The New Men's Studies: From Feminist Theory to Gender Scholarship

The paper situates the new field of men's studies in the context of the evolution of women's studies. It argues that men's studies' distinctive feminist approach to men is a necessary complement to women's studies, citing paradigmatic examples of new perspectives. In tracing women's studies' development, the paper argues that reconceptualizations of "gender" resolve tensions between much of women's studies' non-essentialist empirical social science describing "sex roles" and much of feminist theory's essentialist celebrations of women's core selves.

Feminist scholars have developed a tradition of using the phrase "men's studies" as a pejorative way of denoting the traditional academic curriculum. Hence, the volume of essays edited by Dale Spender subtitled The Impact of Feminism on the Academic Disciplines carries the title Men's Studies Modified (1981). In the same vein Judith Shapiro, in "Anthropology and the Study of Gender," writes that the emergence of women's studies programs is "a reflection of the extent to which the apparently unmarked courses in the academic curriculum constitute a de facto men's studies program" (1981, 11). Implicit in both of the above is the contention that the necessary role of women's studies is to fill the lacunae regarding women in the established corpus of scholarship and teaching. In this context, the proposition that feminists should endorse a call for the greater propagation of men's studies seems preposterous. It appears to violate the very raison d'être of women's studies programs and departments, designed to redress prior overemphasis on men. A call for a men's studies program is likely to evoke from women's studies scholars a response akin to that of Jan Bradshaw who, at a conference on "The Women's Liberation Movement and Men," commenting on how far things had gotten out of hand in the United States, reported to her colleagues in England with horror that "there are Men's Studies collections in US college libraries!" (1982, 184).

Yet, the position I shall propound is precisely that feminist scholars should endorse the concept of men's studies, though a men's studies of a kind decidedly different from traditional scholarship. I shall not

simply be claiming that men's studies is compatible with women's studies, though, as shall be obvious, I believe that it is. I shall instead be making the much stronger claim that men's studies is essential to fulfilling the feminist project which underlies women's studies, and that feminist scholarship cannot reach its fullest, most radical potential without the addition of men's studies.

This latter claim clearly requires extended discussion. Before delineating the contours of this new men's studies, however, I shall find it necessary to trace the etymology of the concept of "gender" in its current usage, since several of the reasons I shall adduce in favor of a program for men's studies have already gained some degree of acceptance because they are implicitly present, though insufficiently appreciated, in the trend favoring the reconceptualization of the field as focusing on "gender" rather than simply on "women." My purpose in this paper is to investigate the relation between the emerging field of men's studies and the ongoing development of gender scholarship, and to present what I believe to be the most intellectually fruitful and compelling conception of that relationship. Though there are other valid considerations which lead one to embrace a program of men's studies, some of which I discuss below, such as a need to motivate men towards feminist political change, these considerations are not my primary concern here. Neither shall I be concerned with questions of pedagogy, of how to structure new courses which communicate new gender perspectives and information generated by men's studies, though I believe there is an urgent need for innovative curriculum development in this area. The question I am addressing is strictly that of the theoretical justification, from the perspective of feminist scholarship, of the project of men's studies.

The next section of this paper, then, discusses the history of the current usage of the concept of "gender" in women's studies. Following that, I shall analyze what I take the field of men's studies to be, and how it relates to feminist scholarship. Finally, I shall conclude by giving, by way of illustration, just one of many possible examples of future directions for research in men's studies. I would like at this point to qualify the analysis which follows, which is my schematic reconstruction of certain developments in feminist scholarship, in two respects. First, though I believe I am tracing a central and important theme in the development of women's studies, this is not intended as anything like a comprehensive account or analysis of the history of the field. Secondly, though I think the concept of gender has made positive contributions to feminist theory, I also have reservations about certain uses of the concept, as I shall make clear later on. At certain points, the terms of discourse are my own and not necessarily those of the

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participants in the dialogue sketched below, yet I believe this account of a particular portion of contemporary intellectual history recognizably captures divergent views of those participants.

