Gender and Sexuality

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(Un)writing Men's (Auto)biography, (Un)writing Men's History

Local, National, Transnational Perspectives

Jeff Hearn

I am not an historian, yet history, and indeed geography, seem permanently to preoccupy me. For a long time I have been seeing politics and society through history and geography. This historicisation and spatialisation has been intensified by living and working in Finland since 1997 after moving from England, where I had lived, and for the last four years also working in Sweden. In this article I address writing autobiographically and writing historically, by seeking to connect (my)self, the problematic of men, studies on men, and national postcolonial contexts. For one thing, this has led me to make my own (or former 'own') country's history and geography more *explicit*. The question of 'men' is not a distanced, abstract enterprise; it can be a matter of life and death.

Issues of personal biography and historical social structure, and their interrelations, have long been recognised as being at the centre of social critique.[1] This connection has been part of the expansion of scholarship on men and masculinities, even if often only implicitly. Here I interrogate relations of personal history/memory/autobiography (what some might call 'identity'), history (and what counts as such) and men/masculinities. I consider interplays of autobiography and gender relations, and trace some links between my/men's autobiography, men's history and ways of writing men. We know that 'Men [*sic*] make history but...not...under circumstances of their own choosing',[2] but what this means with recognition of the gendering of men is less clear. In doing this, I have used memories, autobiography, critical life history, auto-ethnography,[3] memory work[4] and more conventional methods.

Men's autobiography and men's history

Just as space operates locally, in and around the body, and post-locally, including on a global, transnational scale,[5] so time is both immediate and personal, and historical and societal. What does this mean for *men's auto-*

biography, and men's history? Some earlier debates on 'unwriting' men have addressed Unbecoming Men,[6] Refusing to be a Man,[7] effeminism,[8] subversion of men and gender traitorship.[9] Men can be both the writers/subjects and objects of autobiography/history; these distinctions exemplify wider questions of men theorising men.[10]

(Auto)biography and history are both in part forms of writing. They are, like other writing, subject to frequent rewriting—both in their 'initial', not original, production and their re-telling; they also need to be subject to unwriting. After all, man/Man/men is a social category, just as is woman/women. To understand, analyse and critique these category/ies, they have to be thoroughly de-naturalised and de-constructed, just as postcolonial theory deconstructs and de-naturalises the white subject. There is a danger, however, that in focusing primarily on masculinities that 'we' de-naturalise masculinities, and yet in so doing re-naturalise 'men'. The category of men is used and operates in society in many different ways: as individual men, groups of men, all men, the gender of men, in official, state, medical, religious discourse, and in other discursive or conversational ploys. This is why I favour linking hegemony to men.[11]

Within these contexts of *men's autobiography, and men's history* I approach the challenges of (un)writing in three main ways. First, is the basic *gender challenge*—of gendering, of moving from the presumed *'genderlessness'* of men and towards the gender-consciousness of being a man/men and of men's gendered history. Second is the *public/private challenge*, of the disruption of dominant narratives, of men's autobiography and men's history. This lies partly in moving from *heroic public achievement-orientation narrative*, usually with a focus in the public domain, and often including the marginalisation of women, children and 'the feminine', and towards the private and the blurred public/private boundary. Third, is the *temporal challenge* in both men's autobiography and men's history: of moving from *linearity*, and towards non-linearity and divergent writing forms. Together, these challenges can be seen as moving from taken-for-granted *gender power-coherence* towards gender power-consciousness.

These three challenges can apply in writing men: both in individual lives and their autobiographies, and in more macro-histories and history-making(s). Specifically, these challenges involve rethinking the constructing of men's autobiography and men's history, and the genderlessness of dominant approaches; avoiding heroism, avoiding seeing men at the centre of things, as the centre of (auto)biography—deconstructing the dominant, making the One the Other(s),[12] avoiding making women and the private sphere/life invisible; and avoiding a simplified linear approach. So, to name men in autobiography and history means explicit gendering, but in such a way that does not glorify men or place men at the centre of society and discourse.

I. The gender challenge: from 'genderlessness' to genderconsciousness

Gendering men

The first challenge is simply to write autobiography or history explicitly about 'being a man/men': to gender men, critically. This may be more difficult than it appears, just as fish do not need to theorise water. Gendering men is now established, critically. Over the last thirty years or so there has been a major expansion of critical gender research on men and masculinities. Men are just as gendered as women. In this critical development a number of theoretical moves in studying men can be identified. My approach here argues for interdisciplinary Critical Studies on Men (CSM):[13] that is, *historical, cultural, relational, materialist, deconstructive, anti-essentialist* studies on men. In writing men's autobiography and men's history, this involves, on one hand, *naming men as men*,[14] on the other, *deconstructing 'men'*.

Successive critiques have mirrored shifts in social science more generally, around biological essentialism, sex-role theory, patriarchy theory, and their critiques. In brief, these shifts can be understood as part of the development of the materialist theory of gender relations, in terms of social structures, embodied agency and discourse. The most influential work on 'masculinities' has been produced by the Australian sociologist, Raewyn (formerly R.W.) Connell and associates.[15] This approach can be characterised as:

- providing a critique of sex-role theory;
- using a power-laden concept of masculinities;
- analysing men's unequal relations to men as well as men's relations to women;
- considering the implications of gay liberation/scholarship and sexual hierarchies;
- specifying hegemonic, complicit, subordinated, marginalised masculinities;
- examining contradictions and resistances within and amongst masculinities;
- recognising institutional/social, interpersonal and intra-psychic levels; and
- highlighting transformations and change

Recently, there have been further shifts, with critiques of masculinities theory from various perspectives, for example, post-structuralism, postco-

lonialism and queer theory. This opens up complex forms of theorising at different levels of analysis.

The main insights of recent critical studies on men can be summarised as:

- a specific, rather than an implicit or incidental, focus on men and masculinities;
- taking account of feminist, gay, and other critical gender scholarship;
- recognising men and masculinities as explicitly gendered;
- understanding men and masculinities as socially constructed, produced, and reproduced rather than as just 'naturally' one way or another;
- seeing men and masculinities as variable and changing across time (history) and space (culture), within societies, and through life courses and biographies;
- emphasising men's relations, albeit differentially, to gendered power;
- spanning both the material and the discursive in analysis;
- interrogating the intersections of gender with other social divisions in the construction of men and multiple masculinities.[16]

(Un)writing men's autobiography and men's history I

Challenges to men from feminism—the 'Man Question'—have taken various shapes. In 1982 Amanda Sebestyen wrote: 'I see men as my political enemies. I don't want to kill them, that's too conservative a solution. I want them to stop being men any more';[17] in 1987 Alice Jardine: 'we do not want you to mimic us...What we want I would say what we need is your *work*'.[18] These immediately contradict the genderlessness of addressing 'men' in even 'critical', very critical, writing, within most men's writing that is self-consciously socialist, Marxist, Gramscian and derived from Critical Theory.

