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MASCULINITY STUDIES AND THE JARGON OF STRATEGY

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1 introduction

Here are ten things we could say about masculinity: toughness; my friend keeps his head shaved; prostate cancer; not-femininity; ordinary blokes; the bits about men in Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913); a penis; Arnold Schwarzenegger playing the terminator in James Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984); boxing; the adjective *masculine*, defined as "relating to or characteristic of a man."

These items are arbitrary. They obey no reasonable principle of classification, and such a confusion of categories – men's health, famous men, activities that involve men and women, adjectives, personal anecdotes – precludes a methodical analysis of masculinity. Any convincing study would need to demonstrate, in advance of a particular claim about masculinity, that its empirical taxonomy is internally consistent. Or more immediately, that masculinity amounts to more than a motley assortment of shaved heads, cyborgs and dicks.

The study of masculinity cannot begin with masculinity defined as one term in the opposition masculine and feminine, homologous to an opposition between male and female bodies. Variables commonly used to fix gender onto bodies are frequently selected ad hoc across conflicting or incoherent classificatory regimes: sometimes hormone levels and other times genetic coding, or, more recently, speculations from neurobiology colluding with so-called behavioural cues (see Germon). Biological determinism is a misnomer from the start, because biology is far more flexible than the social ideals it is frequently recruited to support (ibid.).

Taxonomies of masculinity and femininity have, however, remained commonplace under the auspices of the following statement: masculinity is social. This statement is hard working, generating a profusion of methodologies, narratives, statistics, and pockets of intellectual specialisation. While few scholars lay claim to essentialist definitions of gender – it is constructed, assembled, performed, processual, multiple, and so on – the essence ascribed to a totality called "society" retains strong critical traction. Anti-essentialist theories of masculinity as socialised have thus been used to license many claims about "masculinities" that could just as well have followed from essentialist perspectives. For example, interviews conducted with men – working-class men,

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married men, Australian men – often rely on a so-called *sexed* taxonomy of sample group participants for the investigation of *gender* as a social construct (see, for example, Doucet; Henwood and Proctor). This anticipatory logic produces masculinity as a discrete object with a roughly contoured figure and a corresponding language of figuration. We may concur that Arnold Schwarzenegger's performance in *The Terminator* has an immediate bearing on the topic of masculinity, not because we agree about the content of masculinity but because the example conforms to common sense about where and how masculinity will most predictably be found: "ah yes, Arnie."

This essay examines masculinity as a quasi-causal object and naming practice that guides a range of discussions around gender, with a particular focus on the sociology of masculinity. It begins by examining R.W. Connell's widely used concept of "hegemonic masculinity," and scrutinises a series of specialised metaphors around hegemony – strategies, positions, goals – that present masculinity as an effect of competitive communion between men. Having identified key tensions in the explanatory model of hegemonic masculinity, the essay then turns towards the analysis of sense and language outlined in Gilles Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense* (1969). Deleuze's notions of "singularity" and "event" are reworked to support a pragmatic account of how masculinity studies can engage tense relationships between observation, description and representation, an engagement that remains salient for developing the ethical scope of gender studies more broadly.

II the jargon of strategy

"Masculinity is social" is an axiomatic assertion in the sociology of masculinity that provides a critical perspective on research around sex and gender. In R.W. Connell's criticism of positivist scientific gender research, for example, it is noted that "'sex' is almost never tested biologically. Rather, the subjects are sorted into 'male' and 'female' by common-sense *social* judgements, as the investigators set up their experiments" (Connell, *Gender* 33; emphasis in original). Even when claiming to use gender-neutral tests and measurement technologies, sex-difference researchers tend to extract themselves from the processes of interpersonal recognition that sociologists believe are central to human experience. Nevertheless, social scientists themselves rarely perform biological tests on the "men" and "women" that they observe. No such tests accompany the male testimonies that populate Connell's *Masculinities*, a fact accentuated by the claim, in the book's preface, to have produced "an anatomy of the gender order of contemporary Western societies" (x). The denunciation of biological essentialism, on the one hand, and the employment of social observations to differentiate men and women, on the other, point to cross-purposes operating within sociology. In some instances, social analysis produces a de-familiarisation of the everyday, calling anything and everything into question. Sociological inquiry can have a *disorienting* effect, to borrow from Sara Ahmed (24, 161). Yet elsewhere the "social" is mobilised to justify conventional appellations on the basis that we, as members of a society, can reliably recognise social constructions because they belong to "us" (on gender and description, see Laurie). Once speaking in a sociological discourse, we can give interviewees "masculine" pseudonyms – Paul, Patrick, Nigel (see Connell, *Masculinities*) – and expect the reader to quietly accept that a man is being described, and that his behaviours provide evidence of "masculinity" by virtue of this fact.

Sociology does not so much overcome the essentialisms associated with positivist gender research as perform a constructivist substitution. The empirical observations of the social scientist displace the measurement tools of the psychologist or biologist, but this does not mean that a social analysis is able to escape the problems of perspectivism, bias and dogma that are readily identified in disciplines claiming to have positive knowledge about sexual difference.[1] An important example for our purposes is the concept of "hegemonic masculinity," for which I will now give some brief background.

"Hegemonic masculinity," for Connell and James Messerschmidt, is "the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue" (Connell and Messerschmidt 832).[2] The following elaboration is helpful:

> Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honoured way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men. (Ibid.)

The concept of hegemonic masculinity remains a powerful corrective to masculinity conceived as an ahistorical or transcultural archetype, not least because it foregrounds struggles over meaning and variable relations of social power (see ibid. 833–34). Placing emphasis on "setting" rather than innate masculine or feminine attributes, Connell also uses "hegemonic masculinity" to denote "in any given setting, the pattern of masculinity which is most honoured, which is most associated with authority and power, and which – in the long run – guarantees the collective privilege of men" (Connell, "Masculinity Construction" 133). Boys and men are required to position themselves within a gender order dominated by hegemonic masculinity; in this way, disciplinary problems among boys are not driven by "raging hormones" but by boys "seeking to acquire or defend prestige, to mark difference, and to gain pleasure" (Connell, "Teaching the Boys" 220). In other summaries, hegemonic masculinity "embodies a 'currently accepted' strategy"; as with all gender patterns over time, "if the strategies are successful, they become settled, crystallizing as specific patterns of femininity and masculinity" (Connell, *Masculinities* 77; *Gender* 82).

