This essay deals with three elements, representation, experience and masculinity, and some of the possible relationships between them. In the first place, I shall posit a contrast between a simple and more complex versions of these inter-connections. Secondly, I shall consider some possible historical sources of the growing complexities of these inter-connections, considering in particular relationships between this nexus and aspects of modernity or post-modernity. Thirdly, I shall consider some possible responses on the part of men to the growing problematic nature of this relationship. And finally, I shall argue for a more multi-stranded understanding which allows for the co-presence of a variety of relationships between representation, experience and masculinity within a modern society.

I should begin with a note of caution. While sociological evidence may be cited at various points that may appear to support the arguments that I am presenting, the overall speculative nature of this undertaking must be emphasized. Despite a considerable flowering of texts dealing with all aspects of men and masculinities in recent years, the study is still in its relative infancy and few of these issues have been explored in any real depth. It is hoped, however, that this essay may provoke further, more systematic, investigation.

It is also important at the outset to present some preliminary definitions of the key terms, although their character and complexity will become more apparent as some of the inter-connections are explored. By representation I mean any symbolic depiction or enactment of men and masculinities. This is not necessarily confined to visual or verbal representations in the form of books, plays, films, advertisements, painting, photographs and so on. It may also refer to more ritual enactments such as parades, religious services and sporting occasions. Experience is a complex term referring not simply to immediate physical sensations of
pleasure, pain, arousal, fear etc but also to the more mediated sense of experience as something which is recollected, talked about and woven into a continuous stream of meanings and identities over the life-course. Further, the term should not be taken as signifying something uniquely personal, although this is a popular and influential way in which experience is understood. Rather, the experience which I am talking about is social experience, social in that the sensations and feelings are mediated though and interact with the society within which they are produced. Further, since experience as a whole is something which undergoes constant redefinition and refinement, its social character reflects the numerous occasions upon which and the various audiences in relation to whom these redefinitions of experience take place.

Masculinity, likewise, is a complex and contested term. It is common, now, to talk of 'masculinities' in the plural\(^1\) and further to argue that these masculinities are represented in some kind of hierarchy, such that certain versions are more dominant or more hegemonic than others. The term, whether used in the singular or the plural, is normally taken to refer to sets of practices which are not biologically or psychologically given but which are shaped and elaborated under particular social and historical circumstances.

It may be seen that, defined in these ways, the three terms already have considerable degrees of overlaps and affinities. 'Masculinities' refers as much to representations as it does to the actual practices of real men as individuals or in groups. Experience is mediated, in part, through representations and representations draw upon, in often complex ways, individual or shared experiences. Experience, further, is something which is always gendered (although rarely just gendered) and constructions of masculinity draw upon shared or imagined experiences. The exploration of the links between these three elements is one of seeking to unravel connections which may already be present as a consequence of these affinities rather than the establishment of causal connections between discrete variables as might be the case with more positivistic modelling.

*The Simple Model*

It is possible to imagine a relatively straightforward circular relationship between the three terms, representation, experience and masculinity. If I need to go to the toilet in a restaurant or some other public place, I seek out a door with the appropriate words or, more often than not, a logo on it. I recognize this simplified logo as signifying maleness and the arrangements inside, urinals etc, confirm this gender identification. The signs on the

two doors emphasize a dichotomous understanding of gender and, in addition, may possibly point to other differences as well. Thus the more functional trousers on the male logo may contrast with the more decorative skirt on the female logo. Gender, representation and experience merge together in a few minutes, constituting some seamless, and seemingly natural, amalgamation. Transexuals or transvestites might, however, find this apparently natural order rendered problematic.2

We may also note societies or communities as a whole where these linkages appear relatively straightforward and apparently natural. Ethnographers and social anthropologists have described communities where the work and the environment is strongly identified with masculinity and where the day to day practices in family, leisure and everyday speech reinforce sharp, if complementary, distinctions between the worlds of men and the worlds of women (Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter provide one of the most widely cited and debated accounts).3 Such communities may be rural or fishing communities or may be dominated by one heavy industry such as mining. The everyday experiences of working underground or in some tightly-knit working group are based upon or reinforce gender differences and masculine identifications. The representations of masculinity may be found in union publicity, local songs or folk-tales and numerous other ways. For example, an historical account of a British fishing community states: 'Sea work was men's work; and for women to have any place in it would be a pollution'.4 This is not to say, of course, that women did not have a significant part to play in the local fishing economy; the important point here is the drawing of lines of demarcation and difference. In such communities, the world of men and the routine understandings of masculinity are subject to daily affirmation both in the company of other men and in the presence of the other, the women.

