Stephen M. Whitehead. *Men and Masculinities: Key Themes and New Directions.* **Cambridge: Polity, 2002.**

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1   Since the project of masculinity studies began in the Anglo-American academia in the 1970s, much has been published on "man" as a gendered category. From within the context of women's studies, a critical view of men and masculinity has been demanded by feminist critics as a necessary contribution to the project of deconstructing patriarchal myths and power structures. "Man," for centuries held to be "the very centre, the core, the drive, the universal 'mankind,'" (Whitehead 5) has become the object of rigorous scholarly scrutiny which aims at making men visible as a political and a gendered category and at decentring and particularizing men's experience and social position. Over the last two decades, predominantly sociological literature on men has provided increasingly complex tools for theorizing masculinity. This sociology of masculinity focuses on contemporary masculine identities. Another strand of academic writing on men is located within the field of gender history and aims at laying open the historical change of notions of masculinity and hence deconstructing an ahistorical, universal image of Man.

2   Stephen Whitehead provides us with a very readable, informative survey of the development, issues, and theoretical concepts of this increasingly important area of study. Whitehead explicitly identifies himself as a "profeminist" scholar, thereby distancing himself from "men's studies" which for him are "those more populist writings that either portray men as needing to reject feminism (if they are, that is, to 'find themselves'), or ignore feminist theories altogether in their research on men" (2). This statement of course is not meant to belittle the earlier academic attempts at critically questioning "Man" which were published under the label "men's studies," but it is rather aimed at the publications of a so-called "mythopoetic men's movement" which glorifies a traditional manliness, or scholarly work that aims at retaining a hierarchical gender order as a natural given. Whitehead, in contrast, sees his book as a contribution to the feminist project of emancipation and thus he draws extensively on poststructuralist feminist theory.

3   The seven chapters of Men and Masculinities: Key Themes and New Directions can be roughly divided into two sections. Section one (chapters 1-3) progresses from the discussion of earlier theoretical debates on men over men's studies as a backlash against feminism to different conceptualisations of masculinity based on Foucauldian notions of power and resistance. Section two explores the potentially problematic social identities of

men as "public men" (ch. 4), "private men" (ch. 5), and the materialization of the male body as an effect of current discourses on manliness (ch. 6). Chapter seven finally provides a conclusion and offers an outlook on new directions in the field of masculinity studies.

4   Chapter one takes up the nature-nurture debate and traces the question of how much of masculinity "is (cultural) illusion, and how much is (material) reality" (9). Whitehead first critically quotes surprisingly recent sociobiological and genetic works which purport a natural sexual difference either located in prehistory or inscribed in our genetic/hormonal make-up. He then examines different attempts at envisioning sexual identity as an effect of nurture. One line of argument follows a historical perspective through which masculinity is revealed as historically variable and subject to change. The focus on nurture reveals both the diachronic as well as the synchronic fragility of concepts of manliness. In this context it is more appropriate to talk of masculinities, "a term that allows us […] to highlight the contingency of masculinities and differences between men in terms of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and so on" (17). Whitehead then charts the development of the sex/gender debate by discussing key texts from the fields of sociology and psychoanalysis, placing special emphasis on the impact of Freud and Jung on the conceptualisation of (gender) identity. Analogous to the three waves of feminist criticism, he presents three development stages of the sociology of masculinity, always in relation and in response to feminist scholarship and critical thought. He identifies the first wave as those writings which draw attention to "the problematic dimensions of masculinity as a culturally privileged or idealized form of male behaviour" (42). Here, the work of sociologist J. H. Pleck is important: Pleck developed the influential notion of a "male gender role strain," challenging the notion of masculinity as functional and stable and stressing the discontinuities and ambivalences of the male socialization process instead. The "male gender role strain" implies that individual men have to pay a high price in order to live up to the dominant ideal of masculinity as powerful, self-controlled, rational and rooted in the public space of work and competition. A second wave, highly influenced by second-wave feminist theory, shifted the focus to the ways in which gender relations in our society are informed by power and favoured a social constructionist understanding of men and masculinities. Influential authors whose concepts are discussed in detail in chapter three are Robert Connell, Michael Kimmel, Jeff Hearn and Arthur Brittan. Yet with all this insistence on masculinity as a social "illusion," Whitehead begs not to forget the very material reality of men's violence which seems to be a persistent feature of male identity (see 35-41). In a third, current wave, the sociology of masculinity is inspired by the poststructuralist theories (especially by Michel Foucault and Judith Butler [see discussion of ch. 3]).