Rather than listing the things that men do, theories of hegemonic masculinity have sought to uncover the *way* in which men do it, in collaboration with other men. The jargon of "strategy" has become indispensable in this regard. It accounts for the production of masculinity without appealing to any essence of masculinity, or so it is hoped. At the risk of repetition, consider five recent examples of "strategy" in (sociological) action:

(1) In Demetrakis Demetriou's critical revision of the concept of "hegemonic masculinity," identity hybridisation becomes "a strategy for the reproduction of patriarchy"; the commercial incorporation of gay culture is "a strategy for the legitimation and reproduction of patriarchy"; and "external hegemony" possesses a "best possible strategy" (346, 349, 350).
(2) Emma Renold suggests that boys in primary schools use a "strategy" to produce "counter masculinities" and "alternative masculinities," and are also found "strategically disassociating themselves from the activities of their non-hegemonic peers," "strategically [developing] an interest and skill in football," and discussing "strategies of retaliation and revenge" (373–75).
(3) Margaret Wetherell and Nigel Edley draw on interview data to find that "Men's identity strategies are constituted through their complicit or resistant stance to prescribed dominant masculine styles," and that it is "probably more useful to reposition complicity or resistance as labels to describe the effects of discursive strategies mobilized in contexts as opposed to labels for types of individual men" (335–36, 352).
(4) James Messerschmidt describes white middle-class boys who develop "a controlled, cooperative, rational gender strategy of action for institutional success" (95), while later finds that lacking "other avenues and opportunities for accomplishing gender, the pimp life-style is a survival strategy that is exciting and rewarding for [pimps] as men" (122), and then, by way of conclusion: "Pimping, in short, is a practice that facilitates a particular gender strategy" (124).
(5) Susan Speer urges us to

> understand how masculinity itself *gets done*, the way it is mobilized for political and strategic ends, how it works as a rhetorical strategy and why men (or indeed women) find it so attractive (indeed – effective) as a resource on certain interactional occasions and not on others. We may then find ourselves in a stronger position from which to undermine or "disarm" it, and to challenge the weapons of patriarchal rhetoric. (127)

These studies differ in objects and purposes, but in each case a similar explanatory burden is placed on strategy. The connection between "masculinity" and "strategy" links a formal identity category (masculinity) to a more substantive psychic orientation (strategising) and its shared semantic universe: negotiating, achieving goals, competing, positioning, and so on.

Tacit associations between "masculinity" as a social identity and "strategy" as a psychic modality are commonplace in different academic contexts. For example, consider Donna Haraway's compelling critique of gender discourse in formative primate ethologies. Rationalist metaphors of "strategic reasoning" and "political calculation" have been readily applied by ethnologists to male chimpanzees, to the exclusion of female chimps whose (actually very similar) behaviours could, through subtle rhetorical inflections, be narrated socially altruistic and politically "unmotivated" (147–48). In a similar vein, one reads in sociology about "a strong position to claim hegemony," "how [men] position themselves to do masculinity relative to these hegemonic ideals," and "masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position at a given historical moment is a hybrid bloc" (Connell and Wood 362; Dellinger 548; Demetriou 349; Donovan 819).[3] It has also been comfortable to imagine that men play strategic social games through extensive spatial calculations, more or less the way they play sports.[4] Like any good game of football, man thinks about action in terms of strategic positions for scoring goals.

Just as important is the vibrant life of *Homo strategus* in popular culture. Strategy easily connotes a world of social activities where men enjoy relative privileges, and through which popular truths about manhood – in sports, politics, battle, and sexual competition – are most commonly established. Open Neil Strauss' *The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists* (2005) to almost any page and discover a thrilling combination of sociological cliché and pulp noir: "So while my mouth moved, my brain thought *strategy*. I needed to re*position* myself next to the Bo Derek blonde" (85; my emphasis). A formative sketch of Machiavellian man can also be found in Robert Greene's *The Art of Seduction* (2003), narrating "strategies" of sexual conquest through the cumulative wisdoms of Julius Caesar, Benjamin Disraeli, the Eisenhower administration, John F. Kennedy, and Napoleon Bonaparte: "In warfare, you need space to align your troops, room to manoeuvre. The more space you have, the more intricate your *strategy* can be" (184; my emphasis).[5] An oft-cited exception proves the rule: in the pilot episode of *Sex and the City* (1998), women's "strategic" conquests of sexual partners are described as having sex "like a man." The critical revelation that masculinity consolidates social hierarchies is also easily accommodated by contemporary cultural vernaculars. Consider television programs like *The Sopranos* (1997–2007), *Breaking Bad* (2008–13), and *House of Cards* (2013–15). These narratives do not ask us to approve of men, but they do require us to believe – from the first episodes to the closing finales – that men are hardwired to strategise, to calculate, and to command force.

We should not conflate the rigorous sociological research of Connell, Messerschmidt and others with the banalities peddled in *The Game*, *The Art of Seduction* or contemporary television dramas. Nevertheless, on some occasions the jargon of strategy limits the argumentative scope of sociological research. As an explanatory motif, the equation MASCULINITY = STRATEGY thus becomes an unmoved mover. Performances identified as "masculine" can always, after the fact, be ascribed to a strategy motivated by hidden rewards. Once selected, any variable X can be shown to explain the unconscious workings of

a strategic mind seeking hidden rewards: X = masculinity, X = whiteness, X = class privilege, and so on. It is always possible, as Claude Lévi-Strauss observes, "to manipulate the notion of interest, giving it an appropriate meaning on each occasion, in such a way that the empirical exigency postulated in the beginning is progressively changed into verbal juggling, *petitio principia*, or tautology" (Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism* 63).