Traditional scholarship used to speak of "sex differences," where behavioral differences were usually thought of as correlative with innate, biological differences between women and men. Against this background, the men's studies scholarship which grew out of the contemporary feminist movement insisted that the biological distinction male/female was not equivalent to nor necessarily correlative with the social distinction masculine/feminine, and popularized the category of "sex roles" to speak of social/cultural differences between women and men. Most were willing to draw the clear political implications of this framework that if sex roles were learned or acquired, rather than innate and given, then they could also be unlearned and changed.

Over time, however, problems emerged with the "sex role" framework. As the sex role hypothesis became radicalized, as more and more facets of femininity and masculinity came to be conceptualized as merely "roles," any remaining notion of a core, natural self disappeared amidst the multiplicity of social roles we were all playing. What emerged from this development was what philosophers refer to as a non-essentialist theory of the self, in which the "self" is merely a convenient label for discrete phenomena we consider as part of a single whole, phenomena not actually intrinsically related to one another.

This consequence proved unsatisfactory to numerous people, in part for the same reasons that many have historically rejected non-essentialist metaphysics: it simply seems to violate deeply held beliefs about the existence of underlying essences which we seem to have experience or knowledge of, beliefs we are usually loathe to surrender. Aside from this sort of general objection to any non-essentialist theory, the loss of a posited essential self posed a particular problem for feminist theory, as we shall see in a moment. In addition, it should be noted that the non-essentialist theory of the self was always consistently rejected from one specific feminist quarter. There was always a strain of radical feminist theory which held that observed differences between women and men were rooted in different inherent essences, and some held further that these differences should be celebrated, not minimized or negated. Those who followed this school of thought could never fully accept all the talk of "roles" which could and should simply be "unlearned."

Of major concern here is that the problems with the non-essentialist theory of the self which emerges from the radicalization of the sex role hypothesis cuts deeply into mainstream feminist thought. It drives a wedge between the political and academic arms of the movement, and
it is here that the problem is most serious. Much of the most important work in women’s studies—what one might call the empirical social theory of women’s studies, work done under the rubrics of sociology, psychology, philosophy, literary criticism, history, political science, anthropology, etc.—was guided by the sex role framework. Yet, while this empirical social theory provided ever more support for the non-essentialist theory of the self, exposing more and more of the social determinants of femininity and masculinity, much of the normative political theory of feminism was cast in terms of an essentialist theory of the self. Feminism’s normative critique of male dominated thought and action railed against the stifling and repression of women’s authentic selves. What was wrong with sexism was that it thwarted the development of capacities of women’s essential “‘real” or “true” selves. The concepts of “authenticity” and “self-realization” were invoked. Yet all of this, while providing much of the motive force behind feminist studies, was incompatible with the commonly assumed framework of those studies.

The conflict between feminism’s critique of sexism generated by its empirical social theory, based on the non-essentialist sex role model, and its critique of sexism generated by its normative political theory, based on the essentialist self-development model, can perhaps be elucidated by seeing that they invoke two entirely different standards of justice. On the non-essentialist account, since there is no natural woman’s self, there is no core self which has been wronged or repressed. The ethical objections to sexism are solely those involving violations of principles of distributive justice. That is to say, in a sexist social system, benefits and drawbacks are unequally attached to roles which are unfairly distributed between men and women, to the overall disadvantage of women. On this model, the goal of feminism is a fair distribution of roles, with their accompanying debits and credits. On the essentialist account, however, even if such a role distribution is equitable, it may still be unjust according to a non-distributive notion of justice, if essential capabilities of the self are still left unrealized. The door is open to a critique of sex roles as inherently dehumanizing, even if equally so to all.

