Male bodies, masculine bodies, men's bodies: the need for a concept of gex

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Though bodies are diverse, and with many different meanings, talk of the male body can easily suggest a male (bodily) essence. This can in turn imply some kind of "deep (bodily) masculinity" that supposedly only men can know, and that is men's or males' special *property*. On the other hand, there is another usage or meaning of "male": something that speaks to the specific social, political and embodied bounded experience of men, the boundaries, bodies, skin, fluids, leaks and all, all embodied, material, all social and cultural. Though this makes some more sense, I remain cautious of the word, "male", as it can so easily be misused out of context. This is partly why I often prefer to use the term, "men", rather than "male". Bodies, male bodies, can be seen in many ways: as sexed, (sex-)gendered, or *gender-sexed*, or simply as "gex". This last approach refers to post-constructionist material-discursive theorizing, which does not assume to proceed from sex to gender.

Despite this, the host of what might be called "general" or gender-neutral analyses of the body, such as of the individual body, the world's body, body politic, consumer bodies, medical bodies (O'Neill, 2004), usually fail to address gendering of the body, and even more rarely gendering of male bodies or men's bodies. O'Neill (2004) also discusses the anthropomorphization of the world, as in the "encyclopaedic body". In the extreme case the cosmos may be mapped onto the male body. Or the male body can be represented in or as the cosmos. This body may well be male, spreading body parts into society and well beyond. Oddly, many sophisticated gendered analyses are often explicitly about women (Howson, 2005) and only implicitly about men. And most of what may appear as "general" analyses

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about bodies are often implicitly about male, masculine and men's bodies (and not about women). Men and men's bodies often remain unnamed, decisively *unmarked*, in a similar but different, way to "white bodies" in Western societies. Gendered and bodily-related associations of and for men are often seen or experienced as less negotiable, *less open to critique* than, say, "economic" or class-based associations, such as assumed relations of "the working class" or "the masses", and certain social ways of being "men" or coded as "male".

Male, masculine and men's bodies and relations to bodies are far from one thing. There are many ways in which the male, masculine and men's gender relate to embodiment. The social accounting for men's bodies has been greatly strengthened through the recent growth of critical studies on men and masculinities. This critical focus on men and masculinities has derived from several, not always compatible, directions and traditions. First, these include various feminist critiques of men, in which the male body is analyzed as a site of power, especially in relation to sexuality and violence, and the phallocentrism of the male body. Second, critiques from lesbian and gay studies problematize the normative male heterosexual body, from gay studies point to the desirability between (some) male bodies, and from queer studies subvert gender, sexuality and other categories. Third, there have been some men's positive and explicit responses to feminism, that are profeminist or anti-sexist; there is also work that is ambiguous in relation to feminism or anti-feminist in perspective. Then, there are the influences of poststructuralism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, STS (Science and Technology Studies), and more recently so-called "posthumanism" and "new materialism". These critiques together bring the theorising men and masculinities into sharper relief, making men and masculinities *explicit objects* of theory and critique, in ways that are themselves more or less embodied. However, even with these influences the question of

embodiment – the experience of, effects on, and social construction of the body – has been unevenly present in developing debates on men and masculinities.

This chapter has a dual focus, to consider both the significance of 'the body' with critical studies on men and masculinities, and the significance of critical studies on men and masculinities for so-called "more general", often non-gendered studies of 'the body'. Yet oddly, this particular line of argumentation can easily reify the body and neglect what men do, the practices that make and re-make men. So what is the significance of bodies for men? And the significance of men for bodies? How do men/bodies figure in theories, in social life, and their relations? What is specific about the focus on the male body?

Embodied sex: the sexed biological sex male body

First, the male body can be understood as given determinate biological sex(ed) matter: the biological given. In this, the male is the given sexed biological body. The idea of 'the natural body' is persistent in everyday, professional, media and academic discourses. Biological approaches to the male body have usually been founded on one or more of the following: instinct; territoriality, competition for food or sexual partners, and physical size; chromosomal difference; hormonal difference; and primary and secondary sex characteristics.[1] Proponents of parallels in explanations of animal and human behaviour have been countered by critiques from many perspectives.

[1] Primary sex characteristics generally refer to chromosomal structure; secondary sex characteristics include: gonadal structure (ovaries/testes); internal genital ducts (fallopian tubes and uterus/vas deferens and prostate); external genital development (vagina, vulva, clitoris/penis); hormonal structure (preponderance of oestrogen and progesterone, or androgens, including testosterone); presence/absence of breasts; and presence/absence of certain body hair.

