

BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

Department of Sociology

Soc 114a

Psychoanalytic Sociology: Masculinities

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Overview

“Are you man enough for that?” “When does a boy become a man?” “Wow, he’s a man’s man!” “What a manly thing to do!” “Real men don’t eat quiche.” Men who disagree with a certain governor are “girlie-men.” “Men don’t cry.” “What a hunk!” “It’s a guy thing.”

We know what males are biologically, and we know what females are biologically. In both cases, their sex is overtly identified by their genitals. But to what extent, if at all, do their genitals determine their behavior? It is widely agreed today in social science that *sex* refers to our biological equipment and that *gender* refers to our sociological, anthropological, and psychological equipment, so to speak. We *learn* how to *behave* as boys and girls, women and men. To put it another way, gender is socially constructed. Although penises and testicles, vaginas and uteruses, work the same ways in all societies, gender varies considerably from one place to another and from one era to another.

Assuming all people initially had about the same feelings; about the same desires for security and meaning; about the same needs for companionship, love, and nurturing; about the same wishes to live effectively in their environments, how might it have happened that masculinity and femininity became so strikingly different in their constructions?

One of the consequences of those differences is that men have tended throughout most of history to dominate women. Patriarchy is defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary this way: “social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line; *broadly* : control by men of a disproportionately large share of power.” Patriarchy then describes a *structure* wherein men dominate women (and children). Sexism describes the attitudes and behaviors that follow from patriarchy.

While it is not difficult to understand that gender is socially constructed, that does not mean that there is a clear or single set of behaviors that define one as a man in this or

any society. “Masculinity” is a general and vague term. Upon close inspection, there are many “masculinities.” Athletes and scholars, businessmen and clergy, poets and workers, gay men and straight, members of one ethnic or race or social class culture or another do not exhibit the same ways of being what any of them might call masculine. Nor do they all think of masculinity in the same way.

Largely as a consequence of many years of the women’s and the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender movements, it is increasingly common for men to inquire into what it means to be a man and how one might reassess what one has taken for granted about what it is to be a man. This course is meant to be an entrée into examining some of the discourse on this topic and helping students, whether they are male or female, find their way to evolve ever more sophisticated ways of understanding gender and acting on those understandings.

Required Readings

Books: required

- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990
- Connell, R.W. *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. 2nd edition, printed 2005
- Ducat, Steven, *The Wimp Factor*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2004
- Ferguson, Ann. *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000
- Kimmel, Michael and Michael Messner. *Men’s Lives, 6th Edition*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2003
- Messner, Michael. *Power at Play: Sports and the problem of Masculinities*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992
- Walker, Rebecca. *What Makes a Man*. New York: Penguin, 2004

Books: and articles recommended and/or from which required readings (on Web CT) will be drawn

- Bettelheim, Bruno. *Symbolic Wounds: Puberty Rites and the Envious Male*. New York: Collier Books, 1962
- Brod, Harry (ed.). *A Mensch Among Men: Explorations in Jewish Masculinity*. Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1988
- “Connell’s Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: a Critique,” Demetrakis Z. Demetriou, in *Theory and Society*, 30.3 (Jun 2001), 337-361.
- Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998
- Kimmel, Michael. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: Free Press, 1996. 2nd edition to be released Dec 2005

- Kimmel, Michael. *The History of Men: Essays in the History of American and British Masculinities*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005
- Kimmel, Michael, *The Gender of Desire*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2005
- McKay, Jim, Michael Messner, and Don Sabo, eds, *Masculinities, Gender Relations, and Sport*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000.
- Sabo, Don, Terry A. Kupers, and Willie London, eds., *Prison Masculinities*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001.
- Stoltenberg, John. *Refusing to be a Man: Essays on Sex and Justice*. Portland, OR: Breitenbush Books, 1989
- Thorne, Barrie. *Gender Play: Boys and Girls in Schools*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993
- Zirin, Dave. *What's My Name, Fool? Sports and Resistance in the United States*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005.