Those familiar with feminist political theory will recognize here familiar strains of liberal vs. radical feminist debates, as well as echoes of long-running nature/nurture debates. A preference for the non-essentialist model in academia should not be surprising. Women’s studies scholars trying to work their way into the establishment would quite naturally adopt the framework of that establishment, including the dominant liberal distributive notions of justice, captured by John Rawls’ concept of “justice as fairness” (1971). The successful
arguments for women’s studies stressed the unequal distribution of knowledge, resulting in a distorted worldview, not a thwarting of women’s intellectual development, resulting in a stupefaction of women. Indeed, if the goal was to validate women’s scholarship, the latter would have been self-defeating.

Notwithstanding the contrasts drawn above, it is of course possible to construct liberal essentialist or radical non-essentialist doctrines. A variant of the former, for example, might hold that the essence of the self lies precisely in one or more of the various social personas distributed by the social order rather than in any deeper level of personality behind these personas. Or a variant of the latter might hold that the unrealized capacities of the self claimed on another account as the essence of the self are just additional properties of certain selves. While recognizing that these distinctions cannot be collapsed into one another, there are nonetheless conceptual affinities between non-essentialist and liberal strains of thought, on the one hand, and essentialist and radical strains, on the other, and one is more likely to find these categories clustered together than not. Thus, following the analysis presented earlier, a gap emerges between the mainstream academic and the radical political arms of feminism, a gap unacceptable to those on either side, who are accustomed to thinking of women’s studies and feminist politics as different aspects of a single movement. Part of the reason why this gap has not emerged more sharply than it has is because the slogan that “the personal is political,” expressing a fundamental feminist insight about the interpenetration of social and psychological categories, has often been understood loosely enough to allow for a certain equivocation between “oppression” as a political concept, dealing with power imbalances between social groups, and “repression” as a psychological concept, dealing with psychological imbalances between aspects of the self. While much of the most deeply felt moral force of feminism centered on the latter, much of its analytical strength derived from the former. Statements about realized essences, while capable of inspiring grandiose political programs, are notoriously difficult to substantiate, while statements about role allocations lend themselves more readily to empirical verification than to inspirational exhortation. Feminism is of course not the only influential modern school of thought faced with this sort of dichotomy. Analogous problems seem endemic to systematic social theory, whether seen in the conflicts between Marxism as empirical science of social change, which develops a theory of exploitation aimed at establishing a fairer distribution of goods and powers, and Marxism as revolutionary dialectics of liberation, which develops a theory of alienation aimed at achieving the full realization of human species-
essence, or in the conflicts between Freudianism as scientific social psychology, which develops a therapeutic practice, and Freudianism as hermeneutic meta-psychology, which develops a radical critique of the social order. Though such tensions between divergent strains of a single worldview are not necessarily fatal to the theory, and indeed often add to the vigor of any worldview, they do require some resolution, however incomplete or tentative such a resolution may be. Without some such overarching unity, divergent strains threaten to separate into antagonistic schools.

Those attempting to re-create a unified theory of feminist studies consequently found themselves stranded between Scylla and Charybdis. The sex role model seemed too fragmenting, yet the most common essentialist framework available entailed a return to a naturalistic biologism most were unwilling to accept. And while non-essentialism had the political overtones unacceptable to some already discussed, essentialism carries with it its own political handicaps. To many, essentialist doctrines are inherently monolithic because of their claim to knowledge of a single human essence. They consequently seem to invite an authoritarian elitism anathema to many whose political allegiance is to pluralist democratic structures. Furthermore, sex role theory is usually more explicit in stating that its model operates on the level of sociological generalization, not necessarily instantiated in every individual, thus avoiding the essentialist implication that those who do not fit the model are abnormal or deviant by violating their own nature.

It is at this juncture that the concept of gender came to prominence. To speak of gender, all came to agree, was to speak of a cultural formation on a biological base, without any prior commitment as to how much was base and how much was cultural formation. The nomenclature of gender carries several advantages. At the most superficial level, by avoiding an a priori stance on nature/nurture, essentialist/non-essentialist questions, research may be carried on without raising suspicions that prior political allegiances are skewing results. Hence, to speak of gender, rather than of roles or essences, appears more academically respectable. I would add that a particular development in feminist theory also contributed to the rising popularity of the terminology of gender in this period, namely the growth of interest in psychoanalytic feminism, with all of its talk of the formation of gender identity and engenderment. The growth of psychoanalytic feminism in this period is not coincidental. For many, it provided precisely the kind of non-biological essentialism they hoped might solve the theoretical difficulties I have just outlined.

