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Politics Of Changing Men*

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In 1970, temporarily in the United States, my wife and I were among a hundred thousand or so people who marched on Washington — in our case by Volkswagen — to protest against President Nixon's invasion of Cambodia and the subsequent killing of students during a protest at Kent State University. The action was one of those dramas of confrontation that Americans do so well. A chanting avant-garde of students, mostly men, tried to storm the line of buses parked in a defensive ring around the White House. Through clouds of tear gas, they were turned back by rows of scowling police, all men. Meanwhile tens of thousands of other protesters massed in the wide parklands and crowded into the streets of downtown Washington in support.

In 1994 I went to another demonstration against violence, this time in Sydney. It was organized by the Australian group Men Against Sexual Assault (MASA), to protest against men's acts of violence against women. We marched through the streets from near Central Station, and held a rally with speeches and music in the main park of the city. About seventy people came. There was no tear-gas and there were no arrests, though there were a few police.

The contrast is obvious. One event is in the history books, the other will not be. But this is not the only difference. Looking back, we can now see the 1970 demonstration, for all its radicalism, as a

patriarchal event. The confrontation was a display of masculinity on both sides, a declaration of toughness which sidelined women physically and morally even though women made up a large proportion of the protesters. This pattern in the anti-war movement was a key reason for the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement at that time.

The 1994 protest was tiny because there was no social movement backing it. The Kent State protest had a specific target, a perpetrator of great visibility, living right there in the building facing us. The MASA protest had as its target the same group that was making the protest: 'men'. Though the *moral* point of each protest was clear, both being actions against violence, the *political* situation was less so. And the demand being made on the demonstrators themselves was more complex. For MASA was criticizing the very masculinity that produced 'the demonstration' as a confrontational genre of political action.

The issues at stake in this critique of masculinity seem to me far more important than is suggested by media jokes about Sensitive New Age Guys, or the Wild Men beating on drums and pretending to be bears. For men to gain a deeper understanding of themselves, especially at the level of emotions, is a key to the transformation of personal relationships, sexuality and domestic life. Men's gender practices raise large questions of social justice, given the scale of economic inequality, domestic violence and institutional barriers to women's equality. Masculinities are deeply implicated in organized violence (for instance, in the wars tearing apart Bosnia, Rwanda and Afghanistan) and in technologies and production systems that threaten environmental destruction and nuclear war. The path of the HIV/AIDS epidemic is closely connected to recent social changes in men's sexualities. The list could go on, but this is enough to establish the point. We are dealing with issues of importance for global society as well as for personal life.

The Historical Moment

For much of this century there has been a gradually increasing awareness of the possibility of change in gender, a consciousness that erupted in the Women's Liberation, Gay Liberation and Men's Liberation movements in the years around 1970.

To people energized by these movements, it seemed that millennia of patriarchy and oppression could now end. The technological conditions for the equality of the sexes now existed, and the change of consciousness had arrived. Feminist women began to invent a new language for a post-patriarchal world and a new politics based on 'consciousness-raising' and 'sisterhood'.

For the brothers in Men's Liberation, many of whom had a background in the anti-war movement, this sense of a great historical drama unfolding gave resonance to otherwise modest reform proposals and vague rhetorics of change. A genre of criticism of 'the Male Role' was created in the 1970s. Most of the critics believed that masculinity was in crisis and that the crisis itself would drive change forward. The end would be a world where masculinity as we know it would be annihilated, replaced by some kind of androgyny.¹

Twenty years later, this apocalyptic thinking has become rare and even seems naive. We are all so much more sophisticated now! Yet those innocent pioneers did us a tremendous favour. The shift in thinking about gender achieved by the liberation movements of the 1970s is irreversible.

Historicity is now the presupposition, not the heresy. Even the conservatives who have moved onto this terrain engage in historical thinking about masculinity. They accept the fact of social transformations in gender, however much they deplore it or try to reverse it. This historical consciousness is the distinctive feature of contemporary masculinity politics, and forms the horizon of contemporary thought on masculinity. Without this consciousness it would be impossible to imagine popular commentators on masculinity, such as Robert Bly in the United States, or Walter Hollstein in Germany.

How should we understand the political possibilities this opens up and how can we act on those possibilities? In thinking these questions through, we can draw on a new generation of social research, which in the last ten years has moved decisively beyond the old 'male role' framework. I will outline some of the main ideas emerging from this research, before turning to questions of purposes and practice.²

From The Male Role To Masculinities

In the 1970s the gender of men was understood, in English-language writing, as a 'male sex role'. This meant, essentially, a bundle of attitudes and expectations that defined proper masculinity. The sex-role concept is still popular. It is the nearest thing there is to a common-sense language for talking about the gender of men.