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Up to 6-7 weeks gestation female and male embryos have externally identical genitalia - after that specific sexed development occurs. At every stage for the human the basic pattern is female away from which development proceeds to produce the male. Maleness requires the presence of special hormones; in their absence, femaleness occurs. The embryo will be female unless it has a Y chromosome. (In birds the opposite applies; the basic pattern is male, females are the departure). While sex is usually assigned by external examination, it is analysis of chromosomal structure that provides the primary sex, in cases of doubt. But as Nicholson (1993: 12) explains, 'Both sexes actually receive very similar genetic instructions … even for the features that tell them apart. … both sexes receive sets of instructions dealing with breast development, but in only one sex are the instructions acted upon. The same applies for all the other physical characteristics, which obviously (sic.) distinguish men from women: genitals, shape, muscle growth, voice-box development, body hair and so on.' Some chromosomal explanations of males have arisen from research on intersexuality, in its 15 forms other than XX and XY types. While XYY men on average appear to be larger in physique, be more prone to severe temper tantrums as children and score lower on IQ tests, it would be simplistic to see the root cause as hyperaggressivity resulting from chromosomal patterning. As Manning concludes 'The huge majority of XYY males lead ordinary lives and the childhood problems which they have are not particularly intractable' (1989: 55).

One major line of biological research has been on variations in testosterone levels, both between and amongst males and females. Testosterone is often represented as *the male* (androgen) hormone. However, while it is produced mainly in the male testes, it is also produced in the adrenal cortex and ovaries in females, and is responsible for differentiation of male and female primary sex characteristics, and sexed stature and musculature. Differential hormonal levels of females/males are 'average' levels, with both 'sexes' having 'female' and

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’male’ hormones. While some animal studies show a link between testosterone and aggression, the connection is complicated, for example, aggression may be mainly by males in the presence of females. There is a long tradition of outcome studies completed among men. For example, men who had committed violent crimes at a younger age have been found to have higher testosterone levels (Kreuz and Rose, 1972).

Some mammalian studies show that victory in dominance struggles tends to increase testosterone, and defeat tends to decrease it. Thus, the physical body extends its power into the social body space, or vice versa. For humans, surges in testosterone occur at puberty, in sexual arousal, and some other social situations, such as winning in sports, successful athletic or fearful accomplishments, even social celebrations. However, relations between testosterone and dominance are not simple. Increases in testosterone have been found following *decisive* sports victories (Mazur and Lamb, 1980) rather than just winning in itself. To make sense of such variations, Kemper (1990) has argued for socio-psychoendocrinology, in which reciprocal links are recognized between testosterone, aggression, dominance, social structure, and behaviour. Biological and behavioural sex differences can be seen in terms of ‘multiplier effects’, whereby sex differences from brain and genitalia are magnified in interactions between individuals and social environments (Reinisch et al., 1991).

There are many derivatives of sexed biological approaches to the male body. Perhaps the most important to mention at this point is the various formulations of psychoanalysis, some biological-driven, some more cultural, some feminist, and so on. Early years’ bodily experiences and relations are formative for subsequent structurings of cathexis (Connell, 1994). In the Freudian account fear of castration and desired pleasure of intimate connection with the mother drive identity formation of the male boy self or the masculine personality:

the symbolic law of the father triumphs bodily over the boy's loss of the maternal body. In this story, the psychological dynamics of the male body can harbour an over-compensatory 'bullying' ego separating from the feminine or a supposedly 'fragile' masculine ego, with both opening the possibility of male dominance (Craib, 1987). In this concoction the penis/phallus can take on all manner of centred bodily and symbolic meanings and powers.

Disembodied sex: the gender-absent minds of males

Males and men have often been represented as taken-for-granted biologically-driven bodies. Yet at the same time, men may be constructed as taken-for-granted disembodied, or least as primarily ("rational") *minds*, rather than bodies. There has been a long running debate on how could this ever be possible. The tendency can be illustrated when men are seen as primary and 'authoritative' conveyors (even "embodiments" or "personifications") of ideas, ideology, faith, religion, rationality, knowledge, and enlightenment (in both senses). Bodies as minds and images of men are shown throughout history as the monopoly bearers of knowledge, even when woman is represented as "justice", often as "beauty", sometimes even as "truth".

According to some social theorists, in this account 'malestream' theorists grant epistemological and usually idealist privilege to men, constructed as minds, over women, constructed as bodies (see O'Brien, 1981). The construction of men as having supremacy as minds, whilst women remain as bodies, can be traced back to many ancient traditions, intellectual, political and spiritual, including classical social theory, and reappearing in various guises in the Enlightenment, and indeed more recently (Lloyd, 1984; Sydie, 1987). Go to any ancient university, and most modern ones too, and you will find ample examples in the libraries, on the walls, in the naming of buildings, and so on. There is an inordinately large literature that provides spurious rationales for keeping the bodies of women out of the

public body of men, who can then debate and decide through reason. In *The Politics* Aristotle placed women alongside slaves and children, believing that women needed a certain amount of coercion of the body to maintain their goodness and purity within the private domain. A contrasting, and in some ways paradoxical, example of male embodied disembodiment appears in the mortification of the flesh and (self-)punishment, in many religious traditions, including some Christian, Hindu and Moslem versions.

