Masculinity as Homophobia
Feat, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity

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"Funny thing," [Carley's wife] said. "If I catch any one man, and he's alone, I get along fine with him. But just let two of the guys get together at you won't talk. Just nothing but roar." She dropped her fingers and put her hands on her hips. "You're all scared of each other, that's what. Ever' one of you scared the reet is goin' to get something on you."

John Steinbeck. *Of Mice and Men* (1937)

We think of manhood as external, a timeless essence that resides deep in the heart of every man. We think of masculinity as a thing, a quality that one either has or doesn't have. We think of manhood as innate, residing in the particular biophysical composition of the human male, the result of androgens or the possession of a penis. We think of masculinity as a transcendental tangible property that each man must manifest in the world, the reward presented with great ceremony to a young service by his elders for having successfully completed an arduous initiation ritual. In the words of poet

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Theorizing Masculinities

Robert Wily (1990), "The structure at the bottom of the male psyche is still as firm as it was twenty thousand years ago" (p. 230).

In this chapter, I view masculinity as a constantly changing collection of meanings that we construct through our relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with our world. Manhood is neither static nor timeless; it is not an abstraction or a myth. Manhood is a product of our biological makeup; it is created in culture. Masculinity means different things at different times to different people. We come to know what it means to be a man in our culture by setting our definitions in opposition to a set of "others"—racial minorities, sexual minorities, and, above all, women.

Our definitions of manhood are constantly changing, being played out in the political and social terrain on which the relationships between women and men are played out. In fact, the search for a transcendent, timeless definition of manhood is itself a sociological phenomenon—what we need to search for is a timeless and eternal meaning of crisis, those points of transition where old definitions no longer work and new definitions are yet to be firmly established.

This idea that manhood is socially constructed and historically shifting should not be understood as a loss, that something is being taken away from men. In fact, it gives us something extraordinarily valuable—a capacity to act. It gives us a sense of historical possibilities to replace the repressive resignation that inevitably attends timeless, ahistorical essentialisms. Our behaviors are not simply "just human nature" because "boys will be boys." From the materials we find around us in our culture—other people, ideas, objects—we actively create our worlds, our identities. Men, both individually and collectively, can change.

In this chapter, I explore this social and historical construction of both biogenetic masculinity and masculinity as it is experienced by young men, offering a new theoretical model of American manhood. To accomplish this I first uncover some of the hidden gender meanings in classical statements of social and political philosophy, so that I can anchor the emergence of contemporary manhood in specific historical and social contexts. Then I spell out the ways in which this version of masculinity emerged in the United States, by tracing both psychodynamic developmental sequences and a historical trajectory in the development of marketplace relationships.

Classical Social Theory as a Hidden Meditation of Manhood

Begin this inquiry by looking at four passages from this set of texts commonly called classical social and political theory. You will, no doubt, recognize them, but I invite you to recall the way we discussed them in your undergraduate or graduate courses in theory.

The bourgeois cannot exist without constantly reorienting the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production, interrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed relations, relations with their truism of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relation with his kind. (Marx & Engels, 1848/1964)

An American will build a house in which to pass his old age and sell it before the roof is on; he will gather a garden and rent it just as the trees are coming into bearing; he will plant a field and leave others to reap the harvest; he will take up a profession and leave it, settle in one place and go off elsewhere with his changing desires. At first sight there is something astonishing in this spectacle of so many lucky men restless in the midst of abundance. But it is a spectacle as old as the world; all that is new is to see a whole people performing in it. (Thoreau, 1855/1965)

Where the fulfillment of the calling cannot directly be related to the highest spiritual and cultural values, or when, for the other hand, it need not be felt simply as economic compulsion, the individual generally abandons the attempt to justify it at all. In the field of his highest development, in the United States, the pursuit of wealth, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends to become associated with purely material purposes, which often virtually give it the character of sport. (Weber, 1905/1966)

We are warned by a proverb against seeking two masters at the same time. The poor man has things even worse; it serves three severe masters and does what it can to bring their claims and demands into harmony with one another. These claims are always divergent and often seem incompatible. No wonder that the ego so often fails in its task. As three tyrannical masters are the
MASCULINITY AS HOMOPHILIC