There are numerous examples in sociological and social anthropological literature of this apparently simple set of relationships. For a relatively recent illustration, I take a study of a small Australian town studied by Dempsey who makes clear the connections with masculinity in the title, A man's town.5 Here in 'Smalltown', Dempsey argues, there are two main gendered axes: the men's superior power, especially their material power and the ideology of gender.6 The identification of 'Smalltown,' as a man's

3 N. Dennis, F. Henriques and C. Slaughter, Coal is our life (London: Tavistock, 1956).
6 Ibid., 4.
town is clearly recognized as such by the women he interviewed although the men were more likely to qualify the label, arguing that everyone was different. However, Dempsey's account points powerfully to the contexts in which men's domination is expressed, in sport, for example, and in the 'men's houses' of Rotary or The Lions. In relation to sport, women are often 'married to the game' just as in the wider spheres of work and employment there are clear divisions between paid and unpaid labour and the exclusion of married women in general from the former. These structurings were presented as part of the natural ordering of affairs in this community and openly identified with values of traditionalism and resistance to more 'sophisticated' urban ways. Such examples are well-known and the communities described in these accounts increasingly seem to be part of a world we have lost (although the Dempsey account was published in 1992), the increasing distance of time simplifying even further the already over-simplified narratives which described and accounted for them. It is relatively easy to devise a package which contains working-class, community, notions of hardness and sexual difference bound together as some integrated whole. It is perhaps less easy to see the circles of masculinity, representation and experience in more middle-class and more individualized contexts.

As an illustration, let us take the part played by the actor, Trevor Howard, in the classic film, 'Brief encounter'. This is a long way from the worlds of miners or fishermen, even further from street-corner gangs. He is presented as an individual, with a distinct biography and a secure professional identity. He speaks relatively softly, is sensitive and has impeccable good manners. In the words of one critic: 'Trevor Howard plays his first considerable part in this film; he does not look ordinary, but he is not required to do so. He has strength, ease, and charm; his performance is quiet and assured'. Yet his movements, the decisive way in which he leaves the station waiting room for example, are the movements of someone who is at home in his environment, who moves easily between public and private spaces. Celia Johnson, on the other hand, never seems quite at home in these public spaces, despite the fact that she frequently makes the journey in order to change her library books, to shop or to have a coffee in the Kardomah. We could never imagine the character played by Trevor Howard, standing on the platform and wondering whether to throw himself under the approaching express train. Here too, gender, representation and experience would seem to coalesce.

Recently, writers on filmic representations of gender, have turned their attention to images of men and the processes of identification

that take place between filmic representation and male viewers.\(^8\)

In the case of Brief encounter, as in the cases of numerous other representations of men and masculinity, we assume that the men watching the film have no trouble in identifying with the male character. The nature of gendered identification with characters on the screen has been much discussed in the literature cited. Here, I would suggest that the identification is less in terms of the plot or character but much more in terms of a mode of being in the world. Even when caught up in the apparent irrational demands of love, Howard retains a controlled and disciplined presence. It is, more often than not, in the particularities that identification takes place; in the hailing of taxis, the lighting of cigarettes, the fetching of drinks and the holding of doors.

**Complexities**

Even in these routine, everyday activities there may be ruptures between the worlds of representation and the worlds of experience. Many adult men may feel that they become invisible when it comes to ordering drinks at the bar or hailing taxis. The relationships between our three terms may already be more complex than even the more simplified models suggests. There are particular areas where these complications become even more apparent. Debates about pornography, for example, often revolve around the extent to which these representations of gender and sexuality not only perpetuate patriarchal systems of domination but actually encourage or legitimate the sexual dominations suggested or portrayed. Women exist for men's pleasure, they are inviting and ever available. The men, on the other hand, are always ready and able to perform. Yet, the continuing debates around pornography, both within and outside feminist discourse, suggest further complexities. They suggest that the realms of fantasy and realms of everyday practice are not only two different things but are recognized as such by the participants. They point to differences according to the mode of consumption of pornographic images, between pornography as part of male bonding experiences, as a group activity, and the consumption as a more individualized act.\(^9\)

Another area of complexity lies in popular representations of the heroic. It may be noted that representations of the heroic