Such dichotomizations of mind/body mirror many other dualisms: man/woman, culture/nature, public/private, reason/passion, and so on. The absence or disembodiment of the body in discussing men and men's knowledge as minds can be very far from material realities; males without bodies may be bourgeois "enlightened", spiritual religious, non-othered constructions of males/men – dominants to be deconstructed. There are major contradictions in dominant constructions of male/men's bodies – between, on one hand, the present and embodied biological male body, even simply as biological bodies, on the other, the absent, disembodied, male minds, even simply disembodied minds. Though in some ways the present biological body and the absent disembodied mind appear to be at odds with each other, they can be seen as two sides of the same coin. In *both* cases, there may be an implicit Cartesian dualism and *separation* of mind and body. Thus these are two versions of a similar, but distinct separation. The contradiction of males/men as both *simply bodies* and as *absent/without bodies*, is much to do with social location, specifically economic class, ethnicity, and other signifiers of the dominant and the unmarked. These dichotomies map onto another set of contrasts: between *male* bodies as biological, and *masculine bodies* as socially constructed: the biological versus the social body.

Gender: the sex-gendered construction of masculine/men's bodies

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Moving to more social accounts of males/men raises many possibilities, and indeed further dichotomies and contradictions. Recognition of the social embodiment of males, and of masculine/men's bodies, takes many forms.

The male sex role

Social bodies of men have been recognized and theorized in a wide range of social science analyses: The most fully established is that derived from the break of gender from sex, with gender as the cultural construction of sex or sexual difference, as in the social construction of masculinity and the male sex (or more accurately gender) role: In this, bodies are reformulated social roles, in which bodies become carriers of social role and expectations of how the male body should be in specific societal or social contexts. In this formulation masculinity, in the singular, may be seen as the embodiment of the male sex role, stressing independence, aggression, and similarly active attributes and qualities. A well cited formulation of such singular ideals of masculinity is as follows: no sissy stuff; be a big wheel; be a sturdy oak; and give "em hell: exude an aura of manly aggression". (David and Brannon, 1976). These features are all intensely embodied forms of masculinity and the male sex role; they can be seen as exemplars of the ideology that the male body does not need changing: it is as it is, not problematic. Indeed, some versions of (male) sex role theory may contribute to relatively disembodied social analysis, that prioritizes social role over body. The dramaturgical metaphor of role theory may suggest that male (heterosexual) scripts are primarily well rehearsed "spoken lines" or alternatively embodied improvized performances carried by the non-problematized male body (thus, perhaps the reason for the *sex*, rather than gender, role). Interestingly, the male sex role approach spawned recognition of the so-called hazards of being male, and how ordinary ways of being men can involve damage to, even self-punishment of, the body, through risk-taking, consumption habits, and other unhealthy

behaviours (Goldberg, 1976). Sex role theory has been heavily criticized, not least for its normative assumptions and methodological problems (Eichler, 1980).

Among the many areas of recent debate in theorizing men and masculinities relevant to analyses of the body, four are highlighted: patriarchal structuring of men's bodies; masculinities and social construction of masculine/men's bodies; embodied subjectivities, and representations. In each case, tensions persist between generalizations on men and masculinity, and specificities of particular men and masculinities.

Men's bodies in patriarchies

The male body may appear as immediate and individual, or framed within the male sex role, but it can also be understood structurally within macro historical societal contexts. A materialist and structural approach to men has often been interpreted as men's relations to the historical transformation of economic class relations, work, physical labour, production, and the economy, and sometimes in terms of societal catastrophe, famine and war. The proletarianization of male bodies, as machines may be contrasted with the bourgeoisification of male minds. The disembodied bourgeois male body is at odds with that account in everyday life and academic writing that sees men's bodies as machines, sometimes as proletarian machines. Machinic bodies can be seen in terms of physicality and physical labour; man becomes gendered (not biological) body.

