have two main components: (a) a structural analysis using the three structures of gender relations already mentioned as a grid; (b) a diachronic analysis attempting to grasp the life-course and the formation of masculinity as a gestalt, or as the particular unification of materials represented by a personal trajectory (as suggested in Sartre's (1958) conception of existential psychoanalysis). In the second phase, the life histories in a given group are re-analysed to explore the similarities and differences among the trajectories they document, and to explore their collective location in the historical dynamic of gender. This paper mainly reports the second step. It may be read as a group portrait of men caught up in a particular social process of change.

Presenting case-analysis material is always difficult. Even Freud, the master of the form, found it difficult (1905, 7-10). In trying to characterise social processes there is a great temptation to pick type cases which become icons, like the famous 'Mack' and 'Larry' histories in *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno *et al.*, 1950), or the 'other-directed' characters in *The*

*Lonely Crowd* (Riesman, 1950, 1952). It is sometimes possible to find genuinely representative, or at least illuminating, cases. But such a conclusion should not be forced by the form of presentation. On the other hand, the biographies should not become mere sources of anecdotes, with the writer as chef picking out the juiciest morsels. This destroys much of their value as evidence, and all of what can be learnt by considering the shape of life histories as a whole.

For this paper I have selected parts of one or two life histories for relatively detailed presentation under each of the analytic headings. Material being discussed under each topic thus comes with some of its biographical context. At the same time, through the paper as a whole, each of the cases is presented substantially in at least one of its aspects, and none is artificially singled out as a 'type'.

The analysis follows the theoretical program outlined above. I start with the background and specificity of the group being studied. To identify their 'location' in the gender order requires an analysis of its major structures; so the life histories are examined in relation to the social division of labour, to the structure of power, and to the pattern of cathexis in sexuality. Evidence emerges for the importance of a level of practice not adequately grasped by the concepts of 'structure' or 'action'; the level of historically-constructed collective circumstances, or 'milieu'. Analysis of this level highlights the extent to which the construction of masculinity is a collective practice. I turn then to the level of personal life or 'personality', the usual locus of discussions of masculinity. Conventional psychodynamic accounts of masculinity give little grip on these lives. But an examination of personal trajectories informed by existential psychoanalysis and Adlerian analysis allows a grasp of the major pattern found in the group and dramatic departures from it. Finally, the analysis returns to the large scale to consider how these trajectories are located in the contemporary history of the gender order.

## GROUP & CONTEXT

The focus of the paper is five young men who were contacted through staff of the Community Youth Support Scheme, a publicly funded agency working mainly with unemployed youth: Jack Harley (22), 'Eel' (c.21), Patrick Vincent (17), Alan Rubin (29), Mal Walton (21). All are on the dole and have at best a spasmodic experience of employment. They left school at age 15 or 16, one being expelled and two others after much truanting. One is illiterate and another almost illiterate. They are, collectively, on the fringe of the labour market. Not incidentally, they have also been in conflict with the state. Most of them hated school and had antagonistic, sometimes violent, interactions with teachers. Four of the five have been arrested and

two spent at least a year in custody. Though of 'old Australian' background, in personal style as well as past history they are outside the 'respectable' working class. Three ride motorbikes and for two of them biking is a major passion; two have tattoos, one over most of his body from the waist up.

In order to gain a clearer sense of the setting, its potentials, and the importance of practice in realising them, I will also discuss three men of the same age group and very similar class backgrounds who have a different position in the labour market. Stewart Hardy (24) is a computer trainee in a bank; Danny Taylor (23) is an office worker in an environmental organisation; Paul Gray (26) is a temporary office worker in a welfare agency.

All eight are children of manual workers, and several grew up in very poor households. This is a setting where the breadwinner/homemaker division of conventional sex role theory becomes an irrelevance. In most cases the boys' mothers had jobs while the boys were still young. In several cases, at various times — modest ups and sharp downs punctuate life at this end of the labour market — mothers were the main income earner for the household. This is easily accepted; only one of the eight expresses any discomfort about women earning an income. Nor does the instrumental/expressive division of sex role theory have any grip. As with the working-class girls discussed by Walker (1989), there is little sense in these lives that women are emotional specialists or 'expressive' or person-oriented in a way men are not.

The families they grew up in had two sharply contrasting economic patterns. In one, the family operates as a tightly-knit cooperative. Stewart Hardy's father was a 'jack of all trades' outback manual worker, travelling from property to property; his wife travelled with him and expanded his labour power, for instance by doing the washing on farms where he got work. When Stewart was in high school his parents had given this away and were working together as contract cleaners, with Stewart working on their contracts too. Mal Walton's parents show the other pattern starkly. He never saw his father, who left his mother when she was pregnant with Mal. His mother supported her mother and her child on her wage as a factory worker, later by working at a caravan park. These patterns are not consciously 'alternative' family forms; few doubt that two earners are better, but sometimes one earner is all that a household can manage to have. The two-earner pattern was in fact re-created in Mrs Walton's family when her lover moved in, leaving his wife and children. Mal refused to accept him as a substitute father, though he would accept discipline from his grandmother.

## STRUCTURES

This section will examine the construction of masculinity in relation to each of the three main structures of gender relations (for definition of these

structures see Connell, 1987). It is important to register that 'gender relations' includes large-scale institutions such as the state (Franzway, Court and Connell, 1989) and the market as well as face-to-face relations.

### Labour

The crucial point the life histories reveal is that a sense of self is shaped, not in relation to the *workplace*, but in relation to the *labour market*. This is best seen through specific careers. Alan Rubin, the oldest of the group, has much more work experience than most. He left school at 15, against his parents' wishes, having been truanting systematically. He got a job in a book binding shop, possibly arranged by his mother. Then he got a job as a labourer for the local council, because he knew someone in the council office. Then he travelled to New Zealand surfing; ran out of money, got a job in a car assembly plant and loathed it — not that he minded manual work, he says, but the place was run like a concentration camp, managed by cretins, and manned by 'robot ants'. Back in Australia he travelled around with professional gamblers for a while, then worked as a mail sorter — that was 'my intellectual job'; he remarks sarcastically. After that he held down a job painting containers for two years, and saved enough to travel to Europe. Back in Australia he settled into a rut, doing 'nothing out of the ordinary': on the dole most of the time, with occasional jobs but none lasting long. He lives with his parents, to save money.

Though this is the longest work history it is characteristic. Alan has no saleable skills, no qualifications nor positional power, therefore no leverage in the labour market. All he has to sell is precisely described by the concept of abstract labour, the lowest common denominator, the capacity to do what almost anyone can do:

He becomes transformed into a simple, monotonous productive force that does not have to use intense bodily or intellectual faculties. His labour becomes a labour that anyone can perform. Hence, competitors crowd upon him on all sides (Marx, 1849, 171).