There are further reasons for the new terminology of gender, and it is here that trends favoring the congruent development of women’s
and men's studies emerge. In her keynote address at the most recent National Women's Studies Association conference, Catharine Stimpson raised the question "What is the real subject in Women's Studies? Is it women's experience . . . or gender as a form of social organization?" In an earlier draft of this paper, I went further than simply answering Stimpson's question by affirming that the subject of women's studies is gender. I argued that it followed from this expanded perspective that the field of women's studies should be reconceptualized as gender studies, with men's studies a component of this new gender studies. I now think that this is an error, and I think the difference between my previous and present positions is significant. I now believe my previous position to have been correct in its context, but I now view that context as being too limited. I believe "gender studies" would be appropriate in a strictly academic context, because I believe it does more precisely indicate what women's studies is ultimately about. But the academic framework is not the most encompassing or fundamental one. Academic work too takes place in a political context, and the sacrifice of the connection to the women's movement implicit in the concept of women's studies is too high a price to pay for scholarly precision. I shall be saying more about men's studies shortly, but let me say at this point that I believe the claim of women's and men's studies must be that they study gender, but from the perspectives of valid conceptualizations of women's and men's experiences, respectively. At this point, it seems to me that the terminology of "gender studies" would at best be acceptable as an additional overarching concept for the general field of studies delineated by both women's and men's studies conjointly, but that it is not acceptable as a replacement for the concept of "women's studies." To prevent "gender studies" being misinterpreted as the latter rather than the former, I prefer to speak of "gender scholarship" rather than "gender studies," because I believe this is more likely to be understood as an alternative description of research in women's and men's studies, rather than as a renaming of women's studies, a name whose recognition women have fought too hard to establish to be so lightly surrendered.

To continue with the convergence of men's, women's, and gender scholarship, whether one believes one is speaking of human nature or of social roles, the basic claim in the study of gender is that the concept of gender must be a fundamental category of all social research, fundamental in the literal sense of "foundational" or "grounding." By focusing on gender as a form of social organization, to use Stimpson's phrase, women's studies insists that its subject is not simply compensatory or additive knowledge about women, but a fundamental revision of all canons of knowledge to take account of a genderized world,
even those areas of knowledge previously thought to be gender neutral. As Sandra Harding and Merill B. Hintikka put it recently in their introduction to a volume of new essays dedicated to expanding feminist perspectives:

We cannot understand women and their lives by adding facts about them to bodies of knowledge which take men, their lives, and their beliefs as the human norm. Furthermore, it is now evident that if women’s lives cannot be understood within the inherited inquiry frameworks, then neither can men’s lives. The attempts to add understandings of women to our knowledge of nature and social life have led to the realization that there is precious little reliable knowledge to which to add them. A more fundamental project now confronts us. We must root out sexist distortions and perversions in epistemology, metaphysics, methodology and the philosophy of science—in the “hard core” of abstract reasoning thought most immune to infiltration by social values. (1983, ix.)