But equally important are men's relations to care, reproduction (in the very broadest sense), and embodied existence. As such, this involves a critique of the limited (productive) materialism of Marxism, as usually conceived (Hearn, 1987). Indeed Marx himself embraced two very different, contradictory versions of even reproductive materialism: a biological

naturalism, and as a first social and bodily oppression (Hearn, 1991). Using similar logic, male bodies may be understood as the agents of patriarchal collectivities. Non-gendered approaches to materialism and marxism have been critiqued and developed in a wide range of marxist feminist, materialist feminist and socialist feminist accounts of patriarchy. These focus variously on biology, the domestic mode of production, kinship, family, economic systems, 'the politics of reproduction' (O'Brien, 1981) (biological reproduction, care of dependent children and care more generally), 'sex-affective production' (production of sexuality, bonding and affection as core processes of society) (Ferguson and Folbre 1981), sexuality or various combinations thereof. Such approaches implicitly or explicitly present diverse materialist accounts of the *collective* male/men's body/bodies.

Understandings of patriarchy have shifted from the literal meaning of rule of the father(s) and the male patriarchal, phallocentric body, to the social, economic, political and cultural domination of men, hierarchically or laterally between men, as in fraternal male bonding. Despite critiques of the concept, from at least the late 1970s, as too monolithic, ahistorical, and neglectful of women's resistance and agency, debate has continued. This includes historical movements from private patriarchy, with men's material embodied power located in the private domain as fathers and husbands, to public patriarchy, with men's power primarily in public domain organizations. Sites of patriarchy have been specified. Walby (1986, 1990) analyzed six patriarchal structures: capitalist work, family, state, violence, sexuality, culture; Hearn (1987) identified reproduction of labour power, procreation, degeneration/degeneration, violence, sexuality, ideology. Patriarchy may be differentiated, as in (public) patriarchies rather than unified in the singular patriarchy (Hearn, 1992a).

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Critical commentaries on men, men's bodies and patriarchies have also been developed in relation to debates on the patriarchal nation, nationalism and militarism. Indeed, there are often slim lines between the production of male bodies for the nation, for the labour force, patriarchal lineage, blood, individual "well-being", and maintenance of a coherent autonomous body. Associations of men and dominance over women's bodies can involve men's bodies, as in rituals of pain, danger, that 'burn' dominance into the male body (Duff, 2010: 693). Men's patriarchal dominance can bring dispensability of at least some male/men's bodies: in the extreme case, being killed in war whilst preserving men's power. Increasingly, such questions must be seen in transnational terms. As Connell (2005) remarks: "Because *globalization* refers to very large scale processes, it is important to recognize that the effects of these processes appear at the most intimate level. Men's bodies, not just broad masculine ideologies and institutions, are involved. The global social order distributes and redistributes bodies through migration and through political controls over movement."

Masculinities and masculine bodies

At about the same time as sex role approaches were being criticized in the late 1970s, critiques of the concept of patriarchy and relatively fixed 'categorical' approaches to gender grew (Rowbotham 1979; Connell 1985). The outcome of these various, if somewhat separate, critiques of social psychological concepts of sex role, and overly structuralist concepts of gender determined within patriarchy, has been a movement to differentiated, pluralized approaches to gender, in which the materiality of the body is constructed through social practice. This has been an influential area of development in critical studies on men and masculinities in relation to difference, as in pluralizing masculinity to masculinities. This has been partly a means of recognizing both material embodied power relations between men and women *and* material embodied power relations between men and masculinities, for example,

between hegemonic, complicit and subordinated masculinities (Carrigan et al., 1985), including sexual and other hierarchies between men.

With some masculinities the male body is or has been clearly constructed in terms of direct as power and dominance. For example, a number of scholars (for example, Phillips, 1987) have pointed to the production of rugged, physical, rather than cerebral, masculinities in imperial colonial territories and frontier settlement. On the other hand, some subordinated masculinities carry relative lack of power and dominance in their bodies. These variations can be understood at least in part by reference to the intersections with other social divisions, including how variations in other social divisions, such as class or sexuality, may be gender-coded as masculine or feminine. A major influence here is the impact of gay scholarship on the body, male-male bodily desirability, critiquing assumptions of the normative heterosexual body, and changing sexual social meanings of the body and its parts (Weeks, 1991; Plummer, 2003). Thus varieties of gendered, sexual embodied masculinities can be recognized.

There has been parallel concern with analysis of unities and differences between men and between masculinities (Hearn and Collinson, 1994). Just as a major issue within feminism has been the relationship of commonalities and differences between women, so men can be analyzed in terms of material commonalities and differences, mirroring debates on diversification of patriarchy. Men are bound together, not necessarily consciously, by dominant sexuality, (potential) violence, socio-economic privilege, power of the father, household relations, work or political power more generally – all material embodied structures and processes. However, the idea of a unity of men is *also* a myth. Men's collective power is maintained partly through assumption of hegemonic forms of men and masculinities – often white, heterosexual, able-bodied men (WHAMs), as the primary form,

to relative exclusion of marginalized and subordinated men/masculinities. In many social arenas there are tensions between collective power of men and masculinities and differentiations amongst men and masculinities, defined through other social divisions, such as age, class, and race. Using the term *masculinities* makes clear there is no one masculinity; rather masculinities are elaborated, experienced and embodied differently for different men.