From the employer's point of view, Alan is interchangeable with any other worker. From Alan's point of view, any job is interchangeable with any other — at least so far as the work is concerned; the human relations can make a difference. He has done quite a range of indoor and outdoor jobs. His account of them gives off an odour of total boredom, an alienation you could cut with a knife.

Such a reaction is not surprising when one's capacity to earn a living is vulnerable to an impersonal labour market and to employers who have no interest whatever in the individual workers. 'Labour market vulnerability' is a genteel phrase, but it is a gut-level reality for these young men and the others in their lives. Jack Harley has worked as a shearer, a labourer, a

printer, a barman, and a truckie. He is not trying to broaden his skills, because he has little sense of being skilful in the first place. All of the jobs have been short-term: he simply takes what he can get. His *de facto* wife Lisa worked as a telegraphist in a country town; then Telecom automated the exchange and she was laid off. She got a job in a shop; after three months business became slow and she was laid off again. Jack's friend Eel did try to break out of the world of abstract labour by starting an apprenticeship. His first employer, at the end of the low-paid three month trial period, sacked all but one of the apprentices — Eel was not the lucky one. He got a start with another small employer, and this time was kept on. Three years into his apprenticeship, the firm closed down. Unable to get a similar job in the 6 weeks allowed by the apprenticeship rules, Eel was out of the course.

In such a situation one does not develop trusting, optimistic views of the economy. Jack Harley has never had a job that lasted and does not expect to get one. He does expect to live on the dole and pick up jobs on the side. He finds the Commonwealth Employment Service unhelpful, its staff 'piggy' and not interested in young unskilled people. More help comes from family and friends. One survives in an impersonal labour market by mobilising personal links. Alan Rubin's first two jobs, as noted, came through personal connections. Jack has worked for his wife's aunt as a barman, and for her father as a shearer in a family group travelling round taking contracts. His own father took him on a motorbike trip round Australia and organised a temporary job for him as a labourer in the Pilbara. Almost every work history in the group shows the importance of personal links, especially family links, in negotiating the labour market.

Beyond that, Jack has developed what one might politely call a radical pragmatism in his approach to earning a living. He does not care in the least if his wife can get a better job than he can. In exactly the same tone of voice he observes that if he can get another job while on the dole it will be in another name. (An offence, if he is caught.) His approach to unions is at best manipulative. He liked the transport union, but lost his licence so was out of that job. He disliked the shearers' union because it was constantly in dispute (a long-running industrial struggle over the introduction of 'wide combs' into shearing technology) and he lost work. He took a strike-breaking job in a print shop because he 'needed the money', and is now black-banned from jobs in the printing industry. None of the five men has any commitment to unionism. Given that unionism normally relies on grassroots solidarity in an industry, developed over time, it is not hard to see why. As a form of working-class mobilisation, mainstream unionism is essentially irrelevant to people on the margin of the labour market.

For several of the group radical pragmatism extends to crime. There is an element of excitement and entertainment in this, especially car theft by the younger men, but for the most part it is a kind of work. Mal Walton gives

an interesting description of his early experience, and the ruinous rate of exchange:

I used to run round pinching milk money. We'd break into cars and pinch their — I was into a real era of pinching stereotypes and selling them. And we used to be like that because what — well I didn't get into drugs until I left school. That's because I was probably bored with nothing to do. I wasn't working — sorry I was working, I was but I lost that job a couple of weeks later. But we used to look around for stereotypes, good stereotypes, and like they would be worth \$500 or something. And we would just take them to our local drug dealer, say 'have this, give us a stick', or 'give us two sticks' or something. We used to always do that. We were lucky we didn't get busted. Been chased a few times, but always got away, never got caught. The only time I got caught I stole a cook book.

It is obviously a better proposition to be the dealer. At least one of the group is a dealer, and claims to make \$300 a week at it (the figure seems high, it may represent his best week). Two others probably deal in a smaller way. Drug dealing does not stand out in their thinking. It is basically another way to make a dollar, as episodic and chancy as employment. The moral outrage of official society's 'drug offensive' (the militaristic title of a national program that began in 1986) is a complete irrelevance; you might as well have an offensive against second-hand furniture dealers.

## Power

To a sheltered academic observer, there seems a great deal of violence in these lives. Episodes mentioned include bullying and outrageous earnings at school, assaulting a teacher, fights with siblings and parents, brawls in playgrounds and at parties, being arrested, assaults in reform school and gaol, bashing gays, individual fist fights, pulling a knife. Speeding in cars or trucks or on bikes is another form of intimidation, with at least one police chase and roadblock and one serious crash resulting.

Pat Vincent's memories of violence begin with his family. His father gave him hidings, which he does not resent though he is frightened of 'the old man coming down heavy'. His big sister treated him the same way: 'if you give any trouble I'll punch you in the head'. Perhaps by way of a pre-emptive strike, Pat took an aggressive stance towards his teachers, 'gave them heaps' (i.e. of abuse), apart from a couple with whom he got on well. Eventually he threw a chair at a teacher and was expelled from school.

By his own account he was extremely violent with his peers — a fight a day in his first year at a Catholic high school when about 12 years old. This was ego-assertive. He felt the school did not care about him, and he 'wanted to be someone, school write-off is better than being nothing'. . . . 'I wasn't a nobody'. There was even some positive prestige to be gained among other boys: 'if you have a fight and you win, you're a hero'. But there were limits

to this prestige. Pat does not seem to have been a peer group leader; he perhaps seemed too violent, especially as the peer group grew a little older. The number of fights declined, and eventually he 'got out of the habit of fighting'. Now he would avoid it, especially if up against someone who will 'smash shit out of you'. But when sent to a juvenile institution after arrest for car theft he had two fights where he 'smashes shit out of him', perhaps trying to establish a reputation there as violent and dangerous.

Pat Vincent, Jack Harley and Eel state a belief about fighting in such similar terms it is obviously an ideological theme in their networks. Violence is OK when it is justified, and it is always justified when the other man starts it. Eel almost drafts it as law:

Unnecessary violence I am against. Violence that has been provoked, if someone has brought it on themselves — they deserve every bit they get.

There is an ethic here, a positive obligation to reciprocate violence. But they are divided on violence towards women. Eel tells with some relish how his bike group got rid of an assertive woman:

There weren't many, no very few. There's my missus, her sister, a couple of the young blokes had girl friends, and that's about it. All the birds are virtually taken, you know. Most of them are pretty quiet anyway. One loud-mouth bitch, she got a smack in the mouth one night, we haven't seen her since. She pushed one of my mates too far. He said if you don't shut up I'm going to smack you in the head. She kept going, so he did. She got all huffy about it, a bugger came up to hit him from behind type thing, all the rest of it. So we got rid of them quick smart.

One can see why there are not many women in the group. (Similar treatment of women in male-supremacist bike gangs in the US is documented by Hopper and Moore, 1990). Pat, however, would disapprove. To him, men who bash women are 'wimps', a term of severe disapproval, because 'if guys hit chicks' they cannot defend themselves. Women are presumed to be unable to compete in the masculine world of violence and are not legitimate participants in the exchange of physical aggression. Physical fights in the family, or with girlfriends and de factos, happen often enough but no pride is taken in them.