Some relatively early reflective political writings on men[19] emphasised the importance of autobiography, and in some national contexts biographical research continues to be a significant tradition for studying men's lives. Reflexive writing by men on academia has also been developed in a few instances;[20] others have explored the biographies of anti-sexist men,[21] memory work with profeminist men,[22] and ageing, autobiography and writing.[23] Over the last thirty years I have periodically wanted or needed to write 'genderedly' and autobiographically—on birth, children, childcare,[24] mothers and grandmothers,[25] sexuality and sexual violence,[26] academia,[27] nation, postcolonialism and men's politics,[28] transnationalisation,[29] academic and political influences,[30] exclusion through homosociality,[31] and gender injustice as a source of anger.[32]

Coming from...

I was born in Wood Street Nursing Home, Woolwich, London—the original home of The Arsenal football club, as my father always referred to them, with some unspoken link to his war service—and lived almost all my childhood nearby in Charlton. This was then a working-class area, probably known most widely for its football team at The Valley, which in the 1950s had the fame of the largest capacity ground outside Wembley, about 75,000? Living near there and seeing the men walking, converging, on the ground was truly exciting.

This made me feel pleased and proud, a feeling doubled when I learnt that Greenwich was home to the Meantime. My house was in-between these two landmarks. I recall those early maps of Christendom with Jerusalem at the centre. What luck!

This was a man's—or boys'—world.

There is no one formula for gendering men; rather there are many possible perspectives and methods. Gendering men is an aspiration, an imperative, a project. For men to write autobiographically or historically in different gendered ways involves naming men as men. This is not to make claims 'as men', not to use this as the basis of 'naming and claiming'[33] knowledge and privilege, when speaking 'as a man'. Stoltenberg[34] has shown how reference to 'as a man' is usually a means of reasserting male privilege; I generally agree. How to write on being a man/men in a gender-conscious way, whilst not marginalising women and children, is a key challenge.

Writing, rewriting, unwriting men's autobiography and men's history is not only a question of substantive gendering, but also necessarily a question of (e)valuation of the categories of experience and epistemology. (Men's) autobiography and (men's) history are drenched in epistemology, in asserting their knowledge from experience. There are different approaches to the status of experience with different epistemologies, generally and in studying men. To follow rationalists, innate ideas are not found in experience, but exist independently thereof, from the structure of the human mind or independently of mind, as in the 'essence' of 'deep masculinity' of Robert Bly and the mythopoetics. It is difficult to prove or disprove such knowledge. In this, men, or women, *know* what men are like, autobiographically, historically, even if evidence appears otherwise. In contrast, for empiricists knowledge is a product of learning based on human perception. In this, men need to be studied by sense perceptions, either one's own or more systematic study of others', as indicative of how men are. This perspective is the basis of much mainstream social science on men, and in a different

way much autobiography. The focus on perception, however, brings its own problems, since illusions and misunderstandings show that perception does not always depict the world as it 'really is'.

There are problems with both these epistemologies, certainly in any 'pure' form. Kant and many critical thinkers have developed some synthesis between these views. According to such views, people certainly have knowledge that is prior to experience, as in the principle of causality. Many have expanded this insight and developed forms of knowledge mixing elements of rationalism, empiricism and critical reflection, through emphasis on interpretation, or more socially grounded analysis of knowledge, as in the Hegelian-Marxist traditions and feminist and other standpoint theories. Standpoint traditions inform feminist and profeminist critical studies on men. A contentious issue is whether men can develop a standpoint that is both non-profeminist and not contrary to feminist interests; I am unconvinced of the viability of a non-profeminist standpoint position of men in producing scientific studies of men. Standpoint positions have in turn been challenged by post-modernist approaches, including post-modernist feminist positions. 'Post'-approaches can themselves be more or less anti-foundational, so producing possibilities of multiple accounts and realities, including of and about men.

These various epistemologies equally apply in writing men's gendered history. What happens in turning to history? So what does gendering men in men's history critically mean? Mainstream history has often been written by men about men, without noticing and explicitly gendering men, let alone critically. In such histories men are an absent presence, and women are generally an absence. In opposition to his story is writing women in(to) history and thus women's history. This explicit gendering of history provides the basis for writing men's history. Critical gendered men's history has grown gradually over the last thirty years. Pioneering examples include Sally Roesch Wagner's 1980s regular column on the gendered history of men in the NOMAS journal, *Changing Men*, special issues,[35] focused gendered studies of men[36] and course teaching.[37] More recently, there have been discussions on how the 'new men's history' may be able and may be used to avoid gendered power.[38] For myself, I became specifically interested in detailed historical change in charting late nineteenth century moves to modern public patriarchies. To make gendered sense of that involves a broader temporal and geographical view of gendered modernity.

In 1993 Connell published an important article 'The big picture: masculinities in recent world history'.[39] This was a relatively early attempt to lay the foundations of a broad historical sociology of men and masculinities, seen through the lens of changing political formations. Masculinities, or men's

collective and individual practices, are seen in history. The article provided the basis for a political sociology of cultural and historical patterns and their dominations by men through the lens of gender. Four major decisive changes in European life in the period 1450–1650[40] (Braudel's 'long sixteenth century') are detailed: 'disruption of medieval Catholicism by the spread of Renaissance culture and by the Protestant Reformation'; 'creation of the first overseas empires by the Atlantic seaboard states (Portugal and Spain, then Holland, England, and France) was a gendered enterprise from the start, an outgrowth of the segregated men's occupations of soldiering and sea trading'; 'growth of cities fuelled by commercial capitalism...created a mass milieu for everyday life that was more anonymous, and more coherently regulated, than the countryside'; 'onset of large-scale European civil war—the sixteenth-seventeenth-century wars of religion, merging into the dynastic wars of the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries—disrupted established gender orders profoundly'.[41] These changes linked with and led to radical assertions of gender equality, state consolidation, and greater centrality of warfare.