Interestingly, the first substantial discussion of 'hegemonic masculinity' was based in a discussion of boys' and adult men's bodies, framed within the patriarchal context, in the paper, "Men's bodies", first published in 1979 and republished in *Which Way Is Up?* (Connell, 1983). It considers the social construction of the body in boys' and adult men's practices. In discussing "the physical sense of maleness", sport is marked as "the central experience of the school years for many boys" (1983: 18), emphasizing the practices and experiences of taking and occupying space, holding the body tense, skill, size, power, force, strength, physical development, and sexuality. In addressing the bodies of adult men, Connell highlighted physicality within work, sexuality, and fatherhood – but, perhaps significantly, not violence. Connell stressed that "the embedding of masculinity in the body is very much a social process, full of tensions and contradiction; that even physical masculinity is historical, rather than a biological fact … constantly in process, constantly being constituted in actions and relations, constantly implicated in historical change." (p. 30).

Michael Messner's (1992) *Power at Play* is an extended example of critical empirical inquiry into masculinities and men's bodies. The approach engages with matters personal and political, psychological and sociological. Messner states that his examination of the lives of male athletes proceeds from analysis of the dynamic interaction between the internal (conscious values, beliefs and less conscious separation-attachment dynamics) and the

external (social institutions). He charts social constructions of sport in relation to boyhood, family influences, success, failure, the body, gender and other social dimensions, and power. Overall, a dominant theme is attention to the self-definition of the "natural" (in this case, the "natural athlete"), resulting from "a collective practice" that constructs masculinity.

A rather similar approach is used by Alan Klein (1993) in *Little Big Men*, a study of bodybuilders, mainly male bodybuilders. The subculture of bodybuilding is analyzed through ethnographic study as a place where men learn to individuate. As Klein concludes:

> Here we have a subculture preoccupied with attaining hegemonic masculinity, but individuals within it who, because of the psychological baggage they carry with them, are only partially successful in accomplishing their goals. Their sense of masculinity and self, often on unstable footing that fuels the hypermasculinity characteristic of bodybuilding subculture, works in certain respects to overcome low self-esteem and build social bonds and sense of community but it also remains perilously superficial.

Of special interest is the inculcation of social and cultural movements in the very body and muscle of the man. The engagement is external and internal, social and psychodynamic, psychological and corporeal. Such an approach can be seen as both theorizing embodied men and masculinities, and specific forms of embodied masculinity.

Masculine discursive subjectivities

A third influential area of debate that examines men, masculinities and bodies has been poststructuralist and social constructionist work on discourses, subjectivities and subjectifications (Petersen, 1998; Whitehead, 2002; Reeser, 2010). Embodied masculinities

here usually operate *within* the discursive. Within masculine subjectivities, there are recurring tensions: between heterosexual dominance and homosociality/homosexuality/gay subtexts; coherent identity and fragmentation of masculine identity; and essentialized, experience, felt as one's own, and deconstruction. Much recent work is influenced by micro-discourse analysis, and/or Butlerian combinations of Austin's theory of speech acts and performativity, Foucaultian discourse, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and critical sexuality theory. In some ways it is perhaps rather surprising how such tendencies have become so popular for addressing masculine subjectivities, whilst often neglecting earlier work on agency, interaction and social change, comparative analysis, and relevance for many of the world's women (Cregan, 2006: ch. 5; also see Brickell, 2005, 2006). At worst, this turns to radical disembodied discursive individualism.

In the light of possible discursive disembodiment, a key intervention was Jefferson's (1994) explication of psychoanalysis, poststructuralism and discourse analysis in "theorizing masculine subjectivity". This was given embodied shape in a study of the 'hard man', the significance of muscle, bodybuilding and the case of the boxer, 'Iron' Mike Tyson. Jefferson (1998) addresses the complex and contradictory relations among desire, anxiety and embodiment of masculinity. He focuses on the deconstruction of discourses relating to muscle and 'hardness', and how identifications with such discourses are made and sustained. This is especially apposite as excess interest in the body, as in bodybuilding, might also appear to suggest narcissism and even femininity. Jefferson has since urged going beyond "the social break with orthodoxy", as represented by Connell's work on multiple masculinities (Jefferson, 2005: 217-218), and instead engagement with radical developments in feminist, poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theorizing: "the psychoanalytic break with orthodoxy: contradictory subjectivities and the social." (pp. 218-219).