Institutional power and organised violence are encountered in the form of the state. The flavour of this relationship is encapsulated in Paul Gray's earliest memory. His family used to take boys from orphanages for a Christmas treat. One time when Paul was six or seven they were driving on the highway:

And there was copper on a motor bike in the bush. And he [the orphan] saw him, and belowed out at the top of his lungs 'Hey Pig!'. And so we all followed and we pulled into like a motel for the rich — and the copper went straight past, you know.

But the times when poor people can pretend to be rich are few, and the coercive arm of the state weighs heavily on them.

In another paper (Connell, 1989) I have discussed the way these young men encounter the school as a representative of state power. For most of them, schooling is far from being an empowering experience; they encounter school authority as an alien power and start to define their masculinity against it. In some circumstances (e.g. assault on a teacher) this leads directly to the police and courts. In other circumstances they drop out, or are expelled or burst from school as Walker (1989) shows for working-class young women, with no qualifications worth having.

Pat Vincent, as a result of the career of schoolboy violence noted above, was thrown out of two schools and ended his education in Year 10. Unemployed, he went onto drugs, quarrelled with his parents over their curfew. His father, a backhoe operator, eventually organised an 'apprenticeship', as Pat puts it (since it was in an occupation without a regular apprenticeship scheme this probably meant an informal training arrangement). Pat sketches what happened next:

Oh yes I had one job, that was apprentice A [job name].  
How long was that?

Seven weeks.

What happened?

I got locked up so I lost it.

What did you get locked up for?

Pinched a few cars and B & E [breaking and entering] and got busted.

Where did you get sent?

B [juvenile detention centre], I was there for a week and a half and I escaped from there. Then I got busted and I got caught and went to C [higher-security institution] for four or five weeks. And then got out on CSO [community service order — alternative sentence].

Was that because of your age?

No, it was — a few times I have been busted, but I went up on about 16 charges ... Walked off [i.e. escaped] which was three months [sentence] providing ... I asked for CSO and I got it. I haven't been in any trouble since then. Keeping out.

This laconically covers a year in and out of custody, two arrests, breaches of bail conditions, surveillance, legal bargaining, and a rapid education in the technicalities of the juvenile justice system and the folkways of detention centres. Pat bears the police no grudge; when first arrested, after a chase in a stolen car, he thought: 'Shit, I'm gone! I thought they would kill me.' But the police were not as hard as he expected. Nor were the staff of the detention centres. He experienced none of the rapes or bashings of rumour. In fact he claims about Centre C, 'A holiday, chicks in there every night just about'. This is face-work — or to put it in simple English, boasting — about how tough you are, a frequent move in Pat's personal style. He is learning to moderate the masculine display. He will shortly have his 18th birthday, and from now on he faces the big people's prison, a different proposition. So for

the moment he is keeping out of trouble. But in the course of these manoeuvres Pat has lost something already. From the detention centre he wrote a hurtful letter home and his mother now will not speak to him. Pat's mother is a factory worker, the family's regular wage earner, a charge hand with some responsibility in her workplace, and possibly (Pat's language is vague) a union delegate. It seems that she has been trying to keep the kids in line and lift the family out of poverty, and that Pat's bull-headed fight with the law, and complaints against his family, on top of the school expulsions, got too much for her. His brother has given him a bed.

The others' experiences differ in detail but not in character. Jack Harley did graduate from juvenile institution to gaol. Mal Walton was arrested for theft but got off with a bond. Eel has been locked up at least once and has had police as regular visitors to his drunken parties. Of the unemployed, only Alan Rubin does not mention being arrested; on other counts, too, he seems the best tactician. Paul Gray, among the employed, had a similar career to Jack Harley, graduating from juvenile institution to gaol on a drug charge.

In this class setting state power is no abstraction: it is a material presence in their lives. This is force of a kind which cannot be incorporated in the peer-group exchange of violence, though Pat Vincent at first responded to it that way. The police are the Great Power in street politics and you cannot get back at the state by personal confrontation however tough you are. The tactic to learn is the one Paul Gray's parents neatly improvised on the highway — evasion. So the boys learn to dodge the police, to manipulate the welfare system, to find the soft legal options, as far as they can without turning into wimps themselves.

None of the five unemployed has found the state an asset in any substantial way, but one of the employed group did. Stewart Hardy, after leaving school and coming to the city, decided that his parents had been right about the need for qualifications. He took himself to technical college, got the Higher School Certificate, and has gone on to tertiary training. The decisive thing here was a sense of being able to use the education system rather than fighting against it. That had roots in high school. Stewart had spent some time as a 'hood' but did not go very far down that track, and in middle adolescence constructed a more peaceable though not exciting relationship with his teachers. In fits and starts, Stewart got himself onto a career track and a masculinity organised more around knowledge and calculation.

## Sexuality

Pat Vincent's sexual awakening came when he was about 11; 'kid stuff' he now thinks. He cannot remember how he learned about it, just seemed to

know, but he remembers his first fuck about 13: 'Just got onto a chick and ended up going all over her. Then I just kept it up'. Sex seems casual and easy, something that is always on tap. It is very important to Pat as part of his self-image. Markedly less so to Alan Rubin, who satirises the breathless boy-talk about 'Have-you-done-this-have-you-done-that-have-you-done-this?', and recalls his first fuck about 15:

Do you want to hear what my opinion of it was?

Yes.

So *what*! ... Turned out to be a bit of a bore.

This is a minority view. Eel shares Pat's stick-it-up-them enthusiasm, though he started a good deal later, at 17. His first fuck was with an older woman, who 'taught me a hell of a lot'. Then he started relationships with women his own age:

I was going out with another bird, and she moved to D [another city]. We were still going out while she was living there, with each other sort of thing. And I planned a trip to go and visit her, you know, to spend a month there, see how she had been doing and the rest of it. And in the meantime I got onto this other bird that I am with now. Just bedwarmer type thing, you know. And about a week before I went to leave for D she turned around and told me she was pregnant. I just went absolutely berko on her. Well I took off to D and I wasn't going to come back. Ended up coming back anyway and about two months later I split up with the bird that I had in D. I have always just kept her around because of the kid.

Eel's antagonism to women is naked. He lashes out at his mother, 'she gives me the shits and I give her the shits'; his father's new woman, 'a bitch'; his wife's mother, 'a real bitch'; and his wife too:

Well, she's me missus but, first chance I can see to get rid of her, she's gone.

Why is that?

Oh, I can't live with her. I've lived with her for what, three years now, she is just driving me up the wall.

What does she do?

Oh ... the things she says, the way she does things, the way she carries on over stupid shit ... Always whingeing because I never take her out anywhere ...