Masculinity scholars cannot, of course, be held solely responsible for argumentative structures of this type. "Strategy" has its wider uses in feminist and queer studies, not least of all in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* ("strategy to denaturalise," "counterstrategies," "strategy of cultural politics"; xxxi, 35, 72) and large portions of Linda Singer's *Erotic Warfare* (1993). The difference with studies of hegemonic masculinity, however, is that the achievement of masculine goals is frequently attributed to a way of thinking understood as inherent to the male psyche, and in relation to an innate disposition for homosocial bonding. Wider implications follow from this association between men and strategy, men and calculation, or men and power. As Connell and Wood observe, men are privileged as managers, leaders, planners, not least because their (assumed) skills in strategy are so highly valued. For any activity that a man participates in it is too easily presumed that beneath confusion we will find clarity; beneath contradiction, logical purpose; and beneath violence, the restoration of order.

The issue is not whether patterns of social competition *exist* – of course they do. But we need to ask whether (a) we choose to read such patterns as achieving social goals peculiar to men; or (b) we choose to read them as functions of a rationality shared by men and women, but where women less often achieve the social goals achieved by men; or, finally, (c) we choose to read social goals as produced in and through the occasioning of social events not reducible to pre-existing goals or motivational structures.

An example will help distinguish these approaches. Consider Demetrakis Demetriou's description of behaviours falling outside expected iterations of the "masculine":

> Some commentators have gone as far as to report that drag is no longer a taboo for heterosexual men. On the contrary, it has been translated into a symbol of heterosexual manhood since, as one of [Rowena] Chapman's interviewees confessed, "the kind of man who turns up at a party as a woman is usually so confident of his masculinity that he doesn't care what he looks like […]" By embracing drag, however, the man in question is able to blur gender difference, to render the patriarchal dividend invisible, "to circumvent feminist arguments, and absent himself from masculinity and thus from any responsibility for it". As this somewhat unusual example shows, the appropriation and translation of gay elements represents a self-conscious attempt to create a hybrid masculinity for purely strategic purposes. (353)

Let's agree with Demetriou that some, although not all, examples of self-conscious gender play do displace difficult questions about the policing of women's bodies. Judith Butler makes this point in an ambivalent commentary on *Paris is Burning* (*Bodies that Matter* 121–40), but also consider Rob Schneider's laboured embarrassment as a "woman in a man's body dressing as a woman" in *The Hot Chick* (2002). Such a cynical co-option of "drag" too easily rehashes old scripts about who should wear what and why. This critical reading does not, however, exhaust the questions raised by Demetriou's example. When a man turns up at a party "as a man," is this also an "attempt to create a hybrid [femininity] for purely *strategic* purposes?" Has he still "absented" herself from the real work of gender subversion at hand? What do we already have to believe about gender presentation, such that some fashions and behaviours are classed as hegemonic strategies, and others are not? Demetriou's critique of "purely strategic purposes" still rests on the fantasy of real men and women beneath the clothes. Clearly, behaviours or narratives with "gender flexibility" as a theme can lead to a variety of both desirable and

undesirable outcomes (*The Hot Chick* is one such undesirable outcome). Less clear is how one could develop a positive science of gender hybridity as a psychological "strategy," without having established what gender-as-usual should look like.

There are actually two issues at stake here. The first concerns the acquisition of social power in relation to shifting social identities. The second concerns the specific role of sociologists in mobilising identity categories for the purposes of critique. Another way of thinking through these differences is to distinguish the politics of recognition, currently associated most closely with post-structural feminisms, queer theory and other approaches concerned with reworking social identities, and the politics of redistribution, which focuses on measurable inequalities in individuals' access to social power and material prosperity. Gender scholars have long been alert to possible tensions between each approach. In "Merely Cultural," Judith Butler notes that for some scholars working in a "neoconservative" Marxist frame, oppression related to social identities is conceived as "derivative" or "secondary" to a primary material economy of capital dividends (35–36). Men at parties dressed as men and men at parties as women both become effects of the same causal mechanism: masculinity as self-interested calculation indexed to a relatively stable currency of (real or imaginary) social rewards.

A well-developed version of the redistributive or "materialist" paradigm is found in Connell's *Gender* (2002). Whatever games of gender presentation individuals choose to play, another game is active beneath it: "Inequalities define interests. Those benefiting from inequalities have an interest in defending them. Those who bear the costs have an interest in ending them" (142). Connell's preferred metaphor is the *patriarchal dividend* (also found in Demetriou), which "is reduced as overall gender equality grows. Monetary benefits are not the only kind of benefit. Others are authority, respect, service, safety, housing, access to institutional power, and control over one's own life" (ibid.). The impact of the dividend could not be higher, for "the patriarchal dividend is the main stake in contemporary gender politics" (143). Through the concept of "patriarchal dividends" we no longer need to say what masculinity *is*, only to show that masculinity has *value* in a market in relation to other substances ("material benefits," "interests" and so on). As the Gold Standard, the patriarchal dividend can explain "why some people would want to change gender arrangements, while others would resist changes" (71). Some women also participate in the "the gendered accumulation process," which Connell defines as "the profit stream generated by women's underpaid and unpaid labour" (142–43). More broadly speaking, anyone who strives for capital accumulation in a gendered capitalist society is structurally defined as potential beneficiary from the patriarchal dividend.

The jargon of strategy offers a psychological counterpart to the materialist paradigm. The "patriarchal dividend" asks us to imagine individuals as investors in a social stock market, each seeking a cumulative stockpile of personal rewards. Although Connell's adoption of the materialist perspective is coupled with an acute sensitivity to individual circumstances and cultural differences, the concept of the "patriarchal dividend," like metaphors of "strategy" and "conquest," is easily exploited to sidestep difficult problems of classification and social recognition. For example, Steve Hall points out that Connell's explanations of male violence in terms of the "patriarchal dividend" or as an expression of "protest masculinities" often lack empirical support, and are simply deduced retrospectively from innate ideas about what men value (38–40). The familiar appeals to logics of substitution – working-class men inflict violence to compensate for economic patriarchal dividends not available to them – can easily become analytical shortcuts, relating all social phenomena to the universalised (but actually quite parochial) middle-class urban milieu.