These moments provide indications of the form of macro-historical changes that are relevant for rethinking and placing men's history placing in a more global context. Global geopolitical analysis has been addressed more explicitly in another article,[42] 'Masculinities and globalisation', which outlines three forms of 'globalising masculinities', respectively '*masculinities of conquest and settlement*', 'masculinities of empire', and 'masculinities of postcolonialism and neoliberalism'.[43] In this, masculinities of conquest and settlement refer to practices by men at the frontiers of incipient empires. They were often drawn from more segregated, even rootless sectors of metropole society, combining an unusual level of violence and individualism in frontier activities. These were often, though not always, relatively autonomous from relevant state control, and especially so in the early stages of conquest and settlement. In some cases they involved the total or partial obliteration of local populations; in others, their effects were primarily in terms of ideological change of local and community gender orders. *Masculinities of empire* refer to differential practices of men within the context of more established empires. This involved, and continues to involve, gender ranking of different men and masculinities—some more highly valued, more 'masculine' (often the imperialists, colonisers and certain resistant colonised), some more 'effeminised' (certain others, less resistant colonised) than others. Empires also created opportunities for forms of administrative masculinities administering empires, and forms of economic individualism, and new distinctions by expertise, rather than violence, at the metropole. Processes of decolonisation tend to challenge and change former imperial gender orders and

hierarchies, producing *masculinities of postcolonialism and neoliberalism*. In some cases, this has meant an association of resistance, masculinity and violence, often disruptive of community-based gender orders. With breakdowns of old empires, new postcolonial masculinities have developed, often through global capitalism and neoliberalism. Though often couched in gender-neutral terms, such as 'the market', such changes have implications from the development of various new forms of masculinity, such as those in the operation and expansion of transnational business.

Both these articles[44] were course readings for the Summer School on 'Men and Masculinities' at the University of Latvia on which I taught in 2001. This gathering brought together a fascinating group of students from ten or more countries, from Central and Eastern Europe, and Western and Central Asia. They were thus varied in terms of nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, as well as of course their own particular personal sets of experiences. The idea of 'globalising masculinities'—or more precisely configurations of men's individual and collective practices—is to my mind a useful one, but a rather different viewpoint from the Western-centric one is needed to develop an analysis of the historical and geopolitical context of men and power in the transitional nations of Eurasia. One of the group tasks set on the summer school was to discuss the three forms of 'globalising masculinities' noted above in terms of the students' own historical, geopolitical, national and ethnic locations and experiences. This led to a particularly interesting series of debates and discussions on the course.

The re-focusing of globalising masculinities in terms of transitional, largely post-Soviet nations meant that different forms of masculinities of conquest and settlement, empire, and postcolonialism and neoliberalism could be drawn on to those based in or usually stressed from 'Western' perspectives. These included: the Russian and Czarist empires; conquest and settlement of Siberia; development of the Soviet Union as an empire; Stalinist 'ethnic cleansings' and mass political purges; communist and proto-communist empires; processes of Russification; the post-Soviet and post-socialist transitions; restatement and re-formation of republics, nations and ethnicities sometimes from pre-Soviet times; particular complex empires and national/ethnic formations and conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, including the Serbian empire; particular forms of post-Soviet capitalism and neoliberalism. Often these historical conditions have involved violence, institutionally and interpersonally. They are highly relevant for understanding men and masculinities.

A number of very interesting points were highlighted from this analysis. Perhaps first and foremost was the cross-cutting complexity of the intersections of masculinities with gender, nationality, ethnicity, religion and other social divisions. Second, there were the complications of empires having multiple centres and of contradictory empires. Third, the interplay, yet distinction, between the land of empires and imperial political systems needs to be noted. Fourth, there were the very specific political histories and recent trajectories of nations, proto-nations and ethnic groups of the former Soviet bloc and its allies, some within the Russian Federation, some independent republics within the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), some within newly independent republics. Fifth, the specific changing position of large numbers of Russians outside Russia in the post-Soviet period was important. Sixth, there was the complex, sometimes contradictory gender imagery and symbolism of empires and nations, and resistances to them. Global transnational analysis and contextualisation of men and power is a high priority.

II. The public/private challenge: from public heroics to public/private contradictions

A second challenge concerns the relation of the public and private, and more specifically the public heroic narrative, as in dominant narratives, of both men's autobiography and men's history. This raises the possibility of moving from heroic public achievement-orientation narrative, usually with a public-domain focus and marginalisation of women, children and 'the feminine', and towards the private and the blurred public/private boundary. This challenge overlaps with the previous point of writing with gender consciousness of 'being a man/men'. It may also lead to the deconstruction of the taken-for-granted dominance of men, the public domain(s), and the nation, along with the unified male self. At the macro level, the collective (male) subject,[45] often assumed in socialist and Marxist discourse, needs to be deconstructed.

(Un)writing men's autobiography II

Dominant forms of men's autobiography have traditionally focused on public heroic achievement-oriented narratives.[46] This issue is explicitly addressed by David Jackson[47] in his 'critical autobiography', using his own life as a resource to theorise male selfhood and gendered constructions of boys and men generally. In contrast to conventional public heroics, Jackson's key themes include 'refusing the search for the true self', 'the myth of unified identity', and 'refusing a split between the personal and the social'. A key challenge is how to move from the public/heroic focus towards the private and the public/private boundary, and from the marginalisation of women, children and 'the feminine' and towards their non-avoidance and recognition. There may well be a tension in focusing on men's private and

personal lives and giving full weight to the effects of men on women and children, and to women's and children's own material actions.

In the short book *Birth and Afterbirth*,[48] I deliberately emphasised my (sexual) difference from women in writing about babies, childbirth and looking after young children ('childwork'). I wrote this as part of the opening of the book with what I thought at the time was self-conscious irony:

> I never guessed babies would be this important. For a long time I thought they were things boring people had, that made women motherly and dim, that we [my then partner and I] wouldn't have or at least have for a while yet.[49]

...and after being at the birth of my third child...