It is this expanded encompassing vision of women’s studies, as the study of gender, requiring a re-vision of the entire curriculum rather than simple the addition of insights about women, which brings the need for men’s studies into focus. But not merely in the simplistic sense that something which claims to be about everything must be about men too. Men’s studies is not merely an additive to women’s studies to create gender scholarship, no more than women’s studies is simply an additive to the traditional curriculum. Rather, the project of gender scholarship mandates a particular conception of men’s studies. This conception is grounded in an increasingly sustained understanding and an increasingly emerging conviction. The understanding is that in falsely generalizing man as “male” to man as “human” we have, to our great loss, obliterated the specificities of both women’s and men’s lives. The conviction is that the only way to depower the pseudo-universality of generic “man” is to study man as particular, rather than as pseudo-generic. Whether one prefers a relatively benign explanation of masculine resistance to studying the specifics of the male role, along the lines of the simply myopia attributed to male scholars in Robert Brannon’s reference to “an old folk saying that ‘the fish will be the last to discover the ocean’ ” (1976, 2) because they are themselves so totally immersed in it, or a more cynical attribution of motivation, taking account of the vested interest of the privileged in obscuring the source of their privileges, the fact remains that such men’s studies have been sorely lacking. As both Brannon and Peter Filene note, libraries simply have not listed the categories “male” or “masculinity.” (Brannon 1976, 1; Filene 1976, 220.) The purpose of men’s studies is to fill
this gap. I take this kind of men’s studies to be the only remedy for a situation in which, by making man the assumed norm, woman always remains the “other,” the problem to be solved, the intrusive datum to be explained, a situation which women’s studies alone may not be sufficient to rectify. No scholarly tour de force in answering “the woman question” can ever eliminate this problematic status of women which first makes women appear questionable unless the status of men is equally brought into question. Thus the study of men as particular, i.e. men’s studies, is a necessary component of the feminist claim to universal, and not merely compensatory, truth.

To some extent, the move to an emphasis on gender is part of a process of self-definition which dates to the beginnings of women’s studies. It is part of the systematization which occurs whenever a derivative research program becomes an autonomous discipline. Insofar as this is the case, questions about the programmatic implications of feminism’s total vision are not entirely new. For example, in a very germane argument that women’s studies should become an autonomous discipline, Sandra Coyner persuasively argues against women’s studies as merely an “interdisciplinary” approach to the “problem” of women:

... the “problem” approach underestimates the importance of Women’s Studies. Women’s Studies is not just a collaboration. It is—or can be, if we explain it right—a completely new [way] of viewing humanity. Interdisciplinary programs do not normally ask the parent disciplines to be revolutionized by their new insights and restructuring of theory and method: they apply theory and method, to solve “problems.” We may have stumbled on our treasure unaware. We started with concern about sexism. But what we have discovered in women’s culture, and what we suspect about the way we will see knowledge itself when we look through our women’s eyes, is certainly far bigger than what we expected and far more dramatic. (1980, 26)

What is particularly new in the current discussion is the additional emphasis on the study of men as men in the new stage of gender scholarship, now that there seems to be general agreement that the stage of initial data accumulation on women has been passed or is at least well under way, and a new level of study of the gender dichotomy itself has been reached. Consider the following programmatic calls for new research in specific disciplines:

in Anthropology:
Women are seen as a problem requiring some kind of special attention, while men are more or less taken for granted, or at least not focused upon in a comparably explicit way. But would it not be better to view men as being just as problematic as women? To insist that we need more studies of men as men—that is, studies based not on an uncritical assumption that what men do is more interesting or important than what women do, but studies carried out with a particular focus on gender? (Shapiro 1981, 122)

in History:

Addressing the Berkshire Conference on Women’s History in 1975, Natalie Zemon Davis, a historian of medieval and early modern Europe, urged that “we should now be interested in the history of both women and men. We should not be working on the subjected sex any more than a historian of class can focus exclusively on peasants. Our goal is to understand the significance of the sexes, of gender groups in the historical past.” (Pleck and Pleck 1980, 3-4)

in Sociology:

Most workshop ethnographies—and other studies of occupations—are normally about men anyway and the re-examination of these studies in the light of notions of gender and masculinity should prove to be an illuminating, if difficult task. Thus taking gender into account is ‘taking men into account’ and not treating them—by ignoring the question of gender—as the normal subjects of research. (Morgan 1981, 95)

in Literary Criticism:

Because masculinity is now described as an historical construct imposed upon a biological given, critics cannot discuss knowledgeably the concept of a male hero in a literary text without some understanding of the definition of masculinity in its culture. . . . Moreover, it would be rash for the literary critic to attempt to describe a male’s development in a work of fiction or biography written in our own culture without some knowledge of the underlying rhythms of American men’s lives described by social scientists. . . . Such an examination will require
skeptical scholars to reopen the question of just how much we really know about men and to introduce into the curriculum new or revised knowledge about men's history, men's psychology, men's images in literature and the arts—in short, an array of new or modified men's studies. (August 1982, 585)

If the arguments I have advanced are valid, it then follows that we have reached the stage of a truly historic reversal. In the initial stages of establishing the field of women's studies, where the agenda was primarily to establish the legitimacy of the concentrated study of women on their own terms, arguments that one needed to turn one's attention to men as well seemed inappropriately accommodationist, as if one feared that the project would not be deemed sufficiently meritorious unless it also included men. In this context, radical and militant feminism stood for exclusive attention to women. Today, however, in the context of gender scholarship, the options have expanded. They are no longer simply restricted to autonomous exclusivity for women vs. assimilation under the male norm, nor is the project of mainstreaming women's studies into a revised general curriculum the only kind of "mainstreaming" now possible to envisage. As noted earlier, women's studies does not simply add knowledge on to existing frameworks, it sees the world through the prism of its own categories. Accordingly, the most far-reaching of today's tasks is not main-streaming women's studies into the established curriculum, but what may be thought of as main-streaming the established curriculum through the comprehensive vision of gender scholarship. Today, then, the most radical potential for women's studies expressly calls for attention to men, though of a radically different sort from traditional male-oriented scholarship, since this new men's studies would be constructed on the basis of the feminist critique of traditional scholarship. For these reasons, I believe that fears that the success of feminism would make women's studies courses unnecessary are unfounded. Given the social roots and historical components of all knowledge, the categories of gender will remain essential to the general constitution of knowledge, even if sexism were entirely eliminated.

These are the reasons for my earlier assertion that the deepest level of fulfillment of the project of feminist scholarship requires the development of men's studies. In seeing men's studies as a continuous development with women's studies, I part company with those like Eugene August in "'Modern Men,' or, Men's Studies in the 80's," (1982) who sees the emergence of men's studies as rectifying some previous deficiency in feminist theory. Again, men's studies is an
extension of, not a corrective for, women's studies. It is the achievements, not the shortcomings, of women's studies which have allowed for the emergence of the new men's studies.

It will be helpful to contrast various approaches to men's studies because salient differences emerge when the feminist approach to men's studies delineated here is compared to other, non-feminist approaches to men's studies. Though men's studies is a young field, there are many portents for its rapid growth. It is therefore essential that at this early stage the implications of different approaches to men's studies be understood and evaluated, to prevent its developing in directions inimical to feminism.

To begin with, August's stance is typical of one strain of thought developed by "men's rights" political groups, not to be confused with anti-sexist or pro-feminist men's groups. (For many of the former writings of Herb Goldberg, primarily The Hazards of Being Male: Surviving the Myth of Masculine Privilege (1977), often serve as primary point of reference.) It exemplifies what I call the Argument from Fairness. Feminist theory is here castigated for unfairly not paying as much attention to male role restrictions, held to be as oppressive as those women labor under. This approach misses the point that what is needed from men's studies is a qualitatively different study of men, of the kind sketched here, not quantitatively more study of men. To this line of reasoning, the traditional feminist response that the traditional curriculum is already a men's studies program, alluded to at the beginning of this paper, remains appropriate. Furthermore, principles of fairness cannot be selectively invoked. Unless and until these same men's studies partisans raise their voices against the exclusion of women from the rest of the academy as loud as they decry the exclusion of men from women's studies, their protestations must be viewed skeptically.