But the concept of a male role has severe weaknesses, both scientific and practical. It gives no grasp on issues of power, violence or material inequality. It misses the complexities within masculinity and the multiple forms of masculinity, and it offers very limited strategies of change. The weaknesses of sex-role theory are now well understood, and the concept should be

regarded as obsolete.³ It has taken some time to develop a better framework, but this is emerging now.

What is meant by 'masculinity'? Let me offer a definition, brief but reasonably precise. Masculinity is a configuration of practice around the position of men in the structure of gender relations. There is normally more than one such configuration in any society's gender order. In recognition of this fact, it has become common to speak of 'masculinities'. There is a danger in this usage, that we might think of gender as just a smorgasbord of identities and consumer lifestyles; it is important always to remember the power relations involved.

To speak of a *configuration of practice* is to place the emphasis on what people actually do, not on what is expected or imagined. There is no limit to the types of practice involved. It was once thought that gender could be defined as a special type of practice, for instance as social reproduction rather than production. But masculinities are constructed in the sphere of production too. Research on working-class and middle-class masculinities in several countries has documented the shaping of masculinities in the workplace and the labour market, large-scale organizations and the political system.⁴

To speak of *practice* is to emphasize that action has a rationale and historical meaning. This is not to say the practice is necessarily rational. We would not think rape, sexual harassment or wife-beating 'rational'; but neither is sexual violence a meaningless explosion of inner rage. As feminist research has shown, sexual violence is competent, generally purposeful action directed towards intimidation and the maintenance of men's supremacy. Hence the emphasis, in prevention work with violent men, on men taking responsibility for their actions.⁵

To speak of the *position of men* is to emphasize that masculinity has to do with social relations *and also* refers to bodies — since 'men' means adult people with male bodies. We should not be afraid of biology, nor so refined or tricky in our theorizing of gender that we have no place for sweaty bodies. Gender is, in the broadest terms, the way in which the reproductive capacities and sexual differences of human bodies are drawn into social practice and made part of the historical process. In gender, social practice addresses bodies. Through this logic, masculinities are embodied without ceasing to be social. We experience masculinities (in part) as certain muscular tensions, postures, physical skills, ways of moving, and so on.

To speak of the *structure of gender relations* is to emphasize that gender is far more than face-to-face interactions between women and men. It is a large-scale structure, embracing the economy and the state as well as the family and sexuality. It has, indeed, an

important international dimension. Gender is also a complex structure, far more complex than the dichotomies of sex roles or reproductive biology would suggest.

Two aspects of this complexity are particularly important for thinking about masculinity. First, different masculinities are produced in the same social context. Gender relations include relations among men — relations of dominance, marginalization and complicity. A hegemonic form of masculinity has other masculinities arrayed around it.

Second, any particular form of masculinity is itself internally complex, even contradictory. This insight we owe especially to Freud, who emphasized the presence of femininity within men's character and masculinity within women's, and who analyzed the processes of repression by which these contradictions were managed. But it emerges in other contexts too.

The fact of contradiction makes it essential to have a definition of masculinity that does not equate gender simply with a category of people. If masculinity simply meant the characteristics of men, we could not speak of the femininity in men or the masculinity in women (except as deviance), and we would lose our grasp on the dynamics of gender. Gender is always a contradictory structure. This is what makes possible its historical dynamic and prevents gender history from being an eternal cycle of the same unchanging categories.

The Making And Remaking Of Masculinities

If gender is a historical product, it is open to historical change; that is what gender politics is about. If that change is to become conscious, and open to democratic control, we need to know how gender is shaped and how it may be re-shaped.

There is a conventional story about how masculinities are made, which runs something like this: Every culture has a definition of appropriate conduct and feelings for men. Boys are pressured to act and feel this way and to distance themselves from women, girls and femininity, understood as the opposite. The pressure for conformity comes from families, schools, peer groups, mass media and (eventually) employers. Most boys internalize this social norm, adopting masculine manners and interests, often at the expense of repressing their feelings. Striving too hard to match the masculine norm may lead to violence or to personal crisis and to difficulties in relations with women.

This conventional story requires three major revisions. First, the conventional story takes one form of masculinity to define masculinity in general. This mistakes gender hegemony for gender totalitarianism. The evidence is clear that hegemonic masculinities

are produced alongside, and in relation to, other masculinities. For instance, in one school my colleagues and I studied, hegemonic masculinity was represented by a group called 'The Bloods', who benefited from the school's cult of football and pursued an aggressive, physically dominating style of conduct. But the same school also produced an intellectual masculinity, represented by a group called 'The Cyrils', who were academically competitive rather than physically aggressive. The school produced and needed both masculinities, and the teachers had to regulate the relationships between them.⁶

The conventional story also takes gender as a social mould whose mark is imprinted on the child, so that masculine personalities are turned out from the conveyor-belt like chocolate frogs. This woefully underestimates the energy, the activity, the agency of a growing person. It underestimates the pleasures and excitements of entering a gendered world and appropriating masculinities there — pleasures that are very clear, for instance, in autobiographical narratives of men and sports, or men and motor vehicles.