Cases of gender flexibility or fluidity present even more serious problems. For example, there exists a tenacious line of argument (usually traced back to Janice Raymond's *The*

Transsexual Empire) that transsexual and transgender identities are simply "strategies" for capitalising on the dividends accorded to men, or on the victim-status "available" to women. In a recent publication, *Gender Hurts* (2014), Sheila Jeffreys argues that "Women who transgender [*sic*] have access to the patriarchal dividend, the privileges and advantages that appertain to men in systems of male domination," and that "When seen as 'men' [transgender men] had to work less hard, received more positive reviews for that work, and were more rewarded" (111). As a consequence, Jeffreys concludes that "transgenderism [*sic*] may appear to offer a solution to some, but one that entails severe punishment of the body" (113). The poverty of Jeffreys' historical scholarship and (mis)use of critical vocabulary is well documented elsewhere,[6] and her conclusions are diametrically opposed to those reached by Connell (see *Gender* 66–68). Nevertheless, Jeffreys' reasoning consistently conforms to neoconservative Marxism criticised by Butler and implicit in Connell's *Gender*. People adopt social identities to achieve hidden social rewards. Therefore, those who seek to modify their identities necessarily participate in a generalised economy of signification tied to the power differential between men and women. In this way, the challenge presented by transgender identities to the stability of "masculinity" and "femininity" can be re-read as a surface effect of a less shaky economic exchange.

We can supplement this argument by saying that women intrinsically want something different from men. According to an argument of this type, femininity *could* present an independent problem for hegemonic masculinity by threatening the patriarchal monopoly on power and authority, by introducing a "second currency" through which privilege and dividends could be measured. But any such claim risks restoring the "separate spheres" version of Parsonian sociology that Connell and others have, and I think quite rightly, fought to reject. There is no question of encouraging men to discover their inner "femininity," or of asking masculinity studies to renew a more ethical version of the self by celebrating everything that escapes masculinity. This can lead to the reification of the "feminine" as a rhetorically enigmatic, morally virtuous, but ultimately empty signifier of everything masculinity is not.

Returning to Demetriou's example, there is certainly some virtue in exercising caution around gender play, especially in environments where gendered micro-aggressions may still profoundly shape the social space under consideration. At the same time, the formalisation of such social dynamics within the economising vocabularies of "strategy" and "dividends" risks confusing the continued existence of unequal economic exchanges (well documented by Connell) with the less predictable, but equally important, struggles over what gets labelled "masculine" and "feminine" and for what collective purposes.

In the following section I want to suggest that the appeal of "hegemonic masculinity" is not simply its capacity to explain individual behaviours (or "strategies") but also its close proximity to the notion of homosociality. In particular, it would seem that the "patriarchal dividend" makes more sense once we believe that men innately seek recognition and respect from other men. The workings of such arguments thus deserve some closer inspection.

III homosociality

Hegemony is *hegemonic* only if those affected by it also consent to and struggle over its common sense. If masculinity includes the full diversity of activities engaged by stakeholders in hegemonic masculinity, then it would seem that either men are special stakeholders, in which case hegemonic masculinity is yet another taxonomy of "what men do," or everyone is a stakeholder, in which case "hegemonic masculinity" describes a collectively constructed common sense. If women fail to recognise or honour masculinity then the mechanism for sustaining privileges must be sought elsewhere and hegemonic masculinity fails to address the regimes of gender inequality it is called upon to explain. The question of why women honour masculinity should therefore

be as interesting to sociologists as the question of why men do.

In practice, this has not always been the case. In Connell, Messerschmidt and others the concept of hegemonic masculinity has focused on special relationships perceived between men. "Hegemonic masculinity" posits competitive fraternisation as the psychological motor of social relationships. Fraternal male bonding fantasies are, of course, found everywhere in the testimonies of interview subjects. Sociologists are constantly being told that men's actions are oriented to those of other men and not women. Connell's *Masculinities* provides a wealth of examples, as does Michael Messner's more recent *The Politics of Masculinities* and the now steady stream of publications on homosociality.[7] Connell quotes interviewee Pat Vincent, who describes his adolescent strivings as including the desire "to be someone." He then qualifies this statement: "I wasn't a nobody" and "If you have a fight and you win, you're a hero" (qtd in Connell, *Masculinities* 99). Elsewhere, Pat states that he likes "chicks" but is "still frightened of the old man coming down heavy" (ibid.). Other interviews are littered with personal anecdotes about keeping up with other boys, trying to be a "real man," and so on. This is a world dominated by a perceived gulf between the cultures of men and women, a gulf that shapes the languages used by interviewees to account for their own identities and desires.

Conversations about masculinity can tell us what someone has thought or felt in the past, but also what they think and feel about their prior thoughts and feelings, as well as what they think and feel about the interview situation itself. This is shaped, in turn, by "the spontaneous narrating structure of memory itself," which produces a "narratable self" onto which memories, desires, and identities are grafted (Cavarero 33–34). Finally, the interview subject is constituted through wider discourses about masculinity, including both the interviewer's and interviewee's expectations about how masculinity should or is likely to be discussed (on these points, see Wetherell and Edley 338). For these reasons, interpretations of interview material can be surprising and even exciting, but interviewers must proceed with caution.

Take as an example Connell's commentary on Pat. From interview material, it is suggested that "Pat is homophobic ('should be shot') […] Accordingly he and his mate are careful not to let their friendship spill over into homoeroticism" (Connell, *Masculinities* 108). But what would count as "homoeroticism," we might wonder, for Pat the homophobe? Had Pat spilled "over into homoeroticism" would he identify it as homoeroticism, and would he then tell us? Pat is not alone: a comparable anecdote is found in Sharon Bird's empirical research on male homosociality, where a male interviewee claims that as a youngster "You just don't hang out with females because you don't want to be a wuss, you don't play with dolls, you don't whine, you don't cry […] you do boy things, you know, guy stuff" (125). Taking the testimony as sound evidence of what "masculine little kids" do, Bird suggests that "emotions and behaviours typically associated with women were inappropriate within the male homosocial group." The following conclusion is then drawn: "This suppression of *feminine emotions* is more than merely a means of establishing individual masculinity. Emotional detachment is one way in which gender hierarchies are maintained" (ibid.; my emphasis). Like Connell's interview with Pat, Bird's confidence in her research subject leaves central questions unanswered: how do we come to perceive emotions as gendered? How can we understand what these interviewees mean by "homoeroticism" or "feminine emotions," if we ourselves do not share the interviewees' understandings of these terms?