5   Chapter two explores in greater detail the relation of men and feminism, that is, how the political and social impact of feminism has changed notions of masculinity and still continues to do so. Here Whitehead critically discusses (and dismisses) the notion of a "masculinity in crisis" that emerged in reaction the "threat" of emancipation and sees men as "disadvantaged" by a growing emphasis on gender equality. This discourse draws on a "monolithic" notion of masculinity, defining "Man" exclusively as white, heterosexual, and middle-class. Men's reactions to the challenge of feminism have been quite diverse. Besides a conservative perspective that argues that gender roles should not be changed at all, Whitehead identifies as anti-feminist a masculinity-in-crisis perspective, which ranges from groups seeking to defend men's rights from new injustices and new sexism against men to the mythopoetic movement searching for men's "inner selves" that are rooted in archetypical myths and rituals. On the other hand, a group-specific scholarship such as gay or queer studies or postcolonial studies aligns itself with feminist scholarship in its critique of an ethnocentric and standardized discussion of men, while a decidedly profeminist perspective seeks to develop a critique of men's practice informed by feminism (63-77).

6   Chapter three presents two major strands of conceptualising men and masculinities in second and third-wave sociologies of masculinity. Here Whitehead discusses the very influential concepts of patriarchy (Kate Millett), hegemonic masculinity (Robert Connell), gender order (J.J. Matthews) and masculinism (Arthur Brittan). While "patriarchy" has been criticized for purporting a rather ahistorical, reductionist and monolithic view of gender relations, other concepts promise a more dynamic, particularized view: Thus, "hegemonic masculinity" (the dominant interpretations and definitions of being masculine) is a dynamic concept that connects the institutional aspects of male power with the collective and historically changing practices of men:

> The concept of hegemonic masculinity achieves what patriarchy fails to achieve: it offers a nuanced account of the processes and relationalities of femininity-masculinity and male power while staying loyal to the notions of gender and sexual ideology, and male dominance. Hegemonic masculinity not only succeeds in signalling the multiple, contested character of male practices; it does so in the context of larger formations of gender structure. (90)

"Gender order" also acknowledges the relations between men and women to be historically constructed, while placing greater emphasis on the dynamics and fluidity of power relations. Similarly, "masculinism" is "the point at which dominant forms of masculinity and heterosexuality meet ideological dynamics, and in the process become reified and legitimized as privileged, unquestioned accounts of gender difference and reality" (97). Although these concepts increasingly stress fluidity and multiplicity, Whitehead rejects them since in his

view they are all based on a notion of power as unchanging, hierarchical and fundamentally oppressive and presents the male subject as pre-discursive and self-consciously in possession of social power. Against these, he sets a notion of power as circulatory, rather dynamic than static (Foucault), and a male subject that is discursively constructed. Drawing on the poststructuralist theories of both Foucault and Judith Butler, he postulates masculinities as "a set of symbolic and material practices, the engagement of which by the discursive subject enables gender identification to be socially validated and materially embodied. Thus the subject is both *subjected to masculinity and endorsed as an individual by masculinity*" (111, Whitehead's emphasis). This allows Whitehead to reject the humanist notion of the autonomous, free male subject and to conceptualise it instead as informed by a specific discourse of masculinity which invests it with power and identity. However, this concept does not strike the reader as quite as revolutionary as Whitehead presents it; it rather seems to be a necessary complement to the existing and still valuable notions of hegemonic masculinity, gender order and masculinism, developing as it does from these very concepts.