The idea of masculinity expressed in the previous extracts is the product of historical shifts in the grounds on which men rested their sense of themselves as men. To argue that cultural definitions of gender identity are historically specific goes only so far; we have to specify exactly what those models were. In any historical inquiry into the development of these models of manhood I chart the fate of two models for manhood at the turn of the 19th century and the emergence of a third in the first few decades of that century.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, two models of manhood prevailed. The Genteel Patrician derived his identity from landownership. Supposing the estate, he was refined, elegant, and given to casual refections. He was a mixing and devoted father, who spent much of his time supervising the estate and with his family. Think of George Washington or Thomas Jefferson as examples. By contrast, the Heroic Artisan embodied the physical strength and republican virtue that Jefferson observed in the yeoman farmer, independent urban craftsman, or shopkeeper. Also a devoted father, the Heroic Artisan taught his son the craft, bringing him through formal apprenticeship to status as master craftsman. Economically autonomous, the Heroic Artisan also cherished his democratic community, delighting in the participatory democracy of the town meeting. Think of Paul Revere at his pewter shop, thrissleves rolled up, a leather apron—a man who took pride in his work.

Hercule Artisans and Genteel Patricians lived in causal accord, in part because their gender ideals were complementary (both supported participatory democracy and individual autonomy, although patriarchs tended to support more powerful state machinery and also supported slavery) and because they rarely saw one another. Artisans were deliberately urban and the Genteel Patricians ruled their rural estates. By the 1830s, this causal symbiosis was shattered by the emergence of a new vision of masculinity: Marketman Masculinity.

Marketman Masculinity derived its identity entirely from his success in the capitalist marketplace, as he accumulated wealth, power, status. He was the urban entrepreneur, the businessman, restless, agitated, and ambitious. Marketman Masculinity was an absentee landlord at home and an absent father with his children, devoting himself to his work in an increasingly homosocial environment—a manly world in which he pits himself against other men. His efforts at self-making transformed the political and economic spheres, causing all the Genteel Patriarch and the Heroic Artisan embodied the fusion of liberty and equality, Gentile

external work, the super ego and the id... It feels thrown in on three sides, threatened by this kind of danger, as if it is hard pressed, it reacts by generating anxiety... Thus the ego, driven by the id, confined by the super ego, repelled by reality, struggles to master its economic task of bringing about harmony among the forces and influences working in and upon it; and we can understand how it is that so often we cannot suppress a cry: "Life is not easy!" (Freud, "The Dissection of the Psychical Personality," 1914/1966).

If your social science training was anything like mine, these were offered as descriptions of the bourgeoisie under capitalism, of individuals in democratic societies, of the fate of the Provençal work ethic under the ever rationalizing spirit of capitalism, or of the arduous task of the autonomous ego in psychological development. Did anyone ever mention that in all four cases the theorists were describing men? Not just "men" as in generic manner, but a particular type of masculinity, a definition of manhood that derives its identity from participation in the marketplace, from interaction with other men in that marketplace—in short, a model of masculinity for whom identity is based on homosexual competition? Three years before Tocqueville found Americans "extensive in the midst of abundance." Senator Henry Clay had called the United States "a nation of self-made men.

What does it mean to be "self-made"? What are the consequences of self-making for the individual man, for other men, for women? If this notion of manhood—rooted in the sphere of production, the public arena, masculinity grounded not in landownership or in artisanal republican virtue but in successful participation in marketplace competition—this has been the defining notion of American masculinity. Masculinity must be provided, and neither is it proved that it is again questioned and must be proved again—constant, relentless, unachievable, and ultimately the quest for proof becomes so meaningless as it takes on the characteristics, as Weber said, of a sport. He who has the most toys when he dies wins.

Where does this version of masculinity come from? How does it work? What are the consequences of this version of masculinity for women, for other men, for individual men themselves? These are the questions I address in this chapter.

Masculinity as History and the History of Masculinity

The idea of masculinity expressed in the previous extracts is the product of historical shifts in the grounds on which men rested their sense of
Patriarchy was the manhood of the traditional aristocracy, the class that embodied the virtue of liberty. The Heroic Aristocrat embodied democratic continuity, the solidarity of the urban shopkeeper or craftsman. Liberty and democracy, the patriarch and the aristocrat could, and did, corrupt. Mr. Marketplace Man is capitalist man, and he makes both freedom and equality problematic; eliminating the freedom of the aristocracy and proletarianizing the equality of the aristocrat. In one sense, American history has been an effort to restore, retrieve, or reconstitute the virtues of Gentleman Patriarchy and Heroic Aristocrat as they were being transformed in the capitalist marketplace.