Supplements have been introduced to explain the particularity of male bonds with some limited success. Homosociality is now sometimes described as multiple (Bird); as organised in relation to material rewards or a patriarchal dividend (Connell, *Gender*); as affective (Evers); as organised through heterosexual relations (Flood); and so on. These approaches have great potential explanatory power and deserve further investigation. Unfortunately,

much extant research on these themes retains the premise that men innately seek identification and communication with other men. The mysterious *malepolitik* is thus privileged over men's relationships to femininity, or women's relationships to masculinity. This makes it difficult to articulate any conception of human motivation outside the schema of values most closely identified with the habits of male fraternisation, whether multiple, pecuniary, affective, heterosexual or otherwise.

It is clear that the notions of "masculinity" and "homosociality" are not always conceptually coherent. However, *even if* these terms signal a cluster of tautological operations, these might be considered less as failures in critical reasoning and more as pragmatic devices for addressing the problems that "masculinity" struggles to name. The following section conceptualises such problems by way of Gilles Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense*.

IV what distinguishes a man from a word?

Although Gilles Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense* is hardly a gender-neutral text (consider the motif of Alice as a paradoxical and aleatory point), it is an unlikely starting point for a discussion of Deleuze and masculinity, given the more direct considerations of Oedipalisation and majoritarianism in his collaborations with Félix Guattari.[8] My focus here is less on what Deleuze had to say about masculinity and more on the ways that *The Logic of Sense* helps us think in and through tautologies. For this reason, we will take an initial detour through Deleuze's analysis of logic, language and naming practices.

The Logic of Sense begins by considering the claim that in order for any given proposition to make sense it must presuppose rules and elements not made explicit within the proposition itself. These rules can only be named using alternative propositions: "given a proposition which denotes a state of affairs, one may always take its sense as that which another proposition denotes" (29). Similarly, given that the *sense* of any noun (including proper names) can be given only by a series of other nouns, the practice of naming can lead to an indefinite proliferation of terms. Deleuze extracts a passage from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* (1871) to discuss a proliferation of this type:

> "The name of the song is called '*Haddock's Eyes*'" – "Oh, that's the name of the song, is it?" Alice said, trying to feel interested. – "No, you don't understand," the Knight said, looking a little vexed. "That's what the name of the song is *called*. The name really is '*The Aged Aged Man*.'" – "Then I ought to have said 'That's what the *song* is called'?" Alice corrected herself. "No, you oughtn't: that's quite another thing! The song is called '*Ways and Means*': but that's only what it's *called*, you know!" – "Well, what *is* the song then?" said Alice, who was by this time completely bewildered. – "I was coming to that," the Knight said. "The song really *is 'A-sitting on a Gate'!* […]". (Deleuze, *Logic of Sense* 30; emphasis in original)

Notice the alternation here between a "real" name and "a name which designates this reality" (30). Reading the dialogue in reverse, we can see that the distinction between "calling," "naming" and "being" becomes difficult to pin down. The relationship between real names and names which designate this reality is certainly not homologous to that between reality and fiction, because the "naming" name ("Haddock's Eyes") is no less real than what it names ("The Aged Aged Man"). The terms are not separated by degrees of fidelity to an object but rather are distinguished by a constant oscillation between the *signifying* series and the *signified* series. For Deleuze the signifier in a signifying series is "any sign which presents in itself an aspect of sense" (37). If "Haddock's Eyes" is the signifier for the name of the song, "The Aged Aged Man," then the sense of the latter is given in the former.

Correspondingly, terms in the signified series include "any thing which may be defined on the basis of the distinction that a certain aspect of sense establishes with this thing" (ibid.). A

thing can include names, propositions, qualities, relations and, indeed, a whole "state of affairs" (38). What matters is that when a signifier is used (e.g., "Haddock's Eyes") the corollary of its sense is sought elsewhere (e.g., "The Aged Aged Man"). The name "The Aged Aged Man" does not need to correspond to anything tangible for its signifier, "Haddock's Eyes," to produce sense. In this way, terms that seemingly refer to nothing can nevertheless function within a pragmatics of sense, wherein the sense of one proposition is related to the difference that it produces in another. For this reason, actually listening to "A-sitting on a Gate" does not necessarily bring us closer to the truth of the exchange quoted from *Through the Looking Glass* because the difference expressed by the production of a name is not reducible to the thing named.

Deleuze's approach can be useful for reconsidering the "ten things we could say about masculinity" listed at the beginning of this essay. Words and phrases that are used to signify masculinity could be distinguished from the signifieds to which they attribute sense. In the category of signifiers could be ordinary blokes, not-femininity, and the adjective *masculine* defined as "relating to or characteristic of a man." These are *gendering* signifiers that make sense of persons or objects through the masculine/feminine dichotomy. As signifieds, we could consider my friend keeping his head shaved, a penis, toughness, and Arnie in *The Terminator*; these latter are among the persons, objects or attributes commonly designated by signifiers of masculinity. Whatever masculinity *is* resides in the relay between the two series: "terminators" have the connotation of masculinity, and masculinity has connotations that could include terminators. Watching *The Terminator* requires no knowledge of the word masculinity and vice versa, but a coherent correspondence is nevertheless possible. Or so we might think. On closer inspection, the notion of "connotation" is wholly inadequate here. Once a body is determined as masculine or feminine, the ontology of the body itself – where it begins and ends, what its essential features might be – can quickly change. In the case of the cyborg protagonist in *Terminator II: Judgment Day* (1991), certain activities within the narrative that could elsewhere be perceived as "caring," "intimate" or even "maternal" (e.g., close attachments formed with minors, self-sacrifice for others) are swept up in a signifying system of "toughness" and "hardness" (see Messner, "Masculinity of the Governator"; and on "care" as a gendered heuristic, Haraway). The same phenomenon is determined from two directions: first, in the connective synthesis that makes toughness distinguishable from not-tough; and secondly, in the identification of tough with masculinity as distinct from not-masculinity. As one author puts it, "the male body comes to represent power, and power itself is masculinized as physical strength, force, speed, control, toughness, and domination" (Trujillo 291). This is what Deleuze and Guattari call a "double-articulation": the naming of a thing becomes inseparable from judgements pronounced on this same thing (see *Thousand Plateaus* 46–47). The sense of masculinity is not produced by proceeding from names (say, "man") to predicates ("is tough") in neat succession. The term masculinity *modifies* the circumstances that occasion it: if we imagine that practices Y and Z are commonly called masculinity, then "being called masculinity" becomes a result anticipated in the practising of Y and Z. The causal mechanism here is less one of ideological belief than performative re-enactment: *this* is *that*, what I see *now* repeats what happened *then*, and *voila!* – another example of masculinity.