This suggests we should think of the making of masculinity as a *project* (in Sartre's sense), pursued over many years and through many twists and turns. Such projects involve complex encounters with institutions (such as schools and labour markets), and with cultural forces (such as mass communication, religion and feminism). These encounters have a dialectical structure not a mechanistic one. Boys and girls may struggle against the institution or cultural force, as well as accept its imprint. This is common, for instance, in working-class boys' conflicts with schools and police. For a certain number, the response is a vehement, protest masculinity that is far from what the institutions intended. This dynamic is, paradoxically, both a source of educational inequality and one of the roots of neo-fascism.

A third revision that needs to be made is to see the making of masculinities as a collective project as well as an individual one. Sometimes this is very obvious, as in the masculine display of the motorcycle gang, the army on parade or the football crowd. Sometimes it is more subtle. Cynthia Cockburn's rightly celebrated study of British printing workers shows a collective masculinity sustained as a workplace and union culture, built in struggle against both bosses and women.⁷ The masculinization of the state and of corporate management is equally a collective accomplishment, achieved by the many practices that exclude, subordinate or marginalize women — practices that are gradually being revealed and fought by equal opportunity programs. If the current right-wing assault against affirmative action, economic

and 'political correctness' succeeds, one of its effects will be to conceal these practices again.

If masculinities are made in such ways, they are also constantly re-made. We may not experience them as such; popular ideology often represents gender as unchanging, the stable, 'natural' pattern underneath the flux. The pattern now often called 'traditional masculinity', and linked to the 'traditional family', is a product of the modern world.

There are now some excellent historical studies of changing masculinities. The most remarkable is research on frontier society by the New Zealand historian Jock Phillips, who traces dramatic changes in the gender strategies of the colonial state. During the process of colonization, the state tried to rein in the brawling, violent masculinity of the frontier (especially the mining camps), promoting instead a pattern of domestic patriarchy in agricultural settlements. Decades later, the state found itself inciting a violent masculinity in order to take part in the imperialist wars of the early-twentieth century. The then-new sport of rugby football was an important propaganda tool for militaristic nationalism. The New Zealand rugby team, the All Blacks (named for their uniforms, not their skin colour) are still a national icon.⁸

In understanding the politics of masculinity, two aspects of this historicity are crucial. The first is the fact of a struggle for hegemony. Groups of men struggle for dominance through the social definition of masculinity. The dominant position in the gender order gives material as well as psychological advantages, and this makes it likely to be challenged. The conditions in which hegemony can be sustained change constantly. Consequently, a given pattern of hegemonic masculinity is liable to be either displaced or transformed over time.

In the last two hundred years of European and American history, for instance, we have seen the hegemonic pattern of gentry masculinity displaced by a more rational, calculative masculinity better suited to an industrial-capitalist economy and to bureaucratic states. This in turn has been challenged by forms of masculinity emphasizing impulse and violence — fascism in the metropole, 'cowboy' masculinities on the frontier. The hegemonic form of bourgeois masculinity has split between forms emphasizing expertise and forms emphasizing domination and egocentric calculation. The struggle for hegemony between them can be seen in the liberal/conservative split in bourgeois politics.

These are specifically the hegemonic masculinities of the dominant world powers. In most discussions of masculinity, Europe and North America form the entire, unquestioned universe of discourse. My second point about historicity is that we cannot ignore the majority of the world's population, nor the

history that made possible the hegemonic masculinities of the hegemonic powers: the history of imperialism.

This history includes direct colonial conquest, which made race relations an inescapable part of the dynamic of gender. Imperialism had a direct impact on the re-making of masculinities in the metropole as well as in the colonies. The most sustained attempt at masculinity training, the 'boy scout' movement, was directly modelled on frontier and military masculinities by its founder, Baden-Powell.

With the creation of global markets, history moved on from direct conquest to indirect economic colonialism. When corporations become multinational, they take along the forms of masculinity that are hegemonic among their managers. As European-style armies have multiplied around the world, not only the arms are exported, but also the social forms that go with them, notably the organized violence of military masculinities.

The spread of metropolitan culture and of metropolitan institutions impacts on local gender orders. A striking example of this is the re-making of local forms of male-to-male sex, in places as far apart as Java and Brazil, on the model of urban North American gay identity. Another example is the arrival, three years ago, of MTV in India. This has provoked changes in the representation of sex in other Indian mass media, especially film and popular songs. A disco song called *Sexy, sexy* became enormously popular, and a new phase of commercial exploitation of heterosexuality is under way.