Marketplace Manhood was a manhood that required proof, and thus required the acquisition of tangible goods as evidence of success. It reconstituted itself by the exclusion of "others"—women, non-white men, minority-born men, homosexual men—and by terrorizing flight into a pristine mythic homonuclear Eden where men could, at last, be real men among other men. The story of the ways in which Marketplace Manhood becomes American Everyday Man is a tragic tale, a tale of striving to live up to impossible ideals of success leading to chronic terms of emasculation, emotional emptiness, and a gendered rage that leave a wide swath of destruction in its wake.

**Masculinities as Power Relations**

Marketplace Masculinity describes the normative definition of American masculinity. It describes its characteristics—aggression, competition, anxiety—and the arena in which those characteristics are deployed—the public sphere, the marketplace. If the marketplace is the arena in which manhood is tested and proved, it is a gendered arena, in which tensions between women and men and tensions among different groups of men are weighted with meaning. These tensions suggest that cultural definitions of gender are placed out in a contested terrain and are themselves-power relations.

All masculinities are not created equal, or rather, we are all created equal, but any hypothetical equality evaporates quickly because our definitions of masculinity are not equally valued in our society. One definition of manhood continues to remain the standard against which other forms of manhood are measured and evaluated. Within the dominant culture, the masculinity that defines white, middle-class, early middle-aged, heterosexual men in the masculinity that sets the standards for other men, against which other men are measured and, more often than not, found wanting. Sociologist Erving Goffman (1963) wrote that in America, there is only "one complete, unshakable male":

a young, married, white, urban, northern heterosexual Protestant father of college-educated, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports. Every American male tends to look out upon the world from this perspective. Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior (p. 124).

This is the definition that we will call "hegemonic" masculinity, the image of masculinity that these men who hold power, which has become the ideal in psychological evaluations, sociological research, and self-help and advice literature for teaching young men to become "real men." (Conseil, 1987). The hegemonic definition of manhood is a man in power, a man with power, and a man of power. We equate manhood with being strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control. The very definitions of manhood we have developed in our culture maintain the power that some men have over other men and that men have over women.

Our culture's definition of masculinity is thus several stories at once. It is about the individual man's quest to become one of those cultural symbols that denote manhood, signs that he has in fact achieved it. It is about those standards being used against women to prevent their inclusion in public life and their consignment to a devalued private sphere. It is about the differential access that different types of men have to those cultural resources that confer manhood and about how each of these groups then develop their own modifications to preserve and claim their manhood. It is about the power of these definitions themselves to serve to maintain the real-life power that men have over women and that some men have over other men.

This definition of manhood has been summarized cleverly by psychologist Robert Brannon (1976) into four succinct phrases:

1. "Noissy Scout!" One may never do anything that even remotely suggests femininity. Masculinity is the relentless repudiation of the feminine.
2. "He's a Big Whee!" Masculinity is measured by power, success, wealth, and status. As the current song says, "He's the man when he's the boss."
3. "Be a Sturdy Oak." Masculinity depends on remaining calm and reliable in a crisis. Holding emotions in check in fact, proving you're a man depends on never showing your emotions at all. Boys don't cry.

These rules contain the elements of the definition against which virtually all American men are measured. Failure to embody these rules, to affirm the power of the rules, and one's achievement of them is a source of men's confusion and pain. Such a model is, of course, unattainable for any man. But we keep trying, valiantly and vainly, to measure up. American masculinity is a relentless test. The chief test is contained in the first rule. Whatever the variations by race, class, age, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, being a man means "not being like women." This notion of anti-femininity lies at the heart of contemporary and historical conceptions of maleness, so that masculinity is defined more by what one is not rather than what one is.

Masculinity as the Flight From the Feminine

Historically and developmentally, masculinity has been defined as the flight from women, the repudiation of femininity. Since Freud, we have come to understand that developmentally the central task that every little boy must confront is to develop a secure identity for himself as a man. As Freud had it, the redoubtable project is the boy's renouncing his identification with and deep emotional attachment to his mother and then replacing her with the father as the object of identification. Notice that he reidentifies but never reaches it. This entire process, Freud argued, is set in motion by the boy's sexual desire for his mother. But the father stands in the boy's path and will not yield his sexual property to his junior son. The boy's first emotional experience, then, the one that inevitably follows his experience of desire, is fear—fear of the bigger, stronger, more sexually powerful father. It is his fear, experienced symbolically as the fear of castration, Freud argues, that forces the young boy to renounce his identification with mother and seek to identify with the being who is the actual source of his fear, his father. In so doing, the boy is now symbolically capitulating to sexual union with mother the substitute, that is, a woman. The boy becomes gendered (masculine) and heterosexual at the same time.