"Masculinity" therefore names too little and too much. Too little, because this denotation always elides differences between examples judged inessential by the speaker; but also too much, because masculinity has its own connotations acquired through previous and disparate usages of the term. In the gaps between too little and too much are what Deleuze calls *singularities*, "bottlenecks, knots, foyers, and centers; points of fusion, condensation, and boiling; points of tears and joy, sickness and health, hope and anxiety, 'sensitive' points" (*Logic of Sense* 52). The sociology of masculinity generates a profusion of twists,

collisions and sensitive points, singular moments when the key signifier "denotes exactly what it expresses and expresses what it denotes" (67). Here I'll discuss just three examples.

The first is almost trivial. In Susan Speer's sociological research on drug taking, interview participant Ben insists that "I'm not a typical bloke, I think I'm very different" (qtd in Speer 118). Ben uses "typical bloke" as a signifier for a particular kind of man, and, as the author suggests, "bloke" functions to indicate an array of practices that Ben perceives as normative for men. But Speer also notices that "bloke" performs a distinct rhetorical function. Not everyone can use the word bloke at all times: it belongs to speaking situations where gendered identities are already working to authenticate the gender – and here, class and nationality too – of the speaker. The casual phrase "typical bloke" allows Ben to speak *through* masculinity to make claims *about* masculinity. As with any heterogeneous series, this movement of signifiers and signifieds could stretch towards infinity, from "what a bloke *is*" to "the names of what a bloke *is*" to "what the names of 'blokes' are *called*," and so on.

My second example is more complicated. In "(In)Secure Times" Fine et al. make a central claim that "male cultures" construct tenuous gendered identities through "local worlds" artificially annexed from any geo-political or historical consciousness. The premise is that "male cultures" can be studied through interviews with self-declared men in two geographically bounded "local worlds." The phrase "local worlds" is doubly determined, because the authors claim both that these worlds are artificial (they are falsely separated in men's minds from broader social relations) and entirely real (they provide a concrete rationale for the selection of interview participants). Similarly, Fine et al. identify the artificial distinctions of man and woman, black and white, working class and middle class, as ideological effects of "local worlds" and "male cultures." These same distinctions are also embedded in the authors' ethnographic methodology, which considers only the views and behaviours of those perceived to be white working-class men. The subsequent conclusion is an important provocation in connecting race and gender to social geography: "white men in various stages of adulthood, poor and working-class, are constructing identities on the backs of people of colour and white women" (66). Nevertheless, the analysis of social segregation here is foreclosed by the tautological definition of "white masculinity" as a product of white men and as *not* involving the activities of people of colour or women. Put another way, these gendered and racial differences function both as practical objects of inquiry and a priori fissures that make cultural worlds directly available to social scientific inspection.

A third example highlights tensions between identity critiques mobilised for political purposes and the gathering of evidence to support such critiques. In Michael Flood's otherwise challenging study of homosociality among "young heterosexual men" he makes a critical claim that "tight bonds among groups of men" are accomplished "through the exclusion of women and an ideological emphasis on men's difference [from them]" (342). This claim is then investigated by selecting men and excluding women from the sample group, and then concluding in favour of "homosociality" and "male bonding" as "constitutive of troubling practices" (356). Men's difference from women is an ideology belonging to "men" in their "homosocial" dominance of women, but is also called upon to explain this dominance. The study infers something about the status of women (and the "trouble" they experience) only by examining relations between men (gendered self-presentations not conforming to the male/female binary are also excluded).

The common difficulty here consists in beginning with, and then claiming to have discovered, innate bonds between men. The grouping of masculinity – and in this case, "class" and "race" identities also – bookends both premises and conclusions of the studies in question, forcing the reader to accept without question the innate viability of the identitarian bond: homosociality, whiteness, class subjectivity and so on. Similarly, throughout Kimmel,

Hearn, and Connell's *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities* (2005), "masculinity" is frequently deduced from "men" and vice versa. A study of men is by definition a study of masculinity; a study of masculinity is by definition concerned with what men do. The basis on which researchers identify "men" as authorities on "masculinity" is implicitly elided, conforming to the social scientific "fantasy of a subject who is transcendent, who places himself above the contingent world of social matter, a world that differentiates objects and subjects according to how they already appear" (Ahmed 33). Empirical questions of aggregation and individuation are foreclosed by the assumption that identities can produce social boundaries *sui generis*, and that scholars are well placed to identify where these identities begin and end.

Without a doubt, political cynicism is quick to follow the identification of logical entanglements, and my intention is not to cultivate antipathy towards empirical research altogether. Simone de Beauvoir's opening to *The Second Sex* is instructive here, in so far as Woman is cast both as an ambivalent, unreal and exhausted research object, and one in desperate need of recuperation as a locus for genuine philosophical innovation. In this spirit, the following section explores how naming practices can both enliven and constrain the "sense" of masculinity in its sociological usage. The issue may not simply be whether "male cultures" is a true description of an existing aggregate, but also what the effects of naming practices might be. How can we talk with them, through them, around them?