Another set of rationales for men's studies constitute what I call the Therapeutic Argument for men's studies. This has both pragmatic and principled versions. The pragmatic version argues that unless some attention is paid to men, male colleagues and students will resist allowing women's studies programs to continue. Hence male feelings of being left out need to be assuaged. I do not begrudge acceptance of this line of argument to those who out of practical necessity are forced to give weight to these considerations. However, because the criterion for success of a men's studies component generated by such considerations would logically be the degree to which men feel satisfied by what is being said, feelings for the most part correlative with established frames of reference rather than with new perspectives yet to be discovered, this line of argument can provide no coherent, substantive guidance
regarding the content of men’s studies, and is therefore inadequate. The principled version of the therapeutic argument is more plausible. Starting from documentation of the strains and doubts many men feel in the current period of challenges to traditional norms of masculinity from various directions, such as the women’s, gay, and ethnic or racial liberation movements, as well as the loss of many traditional work-related sources of masculinity validation, this position argues that men too need new role models, and that lasting social change is impossible without the cooperation of at least some men. (Goodman 1981, 104-105.) Men’s studies is then championed as an important source of new perspectives for these men. (Bliss 1980; Dubbert 1979, 1-12.)

While the latter therapeutic argument is correct as far as it goes, I find it insufficient as a justification for men’s studies. An analogy drawn from another therapeutic context may help clarify my reason here.

Many women, at a certain stage of their developing self-consciousness, are often counseled against giving vent to their feelings of anger against men on the grounds that it will only hurt men’s feelings and alienate them. This too is correct as a prediction of the likely effect of this course of action on men, but it is insufficient as a guide to a woman’s actions precisely because its exclusive point of reference is men’s feelings. A sounder reason not to display counterproductive anger is not because it will hurt men’s feelings, but because counterproductive speech of this kind is speech still made from the stance of the victim, of the powerless. Effective communication speaks with assured confidence in the validity and efficaciousness of its message. Thus to the extent any advice at all is called for, women should be counseled to move past the stage of anger precisely to the extent that this enhances the women’s self-image, and she should be allowed to retain what may in fact be not the best communicative mode precisely to the extent necessary to prevent relapse into an earlier stage of low self-esteem, including repressed anger. Analogously, I consider therapeutic arguments for men’s studies insufficient precisely because they too take as their reference point the needs of men, rather than the needs of women’s studies. By way of contrast, I have tried to present an argument for men’s studies based on the expansive possibilities of women’s studies, arguing that expansion in this direction fulfills important potentialities. That it also has the positive effect for men cited, as I believe it does, is all to the good, and importantly so, but it is not the fundamental reason why women’s studies should accept and support the new field of men’s studies.

Given fears about men “taking over” women’s studies which my arguments may raise, I should perhaps clarify the extent to which I
advocate the complementing of women’s studies by men’s studies. It does not follow from my analysis that it behooves males in positions of authority or influence to insist that women’s studies programs and departments now add men’s studies components. I draw a distinction here analogous to that drawn by Alison Jaggar in “Abortion and a Woman’s Right to Decide” (1973, 347-360). While the question of the relation between women’s and men’s studies is a philosophical question to which I have given my answer above, the question of who is to decide under what conditions this answer shall be implemented is a political question whose answer has a different locus. Despite my advocacy of the position set forth here, the decision-making authority on whether to incorporate men’s studies components into women’s studies programs must remain with women in women’s studies departments and programs. The steps I advocate should be taken precisely to the extent that these women decide it is best to do so.

While I cannot here even begin a survey of current work in the field of men’s studies, I would feel remiss in an article of this nature not to direct readers looking for an exemplary model to Joseph Pleck’s extremely important re-evaluation of the dominant psychological paradigm, The Myth of Masculinity (1981), which includes a list of “Resources for Male Role Studies” and a “Bibliography.” I would like to close by giving an example of the kind of research men’s studies would produce by looking at some possibilities from my own field of political philosophy.