7   The following section explores masculine identities in the context of the public/private dichotomy so pervasive in Western societies. Chapter four begins with a short overview over the deconstructive critique of this very distinction, followed by an analysis of the myths and icons of manliness as they are purported in literature, film and popular culture. The cultural scripts for men becoming "real men" are explored through images of "Man as hunter" - "the adult male subjecting himself to the rigours and dangers of the wild, far removed from the comfort of the (female) home, enduring these trials for the very sake of 'my family's well-being" (119) - and "Man as hero," the successful leader devoted to building an empire. Whitehead then shows how a masculine identity develops in tension with an ideal of manliness that encompasses both work and leisure time. He points out the "pathological and emotionally damaging consequences of striving for this unattainable masculine behaviour" (127) both for "men at work" and for "men as managers." Moreover, leisure time, instead of providing a total escape from the stressful demands of the work place, is also informed by gender politics (138-143). Thus, Whitehead views leisure time also as part of the public sphere and concludes: "The public world of men, men's heroic projects, men's empires, men as (natural) managers and leaders, professional man, superman - these are all myths of (heterosexual) masculinity" (144).

8   What then about the private lives of men? Is there an inner, "apolitical" space apart from social performances in which a man's individuality is rooted? Whitehead explores male subjectivity in relation to the role of the family father, the importance of friendships and

relationships, male sexualities and, finally, the impact of trust, intimacy and emotions on men's lives. Each of these four aspects is discussed in more detail than can be presented here; let it suffice to say that far from reifying the public/private dichotomy, Whitehead seeks to "unpack and illuminate" (149) the individual sense of a masculine self in order to overcome the rigid hierarchies and divisions that inform our society: "In the final analysis, it is this dualism [which declares] the naturalness of the supposedly rational public world of men and the supposedly emotive private world of women that is at the heart of contemporary definitions of gender" (179).

9   Similarly, chapter six seeks to "unpack" another aspect of men's lives that has hitherto been rendered invisible by masculine myths, yet is vital to every man's sense of self: the male body. Required by dominant discourses of masculinity to be strong, reliable, and otherwise unobtrusive, Whitehead in contrast examines the ways in which "male bodies are positioned as 'Other' and rendered insecure" (182), as source of doubt and tension instead of as site of unproblematic embodiment of a mythical ideal. Here Whitehead focuses on race, sexuality and age as potentially destabilizing forces, with black, gay, elderly, or weak bodies as deviating from or falling short of the manly ideal promoted by the dominant discourse. Drawing on the work of Marion Young and Judith Butler, this chapter explores in greater detail the male body as a discursive construction and complements chapter three in which Whitehead develops his notion of a discursive masculine subject.

10   The final chapter takes up the theoretical discussion of chapter three and connects the "sociology of masculinity" with poststructuralist and third wave feminist theory. Again the notion of a masculine subject is taken up and assessed in Butlerian terms. Drawing on the work of Lacan, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Whitehead introduces the notion of a "masculinist ontology:"

> […] through the immanent search for existence and being (male/man), the subject engages with and works on the historically and culturally mediated codes of masculinity that prevail around it. As these codes are already placed at the disposal of the subject, they offer a ready means of identity signification. This search for being (male/man) is termed herein as masculinist ontology. (216)

Such an understanding of men and masculinity offers the possibility of change through the dynamics of the process of embodiment, reification, play and resistance the discursive male subject is engaged in. While this deconstructive position cannot ignore the universality of men and women as a fundamental reality (see 217), the point remains that a discursive gender identity is informed by so many variables that the distinction man/woman, masculinity/femininity with all its mythical idealizations is a crude, positivist reduction

unsuitable to an adequate account of gender relations. The concepts Whitehead offers here provide us with much more sophisticated tools for analysing, conceptualising and describing men and masculinities.

11   *Men and Masculinities: Key Themes and New Directions* is both a valuable, detailed introduction to the sociology of masculinity and an original contribution to the theoretical debate at the intersection of feminist and poststructuralist thought and masculinity studies. Since this new area of studies is of growing interest and importance, Whitehead's book is a very welcome and necessary summary of current research issues taking the study of men and masculinities into new directions.