Through the spread of military technique and industrialization, a certain re-masculinization of the periphery has occurred — felt as a threat by the masculine elites of the metropole. This has led to a striking media and government preoccupation with the hypermasculine figure of 'the terrorist'; the recent arrest of 'Carlos' was front-page news as far away as Australia. This figure is now merging into the equally threatening figure of 'the fundamentalist'.

As these cases suggest, the outcome of globalization is not necessarily that western masculinities are cloned on the periphery. The collective re-making of masculinities, like the construction of masculinity at a personal level, is a dialectical not a mechanical process. Thus the Japanese 'salaryman', born from the Zaibatsu, is not exactly the same as the executive of corporate America. (It is amusing to see in the United States a small flood of books with titles such as *Invasion of the Salarymen*, which seem to confuse economic competition for world markets with the plot line of a horror movie.) The corporate world of East Asian industrialization is massively patriarchal, even more so than European and North American business is now. But it is not marked by the competitive

individualism that is important in the European/American corporate elite.

It is possible that we are now witnessing, out of this global interaction, the creation of new forms of hegemonic masculinity. With the growth of world feminism, the stabilization of new forms of sexuality and the creation of a global economy, the conditions for hegemony are changing. The crucible of new forms is the globalization of finance, the de-regulation of markets and the growth of corporate empires outside the control of any governments or of any democratic process now existing. The masculinity likely to be produced in this context is calculative, with an opening to authoritarian violence as a form of economic action, inheriting the pleasures of patriarchal masculinity without much in the way of cultural restraint on self-indulgence; and uprooted from kin and locality, though quite able to use local nationalisms where these yield political support or markets for exploitation.

There is no reason to suspect the ascendancy of such masculinity would mean anything good for women. One of the notable institutions of the new world order is international sex tourism — more bluntly, the prostitution of women of the periphery to men of the industrialized countries. One consequence is an emerging HIV crisis in centres of sex tourism such as Thailand, a small country that is now regarded as one of the epicentres for the next wave of the AIDS pandemic.

Masculinity Politics

Men's Liberation assumed that a historical consciousness of masculinity itself defined the goal of politics. All that was required was to egg on the apocalypse, thus accomplishing the end of patriarchy that had come into view.

We now know that very different kinds of politics can be pursued within the horizon of historicity. Within the countries of the metropole, including the United States, four main kinds of masculinity politics have emerged. Each has a structural basis in gender relations.

In English-speaking countries, the best-known form of gender politics among men at present is 'masculinity therapy', or 'the men's movement'. It has the most conspicuous public figures, such as Robert Bly and Sam Keen, and a great deal of media attention.⁹ While it is historically derived from Men's Liberation, masculinity therapy represents a dramatic shift towards the political right, which gained force during the 1980s. It mostly ignores social issues and economic inequality, and totally ignores the international context, to focus on emotional problems. It is, at

bottom, a psychological 'recovery' movement, addressed to the pain that heterosexual men feel and their uncertainties about gender. The base of this politics is the complicit masculinity that accepts the broad structure of gender relations but is not militant in its defence.

The clients of masculinity therapists are mostly white, middle-class and often middle-aged. They feel they are in trouble, and that they are unfairly blamed by feminists. Some of their theorists, indeed, claim that men are more disadvantaged than women. All of them say it is men's turn for the attention that feminism has been getting for the problems of women. Some gurus think the basic problem is a failure by fathers to initiate their sons into true masculinity; others think the failure is on the part of women.

The practical effect of masculinity therapy is to turn heterosexual men inward to their own troubles, and to withdraw energy from social change. It offers absolution from the guilt that feminism still arouses among men, and a kind of 'separate sphere' in which men can pursue their own project of rediscovery.

A second form of gender politics is the defence of patriarchy (symbolized by the gun lobby), which exalts men's power and explicitly pursues an anti-feminist agenda. Its point of reference is hegemonic masculinity, but it may recruit key support from marginalized masculinities (for example, among working-class youth).

For the most part this does not take the form of a movement, but is a trend or emphasis in culture, politics and business. An important part is the commercial promotion of exemplary masculinities. Televised sports, Hollywood action movies, superhero comics, airport-rack novels, violent video games and children's plastic toy sets relentlessly insist on the bodily superiority of men and their mastery of technology and violence.

But this is not the only arena. A gun-lobby agenda is also built into the cult of the ruthless business entrepreneur, which has been given force by globalization and by political demands to achieve international competitiveness. New-right attacks on the welfare state have a gender dimension as well as a class dimension.

And at times a social movement can arise from hegemonic and marginalized masculinities. We have been forcibly introduced to this by the Oklahoma City bombing. As Bill Gibson's important study *Warrior Dreams* indicates, the U.S. militia movement is part of a wider paramilitary culture, in which a particularly narrow model of masculinity — tough, dominating and violent — is obsessively pursued.¹⁰ The Australian Gun Lobby, though smaller, is currently pushing these U.S. themes.