Why do the women in Eel's life put up with this kind of treatment? There is excitement and pleasure in sex, doubtless, but probably the key thing is lack of alternative. Rich (1980) coined the term 'compulsory heterosexuality' to describe the cultural and social pressures on women to make themselves sexually available to men on whatever terms they can get. Pateman (1988) speaks of the 'sexual contract' underpinning the 'social contract', which regulates men's sexual access to women's bodies and defines women in terms of exchange among men. What needs to be added



to these concepts is the fact, made very clear in these life histories, that compulsory heterosexuality is also enforced on men.

This works even at the level of their relationship to their own bodies. Mal Walton registers this in one of those great moments in interviewing. He accidentally learnt how to masturbate, and rather enjoyed it:

After that I started masturbating a lot — too much in fact. It catches up with you. It does. I read in a book that if you masturbate too much, it's because your hand's harder than a vagina, you get used to it being hard. And then when you start to go with a girl you just don't, you just don't enjoy it.

Did that happen for you?

Yeah. That's why I stopped completely. I don't need to now anyway. No more, that's it, as soon as I found that out. It freaked me out.

So the male body has to be disciplined to heterosexuality. And that means other bodies as well as one's own. Eel has a friend Gary who is 'more or less like a brother . . . everything we did together: we got locked up together, we got beat up, parted together'. Gary nearly killed Eel one night with a .22 rifle in a drunken argument when Eel insulted an ex-girlfriend of Gary's. But they are as one on policing gender:

Gays I have trouble putting up with . . . we used to go poofer-bashing up the Cross<sup>2</sup> and all the rest of it, me and Gary, a few of the other blokes.

Eel ran into trouble on this front, because his older brother 'turned queer'. The brother sounds quite a character; Eel, who has a keen sense of humour, acknowledges his skill at handling a homophobic milieu:

All his mates are trendies and yuppies, fags. He comes out to visit me and Mum. And all my mates are over — they're all like me. He feels as awkward at Mum's place when they're around as I do at his place. But he copes with it all right, he copes well. He sort of tries to, when he comes down, he plays both sides of the fence. And when the guys aren't there he is his normal self. And when the guys come over he's not as bad as what he is. Just, so they don't, so he doesn't get a hassle, or hassle me or Mum.

The brother grew up in the same school of aggression as Eel, but grew bigger and stronger: 'Picks me up and bash lands me. If I give him any shit — *pain!*'. So Eel does not make his trips to the Cross anymore: 'So long as they stay out of my way I don't give a shit what they do. As long as they don't cross my path.'

The acknowledged sexuality of the five is exclusively heterosexual. But there are homosexual possibilities in working-class life too, as is shown by Paul Gray. Paul shared early sex play with a boy friend in primary school. His first fuck and first relationship were with a girl, crude and unsatisfying: 'in, out, in, out, and off, kind of thing'. Then he discovered beats, places where men meet for anonymous homosexual contact:

I found out about toilets after that so, sex was — toilets. I saw the writing on the wall if you like. OK, then explored that side of it. It was fine, I enjoyed it all the time. But when it was over I wanted to go, I didn't ever want to hang around and spend the night.

It is quite possible he was making money from it. Despite a number of relationships with men he never settled into a gay social identity. At the same time he could not settle into a heterosexual masculinity and eventually found a more radical solution, which will be discussed below.

### MILIEU

Contemporary social theory distinguishes action from structure and sees social life as constituted in the interplay of the two. Giddens (1984) makes the two levels of analysis a tight-knit logical couple, writing of the duality of structure and the mutual constitution of action and structure. This framework has been useful in reconceptualising gender, allowing a move past the antinomies of structuralism and psychologism (Connell, 1985). For that reason it was built into the design of this research, and used in analysing the cases.

But in the course of analysis more and more evidence accumulated which did not fit into these logical categories: which did not have the virtuality of structure, being historically concrete and contingent; but which was not action from the point of view of an acting subject. Examples, from the case study materials so far discussed, are Jack Harley's network of relations to the labour market through family, friends and neighbourhood; the routine peer violence and the state of play between youth and police encountered by Pat Vincent; the situation that permits Eel's vituperative misogyny to continue. In a different context, but in much the same way, the milieu of the gay community has emerged in research on sexuality as a key to personal practice in response to the AIDS crisis (Kippax *et al.*, 1990, Connell and Kippax, 1990).

A third logical term seems to be needed, beyond the categories of structure and action; perhaps a family of concepts covering situation and collective practice. The most appropriate term in this case seems to be that of *milieu*. By this I mean the historically constructed collective circumstances of life, in which effects of structure can be decoded, to which personal practice is addressed, but which is reducible to neither.

Here is Eel on his motorbike fraternity:

It wasn't really a gang so much —

You mean you weren't like Hells Angels?

No, it's nothing like that. I mean we partied just as hard as them but, we didn't



have the reputation, you know. Kept it quiet. We used to go away for weekend rallies, day rides, night rides, and parties and all those sort of things.

Everyone gets ripped and pissed?

Yes, yes, we had some good parties. We used to get a couple of ounces, put them in the bowl, couple of grams of speed or something. Occasionally someone would bring some hammer [heroin] or something around, snowcap and throw it on top of the cone, smoke ourselves stupid. Demolished a house that I was renting, totally demolished that place. All the parties, there was a party every night. I'd moved out of home, with a bloke at work, and we could — one other bloke and a couple of birds moved in with us. And we got kicked out of the place we were in so we moved up the E. Road. There was parties there every night. There was always someone coming over with some booze, or some snow or something. Yes, we had, we used to, cops sitting out front taking down rego numbers. Something like 20 bikes parked outside the front of this house every night of the week, seven days a week. Just one big party, because a lot of us were out of work at the time too so — nothing better to do.

The parties often turned into violence. I have already quoted Eel's description of a violent put down of a 'loud-mouth bitch' at one of these parties. More often it was brawls among the men.

It is important to register that this is not uncontrolled, psychotic violence. It is socially defined and even managed. Eel and his mates dumped people who were too aggressive, to maintain good feeling in the group:

How do people get on in the group?

Generally excellent, normally it was fantastic. You get the occasional person that climbs up the wall every time they open their mouth, type thing. You sort of edge them out real quick. Otherwise we all got on superbly. We still do.

And most of the actual violence is confined within the group, where it will not attract police action. Violence directed outwards is mainly symbolic, as Eel acknowledges:

Did you get into many fights?

No not really, very few. Most people would take one look at us and move. No big drama. Anyone who has got any guts to stand up they ended up backing down anyway most times.

Was it just from sheer numbers or people or ...  
No, I think a lot of it's to do with appearance. About they, the way we look and the fact that we have got earrings and tattoos, we ride bikes. That's enough to scare shit out of most straight people. So that a lot of the real fights are between us personally — disagreements, you know.

The exceptions were expeditions to bash poofers (and possibly 'wingnuts', i.e. Asian immigrants) — who of course are not 'straight people' in the eyes of Eel and his mates.