> Next morning I found myself, lying in bed, knees up, getting rid of some wind by pushing down in the same way I had seen the previous night; then on the loo I had the very strange experience of momentarily believing/fantasising that the slime sticking to my anal hair was a 'show'.[50]

These were not meant as advocacy of biologism, rather commentary on the (patriarchal) social relations of reproduction[51] that prioritised the public actions and work over those in the private domains. On the other hand, this could be seen as a strategy for how I had 'got it wrong' in the past 'as a man', and how by implication I had now 'got it right' in the (then) present.[52]

The focus on the private has implications for others, including ethical issues in relation to others. When the former UK anti-sexist magazine *Achilles Heel* published a special issue on mothers I realised it was too difficult to write about my own mother, and decided instead to write on my grandmothers and one great-grandmother—all long dead—as, to say the obvious, grandmothers are mothers too. I tried to focus on my relationship to them rather than them as separate people.[53] In so doing, I was concerned that my mother might be annoyed or hurt when I wrote that visiting her mother was sometimes boring for a young child; in the event she seemed surprisingly pleased, even delighted, with the writing. Another device in gendering me(n) is gendered use of the father, often by distancing, so establishing a hierarchical relation of superiority, either way.[54]

Hélène Cixous has written: 'Men still have everything to say about their own sexuality'.[55] In *Birth and Afterbirth* I wrote about being 'effeminate'—not a very good word. Later I wrote about my own complex sexualities, for example, in terms of sexual non-intercourse, relations of heterosexuality and gayness.[56] This can be located into various coming out genres, without wishing to colonise specifically gay outs.

At home...

When I was young boy in London, I distinctly remember anti-catholic sentiments from my father. We lived near a RC church and the fact that this was well attended and partly by large Irish, Italian and other families was a source of irritation to him, or worse—a none-too-thinly disguised racism. I didn't realise its significance at the time. Now I see it was linked to his self-definition as a respectable man, favouring smaller, protestant families, rather than the larger, catholic, foreign, more 'unruly' ones. It was also probably linked to his assumption of class (and, in a sense, ethnic) superiority to my mother's non-respectable working-class family. Again, He also, from time to time, referred to my mother's relatives as 'rubbish'.

Moves to the private and personal, and the blurring of the private and public are also matters of forms of knowledge, as in the relation of the body and the bodily to what is *known*—the epistemological. This approach is taken up by Jackson,[57] especially in terms of loss of bodily control and the fragmentation of knowledge and narrative. Embodied knowledge is one form of knowledge. Accordingly, he writes of the need to re-integrate 'my expelled selves with my present identities, particularly my fantasised feminine selves, my anti-homophobic selves, my softer and more tender, masculine selves'. He advocates: 'Self-caring—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.' In different ways these represent examples of questioning, deconstructing autobiography the taken-for-granted dominance of the public domain(s) and the unified, rational male subject and even men. They are part of making the One(s) the Other(s).[58]

(Un)writing men's history II

How do these imperatives translate into historical terms? Unwriting also operates at the more macro level. The historicity of public/private boundary can be problematised through detailed unwriting men's history. In moving to Finland I have found it necessary to problematise the 'nation' and men's relation thereto, and place nations transnationally. The nation-state has been routinely male, into which women are allowed, recruited as citizens, voters, even soldiers and political leaders. This unwriting suggests a focus on the private or the blurred public/private boundary rather than public heroism.

Doing historical research on men means attending to particular historical sources as well as deconstructing the very notion of men's history. Sources include mainstream histories, and socialist, feminist and other critical histories, along with texts from the period in question. With men's societal domination such texts are usually by men, often about men, usually in an implicit way talking of 'men' and 'masculinities':[59] men writing men.[60] This raises the issue of the huge gaps in what has been recorded: privacy, domesticity and silence are crucially important. In assessing these gender, class and other invisibilities where are the subjectivities of men in, for example, the 1890s to be found? There is much documentation on prostitution, contraception and sexual violence, but less on domestic non-contraceptive sex, sexual non-intercourse, and feelings, ambivalences of sexuality. This is a world of fragments, diaries, 'fiction'.

In many ways, doing historical work on the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries led me to question the notion of masculinities, including hegemonic masculinity. It was difficult to transplant contemporary concepts historically back in time. Just as 'manliness' might mean different things,[61] so might masculinities. One example of this was the investigation of the historical construction of 'male' 'character'. The term masculinities might be very inappropriate in doing historical work.[62] In this sense, masculinity is no longer a mentalist construction but a historical material discursive construction of and by the male/masculine subject. So, how to tell some historical story, whilst focusing on the gendering of men and also the move from public heroics to the more everyday realities of private domains and the blurred public/private boundary? This work also pointed to the importance of deconstructing the public/private boundary, and working on the relations between and across social arenas. In working on the period 1870–1920 I specified key linkages between and across clusters of patriarchal arenas: economy, (hetero)sexuality and procreation; the fatherhood, professions and the state; (hetero)sexuality, private violence and the state.[63]

Men's historical relationships to the private sphere and the blurring of the public/private divide, need to be understood in relation to nation, state and welfare. These vary according to the specific histories of particular parts of the world, including intersections of welfare and warfare. While much social science can be characterised by methodological nationalism, it is necessary to deconstruct the nation, and men's relations of dominance thereto. The nation-state constructs men, and powerful men have historically constructed the nation-state. The specifics of 'the British case' need to be understood in relation to transnationalisation, its global power, Empire, language, class, gender, migration and constructions of citizenship, racialisation and sexuality. Contextualisations are demanded routinely in analysing marginalised countries; this should be taken up by larger, 'more central', more dominant societies, that take themselves for granted easily and powerfully.

This specificity becomes more apparent when placing the UK alongside another country, in this case Finland. The UK industrialised and urbanised early, is densely populated (some 59 million), and is ethnically and culturally diverse. In contrast, Finland is a newly established nation, formed from experience of imperialism in the north of Europe, with a harsh winter climate. By European standards, it industrialised and urbanised late, in the 1870s, then in the 1950s, is relatively lightly populated (about 5 million), and is ethnically relatively homogenous, especially in rural regions. The specificity of the UK is clearer when contrasted with Finland, positioned between Sweden and Russia, previously ruled by Sweden, then Russia. I write about Finland not for 'cultural comparison', but because living (t) here understanding the place and its very different history is necessary. This also unsettles my understandings of the UK.[64]

The classic taken-for-granted basis of private domain power is fatherhood. What happens if we consider this as an example of the social construction of men, i.e. fathers as men?[65] In the British case, following early industrialisation, state powers in relation to the private domain of fatherhood accumulated in the 1830s. The 1833 Factory Act regulated child labour, an early state intervention in fathers' authority; the 1833 Education Act began government grants for education; the Poor Law Amendment Act enabled family break-up in the workhouse. From 1839 fathers' rights over legitimate children were no longer absolute in law, though women and children were the property of the husband/father until 1857. However, despite some moves towards equalisation of women's and men's marital property rights, by the end of the nineteenth century little had shifted in men's authority over women and children in marriage in practice.