There is also a gender dimension in the politics of gay men. Gay Liberation in the 1970s mounted a vigorous critique both of

conventional stereotypes of gays, and of conventional masculinity as a source of oppression. It is worth recalling, whenever masculinity therapists talk of the need for a men's movement, that there is a movement of men in gender politics that has now been in existence, and has won important victories, for over a quarter of a century. This movement is based in the principal form of subordinated masculinity in the current western gender order.

There have been changes of course. Urban gay communities have seen a revival of conventionally masculine styles and an enormous tragedy in the HIV epidemic. Gay men's politics have been re-shaped around AIDS. In making their response, gay communities have given a stunning demonstration of men's capacities for care, for emotional solidarity and for collective action in the face of crisis and abuse.¹¹

Queer politics involves a reversal of the mainstream approach of gay politics, contesting and dismantling identities rather than affirming them as bases for community-building. There is no doubt about the creativity of this movement, and the relevance of its cultural critique to the dismantling of hegemonic masculinity. Whether it has the capacity to build long-term responses to homophobic violence, HIV/AIDS and the new Christian right remains to be seen.

A fourth form of gender politics is transformative in nature. In the early 1970s some men's consciousness-raising groups were formed, in the United States and Britain, in a small movement that was sometimes called 'Men's Liberation'. Anti-sexist activism among straight men declined in the 1980s, but has found new strength recently.

Left-wing men in Britain have produced a lively and intelligent magazine called *Achilles Heel*, while American men have sustained a network called National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS) and a magazine *Changing Men*. Canada produced the most impressive outreach: the White Ribbon movement. In the wake of the Montreal killings of 1989, a widespread movement opposed to violence against women developed with men campaigning alongside feminist women.¹² This is now international.

There is no convenient name for this form of politics; it seeks to exit from current patriarchal structures (thus the term 'anti-sexist men's movement'), but it also tries to transform existing forms of masculinity. It shares many goals with gay politics but, since it involves an attempt to escape from a gender identity rather than to affirm one, has a different underlying logic. Its arenas are private as well as public, including a gender revolution in certain households where men take an equal share with *Kinder* and *Küche*, if not *Kirche*, and women take an equal share in decision-making

and control of assets.

Men's Interests

All forms of masculinity politics involve a relationship with feminism. Whether rejection, wary co-existence or warm support, this is the emotional centre of current debates. In the days of Men's Liberation, it was assumed that feminism was good for men because men too suffered from rigid sex roles. As women broke out of their sex role, men would be enabled to break out of theirs, and would have better and healthier lives as a result.

The failure of any large number to sign on as the men's auxiliary to feminism suggests a flaw in this analysis. Men's dominant position in the gender order has a material pay-off and the discussions of masculinity have constantly under-estimated how big it is. In the rich capitalist countries, men's average incomes are approximately double the average incomes of women. Worldwide, men have ten times the political access of women (measured by representation in parliaments). Men have even greater control of corporate wealth (looking at top management in major corporations). Men control the means of violence, in the form of weapons and armed forces.

I call these advantages the 'patriarchal dividend' for men, and this dividend is not withering away. The gender segregation of the workforce in the rich countries has declined little in recent years. Men's representation in parliaments worldwide has risen, not fallen, over the last five years. As corporations have gone multinational — under the aegis of corporate hegemonic masculinity — they have increasingly escaped the national-level political structures through which women press for equal opportunity and an end to discrimination. Both the new international garment manufacturing and microprocessor assembly industries, for instance, are arenas of rampant sexism. Violence against women has not declined measurably.

However not all men are corporate executives or mass killers. Though men in general gain the patriarchal dividend, specific groups of men gain very little of it. For instance, working-class youth, economically dispossessed by structural unemployment, may gain no economic advantage at all over the women in their communities. Other groups of men pay part of the price, alongside women, for the maintenance of an unequal gender order. Gay men are systematically made targets of prejudice and violence. Effeminate and 'wimpish' men are constantly put down. Black men in the United States (as in South Africa) suffer higher levels of lethal violence than white men.

There are, then, divisions of interest among men on gender

issues. I would also want to emphasize that not all interests are egotistic. Interests are also relational, that is, constituted in the social relations one shares with other people. Most men have relational interests that they share with particular women. For instance, as parents needing child care provision and good health services for children. Or as workers needing improved conditions and security. Gay men share with lesbians an interest in fighting discrimination.