Eel accurately remarks that his group is not Hell's Angels — not even the

Comancheros or Bandidos, the two clubs involved in the 'Father's Day massacre' at Milperra in Sydney's outer suburbs (Harris and Raymond, 1985). But it is certainly part of the same milieu, a network of 'outlaw' motorbike clubs which developed in the postwar decades in Australia (Cunneen and Lynch, 1988) as in the United States (Hopper and Moore, 1983). Cunneen and Lynch trace the growing conflict between these groups and the police which culminated in annual riots at the Bathurst motorcycle races. Their analysis of the importance of state intervention in generating these episodes has close parallels with the relationship to the state documented in these life histories.

What we see in this milieu is the construction of masculinity as a *collective practice* rather than a form of individual personality. Of course this requires individual practices. Eel wears earrings, has cropped hair long in the back, has tattoos on both arms, keeps a bike. But by himself this means little. It is the *group* that is the bearer of masculinity, in a basic way. In a different milieu, Eel is at a loss. He is currently doing a short computer awareness course at a technical college, and his experience there is a telling example of the importance of milieu.

Well, I sort of find it hard to talk to women, you know, especially those in the tech class. There's one I wouldn't mind getting myself into. I don't like to say the wrong thing, you know, because I don't know ... Totally different class of birds ... Drives me up the wall sometimes. Because I give her and this other bird and [a friend] a lift home, drop the others home and then she's the last one I drop off on my way to work, kind of thing. We can sit in the car for 15 minutes and not say a word. Because I just can't think of what to say and what not to say.

A different proposition from picking up a 'bedwarmer' in a setting where he feels comfortable.

Eel's bike network is a dramatic example of milieu, as are Cockburn's (1983) print shops and Metcalfe's (1988) mines, where masculinity is likewise sustained in a collective practice that excludes women and manages the expression of aggression. Other examples are much less tight. Pat Vincent for instance is not a bike and has a more loose-knit friendship network. He has a best friend. They get along well, go surfing together, go out 'tagging' and spend time talking — though, Pat specifies, 'not heaps of personal stuff'. It is in fact a ritualised relationship in which an acceptable masculinity is sustained. Pat is homophobic ('should be shot'). Accordingly he and his mate are careful not to spill over into homophobia.

Across the broader milieu where these young men have grown up, the interviews suggest significant tensions in sexual ideology. A thin, contemptuous misogyny, in which women are treated basically as disposable receptacles for semen, coexists with a much more respectful, even admiring view of women's strength. Sometimes these views coexist in the same head. Homophobia is common but not universal. Some of the respondents reach

easily for live-and-let-live formulae. Fatherhood is feared, because it means commitment, but also desired, especially if the child is a boy. Anger at girlfriends for getting pregnant — the boys never blame themselves — fights with a practical willingness to live together and share child care. The ritual denunciation of feminist extremists that we came to expect from every group of men interviewed, sits beside straightforward and unselfconscious statements supporting sex equality.

These ideological tensions get sorted out in different ways by different men, with no obvious connection to their social position. No collective process seems to be going on that is likely to resolve them.

## THE PERSON

### Psychodynamics

Mills' famous formula that the sociological imagination is concerned with the intersections of biography and history within society (Mills, 1970, 12-14) is misleading. Biography and history do not 'intersect'; they are the same thing, social practice, seen from different points of view. At this point in the analysis I shift perspective to the person being constituted and the shape of the life history.

The most common way of handling this issue in relation to gender is through a concept of masculinity and femininity as core identities or core personalities laid down at an early stage of life through parenting practices and identification. Chodorow (1978), in a highly influential argument of this type, suggests that the key is the fact of primary care by women in early childhood. Femininity is constructed on the basis of identification with the parent of the same sex, masculinity in rupture with that identification. This leads to a divergence of personalities which need emotional merging, and thus are motivated to mother, from personalities which sustain barriers and move away from interpersonal caring.

After a good deal of work I have failed to find any analysis of this general kind which will make sense of the life histories here. The interviews give little direct evidence on parenting in early childhood. As a number of the mothers had jobs, it is likely that child care was often diffused in the family group, and certain that there was less chance of 'primary identification' with the mother than in the normative bourgeois family. Nor was there a clear-cut identification with fathers. Eel was relatively close to his father, but Patrick Vincent fought off both his parents. In the other three cases fathers were often away or completely absent. The notion that boys would identify with the *position* of father, in the absence of the incumbent, does not wash. Alan Rubin and Mal Walton, who had stepfathers, both rejected

their authority and seem to have established no emotional relationship with them.

More strikingly, there is little indication in the interviews of the emotional investment in *gender difference* we have come to expect in analyses of masculinity. Jack Harley, a bikie with a history of violence and a criminal record, feels no unease about staying home to do the child care if his wife can get a better paying job than he can. Several of his mates do. He hopes to get trained to do bar work. Why? What he likes is the human dimension, the chance to meet people and hear their troubles. Not exactly super-masculine; indeed this could easily be seen as women's work, the classic function of a barmaid.

What emerges in this milieu is a combination of a sharply marked gender boundary and a remarkable (from a bourgeois point of view) indifference to its psychological content. 'Difference' is confined to sexuality and violence, both being immediate functions of the body. Jack is homophobic, worried that there are more gays and lesbians than before, but he has a solution. Homo-sex is OK if a man wants to become a woman (implying transsexual surgery), but it is wrong the way men are. The body seems to have become a symbol — but a symbol only of itself, of bodily difference as such.

### Trajectories

Mal Walton was an only child, deserted by his father before he was born. He has lived with his mother and grandmother until very recently.

What was it like growing up with your Mum and your Nan?

Hard.

Why was it hard?

Two women — never had a man there to, you know, give me a good tan around the arse. Because I've, I've pretty well had it my way, you know, but — That's why I wished that I had a Dad, so, you know, he would kick me up the bum and say 'you've done wrong'. Because I have always done the opposite. I've kicked Mum up the bum and said 'No, I want to do that'.

But he rejected his mother's attempt to make him respect a stepfather's authority. The only person he listened to was his grandmother. By early adolescence he was uncontrollable from his mother's point of view, out all night and fucking girls. The school had no more success, despite savage canings. Mal refused to learn, was treated as disruptive, placed in the bottom stream and in a special class. Increasingly he did not turn up to school at all. He left school as soon as he was legally able to — without having learnt to read. This puts him at a desperate disadvantage in the labour market. Indeed he carries three forms of stigma: 'broken home', epilepsy (because of this he has not used narcotics), and illiteracy. He manages the last two by 'passing' — concealing the epilepsy from

employers, and trying to conceal his inability to read from the employment service as well as from bosses.