V tautology, pragmatism, irony

It was suggested above that singularities are *knots*. Knots can entwine a range of ideas and practices that become difficult to unravel, without necessarily collapsing into one another. A knot is never a soup: knotty words like "masculinity" wrap around themselves so tightly that pulling in one direction causes tension or even breakages in another. For the very same reason, knots can be useful because they tie things together. Deleuze cautions not to probe too earnestly for a firmer bond of identity between words and things: sense is "not something to discover, to restore, and to re-employ; it is something to produce by a new machinery" (*Logic of Sense* 72). More specifically, sense is wrapped up in a *problematic*. In contrast to propositions, a problematic cannot be evaluated according to truth and error, nor does it anticipate one single solution:

> Error […] is a very artificial notion, an abstract philosophical concept, because it affects only the truth of propositions which are assumed to be ready-made and isolated. The genetic element is discovered only when the notions of true and false are transferred from propositions to the problem these propositions are supposed to resolve, and they therefore alter completely their meaning in this transfer. (120)

Tautological thinking is never not-thinking. It is a limit, a boundary, or a threshold, in relation to a problematic that is neither true nor false. For Charles S. Peirce, whose material semiotics lingers throughout the work of Deleuze, "reasoning should not form a chain that is no stronger than its weakest link, but a cable whose fibres may be ever so slender, provided they are sufficiently numerous and intimately connected" (Peirce 87; see also Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 29–33). By following these fibres and inhabiting logical paradoxes we can ask how the most exciting or novel truths might inhere and subsist in the jostlings between incongruous statements. Widely held beliefs do not disappear simply by being proved wrong. Ideas can be understood as a living species of thinking, expressing really-existing knots in everyday practices, ones that extend to a diversity of unexpected domains.

From this viewpoint, "masculinity" and "femininity" might be understood as placeholders for an aggregate of problems that cannot be systematised without contradiction. For example, Judith Butler argues persuasively that "gender" functions as both cause and effect for Catharine MacKinnon: "If gender hierarchy produces and consolidates gender, and if gender

hierarchy presupposes an operative notion of gender, then gender is what causes gender, and the formulation culminates in a tautology" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xii). Nevertheless, Butler acknowledges that the irritation provoked by the proposition "gender causes gender" does not detract from the real problem that this circular logic articulates. The term "gender" in MacKinnon allows a chain of significations to be proliferated (around oppression, equality, justice, harm, and so on), without existing either as an effect of distinct social processes or as their primary cause. MacKinnon may not produce internally coherent definitional claims about gender, but her discourse does voice a genuine problematic around the coincidence of descriptions and norms (see, for example, "Sex and Violence"). Far from becoming a simple category error, the slippage between causes and effects enables Butler to read "gender" as always-already caught up in gaps and ambiguities that allow for re-signification and political subversion.

A more recent example turns in a different direction. In a social commentary on farming life, Saugeres suggests at one point that "men construct their gender identities differently within culturally constructed ideas of masculinity" (379). Considered in isolation, the author seems to have locked "masculine" and "men" into an interminable definitional loop. Masculinity is what men do, and men are recognised through their possession of masculinity. Yet Saugeres' commentary also develops incisive qualitative distinctions between on-farm and off-farm work, between work as just a job and work as a personal taste or identity, between social relationships and relationships to the land, all the while calling attention to the ways in which such distinctions naturalise differences between men and women. An immanent productive *capability* subsists within the circular claim quoted above: the term "masculinity," present in both premises and conclusions, provokes renewed attention to the world observed by the author.

A distinction between equivocation and elaboration might be useful at this juncture. There is, to begin with, the limit-point of conversations where the equivocation of "men" and "masculinity" cannot be further differentiated and becomes simultaneously cause and effect, question and answer, contracting any number of original insights into the familiar circuit from "masculinity" to "what men do" and back again. But then there are the elaborative uses of masculinity, ones that connect interviews, anecdotes, traits, norms, a whole ensemble of terms that are commensurated, however briefly, for the purposes of critique.

What links equivocation and elaboration is the naming *event*. Masculinity does not function consistently either as a common noun (like "ear") or as a predicate (" … *is* masculine"). The term has greater affinities with a named event like "Melbourne." Melbourne cannot become the adjective "Melbournian" without necessitating the existence of a discrete and irreducible object ("Melbourne"). No number of synonyms can exhaustively substitute for the name "Melbourne" because the name performs a connective function in assembling heterogeneous objects: roads, peoples, books, the weather. Without the word "Melbourne" items of different scales habitually grouped together would suddenly seem incongruous. Rather than obeying the laws of the general and the particular, a naming event of this type can be used "as a conceptual tool with multiple possibilities for detotalising or retotalising any domain, synchronic or diachronic, concrete or abstract, natural or cultural" (Lévi-Strauss, "Categories" 149). A proper name moves quickly across domains and makes connections that depend on the partial character of the mobile term, much like the *leitmotif* in a Wagnerian opera (Donner's hammer, the Rhine, ropes and swords) or the recurring sound bites on a Public Enemy album ("yeah *boyee!*"). When behaving as a proper name, the circulating term masculinity can likewise produce "the instantaneous apprehension of a multiplicity," as if standing at what Deleuze and Guattari call "a point of absolute survey at infinite speed" (see *Thousand Plateaus* 42; *What is Philosophy?* 21).

In this context, consider the following ten terms: adolescence, America, whiteness, subordination, the eighteenth century, female,

school, working classes, Hollywood, and complicity. As a naming event that ramifies the series, the word "masculinity" allows these very different domains "to be integrated into the classificatory scheme, thus affording classifications a means of going beyond their limits" (Lévi-Strauss, "Categories" 149). In this case, incongruities are transcended through an integrated schema of sociological *topoi*: adolescent masculinity, American masculinity, white masculinity, subordinate masculinity, eighteenth-century masculinity, female masculinity, schooling masculinities, working-class masculinity, Hollywood masculinity, and complicit masculinity. Here the name masculinity is able to assemble different foci without passing by way of fixed general criteria. It may be that some attempts to fix the meaning of "masculinity" can impede its efficacy, just as the overelaboration of a musical *leitmotif* can encumber its adoption elsewhere. In the topical ensemble above, the excess of masculinity as a signifier persists "by virtue of its own deficiency, even if this means to be deficient by virtue of its excess" (Deleuze, *Logic of Sense* 136). Efficacy at multiple points in a signifying series does not mean unbounded mobility. Wetherell and Edley suggest, for example, that the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" has been "particularly influential precisely because of its elasticity and lack of specificity and this may still be so for large-scale sociological, cultural, anthropological and historical investigations," but that at a certain threshold of interrogation the concept ceases to make sense in social psychological analysis (354).