When we look at men's lives concretely, we regularly find dense networks of relationships with women: with mothers, wives, partners, sisters, daughters, aunts, grandmothers, friends, workmates, neighbours. Very few men have a life-world that is blocked off from women, that is genuinely a 'separate sphere'. Each of these relationships can be the basis for men's relational interest in reform. For instance, I have an interest in my wife's being free of the threat of intimidation or rape, in her having job security and equal pay, in her having the best possible health care. I have an interest in my daughter's being free of sexual harassment at school, in her having access to any kind of training and all occupations, in her growing up a confident and autonomous person.

Men's interest in gender hierarchy, defined by the patriarchal dividend, is real and large; but it is internally divided, and it is cross-cut by relational interests shared with women. Which of these interests is pursued by particular men is a matter of politics — politics in the quite familiar sense, of organizing in the pursuit of programs. Men who try to develop a politics in support of feminism, whether gay or straight, are not in for an easy ride. They are likely to be met with derision from many other men, and from some women. They will not necessarily get warm support from feminist women, some of whom are deeply distrustful of all men, most of whom are wary of men's power, and all of whom make a political commitment to solidarity with women. Since change in gender requires reconstructing personal relations as well as public life, there are many opportunities for personal hurt, mistaken judgements and anger.

I do not think men seeking progressive reforms of masculinity can expect to be comfortable while we live in a world marked by gendered violence and inequality. Masculinity therapy offers personal comfort as a substitute for social change. But this is not the only use for emotional support. As shown by John Rowan's *The Horned God*, therapeutic methods and emotional exploration can be used to support men, as feminist therapy supports women, in the stresses of a project of social change.¹³

Goals And Visions

Given the difficulties of the project, what might motivate men to press on into the flames? We need some conception of where the politics should be headed, a vision of the world we are trying to produce. Other forces certainly are making choices, which children and youth face in a barrage of advertising masquerading as sport, militarism masquerading as entertainment, commercial sex masquerading as personal freedom.

The goal defined by sex role reformers was the abolition of masculinity (and femininity) by a movement towards androgyny, the blending of the two existing sex roles. The term has gone out of fashion. For more than a decade, the trend in feminist theory re-emphasized difference between women and men. This had obvious advantages in knitting together a women's movement, but it also had costs. Within a patriarchal culture, difference is always read in hierarchical terms, the masculine as the pole of authority. Difference becomes difference/dominance. This cultural fact sets limits to a rights-based popular politics of reform. Conservatives can always get mileage by painting criticisms of male dominance as attacks on difference — as attempts to turn boys into girls, men into women.

The only way past this knot is to go through it. A de-gendering strategy, an attempt to dismantle hegemonic masculinity, is inevitable if we are to move towards gender equality.

But the early formulations of the goal of de-gendering in terms of androgyny were certainly inadequate. They underestimated the complexity of masculinities and femininities, putting too much emphasis on attitudes and not enough on material inequalities and issues of power. They also underestimated the investment people have in existing cultures of gender.

Taking its cue from cultural feminism, the 'mythopoetic' men's movement has been emphasizing the cultural riches of masculinity. This culture includes hero stories from the *Ramayana* to the *Ring of the Nibelung*; critiques of heroism from *Don Quixote* to *All Quiet on the Western Front*; the participatory pleasures of neighbourhood brass bands and baseball; the ethic of solidarity produced in the union movement; the abstract beauty of pure mathematics. That is a heritage worth having — for women as well as for men.

We need to reformulate the de-gendering strategy, to make it a re-gendering strategy at the same time. The Italian gay theorist Mario Mieli proposed a 'transsexual' strategy for liberation, calling on a range of symbols — heterosexual and gay, feminine and masculine — in a constantly changing improvisation. The American feminist, Wendy Chapkis, discussing the politics of appearance among women, proposed moving toward a more

colorful revolution', with space for pleasure and diversity.¹⁴

The idea here is to compose, rather than abolish, the elements of gender; to make the full range of gender symbolism and practice available to all people. Though this may sound exotic when formulated as a strategy, it is already occurring. Schools, for instance, expand the options for girls by making science and technology courses more available to them; and for boys, by encouraging them to learn to cook or to sew. It has been argued that the most effective form of sex education with teenagers is 'learning to be the opposite sex', that is, trying to get girls and boys to think through heterosexual relationships from the point of view of the other party. (Most school sex education is forbidden, however, to go beyond heterosexual thoughts.) Bronwyn Davies, an Australian feminist educator, wryly suggests that children are good post-structuralists, and readily learn to move among different gender positions in culture.¹⁵

The bodily dimension of gender is often thought to be the absolute limit of change. When I am interviewed about these issues on radio, interviewers often seem to think that bodily difference (either in sport or in reproduction) is a knock-out question. But if we understand gender as being about the way bodies are drawn into a historical process, then we can recognize contradictions in existing embodiments and can see enormous possibilities of *re-embodiment* for men. There are different ways of using, feeling and showing male bodies.