Mal got into minor crime as a teenager. After leaving school he got into more serious theft to finance dope purchases. Arrested at 15, he got off with a bond and managed to keep out of the courts from then on. After drifting for 3 years, mainly on the dole, he decided to take himself in hand and found a number of short-term labouring jobs, including some 'black monkey'. This went to finance a motorbike and elaborate tattoos. Speeding on the bike he had a crash and was seriously injured. He is currently living with a girlfriend, the first household of his own, and is making heavy weather of it. They are \$2 000 in debt and he is trying to work out how to get an illicit job to pay it off.

The gender practice here is essentially the same as with Pat Vincent, Jack Harley, Eel, and Paul Gray (up to middle adolescence): violence, school resistance, minor crime, heavy drug/alcohol use, occasional manual labor, motorbikes or cars, short heterosexual liaisons. There is something frenzied and showy about it. It is *not* a simple taking on board of the conventional stereotype of masculinity, as Wallis (1978) noted in his case study of bike boys in Britain. Mal, for instance, does not care for sport, which he finds 'boring'. This opinion is shared by Pat Vincent, though not by Eel — so dubbed because in childhood a fanatical supporter of the Parramatta Rugby League team, 'the Eels'.

I would suggest that this practice has a good deal in common with what Adler (1956) called the 'masculine protest'. Adler's concept was a psychodynamic one: a motivational system that underlay neurosis, arising from the childhood experience of powerlessness, and resulting in an exaggerated claim (by women or men) to the potency European culture attaches to masculinity. Among these young men too there is a response to powerlessness, a claim to the gendered position of power, a pressured exaggeration (bashing gays, wild riding) of masculine conventions.

The difference is that this is a social, indeed largely collective, practice and not an intra-psychic matter. I would argue that there is no standard developmental-motivational path into it, apart from the level of tension created by poverty and an ambience of violence. Through interaction in this milieu, the growing boy puts together a tense, freaky facade, around a claim to power where there are no real resources for power. There is a lot of concern with face, a lot of work put into keeping up a front. With Patrick Vincent I have a sense of a false-self system in the sense of Laing (1965, 94–105), an apparently rigid personality compliant to the demands of the milieu, behind which there is no organised identity at all. He scares me. Both Eel and Mal Walton talk about going on massive binges, when they had a little money saved up. Eel scared himself.

I ended up going through three grand in two months, on speed alone. It was straight up my nose. Wasted two months. Didn't know whether I was coming or going.

Did you enjoy it?

I enjoyed it yes, I still do enjoy it, but I wouldn't get as heavily involved as I was.

Why the change?

By the end of the two months I noticed the change in myself. Really hot tempered — one wrong word and I was right off the deep end. Hitting people and breaking things in the house, breaking walls, punch out, breaking windows and stuff, so ...

I would emphasise that this masculine-protest masculinity is not simply a stereotypical occupation of a conventional male role. It is compatible with respect and attention to women (Mal Walton — in contrast to Eel's misogyny), egalitarian views about the sexes (Pat Vincent), affection for children (Jack Harley), and a sense of display which in conventional role terms is stereotypically feminine. Mal Walton is a living work of art. His body is bejewelled with tattoos, which he has planned and financed over the years with as much care as any *Vogue* wardrobe.

Alan Rubin's trajectory is related to this kind of masculinity but distinct from it. Alan ran out of control as a child, truant and left school at 15. He has stayed in the same milieu and economic circumstances as the others. But he has constructed a laid-back, ironic, intellectual, 'bohemian' (his word) personal style. He is scathing about 'yobbo's' and 'ockers' and has no antagonism to gays. He has, I think, consciously distanced himself from the track taken by the others.

### Contrasts

Stewart Hardy, Paul Gray and Danny Taylor began in very similar settings to the five who are the main subjects of this paper, but have ended up somewhere else. All three trajectories are interesting. Stewart's interrupted educational career has been outlined already. His father, a 'battler', had little communication with Stewart, except when the boy went to get money off him in the pub. Stewart was closer to his mother, but also fought with her, especially when his father was drunk and Stewart had clashed with him. Stewart found little to build on here, and has built his life into another space, socially and geographically. He distanced himself from the tough gangs at school, after a flirtation with their aggressive style. His next way out was provided by religion. He became involved, via a couple of young women, with a fundamentalist church which absorbed his energies for several years and decisively separated him from his rough school mates. His final way out was coming to the big city. Here he acquired a white-collar job, lost his religion, got into computing, went to technical college, and is

now lining up for university. He has become involved with a girl six years younger but more sexually experienced than he; is a bit put out by the sophistication of her peer group and wonders darkly what they say about him behind his back.

Paul Gray and Danny Taylor also started close to the masculine-protest trajectory. Paul was right on track with family violence, theft, a juvenile institution, gaol. Danny was a little more conventional in his masculinity, aligned with a 'football mad' brother and father. They, too, moved away from this trajectory, but at much sharper angles, attempting to negate hegemonic masculinity and expel themselves from the ranks. I have described Danny's path in another paper (Connell 1990a), so will be very brief here. He realigned himself with his mother, in adolescence. He made it through high school and attempted higher education, but did not succeed there. A difficult love affair, in which he found himself in a very dependent position, broke up leaving him in personal crisis. He sought healing in a counter-cultural milieu and became involved with 'green' politics. He was offered work by an environmental organisation, and has tried to accept at a personal level feminism's critique of men's misogyny.

Paul Gray's path is even more surprising. His early exit from school, his involvement in minor crime, his arrest and institutionalisation, his aggression towards mother and sister, and first sex with a girl, are very like the stories of Jack Harley, Patrick Vincent and Mal Walton. But Paul, as has been mentioned, was also encountering gay men at the beats. In late adolescence he was at the same time on the fringe of the gay world (beats and bars), secretly cross-dressing, and nostalgic for a heterosexual relationship. He travelled around Australia, visited his father in another state, did time for possession and was nearly raped in gaol; eventually formed a relationship with a woman which lasted for a couple of years, and travelled overseas.

When he came back to Australia, Paul began cross-dressing regularly and is now trying to live as a woman. This resolved his 'confusion', as he puts it. Cross-dressing gives him relief from 'tension', but it is clear that considerable effort goes into it too:

Have you yet gone out in public?

Yes, in the last year and a half, that's, when I go out I mainly go out as a woman.

And is that different for you?

Yes, it is. Because it is, I become more aware of people around me. It's still quite hard to do. But it is a matter of forcing myself to do it. And I have, a rule I suppose that once I leave the front door there is no going back in, so, until the course is run and the night is finished. Yes, but I mean, I mainly go to gay bars and that sort of thing. I see a lot of movies, go to a lot of restaurants and that sort of thing. The majority of my friends, a large majority, know about it

now. The guy I work with knows about it. He has only just in the last week or so knew about it, that was really quite funny telling him.

There are major costs. Apart from the physical and social risk, given that he doesn't completely 'pass' (few cross-dressers do), the process broke up his longest relationship, as his partner could not accept what he was doing.