Similarly, that most 'private' matter of all, men's sexuality, needs to be understood in terms of the blurring of public and private domains. State and private life, especially men's sexuality, are intimately related, and still represent a neglected aspect of politics. From the late nineteenth century this included the impact of capitalist transformation, consolidation of the modern state and organisational growth more generally. Historical shifts in patriarchy, state and organisations have involved not so much the individual patriarchs' loss of power at home and work, as the rise

of novel organisational forms and sexual positionings of men. Relevant developments of both organisations and men's sexuality included: growth of film, mass media and media stars; mass popular photography; use of sexuality in advertising, public relations and 'girlie calendars'; the advent of typing, office technology and the female secretary (and her particular significance in male fantasy); expansion of sexology, the sex hygienist movement, and popular sex manuals; popular sex scandals; recognition of sexual harassment as a workplace issue; the rise of censorship, 'moral panics' and 'outrages'. Under the Contagious Diseases Acts a combination of men, as police, medics and justices, was able to enforce three months' detention in certain hospitals on women considered prostitutes in certain naval ports and garrison towns. Although these Acts may appear to be specifically about women and sexual procurement, they were implicitly about men's sexuality.[66]

Constructions of men in their public capacities, as workers and soldiers, around the turn of the twentieth century can be rethought in terms of private/public male bodies. Changing relations of men and nation derived from moves to modern welfare and national mass armies in the Boer and First World Wars. Recruitment campaigns appealed to men's responsibilities to defend Queen/King and Country, and 'their' women, children and families. They also revealed the parlous state of men's health. Response to this contributed to strong historical associations of manhood and the modern nation-state, involving, for some men at least, forms of imperialist manhood/nationhood, mediated by age, class, ethnicity and sexuality.[67] Through the twentieth century the norm of the 'working man', 'family wage' and 'family man' continued, through alliances of business, government and unions. The Second World War impacted strongly on national citizenship, planning, welfare and gender, with soldiers away from home, new patterns of gender-mixing and sexuality, women's work in industry (though later lost), and evacuation of women and children. Compulsory national service was abolished in 1957, while it continues for men in Finland, along with 'civilian service'.

The peculiar nature of British nation-state and 'welfare state', and men's relations thereto, derives from its peculiar history, with 'Great Britain' formerly at the 'centre' of its Empire. The state has been dominated by patriarchal, white ethnic, class interests, with an associated distrust of the state by the working classes, and broad antagonisms between the state and the individual. Demands for welfare reforms were made very much through women's political pressure and the labour movement, itself male-dominated. These histories intersect with those of 'race' and ethnicity, through imperialism, racial politics, and control of immigrations of black and minority ethnic people. The British state welfare system has taken gendered forms, as in relations of the male breadwinner family and state, with welfare widely assumed best to be delivered through the family rather than directly to individual citizens. The post-war welfare state was based on contributions and assumed lifelong employment for men, rather than women with family responsibilities.

In recent decades the state has been challenged, partly in its responses to Second Wave feminism. For example, with men's (often a husband or a father), violence to women and children, the state has been urged, for example, by Women's Aid, to increase its powers against husbands and fathers. Yet despite reforms in the 1960s and 1970s, no fundamental state action has occurred freeing women from violence.[68] In the 1990s and 2000s, such violences of men and fathers have been brought more fully into view, sometimes control, of the state, suggesting shifts in the public/private boundary.

In contrast, Finland is a 'young' nation-state, though maintaining some traditions from its Swedish, Russian and rural pasts. As with other Nordic nations with small, relatively homogenous populations, Finland developed a form of democracy involving a specific, positive relation of citizens and state. Rural traditions and lesser industrialisation and urbanisation made for a less interventionist state in the nineteenth century. Since 1866, parental punishment of children has been considered a legal violation, within the criminal law on assault, if severe bodily harm has been caused. Corporal punishment was only considered acceptable if causing mild bodily harm[69] and has since become totally illegal. From the late nineteenth century women had high participation in the labour market and trade unions, and strong educational traditions. Women were part of the struggle for national independence and suffrage was for all, women and men, in 1906. Governmental financial support to childcare centres began in 1913, and state legislation on financial support to kindergartens or childcare centres in 1923.[70]

In Finland the position of father as breadwinner was reinforced in the 1920s, with emphasis on women as responsible for raising the next generation.[71] Husbands' formal guardianship over wives continued until 1930.[72] In the 1930s the father as breadwinner was challenged, with working-class women's claims for the right to work.[73] The trade union movement took a more supportive position on women's employment than many union movements, though supporting a family wage system.[74] The 1936 Child Welfare Act gave the state the right to intervene in the family and suspend parental rights; children became entitled to state protection.[75]

During the Second World War, while British men/fathers/soldiers were away from home, Finnish men were occupied with fighting on the home front, first against the Russians, then the Germans. Finnish men and women lost much: they lost the battle but won the war against rejoining the Russian Empire, though large border areas were ceded to the Soviet Union. Significantly, these were in Karelia, the cradle of late nineteenth century Finnish cultural nationalism, leaving deep personal and family scars, which have fed into later debates on 'misery of men'.[76] Jaana Kuusipalo[77] says: 'During the war women took the main responsibility for farming and the production of industry as well as for the continuity of civil life and thus they were breaking the division of labour between the sexes. At the end of the Second World War more than one half of the Finnish industrial labour force consisted of women.'[78] Peacetime brought return of the father, yet Finnish women kept their jobs and did not return to home duties, as in the UK.

Like the UK, the basis of the Finnish welfare system was laid in the 1940s, 'the decade of family policy'.[79] With a coalition government of Agrarian and Social Democratic parties, welfare-state construction was part of a national consensus during and after the war. Maternity benefit, family allowances, free school lunches, child health centres, loans for newly married couples, child benefit and housing benefit for families with several children were introduced in the 1940s. Acts on municipal health visitors and midwives, school transport, health care of school children, housing production, and clothing for children of low-income families were passed between 1944 and 1958. While the British welfare state was an outgrowth of wartime and subsequent state concessions, the Finnish experience can be seen as part of merging of state and civil society in much closer ways: people 'are used to organising but their ideal is to act on behalf of their issues through the state, to pressure "the state to do something".'[80]

In the Finnish case, the 'woman-friendly' (compared with the UK) welfare state has been developed around employment, family, education and care, much less against violence and abuse. In the 1970s the 'child package', including the Paternity and Child Maintenance Acts, was enacted. The former began from the child's 'right to have a father'. A married man automatically becomes the father to a child born to a woman to whom he is married;[81] an unmarried man can become a child's father in law through voluntary recognition or establishing paternity by the court. The 1983 Finnish Child Welfare Act embodied the principle of children's welfare as paramount, in social work, education, health, planning, and other state functions.