Naming events are rarely benign. The naming of "Melbourne" easily smoothes over the complex forms of violence that secured the displacements – both symbolically and physically – of Indigenous populations in the Yarra region (see Edmonds). The history of Melbourne, like the history of "masculinity," does not begin with the name but with the conditions that allow the naming event to take effect. To agree upon a shared thematic of "masculinity," even in our most cautious uses of the word, is to have tacitly elaborated a broad cultural terrain on which masculine and feminine become distinct from other variations within or between bodies. One does not arrive at "man," or at the grouping "local worlds" and "male cultures," by way of the general criteria and the particular instance. Rather, we create "variable associations with zones of clarity and obscurity" wherein the aggregation of "tiny perceptions" involves "as much the passage from one perception to another" as it does the "components of each perception" (Deleuze, *The Fold* 112, 99).

The specificity of tacit knowledges and pragmatic connections is no more apparent than in the predominance of what Deleuze calls "classical irony" in contemporary commentaries on masculinity. Classical irony maintains "the model of a pure rational language" but nevertheless situates itself immediately in the world of representation (*Logic of Sense* 138–39), toying with the depths of experience only to ascend, with nods and winks, to the heights of rational argumentation. Witness the wild success of "boys" in publication titles: "boys will be boys," "oh boy!," "girls' jobs for boys?," "bad boys," "just boys doing business?," "boys boys boys," and so on. These "boys" jokes reconcile the imperative to select and critique plausible manifestations of masculine phenomena, while acknowledging such selections to be arbitrary and even anachronistic. Classical irony also mediates a certain descriptive register around gendered social organisation. Consider the following passage in Connell:

> [The] imagery of masculine heroism is not *culturally* irrelevant. Something has to glue the army together and keep the men in line, or at least enough in line for the organization to produce its violent effects. Part of the struggle for hegemony in the gender order is the use of culture for such disciplinary purposes: setting standards, claiming popular assent and discrediting those who fall short. (*Masculinities* 214; emphasis in original)

Note that the imperative clause is rhetorical rather than prescriptive ("Something *has* to glue the army together […]") and that the reader must provide their own quotation marks for loaded denotations ("men in line," "setting standards," "those who fall short").

Such language occupies a precarious but necessary space between explaining how something works and saying that something is, in fact, working. Classical irony mediates the ambivalence of a discourse that wants both to explain how society functions and to resist the global claim that society *really does function*. One must write both that the army is being held together and that it isn't; that patriarchy maintains the status quo and also that it doesn't; and that men are the true bearers of masculinity but also that they aren't. For similar reasons, whatever items we choose to list among "ten things we could say about masculinity," they will always be read simultaneously as naive, because masculinity must include some minimal content to be accepted as a viable object of study, and as ironic, because this minimal content will always attract – and for good reason – immediate scepticism. In the gap between naivety and scepticism is the problematic, and this problematic persists well before and long after any particular claim about what masculinity really is.

VI conclusion: eating words

The Copernican revolution that masculinity studies inherits from feminist philosophy and political movements is that gender does not belong essentially to the male or female body but must be constructed through social relationships that have a political and historical specificity. Masculinity does not emanate from some Divine power of biological transmission; a secular product of culture, masculinity is social.

However, we must be careful not to simply replace the biological (*sic*) *doxa* with a parallel formulation, that of the innate disposition of men to strategise in relation to other men. What difference does it make whether gender is "ordered" from a mysterious Divine source, or whether it is "ordered" through the mysterious inner motivations of men relating to, cultured in and through, unable to see anything but, other men? If the sense of one proposition is related to the *difference* that it produces in another, then the sense of both theological and secular propositions is the same: gender obeys an order; masculinity is dominant; what men say and do together is what masculinity has been, is, and will be.

As a naming practice, "masculinity" selects as it signifies, combines and divides as it describes. The work of selecting, combining and dividing frequently exceeds, in turn, any particular ideology. When a term gets mixed up in the "actions and passions of bodies," the issue is not only what is said but also what to do with our sayings afterwards: "either to say nothing, or to incorporate what one says – that is, to eat one's words" (*Logic of Sense* 134). We are frequently required to digest "masculinity" in its least processed form, "of or relating to men," only to derive enjoyment from its decomposition – masculini*ties*, masculinity *in crisis*, *hybrid* masculinities. The concept of masculinity is often approached in this perishable and half-digested way, with quotation marks eating into it. Just try using "masculine" in a sentence without nibbling at the corners. The concept of masculinity may be most efficacious once chewed up, so that its claim to being self-evident – *viola!* – no longer feels so persuasive. But one can also look sideways and approach unexpectedly, or stumble upon "masculinity" by pursuing three or four other things at once. Whatever course is chosen, the problem will not be to replace "ten things to know about masculinity" with a more reliable, current or inclusive list. It is more urgent to ask what it means to criticise such a list as essentialist, while remaining confident in the need for a specialised theory of masculinity as distinct from a theory of gender *tout court*. Which is another way of asking: does the sociology of masculinity have an object, and, if so, must that object always make sense?

notes

I wish to acknowledge Jessica Kean and Adam Gall for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

1 These concerns have been raised by Elspeth Probyn around the gendering of ethnographic practices, and also by Jeff Hearn when

distinguishing between studies of masculinity and studies of men.

2 For a broad literature review around "hegemonic masculinity," see Demetriou.

3 To their credit, Connell and Wood do recognise that the nomenclature of "teams" in male-dominated workplaces contributes to the "cultural masculinization" of sporting metaphors (350).

4 On spatial extension as a gendered trope of transcendence, see Richardson 146.

5 In Greene (389) there are also coquettish tactics and Marilyn Monroe-isms designed for women, but the author rarely discusses feminine sexuality through political allegory or military metaphors.

6 See Jagose (50–51, 87–88) on Jeffreys' critical argumentation; and for an alternative historiographic approach to transgender identities, see Stryker.

7 For a definition of "homosociality," see Bird (131), and for a comparable study, see Flood.

8 On Deleuze and feminism, see Grosz. On Deleuze and Guattari's specific critique of masculinity and the nuclear family within psychoanalysis, see Laurie and Stark. For a discussion of Deleuze and Guattari's "becoming-woman," see Minissale (this special issue).

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