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Discursive representations of masculinities

Interestingly, this combination of psychoanalysis, post-structuralism and discourse analysis has remarkable similarities to the theoretical perspectives combined in some media analysis, such as Nixon's (1997) deconstruction of men's clothing advertisements. Cultural approaches to men's mediated bodies have focused on many forms, such as film, television, photography, and genres, such as pornography, sitcom, horror, westerns. A key text inspiring many critical re-readings of film was Mulvey's (1975) 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema'. She postulated that the ideology of patriarchy ensures that the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification, so that 'man' is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like: the unconscious of patriarchal society structures film form (also see Mulvey, 1981).

Another key theme has been men's identifications with the sexually objectified man in the media, in either a narcissistic (Wernick, 1987) or homoerotic relation, affirmed through the homosexual or homosocial subtext of the medium or gaze (Wood, 1987; Sedgwick, 1985, 1991). Film and other media have often 'specularized' men and the male body: 'People watch films partly to watch men' (Horrocks, 1995: 44; see Neale, 1983, Cohan and Hark, 1993; Kirkham and Thumim, 1993; Simpson, 1994). "Male subjectivity" has also been explored oppositionally. Silverman's (1992) *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* interrogates the dominant fiction ('the ideological reality through which we "ideally" live both the symbolic order and the mode of production', and 'whose most privileged term is the phallus'), and how this may be subverted in texts through symbolic castration, male masochism, identification with the Other, and various 'homosexualities'. She sees the Second World War and its aftermath as 'the historical moment at which the equation of the male sexual organ with the phallus could no longer be sustained' and that 'the disjunctive of those two terms ... led to a

collective loss of belief in the whole of the dominant fiction' (p. 2). In *Running Scared* Lehman (2007) investigated the patriarchal culture that keeps the male body, especially male genitals, frequently "out of sight" in mainstream film, novels, paintings, and other media. He highlights pervasive anxiety underlying images of the male body, and how attempts to keep male sexuality hidden in pursuit of "good taste" and avoidance of perversion maintain "male mystique" and preserve power of the phallus. This coheres with how men's bodies and skin are differentially marked in scarring and wounding (Burr and Hearn, 2008).

Gex: the gexed post-construction of males/masculinities/men and male/masculine/men's bodies

The notion of gex is a shorthand for gender/sex, and takes seriously the complex intersections of gender, sex and sexuality, rather than assuming that gender is a cultural construction of pre-existing sex, in this context the male sex. There are a range of contemporary developments that bear on this, and which suggest a different post-constructionist (Lykke, 2010) understanding of men/males/masculinities and bodies.

Social construction of biological males

Social accounts of the male body also bear on the very idea of (male) sex. While sex assignment is usually seen as strictly biological, this is not the whole story. Biological, chromosomal and hormonal approaches are complicated by a host of bio-cultural considerations around the notion of 'sex' itself.[2] Social constructionist accounts have long made this clear also within micro-sociological analysis, most famously by Garfinkel (1967),

[2] This has also been a long running in high level sports competition. These are both individual (for example, Eva Klobukowski, a 'woman' at 1964 Olympics failed chromosomal tests in 1967), and societal (in societies 'girls' may turn to become 'boys' at puberty). In 1992 some Winter Olympics women were tested of presence of Y chromosome; and this was opposed by 22 French biologists and geneticists on the grounds it was discriminatory to women. More recently, in 2009-2010 the South African athlete, Caster Semenya, had to undergo biological tests after doubts were raised, and later dismissed, about her sex.

and Kessler and McKenna (1978). Fausto-Sterling, herself an eminent biologist, has written extensively on the construction of the biological, including the biological male. Some biologists do only write on biology; they also provide accounts of human socialisation, along with the neatness of many biological accounts. She discusses the making of the male at birth, and how masculinity is indeed a social phenomenon, including assumptions of the active in/of masculinity, and of hormones as social drivers (Fausto-Sterling, 1995, 2000; see Garlick, 2003). Intersexual people, when told they had been assigned to the 'wrong' sex/gender, have sometimes experienced major psychological reactions, distress, mental illness, even suicide. For many years it has been recognized in medical cytogenetics that social sex and psychological sex/gender identity are partly matters of upbringing. In such accounts the sex male is a variable, indeed a 'summary', category, summarizing chromosomal variations, averaged though variable hormonal levels, that can be changed to some extent. This perspective problematizes relations of male, men and masculinities, as is made clearer in considering the considerable cultural variation in body types, various forms of sex changing,[3] and transgenderism. This fits with such diverse approaches as Dworkin's (1974) recognition that humans are multi-sexual; Laqueur's (1990) historical subversion of sex; and Butler's (1990) deconstruction of the sex-gender distinction as a socio-cultural construction: gender is not the cultural arrangement of *given* sex difference; rather sex/gender difference is a cultural arrangement, dominantly constructed by way of the heterosexual matrix. Accordingly, simple separations of male/men/masculine/masculinities are not viable.