The conventional literature on 'transvestism' and 'transsexualism' treats them as psychopathological syndromes, to be explained by some abnormality in early development. In Stoller's (1968/1976) well-known argument on male-to-female transsexualism, key causes are an absent or distant father, and a pathological enveloping mother who desires and cues a feminine identity in the son. Paul Gray certainly had a distant father. But so did half the other men in the group. Basically his childhood situation was well within the normal range in this milieu. And far from having a feminine identification he was, by mid-adolescence, into violence, petty crime and fucking girls like any card-carrying delinquent. The conventional psychopathology of gender misses both the structural issues and the agency involved in such a story. The outcome of the contradictory relationships and affects in Paul's life can hardly have been predetermined. Paul constructed an outcome as a *practice*, and he still has to work at it, and pay the price.

What is true here is true of the other cases discussed in this paper. An active process of grappling with a situation and constructing ways of living in it is central to the production of the different masculinities. From essentially similar starting points — gender privilege and class deprivation — three contrasting masculinities are produced by a combination of personal and collective practice.

One is the masculine-protest masculinity explored in the previous section. This picks up themes of hegemonic masculinity in the society at large but reworks them in a context of economic marginality.

The second is represented in different ways by Stewart Hardy and Alan Rubin. What they have constructed is not a version of hegemonic masculinity, the form of masculinity which, so to speak, is the front-line of patriarchy. Rather, they have produced less keyed-up masculinities which are *complicit* in the collective project of patriarchy. They certainly want the benefits of the subordination of women and homosexual men. Stewart Hardy, despite his expanding education, remains homophobic and misogynist. His treatment of women in actual relationships is manipulative. His reaction to questions about feminism is long, confused and mainly hostile. And in stark contrast to Pat Vincent and Jack Harley he has a conventional hostility to the idea of his wife earning more than he, because it would damage his self esteem. But though they want the benefits of male supremacy, Stewart and Alan do not care to pay the full price of upholding

hegemonic masculinity. They opt out of the physical confrontations, the labour, the maintenance of peer life. It is entirely characteristic that they look down with contempt on the naively masculine 'ockers' and the 'little shifts' — people like Eel or Patrick — who do the dirty work of sexual politics for them.

Finally there is the attempted negation of masculinity by Danny Taylor and Paul Gray. Paul, it is worth noting, has not gone straight for a sex change. He does not want 'the operation'; what he wants to do is 'live as a woman' on an everyday basis. His practice is above all a path out of a masculine identity. In that respect — though spectacularly different in appearance — it is logically very similar to Danny's attempt to fight free from his masculine consciousness.

The three trajectories traced in this section are not, ultimately, differentiated as character types, as syndromes. They are differentiated as *politics*. They take off from similar starting points, and work with similar materials, provided by the gender order and the class order. They take different stances towards these materials and point towards different (collective) futures. In protest masculinity we see a shrinking of the domain of gender, a stripping down towards the body, at the same time as a ferocious claim to power within existing gender relations. In complicit masculinity we see a strategy for the reproduction of the conventional institutionalised gender order. In the negation of masculinity we see a rejection of patriarchy if not yet an effective opposition.

### THE HISTORICAL MOMENT

However intricate the personal trajectories appear, we should never lose sight of the common ground on which the drama develops: the fact of class deprivation. All these men are constructing gender from a starting point in poverty, and with little access to cultural or economic resources. The bikies' anger at 'straight people' is a class resentment as well as a display of collective masculinity. Stewart Hardy's distancing from that masculinity is intimately connected with his hard-won upward mobility in class terms, his development of a class practice that attempts to gain leverage in education, in religion, in employment.

Alan Rubin, who does not participate in the displays of protest masculinity, is even more bitter against convention and authority. He regards the political and economic system as 'totally corrupt', religion as 'mumbo jumbo'; he is scathing about 'plastic people' who 'just exist' and don't know what is really going on (Stewart might be meant). Alan objects to jobs where he is 'taking orders from a load of people whom I consider to be cretins', and making profits for people who are millionaires already. The code of

revenge — 'if anyone gives me a hard time I give them a hard time back' — takes on extra depth here as a class statement. The trouble is that Alan in practice is not fighting back. In a classic piece of research Sennett and Cobb (1972) wrote of 'the hidden injuries of class' among American men. There is a good deal of class injury here too, a sense of limited options and constrained practice as well as class anger.

The bikies' gender project is to construct hegemonic masculinity in a subordinated class situation, where the claim to power that is central in hegemonic masculinity is *constantly* negated by the facts of economic and cultural weakness. Mal Walton may be strong and his tattoos scary but he cannot even read. Eel may be the toughest brawler among his mates but the police — as an institution — are tougher than the lot of them put together, and the bikies know it.

By virtue of class situation (structural unemployment) and practice (e.g. in relation to education), these men have lost the *institutional* benefits of patriarchy. For instance they have lost the economic gain in relation to women that accrues to men in employment, the better chances of promotion, the better job classifications. If they accept this loss they are accepting the justice of their own deprivation. If they try to make it good by direct action, state power stands in their way. One resolution of this contradiction is a spectacular display, embracing the marginality and stigma and turning them to account. Though the cultural context is very different, there is some similarity to the logic of masculine display among black men in the United States (Majors, 1989).

At the level of personal practice this translates as a constant concern with front, credibility. This is not necessarily the kind of front that traditional pictures of working-class masculinity would suggest. Jack Harley, as already mentioned, is not concerned if his woman earns more than he does. But he is very upset if another man's child is foisted on him as his own, or if his girl is fucking someone else. He is concerned to be a credible revenge threat, to ward off injury by being known as someone who injures back. Through the interview he repeats formulae like 'they pull a knife on me I'll pull a knife on them'; he presents this as an ethic. This kind of front matters more to him than income, security, possessions. He does not own a great deal, but can be very generous; he sold his much loved bike to buy his girl a car, before she even had a licence. Like his parents he takes the view that money is there to be spent, it is no use in the bank. He can hardly imagine what he would do with a large sum if he won the lottery.

At the group level, the collective practice of masculinity becomes a performance too. Eel's parties have witnesses — the silenced women, the cops outside — just as the bikies out together are witnessed by straight people. Whatever one thinks of the script, it has to be acknowledged as a skilled, finely-pitched production mounted on a shoestring.

The trouble is that the performance is not leading anywhere. None of the five has much sense of an individual or a shared future, except more of the same. Eel is doing a short computer course, and imagines doing well at it, but the image is immediately cut off:

I don't really think much about the future, I just take things day to day. Hopefully one day I might end up as a systems analyst with computers. And if everything works out with this training course, managed to get a start after that, work myself up to an operator, programmer, and then a systems analyst. Either that or I'll be dead by the time I'm forty.

From what?

I don't know. But well, live fast and die young sort of thing... I love my bikes. I'll be on my bike till the day I die. I'll die on the bike. I'm not going to stop parrying. It's a way of life isn't it? Called Rastafarians. I'm a believer in that religion.