I am charmed to see, in shops selling artistic postcards and posters, a genre showing muscular male bodies cuddling babies. Why not make this a widespread pleasure? Provided, of course, that the men are also sharing the other tactile experiences of baby-care — getting the milk in, wringing out the nappies and wiping up the shit.

But gender multiculturalism is not enough. As Chapkis argues, playing with the elements of gender can be benign only if we unpack the package deal that links beauty and status. We can rearrange difference only if we contest dominance. A recomposing strategy thus requires a project of social justice.

Gender relations involve different spheres of practice, so there is an unavoidable complexity in gender politics. We must distinguish at least three spheres: the relations of power, the relations of production and the relations of cathexis.¹⁶ Pursuing justice in power relations means contesting men's predominance in the state, professions and management; and ending violence against women. Pursuing justice in economic relations means equalizing incomes, sharing the burden of household work, and equalizing access to education and training. Pursuing justice in the structure of cathexis means ending homophobia and

reconstructing heterosexual relations on the basis of reciprocity not hierarchy.

Along these lines we can define an agenda for a progressive politics of masculinity. That still leaves open the question of its form.

Models Of Politics

It is commonly assumed that a progressive politics of masculinity must take the form of a social movement. The usual model is feminism. Many writers imply a close parallel between the women's movement and a men's movement. More remotely, the labour movement and civil rights movements serve as models.

I would argue that these parallels are not close, and may be seriously misleading. The movements just listed are mobilizations of oppressed or exploited groups to end their subordination. They seek the unity of the group and assert the dignity of a previously stigmatized identity.

Men as a group, and heterosexual men in particular, are not oppressed or disadvantaged, though that belief is now promoted by right-wing campaigns against affirmative action. Hegemonic masculinity is not a stigmatized identity. Quite the opposite: the culture already honours it. Seeking the unity of men can only mean emphasizing the experiences and interests men have that separate them from women, rather than the interests they share with women that might lead towards social justice.

This is not an abstract theoretical point. It has happened in practice in the history of some anti-sexist men's groups, such as the American group MOVE studied by Paul Lichterman.¹⁷ Initially involved both in anti-violence work with batterers and in raising public issues about masculinity, this group gradually moved towards a therapeutic ideology, developed a concern with being 'positive' about men, and moved away from public stands and issues about the structure of power. What happened in this specific case also happened much more broadly in the transition from 'men's liberation' in the early 1970s to masculinity therapy in the 1980s.

To fight for justice and a new way of life often means, paradoxically, doing the opposite of the things that would create a 'men's movement'. That is, tackling issues that inevitably divide men rather than unite them: issues like homophobia, affirmative action for women, equal pay, sexual harassment and violence.

This is not to doubt the importance of solidarity among the men, and the women, involved with these issues. Indeed, I would

emphasize this point strongly. Experience has shown that work on these issues is stressful, often painful, and difficult to sustain without support.

This points to the importance, for men engaged in such struggles, of networks such as NOMAS. At the end of the 1980s, NOMAS moved towards a more clearly defined anti-sexist stand, though it still has a lot of overlap with masculinity therapy. Journals such as *Changing Men* in the United States, *XY* in Australia, are key elements in anti-sexist networks.

We should be clear, however, that none of this amounts to a social movement comparable to feminism or to the gay movement. Rather than agonizing over the failure to produce a large-scale movement including straight men, it would be better to recognize that there are structural reasons why such a movement is unlikely to appear, and to work out a more relevant political model.

The relevant model is, I think, one of a variety of struggles in diverse sites, linked through networking rather than mass mobilization or formal organization. Men are likely to be detached from the defence of patriarchy in small numbers at a time, in a great variety of circumstances. So the likely political pattern is one of unevenness between situations, with differently-configured issues and possibilities of action. As the networking involves sharing information as much as mobilizing resources, media such as journals will be important; not only special-purpose journals such as those just listed, but more general journals such as *Arena* (provided they have some continuing discussion of these issues!).

Let us consider a few cases. The peace movement is perhaps the longest-established forum where significant numbers of men have been engaged in a critique of an important part of hegemonic masculinity, its opening towards violence. The context includes Quaker traditions, the Gandhian legacy, and the search for non-violent forms of militancy. Though the peace movement has not generally defined masculinity as its target (that connection being made by feminist groups in actions excluding men, such as the Greenham Common encampment in Britain), it has provided a forum for political action that contests hegemonic masculinity.

More conscious contestation has come from groups organizing and acting around issues of men's violence towards women. Generally maintaining a relationship (sometimes tense) with women's groups mobilizing around domestic violence or rape, such groups have worked with violent men to try to reduce the chance of further violence, and have launched wider educational campaigns. The most extensive has been Canada's White Ribbon campaign, as already mentioned. Mass media and mainstream politicians as well as community groups have brought into a campaign rejecting violence against women, with considerable

impact at a national level.