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frequently establish some kind of relatively unproblematic linkage between masculinity, violence and the taking of risk. Autobiographical accounts often suggest an identification, straightforward or more complex, with childhood comic book heroes such that these confirm and mould developing ideas of a masculine self. \(^{10}\) Similarly, the extremities of confrontation with real acts of violence may provoke the response that it is 'just like the movies'. A Vietnam veteran is quoted by Jefford as saying: 'had flash images of John Wayne films with myself as hero'. \(^{11}\) Yet again, however, it may be suggested that matters may often be more complex than this. Children quickly come to recognize the gulf between fiction and reality and if they continue to play at the fictions it may be with an increasing sense of irony or role distance. Jackson describes a partial sense of ironic detachment in reading the comic-book adventures of 'Cannonball Kidd'. \(^{12}\) The child who dresses up as 'Superman' will also quickly realize the nature of dressing up and performance for what it is, as a set of practices in their own right rather than some form of sympathetic magic which attempts to recreate the original. Boys in groups frequently draw attention to and mock the narrative conventions of the texts which they are simultaneously consuming. Thus boys of my generation quickly came to wonder how it was that cowboys retained their hats despite the most ferocious fist fights. At a more adult, and more consequential level, participants in armed conflict realize what is missing from the fictional narratives that bore some superficial similarities to the situations in which they found themselves. In both these examples there would appear to be a gap between the way things are supposed to work and the way things work in practice. Superficially, the circles between representation, gender and experience would seem to be straightforward. Pornographic or heroic images state or reaffirm what it is to be a man and these representations are incorporated into lived practices and experiences. Yet these more simplified accounts would seem to bypass the roles of fantasy and irony and the ability of social actors, men and women, to make use of and comment upon the representations which they confront rather than simply to absorb them into their constructions of gender and sexuality. One might argue that a dominant trend in modern sociology has been to explore the ways in which social actors are far from being absorbed in the roles that they play, whether this appears in discussions of the relationships between structure and agency, \(^{13}\) critiques of the


\(^{11}\) Jeffords, *Remasculinization*, 15.


more simplified, uni-directional accounts or Goffman's fruitful notion of 'role distance'.

We may argue, therefore, that one source of complexity lies in the ability of social actors, male and female, to comment upon the images and representations with which they are confronted. Another source of complexity lies in the very nature of male power. In a context which might be described as 'patriarchal' it may be suggested that there is often something paradoxical about representations of men and masculinities. Representations of men are ubiquitous, in statues, newspapers and magazines, tales and histories of public events and so on, yet they are also sometimes strangely muted. This may be a feature of Western culture where images of the Virgin Mary, for example, are much more obviously feminine than images of Christ are masculine. Put another way, public representations of men are sometimes less directly coded as masculine than are public representations of women; difficulties encountered in the attempts to provide a female equivalent of Playboy point in some way to this lack of symmetry. In part this is due to patterns of male hegemony whereby those in power do not necessarily have to draw direct attention to those attributes which constitute the basis of their power. Associated with this is the familiar historical merging of masculinity with humanity. In part also there is the traditional association of men with individuality or singularity. Within this framework women are more easily represented as a group or as representatives of a category while men are more readily identified with individual subjects. The frequent complaints about the lack of good parts for women in films or plays may be one illustration of this.

It may indeed be argued that, despite the apparent stability of conventional representations of men and masculinity, there is often a barely concealed uncertainty or insecurity about some of these models. For example, in some cases work of interpretation or reinterpretation is required in order to achieve the links between gender and representation. Thomas Hughes work, The manliness of Christ may be taken as an illustration here. The author of Tom Brown's schooldays (1856) was concerned about popular representations of Christ which presented him in too passive or too feminine a light. There was perhaps some concern that young men were being turned away from the church and Christianity by images which seemed to stress passive suffering and sacrifice rather than a more active engagement in the world. While Hughes was


also concerned to distance himself from over simplified versions of 'muscular Christianity', the man who saw boxing as an integral part of the education of young men was unlikely to wish to perpetuate images of 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild'. Christ driving the money lenders from the temple was potentially a much more attractive model and has continued to be so in debates about Christianity and pacifism.

Thus, just as individuals may use and respond to gendered representations in a variety of ways, so too are there various possible responses within a given society to particular images. Some degree of challenge or contestation is possible. If some of the central images of Christ might seem to be too feminine for some commentators, other more secular or popular representations of masculinity might also seem to raise doubts as to their desirability. For example, the unambiguous boyish character of William Brown in the popular stories of Richmal Crompton, might prove too much for some educators, concerned with the development of more appropriate role models. William scorned things feminine and enjoyed the more robust activities associated with the open air and his gang of outlaws. William, it might be said, was often a little too close to truth for comfort. Later, in a different context and raising different issues, doubts were cast on the appropriateness of James Bond as a masculine role model. Here the concerns were with his sexual promiscuity, his cheerful acceptance of violence and his class-based snobbery. The more general point to make is that many of the figures who were constructed as masculine representations could also be subject to multiple readings and hence contest and debate. In a more pluralistic society, such debates become increasingly likely.