Masculinity, in this model, is inevitably tied to sexuality. The boy's sexuality will now come to resemble the sexuality of his father (or at least the way he imagines his father)—enervating, predatory, possessive, and possibly punitive. The boy has come to identity with his oppressor; now he can become the oppressor himself. But a terror remains, the terror that the young man will be unmasked as a fraud, as a man who has not completely and irreversibly separated from mother. It will be other men who will do the unmasking. Failure to dis-see the man, make him appear not fully a man. He will be seen as a wimp, a Mama's boy, a sissy.

After pulling away from his mother, the boy comes to see her not as a source of nurturance and love, but as an insusceptibly infantilizing creature, capable of humiliating him in front of his peers. She makes him dress up in uncomfortable and itchy clothing; he keeps his teeth with lipstick, staining his boyish innocence with the mark of feminine dependency. No wonder so many boys come from their mothers' embrace with grins of "Au, Moom! Quit it!" Fathers represent the humiliation of infancy, helplessness, dependency. "Men act as though they were being gushed by (or rebelling against) rules and precepts emotionsomitted by a mother," writes psychohistorian Geoffrey Gorer (1964). As a result, "all the niceties of masculine behavior—modesty, politeness, neatness, cleanliness—come to be regarded as concessions to feminine demands, and not good in themselves as part of the behavior of a proper man" (pp 5c, 67).

The flight from femininity is angry and frightened, because mother can so easily emasculate the young boy by her power to render him dependent, or at least to remind him of dependency. It is relentless, masculinity becomes a lifelong quest to demonstrate its superiority, as if to prove the unspeakable to others, because we feel so aware of it ourselves. Women don't often feel compelled to "prove their womanhood"—the phrase itself sounds ridiculous. Women have different kinds of gender identity crises; their anger and frustration, and their own symptoms of depression, come from being excluded than from questioning whether they are feminine enough.8

The drive to repudiate the mother as the mark of the acquisition of masculine gender identity has three consequences for the young boy. First, he pushes away his real mother, and with her the traits of nurturance, compassion, and tenderness she may have embodied. Second, he supresses those traits in himself, because they will reveal his feminine otherness. Third, he establishes complete separation from mother. His life becomes a lifelong project to demonstrate that he possesses none of his mother's traits. Masculine identity is born in the renunciation of the feminine, not in the direct affirmation of the masculine, which leaves masculine gender identity tenuous and fragile.
argues that "ideologies of manhood have functioned primarily in relation to the gaze of male peers and male authority" (p. 769). Think of how men "bestow upon another of their accomplishments—from their latest sexual conquest to the size of the fish they caught—and how we constantly parade the markers of manhood—wealth, power, status, sexy women—in front of other men, desperate for their approval.

That men prove their manhood in the eyes of other men is both a consequence of sex and out of a deep fear. "Women have, in men's minds, such a low place on the social ladder of this country that it's useless to define yourself as 'a woman,'" noted playwright David Mamet.

"What men need is men's approval." Women become a kind of currency that men use to improve their ranking on the masculine social scale. (Even those moments of heroic conquest of women carry, I believe, a current of homosocial evaluation.) Mascallity as a homoerotic enactment. We test ourselves, perform heroic feats, take enormous risks, all because we want other men to grant us our manhood.

Mascallity as a homoerotic enactment is fraught with danger, with the risk of failure, and with intense relentless competition. "Every man you meet has a rating or an estimate of himself which he never loses or forgets," wrote Kenneth Wayne (1913) in his popular turn of the century advice book. "A man has his own rating, and instantly he lays it alongside of the other man" (p. 18). Almost a century later, another man remarked to psychologist Sam Otherson (1992) that "by the time you're a adult, it's easy to think you're always in competition with men, for the attention of women, in sports, at work" (p. 231).

Mascallity as Homophobia

If masculinity is a homoerotic enactment, its overriding emotion is fear. In the Freudian model, the fear of the father's power terrifies the young boy to renounce his desire for his mother and identify with his father. This model links gender identity with sexual orientation: the little boy's identification with father (becoming masculine) allows him to move engage in sexual relations with women (he becomes heterosexual). This is the origin of how we can "read" men's sexual orientation through the successful performance of gender identity. Second, the fear that the little boy feels does not send him scurrying into the arms of his mother to protect him from his father. Rather, he believes he will overcome his fear.