I believe that the history of political theory contains an as yet insufficiently analyzed hidden history of masculinity. Much of what has passed for descriptive accounts of human nature can be more adequately understood as prescriptive accounts of historically specific paradigms of masculinity, including such scions of the masculine heritage as the warrior-scholar epitomized as Plato’s Philosopher-Ruler, the aristocrat who appears as Machiavelli’s Prince, the bourgeois male hypostatized as Hobbes’ natural man, and the homme-citoyen given the name of Rousseau’s Emile. David Morgan speculates along these lines when he writes

... it is possible to see Weber’s Protestant Ethic as a study of masculinity, not a universal, biologically fixed notion of masculinity but one that was intimately bound up with the developing social formation of capitalism. The main character traits of the ideal-typical puritan—self-control, discipline, rationality, methodicalness—are traits which would probably be defined as ‘masculine’ by many people, including not a few social psychologists,
in contemporary society. . . . In this study, as in many other studies, men were there all the time but we did not see them because we imagined that we were looking at mankind [sic]. (1981, 93)

Men’s studies perspectives are also needed to elucidate neglected areas of contemporary social and political philosophy. For example, finely nuanced analyses of male concepts of social identity are essential to any attempts to more deeply pursue Carol Gilligan’s suggestions (1982) that much of our moral discourse which centers on concepts of individual rights rather than interpersonal responsibilities derives from a particular kind of male bias and self-understanding, or Evelyn Fox Keller’s suggestions (1985) that our fundamental conceptions of scientific rationality are similarly derived. Furthermore, to take an area of current legislative controversy, even assuming feminist perspectives on questions of women’s reproductive rights there remain many questions to be answered in the largely uncharted terrain of male reproductive rights, such as putative men’s rights to abortion counseling, spousal notification of abortion decisions, adoptive rights of unwed fathers, rights and responsibilities of sperm donors, and health and safety rights of male workers in areas where protective labor legislation does protect some women’s rights.

To give one final example, I have argued elsewhere that one reason controversies about pornography and censorship have split usually allied civil libertarians from feminist advocates is that the classical civil liberties position on pornography assumes a classically male, dualistic, negative attitude towards the question of embodiment as pre-eminently experienced in sexuality, an attitude challenged by many feminists’ more wholistic stance towards mind/body questions, and that consequently much discussion about pornography between feminists and civil libertarians is often at cross-purposes, with feminists looking at how sexuality is portrayed, and civil libertarians focused on the substantially narrower question of whether sexuality is portrayed (Brod 1984, 47-63).

Men’s studies opens up many new possibilities. It has been my primary intention here simply to provide a context for the unfolding of these possibilities.7

In 1949 in the Introduction to The Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir wrote, “A man would never get the notion of writing a book on the peculiar situation of the human male” (1974, xvii).8 It is one of the foremost achievements of feminist scholarship that this is no longer true.
notes

1. My colleagues in the Program for the Study of Women and Men in Society at the University of Southern California have been very fruitfully engaged in this project. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their support in the writing of this paper.

2. For a recent statement of this line of criticism of sex role theory, see Stanley and Wise (1983, 97-105).

3. There is an older usage of "gender" in the biological sciences where it means what is herein referred to as biological sex. My use of the concept, however, is in accord with its prevailing current usage in the social sciences and humanities.

4. Though in the analysis which follows I classify other elements of this article as non-feminist, I believe these points are well taken.

5. This position is taken by Janet Saltzman Chafetz (1974, xi). Interestingly, she uses the term "gender" in its older biological sense.

6. See also the other works cited here, especially Pleck and Pleck (1980), which traces the development of men's history, and David and Brannon's widely used anthology on contemporary male sex roles (Brannon 1976). Two college level textbooks which provide useful presentations of current men's studies perspectives are Doyle (1983) and Franklin (1984).

7. The conception of men's studies delineated here is further developed in The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies (Brod 1987), and several articles in a special issue on men's studies of the Journal of the National Association for Women Deans, Administrators, and Counselors including Brod (1986).

8. I was reminded of this by Mark Gerzon's use of it as the introductory epigraph to his A Choice of Heroes: The Changing Faces of American Manhood (1982, 1).

references

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