There has been much greater development of a preventive, institutional, 'consensual' welfare state than in the UK. The Nordic model has provided strong support for family life, greater public participation by women and more child-friendly welfare. Family support has been the focus rather than child protection. All this has spread care work *among women*, and supported taken-for-granted patriarchal fatherhood within heterosexual families, as in 'shared care' after divorce, even when abuse has occurred. Levels of men's 'domestic violence' remain rather similar in Finland and the UK.[82] State welfare contexts in the UK and Finland are distinct. In the UK this follows from its class, imperial history, the Finnish its Nordic welfare nation-state for a relatively homogenous population. UK public child care remains low, even with recent increases. A patriarchal welfare state tradition continues, with antagonism of state and recalcitrant men/fathers; remedial rather than preventive family policy, separating child protection from general child welfare; family- and individual child-orientated rather than community intervention; law-led 'legalism' rather than discretion-based intervention; family policy separated from income maintenance. 'Private' men have been constructed differently at the private/public boundary in the UK, with moves to fragmentation of fatherhood.[83]

III. The temporal challenge: from linearity to...

(Un)writing men's autobiography and men's history III

Gendering men and blurring the private/public boundary prompt a third challenge: to rethink *time*, 'the relationship between past and present', 'challenging chronological, linear sequence'.[84] The rationale for looking at the past lies paradoxically in the present, specifically here the need to understand men's power, men's identities and men's relations to private/public, sexuality, the body—have all been problematic.

In 1995 I met my partner, and soon after moved to Finland. I have since begun working in Sweden, and thus have three main countries, with which I have different relations. Interestingly, nationality seems to be rarely addressed reflexively in this critical men's autobiography.[85] All this makes for some fragmentation of experience, my autobiography, my self. Sweden figures as future (what is in store?), as present (partly where I work), and as past (the imagery is intense—for example, contradictorily the 'fount' and 'leader' of gender equality, and its 1960s 'sexual' reputation).

Moving north to postcolonialism

At just 18 I went (up) to Oxford. There I met, encountered for the first time upper-class boys/young men/men. When I was at university I struggled to make sense of the class privilege of Oxford and my own working-class cultural background. Marxism replaced religion and my own identifications included support for Irish Republicanism. On the wall of my college room was a map of united Ireland. It was graphically traditional and politically stated; most other students didn't give it a second thought.

After graduating, I had the offer of staying on as a research student, but turned it down and went to study urban planning and sociology—what I saw as more useful, more politically engaged in the 'real world'. I began the gradual move northwards—I had the feeling that the North would be the place where I could be more useful, where there was more 'authenticity', where within the close-grained interstices if toughness it was possible to be someone else than how I was in the confines of London.

Going north was a move to a subordinated part of England, a regional postcolony, and to a subordinated part of me. It also carried a sexual subtext ñ the illusion of a place where I might meet a woman who was a 'real kindred spirit' or 'soulmate' and where the ties of bourgeois heterosexuality would be less stringent.

Class, ethnicity and sexuality were all inflected in the move north. As it happens, I was moving in 1974 to Bradford, an area that was industrialised early and so was one of the first to decline. The low wage workforce was maintained by successive waves of cheap labour migrants from Ireland, Eastern Europe and South Asia, especially Pakistan, specifically Mirpur in the North there. The city has the largest proportion of Pakistani residents. In Bradford I lived in an ethnically mixed area and came to appreciate the diversity of ways of being men and the diversity of ways of enacting patriarchies. This was postcolonialism within an imperialist or post-imperial country.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s I realised my profeminist, personal-political interests were very close to my (profeminist) working, academic and theoretical interests. My researching on men comes from that tradition, perhaps more obvious in 1970s and 1980s socialist and feminist circles. 'Men' are a social political matter and have more significant material effects than just as outcomes of text.

Finding men problematic

Why and how did I become bothered by all stuff about men (and masculinities)? The beginning point is perhaps a little arbitrary; I could begin the story when I was five or six or seven. At five I went to a mixed primary school; my best friends there were three girls—Judith, Gillian and Mavis. Two years later I left that school and went, as was usual then, to the local all-boys junior school; that's the last I saw or heard or them. I wasn't keen on the way the 'big boys' played. Or I could begin by talking about my admiration for my Victorian-style greatgrandmother or…

I usually begin this story in 1978, living with my then partner and three young children, very concerned about the many messages of feminism, and particularly conscious of most men's avoidance of care for children. Most men who seemed sympathetic to feminism seemed to me to be unconcerned about the facts and labour of child care. From this, I became involved in founding of two groups centrally concerned with social change around gendered power relations—one a mixed-group campaigning for more provisions for under-fives, their mothers and other carers; the other a men's group broadly anti-sexist and broadly focused on consciousness-raising. The men in these groups came from outside Bradford. These and other similar personal-political initiatives became my political home; I have been involved in numerous anti-sexist, pro-feminist campaigns and groups since.

In 1978 I began writing on men, initially as a record of being at and around the birth of my third child. This coincided with an ongoing interest in work, careers, gender and theorising patriarchy. One of the early pieces of my writing—a short book on men's and my relationship to Birth and Afterbirth written for personal and political reasons—was used by a university colleague in teaching on Human Development and Socialisation! My personal/political interest was being academicised.

These non-chronological reflections, though personal, resonate with more challenges and constructions of men's history, and the need to disrupt and deconstruct dominant, often taken for granted, mythic linear temporalities. Brian Roberts[86] has discussed the complexities of variations in forms of time: how the past, present and future can be multiple permutations in how people speak about themselves, others and their 'community'.[87] Individual memories are told in contexts of and interrelations with collective memories[88] and forgettings,[89] with various 'paradigm transformations' in political interpretive approaches to memory, subjectivity and oral history.[90] Autobiography and history do not necessarily build on simple

past-to-present narratives; they can move back and forth, with contradictions; they can be unwritten in terms of changing work, domesticity, sexuality, violence, and so on. Differing time perspectives are linguistic/written constructions and constructions of self, community, history 'itself'. In much historical writing and constructions of history well-entrenched time perspectives and male narratives, individual or collective, remain in use:

As Brian Roberts writes:[91]

> Where history-writing has a strong narrative structure there is a keen sense of continuity associated with the underlying application of 'story'. Here, the use of past-present may be discerned—often held together by some assumptions of themes based on the continuity or revival of traditions and roots. This is found particularly where there is reliance on 'national' stories, past heroes, symbolic past events, group or national character, victories and setbacks, and myths which simplify the complexities of historical circumstances to sustain the overall moral and story.