Material-discursive males/men

[3] It is not uncommon for females to have higher androgens than average male, and, of course, hormonal levels can be changed by human interventions on the biochemistry of the body. Henriques et al. (1984: 21-2) note the example of Puerto Rican girls sexually maturing from six months, with full breast development at 4 years because of excess of oestrogen through chicken diet (cited in Edley and Wetherell, 1995: 36).

While poststructuralism can in part be interpreted as a critique of materialism, some versions of poststructuralism can be seen as expansions thereof. In some cases, convergence of the material and the discursive has become foregrounded, in materialist theories of discourse, its material contexts, material acts, and material effects. Intersections of poststructuralism and materialism suggest that gendered human-gendered nature relations, even matter itself can be seen as contingent processes; matter is both beyond humans and humanly made within an epistemological-ontological-ethical frame (Barad, 2006). Materialism can now be understood broadly as encompassing non-human nature, the social relations of production, science and technology, the bodily/corporeal (including sexuality and violence), as well as the materiality of discourse, and reproduction of ideas, ideology and discourse. Since the late 1980s I have sought to develop such a materialist-discursive analysis of men (Hearn, 1992a, 2011).[4]

These developments fit with debates on the body that move beyond oppositions of biology and social constructionism, and towards a concern with embodied material-discursive practices and processes. Such multiply-faceted concerns with the male body open up various more complex accounts of masculine bodies, being masculine, doing bodies. One approach is to address the relations of the phenomenological body in being men, the material body, and the discursive body, simultaneously. This has led to more complex, more subtle accounts of masculine/male/men's bodies. Thus Whitehead (2002) writes on the discursive materializing of the male body; Thomas argues for re-enfleshing boys' and men's bodies, and that the 'matter' of the male body may be "one possibly productive way to analyse male power and hegemony, and to reconfigure male identification and desire" (Thomas, 2002: 60). Scholars

[4] STS scholars have referred to the material-semiotic (Haraway, 1992) and human-nonhuman assemblies (Akrich and Latour, 1992) to address human/non-human, human/machine and similar relations. In this, gender and sex are not separable from bodily matter, and that "matter" is itself social and constructed in part through human species/non-human species interactions (cf. Haraway, 2008). The turn to materialism beyond separation of the material and the discursive/semiotic is referred to "new materialism" (Alamo and Hekman, 2008).

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have shown how gay and queer male sexuality may challenge, through penetrative sexual acts, the impermeability of male sexuality (Bersani, 1988; Waldby, 1995; Thomas, 2002). Other possible approaches stem from the disability movement, crip theory (McRuer, 2006), and studies of bodily (hetero)normativity (Gershick, 2005). These may serve to change gender relations and men's dominance in the bodily and sexual realms. At the same time STS has had profound impacts on conceptualizations of gender, as in gendered human/machine relations and technology as part of making gender more complex, contested, material, bodily, discursive. Men may develop close embodied (love?) relations with technologies such as cars or motorbikes. Technologies can act as prosthetics of or for men/males, as with high-tech sex dolls (Levy, 2007) or sexual virtual bodies (Hearn, 2006). Male/men's bodies and bodies for males/men become increasingly transnational, non-local, virtual.

To illustrate some of these complications further, I offer two examples. Bodies are central for the experience of ageing (Calasanti, 2003). Looking at older men necessarily entails looking at the body. Questions of embodiment and bodily normativity are less avoidable in addressing (men's) ageing. The social constructionist hegemonic masculinity frame is too weak for taking on board the complexities of ageing (Hearn, 1995; Hearn and Sandberg, 2009). The complex picture with men being both given status through ageing and old age, and marginalized is difficult to conceptualize within the hegemonic masculinity frame. Grosz (1994) argues that men's sexual and cultural practices produce a certain kind of body. Focus on erection, penetration, male orgasm and "male phallic sexuality" produces the hard impermeable non-receptive body. In ageing, the hegemony of men (Hearn, 2004), what it is to be a man, and masculinities, may be problematized, with frailty, disability, leakage, 'impotence', dependence less hidden. Ageing male/men's/masculine bodies are neither solely biological nor discursive processes. In foregrounding embodiment, traditions from

phenomenology, sexual difference and queer theory become especially relevant, for example, in making sense of older men's bodily relations to movement (or lack thereof), taking up space and activity, and bodily boundaries, fluidity, and leakages (cf. Grosz, 1994): Jackson (2001, 2003) has taken up older men's loss of bodily control and fragmentation of embodied knowledge. He advocates "gaining a more precise knowledge of my bodily limits and boundaries. Learning to recognise my body's specific, warning signs when I've been pushing myself too hard. An urgent need for gentleness towards my self." This contrasts to male bodies characterized as impermeable, hard and hermetic (Waldby, 1995; Sandberg, 2011).