These remarks are not as casual as they sound. Death, especially death on the bike, is a powerful theme in motorbike culture internationally (Congdon 1975, Willis, 1978).

Pat Vincent and Mal Walton, normally less eloquent than Eel, have haunting passages where they talk of what they can pass on to their children. Pat has imagined only a boy, and his vision is of teaching him boxing and weight-training, so that by the time the boy is 18 he would be able to kick the shit out of anyone who hassles him. Mal also wants a boy to carry on his name, as well as a girl ('because you can dress them up and make them look really cute'). He wants the boy to have and to be things that he could not. He also wants to pass on his own most valuable knowledge:

Like if he wants to smoke pot, sure, as long as he smokes it with me. Or if I'm not smoking then as long as he smokes it around me. And I don't, like I don't want his first experience with drugs to be a real — like someone, say he goes and gets some speed and gets cut it with glass, which some people do, and he shoots it up without filtering it, then he would really fuck himself up. I want him to come to me and say 'look Dad I want to try speed' or 'I want to try some smoke', or 'I want to get pissed'. As long as he comes to me and does it and then I'll know, like, I'll know that he knows what he is getting and what it's all about.

This looks like a cul-de-sac. It is certainly an active response to the situation, and it builds on a working-class masculine ethic of solidarity. But this is a solidarity that divides the group from the rest of the working class. The evaporation of the economic basis of masculine authority leads to a divided consciousness — egalitarianism and misogyny — not to a new political direction.

Perhaps the most fundamental shift going on here is the attenuation of the *cultural* content of gender. I remarked earlier on the way gender

difference seemed to be thinned down in practice and consciousness, reduced towards the directly physical — fucking and fighting. This is not an *elimination* of difference. Within that reduced sphere difference is vehemently asserted, indeed policed. But it appears that the cultural elaboration of gender, an important feature of the legitimisation of men's dominance in the society as a whole, is difficult to sustain in this context of poverty and marginality. This suggests a crisis tendency in the gender order which might be as important in the long run as the better documented collapse of legitimate patriarchy among intellectuals (Connell, 1987, 270ff).

It is notable that some of the most conventional views on gender in these interviews come from Stewart Hardy, upwardly mobile and deliberately changing his class affiliations. The other example of complicit masculinity, Alan Rubin, while certainly not mobile in class terms, nevertheless possesses an intellectual culture and a marked sense of personal difference. Is it the case that the half-conscious middle way, affiliating to the system of masculine privilege while keeping one's distance from a strenuous masculine display, is easiest when one is also affiliated to another system of cultural privilege? At all events this raises doubts about a strategy for reforming gender relations in this milieu that relies on institutions like the school.

The tracks out of hegemonic masculinity taken by Danny Taylor and Paul Gray are, in their own ways, as dramatic as the bikes' display. They are, however, strongly individualised, not collective. In the counter-cultural milieu Danny has moved into, individualism is strongly enjoined. Danny is engaged in a direct negation of hegemonic masculinity on several points: trying to open up to other people, to make himself vulnerable not defensive, criticising his own 'misogyny'. But he is doing this by way of a personal quest, as a remaking of the self, not as a shared project.

Paul is even more deeply self-absorbed. He is in the throes of 'coming out' in women's clothes, to friends and to family, and has just come out at his workplace. He is learning to negotiate public spaces while dressed, trying to work out what living as a woman means for his sex life, reinterpreting his past. He has many uncertainties, much is still 'up in the air' and he is not sure where it will all go. We should not see him as a conventional transsexual (cf. Bolin 1988) and it is notable that he does not make the classic claim that he is 'really a woman'. In his life a contradiction in practices developed which has split, but not overwhelmed, the sense of masculinity. At best he feels himself to be a woman-under-construction, and has clashing fantasies of his future as a man and as a woman-with-male-genitals. However it turns out, at the moment the project is individualised.



## CONCLUDING NOTE: RESEARCH AND POLITICS

I suggested at the start of this paper that the life-history method had the capacity to illuminate questions of structure and collectivity as well as questions of personal experience. This has, I hope, been borne out by the examples in this paper. And it is precisely through the combination of these levels of analysis that such an approach may illuminate politics. It may help to show what are the historical possibilities implicit in a given situation, how structures of relationship might be changed by feasible collective practices. The lack of a capacity to make this kind of analysis has stalled most of the literature on masculinity and 'men's studies' in the last two decades.

Possibilities for change in masculinity have a great deal to do with the differing forms present in a given situation. The evidence in this paper shows some of the complexities involved. The 'protest masculinity' of the bikies is plainly a version of the hegemonic form of masculinity in Australian society in recent decades. But the stress of constructing it in a context of youth, poverty and marginality results in a fissured and brittle masculinity that is a far cry from the polished masculinity of, say, a successful businessman. Alan Rubin and Stewart Hardy show a different relationship to the pattern of hegemony. What I have called their 'complicit' masculinity is consciously distanced from the bikies' protest masculinity, and there is a practice behind this consciousness — their claim can be accepted. Yet this masculinity is complicit in the collective project of patriarchy. Indeed, since these men pay less of the price of sustaining patriarchy, this form of masculinity may be less likely to generate any progressive gender politics than protest masculinity is.

Danny Taylor and Paul Gray are consciously rejecting hegemonic masculinity, Danny through a subordinated masculinity in which he is trying to find political value and Paul by direct negation. Paul's gender practice elaborates, where the bikies attenuate, the cultural dimension of gender. There are possibilities for politics here, difficult to crystallise but implicit in Paul's multiple locations in gender relations over the past few years. A progressive politics might seek to complicate and cross-fertilise, rather than to shrink, the sphere in which gender is expressed or represented. But this remains implicit. So far Paul's vision of the future is about his location on the map of gender, not about shifting the coordinates of the map.

Yet it is hardly likely that either Danny's green activism or Paul's high-heeled shoes are the forerunners of a mass movement among working-class youth. The wider possibilities would seem to lie in aspects of the situation that are overshadowed by protest masculinity but are still present in the unemployed men's life histories. These are the economic logic that underpins egalitarian households, the personal experiences of women's strength,

and the interest that several of the men have in children (an interest which few of them experienced from their own fathers). These facts point to a practice of *domestic* gender equality which contradicts the hyper-masculine display of the road and the party scene. There are certainly some interesting possibilities here. Whether they are realised depends on a political response emerging, whose agent or occasion is still difficult to see.

## NOTES

- 1 My thanks to the men who told their life stories; for most of the men discussed here it was not a familiar or easy thing to do. Norm Radican and Pip Martin did most of the interviewing; Angela Cole and Val Whitbread the transcription; Marie O'Brien and Yvonne Roberts the manuscript typing. Mike Messner, Gary Dowsett and Mark Davis gave detailed and helpful feedback on a first draft. The research was funded by the Australian Research Grants Committee, and by supplementary grants from Macquarie University.
- 2 King's Cross, near the main centre of gay men's commercial and social life in Sydney.

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