To say the obvious by now, such 'national' stories, past heroes, victories and setbacks, myths, and so on, are often male-dominated, as conventional men's histories, whether individualist, collectivist, socialist, bourgeois or whatever. Seamless continuity of 'past to present' seen through (certain) men's public-domain achievements and heroics is engrained in such dominant histories. This connects with debates on different understandings of what history is. For example, Robert Grele[92] has discussed the complex relations of oral history and different versions of history, including what[93] he calls 'History 2': that 'is a history based upon personal forms of work and identity, heavy on collective understanding of ceaseless time, non-changing patterns of social and moral relations.' The easy gendered temporality of men's mainstream histories need to be disrupted and deconstructed, as part of unwriting men's history and men's autobiography, to various non-linearities and divergences.

Some end comments

Conventional men's autobiography and men's history have usually ignored men's gender relations, and instead reproduced patriarchal social relations through their own practices. There is the characteristic silence on the gendered reflexivity of the author and constitution of that writing. Changing this involves problematising silences that have persisted on both the category of men and men's practices in autobiography and history. Linked questions are: How can the silences there are about men's reflexive gendered presence be countered, including silence on itself? How to reconstitute the silences around the relation of men and such writing? In confronting 'silences of men', critical autobiographical and historical texts can be useful in creating and situating knowledge.

My concerns here are clear and simple—male-dominated gender oppression continues—yet it is extremely complex. Locally and globally, gender injustice is rife, is a source and site of oppression, discrimination, violence and much more. This is intolerable and takes many forms: consider who does most of the world's killing. There are various places of departure to this problematic, yet the intertwining of personal, political, historical and theoretical elements recurs.[94] How gender relations are organised is disturbing; it is personally painful, even if (being a man) I benefit. Researching and theorising men are similar contradictory experiences. This demands political action by men, just as racist regimes need to be resisted by white people. Additionally, there are ambiguities, ambivalences, contradictions, differences, fragmentations, fracturings, intersectionalities and paradoxes in the politics of men and on men; men's gender class combines with multiple practices of power. Such matters, silences and challenges need to be part of unwriting men's autobiography and men's history: moving from the pervasive *taken-for-grantedness* of gender power towards gender power-consciousness.

Notes

1. C.W. Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York, 1959).
2. The fuller extract runs: 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances of their own choosing, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.' Marx, Karl (1852), *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Online: Available at: http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ (Accessed 12 December 2009), pp.147–63.
3. Rosanna Hertz (ed.), *Reflexivity and Voice* (Thousand Oaks, 1987).
4. Frigga Haug, *Female Sexualisation* (London, 1987).
5. Jeff Hearn and Linn Sandberg , 'Older Men, Ageing and Power: Masculinities Theory and Alternative Spatialised Theoretical Perspectives', *Sextant: Journal of Women's Studies*, 27 (2008).
6. Mike Bradley et al., *Unbecoming Men: A Men's Consciousness-Raising Group Writes on Oppression and Themselves* (New York, 1971).
7. John Stoltenberg, *Refusing to be a Man* (Suffolk, 1987).
8. Stephen Dansky, John Knoebel and Kenneth Pitchford (1977), 'The Effeminist Manifesto', in Jon Snodgrass (ed.), *A Book of Readings For Men Against Sexism*