Second, men's violence says and shows violent bodies. Males/men perpetrate most violence, especially planned, repeated, heavy, physically damaging, non-defensive, premeditated, non-retaliatory, sexualized, collective, institutional, and military violence. Men may be seen as naturally aggressive, and violence considered naturally associated with males/men; "Nature" may be invoked as justification for such violence. In researching men's violence to women I came to see how the social constructionist hegemonic masculinity frame does not work well in analyzing the problem (Hearn, 1998, 2003). In defining hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell, 1995: 77), the issue of legitimacy is central. However, with men's violence to women, from whom is legitimacy achieved and maintained? Perhaps the very mixing of "the hegemonic" and "masculinity" is a difficulty. Hegemonic presumably means having the character of hegemony or contributing to hegemony. Hegemony has moved from a configuration of material-discursive social forces and power, albeit contingent and contested, and to something (intuited, hypothetically) that informs (adjectivally, yet unclearly) masculinity as configuration of practice or cultural ideal

(even if not achievable) that legitimates domination. A focus on masculinities and hegemonic masculinity may shift emphasis from male/men's/masculine embodied material-discursive power. Though unintended, prioritization of masculinity may let males/men "off the hook" of responsibility for violence to women; it may diffuse critique of men. All can be against hegemonic masculinity, especially if it is a cultural ideal that is aspired to and does not exist; critiquing embodied males/men/masculinity is more delicate.

Situatedness, and towards the abolition of men

In making sense of the complex embodied discursive materialities of males/men/ masculinities, situated knowledges are crucial. These are a means of engaging with the relations between men/males as a gender class, and differences between men/males. A plural material-discursive approach to knowledge is likely to yield greater insights than a single grand theory. This includes naming men as men, yet decentring men. Naming men as men does not construct masculinities as simply variable, but seeks abolition of 'men' as a social category of power. This involves beginning from the assumption that the social category of men can be historically transitory. Plural situatedness is also part of a methodology for deconstructing the hegemony of men. Men's relations to this theoretical object may range from dismissal as irrelevant to immense uncertainty and humility to even a certain kind of social paralysis for some, or an awakening of renewed optimism of a future where gender is degendered, with the abolition of the category of men. This resonates with Lorber's (2000, 2005) degendering project and multiple framings of feminism (Egeberg Holmgren and Hearn, 2009). One of the clearest statements of this possibility of abolishing men is that by Monique Wittig in her analysis of the possibility of abolition of the categories of women and men:

> ... it is our historical task, and only ours (feminists) to define what we call

> oppression in materialist terms, to make it evident that women are a class, which is to say that the category "woman" as well as the category "man" are political and economic categories not eternal ones. Our fight aims to suppress men as a class, not through genocidal, but a political struggle. Once the class "men" disappears, "women" as a class will disappear as well, for there are no slaves without masters. (Wittig, 1992)

In seeking to understand possible moves towards the abolition of men, there are many possibilities. A variety of texts show the limitations of a view of gender as overly dichotomized or in a fixed relation to sex. These include historical and cross-societal analyses of "multiple gender ideologies" (Meigs, 1990) and "third sex/third gender" (Herdt, 1994). Other approaches derive from historical dialectical processes of transformation of men as a gender class (cf. Hearn, 2004; Howson, 2006). Another route derives from genderqueer, undoing gender, 'gender ambiguity' (Epstein and Straub, 1991), 'gender pluralism' (Monro, 2005), 'overlapping gender' (Jolly, 2007), refusing to be a man (Stoltenberg, 1989), effeminism (Dansky et al., 1977), and queer heterosexualities (Heasley, 2005). Indeed women and men, including transmen, can exhibit female masculinity (Halberstam, 1998).

Conclusion

In seeking to understand male/men's/masculine bodies, there are several key dimensions of difference, between: embodied sexed bodies and disembodied sexed minds; the biological and the socially constructed; the material and the discursive; the socially constructed and the post-constructionist material-discursive. Some accounts make clear separations between these two poles; others are more concerned with transcendence or dialectics of these poles. Some accounts are more concerned with just one of these poles; others are concerned with both

poles. A concept of gex points to the complexity of the embodied material-discursive simultaneity of males/men/masculinities.

Finally, what is specific about the focus on the male/ masculine/men's body/ies? Several themes recur: the norm of the unmarked; how being a man/men can be both the most embodied and the most disembodied of experiences; relations of dominance and embodiment; the place of the non-normative body within the normative; assertion of leaky, sensuous, open-ended embodiment; and the contingent relations of male/masculinities/men.

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