Even in totally masculinized industries some unions have taken progressive action. In 1979-80 the United Steelworkers successfully pressed for women to be hired at the Hamilton steelworks in Canada. A serious effort was made to generate discussion of the issues by the male membership, and a fair level of support for the change was gained. A few years earlier, the Builders Labourers Federation in New South Wales sponsored the entry of women workers on exclusively male building sites. In this case, the women clerks in the union office had challenged the sexism of left-wing male leaders and persuaded them to change their policy. In another Canadian example, in electrical manufacturing in Westinghouse plants, it was pressure from below that led to the integration of women into formerly all-male shops. Stan Gray, the activist who tells the story, notes that this was only the beginning of the process. A sprawling struggle, in the context of recession and layoffs, nevertheless moved on to campaigns against workplace sexism; some of the men came to see sexism as divisive and against their own interests as workers.¹⁸

What is involved in all these cases is not a social movement of men, but some kind of alliance politics. Here the project of social justice depends on the overlapping of interests or commitments between different groups. The overlapping may be temporary, but can be long-term (a familiar situation in politics). Existing power resources can be used for new ends; we do not always have to start from scratch.

It is often assumed that alliance means compromise and therefore containment. The familiar militant gesture of insisting on revolutionary purity is not unknown in men's counter-sexist politics. It is made, for instance, by John Stoltenberg, a supporter of hard-line anti-pornography feminism. His book is called, appropriately enough, *Refusing to Be a Man*. The gesture is emotionally satisfying, but the chances of changing the world in this way are slight.

While pluralism in alliance-making is necessary, containment is not a necessary result. Given that patriarchy is a historical structure, not a timeless dichotomy of men abusing women, it will be ended by a historical process. The strategic problem is to generate pressures that will culminate in the long run in a transformation of the structure; and any initiative that sets up pressure in that direction is worth having. Lynne Segal, in her book *Slow Motion*, perhaps the best feminist appraisal of issues about masculinity, is cool about the pace of change. But she is in no doubt about the possibilities of change, through hard work in familiar institutions such as workplaces, unions and political parties.¹⁹

Much of this work is, above all, educational. It involves attempts to reformulate knowledge, to expand understanding, to create new capacities for practice. I think we might value this fact and build on it.

Some of the most impressive recent anti-sexist work is educational work in difficult circumstances, such as prisons, and around difficult issues, such as violence. An example is the educational program for young men developed by the Australian group Men Against Sexual Assault. According to David Denborough, it is possible to find respectful ways of working with young men without shying away from the hard issues of men's violence. Denborough draws on the new masculinity research to develop the strategy, encouraging young men not only to recognize the main narrative of masculinity in their community, but also to search for the counter-narratives, the other possibilities that exist in the same situation. A search for counter-meanings also appears in Don Sabo's work in an American prison. Sabo notes how sport and physical training at one level plays into the cultivation of masculine hardness, at another represents a kind of self-care in a hostile and very unhealthy environment.²⁰

In the long run, as Keynes remarked, we are all dead; and while we are still alive, we want to see something more than a rise in the probability of social justice in the distant future. As well as long-term educational strategies, then, we also need what British feminists called 'prefigurative politics' — at least samples of paradise, at least little bits of justice, here and now.

Again, this is familiar in principle. Progressive education hoped to prefigure the good society in democratic schools; industrial democracy hoped to prefigure a democratically-controlled economy in each workplace. In our household (as in many others) we hope to prefigure a society in which gender equality and sexual tolerance is routine, a bedrock of civilization.

However the prefigurative politics of gender and sexuality are not necessarily rocklike. They may, on the contrary, be scandalous, hilarious or disturbing. Halloween on Haight Street, Cal-PEP, an AIDS prevention program run by prostitutes and former prostitutes; the pleasures and dangers of queer culture; integrated sports. Prefiguration may also be peaceable. In parks I often see something rarely seen twenty years ago: fathers taking toddlers and babies in push-chairs for an outing.

I want to end these reflections with this image, not with a grand strategic statement. A new gender politics for men means new styles of thinking, including a willingness to be uncertain and an openness to new experience and new ways of conveying it. When pictures of men with guns are rare, and pictures of men with push-chairs are common, we will really be getting somewhere.

* This paper began as a presentation to a conference on Reproduction and Change in Masculinity, sponsored by the Hans Böckler Foundation of the German union movement held at Munich in September 1994. First english language in *Socialist Review* (USA). I am grateful to Heinz Kindler and Gudrun Linne for inviting me to this event, and to the participants at the conference for their response, and for their presentations on the important work being done in Germany, both in union-based education programs and in youth work. I do not know of any other union movement in the world which has taken such an initiative.

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