(Albion, CA, 1977), pp.116–20.
9. Jeff Hearn, *Men in the Public Eye. The Construction and Deconstruction of Public Men and Public Patriarchies* (London and New York, 1992).
10. Jeff Hearn, 'Theorizing Men and Men's Theorizing: Men's Discursive Practices in Theorizing Men', *Theory and Society*, 27:6 (1998), pp.781–816.
11. Jeff Hearn, 'From Hegemonic Masculinity to the Hegemony of Men', *Feminist Theory*, 5:1 (2004a), pp.49–72.
12. Jeff Hearn, 'Deconstructing the Dominant: Making the One(s) the Other(s)', *Organization: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Organization, Theory and Society*, 3:4 (1996), pp.611–26.
13. Jeff Hearn, 'The Implications of Critical Studies on Men', *NORA: Nordic Journal of Women's Studies*, 5:1 (1997), pp.48–60.
14. David L. Collinson, and Jeff Hearn, 'Naming Men as Men: Implications for Work, Organisations and Management', *Gender, Work and Organisation*, 1:1 (1994), pp.2–22; Jalna Hanmer, 'Men, Power and the Exploitation of Women', in Jeff Hearn and David Morgan (eds), *Men, Masculinities and Social Theory* (London and New York, 1990), pp.21–42.
15. See for example Tim Carrigan, R.W. Connell and John Lee, 'Towards a New Sociology of Masculinity', *Theory and Society* 14:5 (1985), pp.551–604.
16. Michael Kimmel, Jeff Hearn and R.W. Connell (eds), *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities* (Thousand Oaks, CA, 2005).
17. Amanda Sebestyen, quoted in Scarlet Friedman and Elizabeth Sarah (eds), *On the Problem of Men* (London, 1982) p.23.
18. Alice Jardine, 'Men in Feminism: *Odor di oumo or compagnons de route?*' in Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (eds), *Men in Feminism* (London, 1987), p.61.
19. Bradley et al., *Unbecoming Men*; David Jackson, *Unmasking Masculinity: A Critical Autobiography* (London, 1990); Victor J. Seidler (ed.), *The Achilles Heel Reader: Men, Sexual Politics and Socialism* (London and New York, 1991); Jon Snodgrass (ed.), *A Book of Readings For Men Against Sexism* (Albion, CA, 1977); David Steinberg, *Fatherjournal: Five Years of Awakening to Fatherhood* (Albion, 1977).
20. R.W Connell, 'Long and Winding Road', in Barbara Laslett and Barrie Thorne (eds), *Feminist Sociology: Life Histories of a Movement* (New Brunswick, 1997), pp.151–64.; David H. J. Morgan, 'Men, Masculinity and the Process of Sociological Enquiry', in Helen Roberts (ed.), *Doing Feminist Research* (London, 1980), pp.83–113; Eric Mykhalovskiy, 'Reconsidering "Table Talk": Critical Thoughts on the Relationship between Sociology, Autobiography, and Self-indulgence', in Rosanne Hertz (ed.), *Reflexivity and Voice* (Thousand Oaks, CA, 1997), pp.229–51; Michael Silverstein (1977) 'The History of a Short, Unsuccessful Academic Career (with a postscript update)', in Snodgrass, *A Book of Readings for Men Against Sexism*, pp.177–97.
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23. David Jackson, 'Masculinity Challenges to an Ageing Man's Embodied Selves: Stuggles, Collusions and Resistances', *Auto/Biography*, 9:1 and 2 (2001), pp.107–15; David Jackson, 'Beyond One-dimensional Models of Masculinity: A Life-course Perspective on the Processes of Becoming Masculine', *Auto/Biography*, 11:1 and 2 (2003), pp.71–87.
24. Jeff Hearn, *Birth and Afterbirth: A Materialist Account* (London, 1983); Jeff Hearn, 'Childbirth, Men and the Problem of Fatherhood', *Radical Community Medicine*, 15 (1984), pp.9–19.
25. Jeff Hearn, 'Grans, Nans and Other Mums', *Achilles Heel*, 12 (1991), pp.22–4.
26. Jeff Hearn, 'The Personal, the Political, the Theoretical: the Case of Men's Sexualities and Sexual Violences', in David Porter (ed.), *Between Men and Feminism* (London and New York, 1992), pp.161–81.
27. Jeff Hearn, 'Men, Managers and Management: The Case of Higher Education', in Stephen Whitehead and Roy Moodley (eds), *Transforming Managers: Engendering Change in the Public Sector* (London, 1999), pp.123–44; Jeff Hearn 'Organization Violations in Practice: A Case Study in a University Setting', *Culture and Organization*, 9:4 (2004), pp.253–73; Jeff Hearn 'Personal Resistance Through Persistence to Organizational Resistance Through Distance', in Robyn Thomas, Albert J. Mills and Jean Helms Mills (eds), *Identity Politics at Work: Resisting Gender, Gendering Resistance* (London, 2004), pp.40–63.
28. Jeff Hearn, 'Autobiography, Nation, Postcolonialism and Gender: Reflecting on Men in England, Finland and Ireland', *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 14:2 (2005), pp.66–93.
29. Jeff Hearn, 'Feeling Out of Place? Towards the Transnationalisations of Emotions', in Stephen Fineman (ed.), *The Emotional Organisation: Passion and Power* (Oxford, 2005), pp.184–201.
30. Jeff Hearn, 'The Personal is Work is Political is Theoretical: Continuities and Discontinuities in (Pro)feminism, Women's Studies, Men and My Selves', *NORA: Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 16:4 (2008), pp.241–56.
31. Jeff Hearn, 'Personal Resistance Through Persistence to Organisational Resistance Through Distance'.
32. Jeff Hearn, 'Men: Power, Challenges of Power and the "Big Picture" of Globalisation', in Irina Novikova and Dimitar Kambourov (eds), *Men and Masculinities in the Global World: Integrating Post-socialist Perspectives* (Helsinki: 2003), pp.45–74.
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34. Stoltenberg, *Refusing to be a Man.*
35. *Gender and History*, Special issue 'Formations of Masculinity', 1:2 (1989).
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40. Connell, 'The Big Picture: Masculinities in Recent World History', p.607.
41. Connell, 'The Big Picture: Masculinities in Recent World History', pp.607–8.
42. Connell, 'Men in the World', *Men and Masculinities*, 1:1 (1998), pp.3–23.
43. Connell, 'Men in the World', pp.12–16.
44. Connell, 'The Big Picture: Masculinities in Recent World History'; Connell, 'Men in the World'.
45. Paul Connerton, 'The Collective Historical Subject: Reflections on Lukacs' History and Class Consciousness', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 25:2: (1994), pp.162–78.
46. Jackson (1990) uses the cricketer Geoff Boycott, the writer Roald Dahl and the politician David Owen as examples of such autobiographies.
47. David Jackson, *Unmasking Masculinity: A Critical Autobiography* (London, 1990).
48. Hearn, *Birth and Afterbirth*.
49. Hearn, *Birth and Afterbirth*, p.9.
50. Hearn, *Birth and Afterbirth*, p.15.
51. Jeff Hearn, *The Gender of Oppression. Men, Masculinity and the Critique of Marxism* (Brighton, 1987), Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (London, 1981).
52. This is comparable to another way in which men may talk about their violence to women, see Jeff Hearn, *The Violences of Men: How Men Talk About and How Agencies Respond to Men's Violence to Women* (London, 1998).
53. Hearn, 'Grans, nans and other mums'.
54. This is resonant with how some men talk about their violence to women, by saying they are not as violent as some (other) men. See Hearn, *The Violences of Men*.
55. Jardine, 'Men in Feminism', p.61.
56. Hearn, *Men in the Public Eye*.
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Peacock Revolution

Mainstreaming Queer Styles in Post-war Britain, 1945–1967

Justin Bengry

By 1964, aged just 27 and operating eighteen boutiques, John Stephen had already become known as the 'King of Carnaby Street'. He owned a £6,000 Rolls Royce and was fast approaching millionaire status.[1] By 1965, his empire had grown to include 22 shops throughout London and Brighton.[2] Through the early and mid 1960s, Stephen's success seemed unstoppable. His was a 'rags to riches' story. A self-described 'nobody—just the third youngest of the nine children of a small shopkeeper [from] the dock area of Glasgow', Stephen would make his fortune repackaging queer styles for the mainstream market, heralding the 1960's 'Peacock Revolution' in British menswear.[3] Stephen was not the first designer or retailer to introduce queer styles and fashions. He was, however, the most successful to balance the homosexual associations of his styles with hetero-normative masculinity in order to appeal to a new and burgeoning young male consumer base.

Cultural studies scholar Elizabeth Wilson defines fashion as 'an aesthetic medium for the expression of ideas, desires and beliefs circulating in society'.[4] In other words, fashion and style are ideological. But they are also material and commercial, based ultimately on the production of a consumer article and its success in the marketplace. Exploring the cases of early physique photographer and Soho boutique owner Vince, and his Carnaby Street successor John Stephen, this article identifies an important moment in the invocation, sanitisation and manipulation of homosexuality in Britain's public commercial sphere. The success of Carnaby Street, and the aesthetic associated with it, indicates a thriving relationship between homosexuality and capitalist strategies even before the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967. The stories of Vince and Stephen illuminate this place where the ideological and the material meet.

Based initially on an outright courting of queer customers in publications known to have substantial homosexual readerships, both Vince and later Stephen recognised the lucrative potential of the homosexual market,