Thus images and representations of men sometimes require some considerable work of interpretation before the linkages with masculinity may be secured. Further, and this is increasingly the case in more complex societies, dominant images of masculinity may also be open to challenge or contest. In such cases, the apparent unbroken circles linking masculinity, representation and experience are rendered more problematic. It might be wondered, indeed, whether there is not some deeper, inbuilt instability in masculinities and their representation. These seemingly strong linkages, even in some of the most apparently favourable circumstances, may always have something of the problematic about them. This was certainly part of the much debated argument

of Nancy Chodorow\textsuperscript{20} where, especially in modern times, the combination of the strong skewing of parenthood in the direction of mothers with the relative absence on a regular basis of fully rounded masculine role models, encouraged the development of forms of masculinity which encouraged hardness, emotional distance and detachment. Within a patriarchal society, the processes of masculine identification are founded on a degree of insecurity and inauthenticity. In the process of growing up, the boy is certain that he does not wish to be like his mother but often has little sense of a more positive source of identification. The familiar models of hegemonic masculinity (‘no sissy stuff’, ‘the big wheel’, ‘the sturdy oak’ and ‘give ‘em hell’)\textsuperscript{21} have a degree of abstraction or remoteness about them. In some of the more extreme cases these may take on the character of a kind of hypermasculinity, with the stress on hardness and a capacity for violence.

At this point it needs to be stressed that our concerns are not only with gender and that gender is always compounded with and refracted though other structured systems of difference and inequality such as class and race. Thus, some current concerns about masculinity often focus upon, not men in general, but young working class and/or black males. This is linked, in some political and social scientific debates with concerns about higher proportions of female headed households and the greater degrees of elaboration of flourishing masculine street cultures, with their associated patterns of contest and controlled violence, defence of honour and territory and sharp divisions between male and female spheres.

\textit{Modernity and Complexity}

The more psycho-analytical accounts suggest that the problems of male identification, and hence the links between masculinity, representation and experience, have been with us for some time and have deep roots. Nevertheless, other debates continue to point to exchanges between social contexts and individual experience. Even if one accepts that the more problematic aspects of masculinity have deep roots it may still be argued that there are particular features of a modern society, or more specifically a late modern society, which may exacerbate these problems.

In the first place we may refer to a possible decline or weakening of distinct, dominant or uncontested masculine representations. As we have seen, many dominant images — Bond, Rambo etc — are themselves objects of debate and contestation. There are

\textsuperscript{20} N. Chodorow, \textit{The reproduction of mothering} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

continuing debates about particular sports personalities or rock musicians, who may manifest certain features of hegemonic masculinities, and whether they are appropriate models for young men at the end of the twentieth century. Public debates about the career of the boxer, Mike Tyson, provide a particularly dramatic example. Further, the former dominance of male heroic models has been increasingly challenged by the growth of dominant women whose symbolic representations often take on some of the characteristics of heroism conventionally associated with men. Baroness Thatcher is probably the most prominent example in recent decades where heroic images — at the time of the Falkland's War or in her stance over many aspects of Europe for examples — merged with but did not suppress other more feminine representations.

Thus there would appear to be a degree of instability in representations of masculinity in high modern cultures. Few of the dominant images of men and masculinity go unchallenged and there is increasing competition from dominant images of women which appear to appropriate some traditional masculine territory without denying themes of femininity. At the same time, as I shall argue later, there are challenges to the very idea of stable and oppositional models of masculinity and femininity and their association with dominant sexualities. The growing instability of representations of masculinity has been matched, and perhaps partially caused by, the weakening of distinctive masculine experiences. This has several dimensions to it. In the first place, while gendered divisions of labour are still very much apparent in the labour market and in the home, the exclusivity of any sphere has almost completely broken down, partly as a consequence of legislation dealing with equal opportunities and partly as a consequence of shifts in less formal negotiated practices between women and men in, say, domestic labour. Thus while certain areas of public life are still heavily weighted in favour of men, the sense of total exclusivity has gone: politics, followed somewhat later by the military and the church provide some of the key examples here. Further, there are increasing debates about the recruitment of men to areas traditionally associated with women such as nursing and, less formally, parenting or child-care in general.

This has consequences at the level of day to day experience as well as for the more abstract structures of the labour market or gendered divisions of labour. Here we are talking about the increasing sharing of physical space (as well as symbolic space) by women and men and the consequences of this for everyday

experiences. It is clearly not necessarily the case, at least in the short run, that occupation of the same physical and symbolic space by men and women will lead to the lessening of gendered boundaries or practices. In some cases, the reverse may be more likely. Thus women, introduced into areas formerly exclusive to or heavily dominated by men, may find themselves confronted by a variety of gendered practices including informal exclusions and sexual harassment. The police and the military provide widely quoted examples here. We may assume that, in these cases, the exclusionary or other practices on the part of men will reinforce and perpetuate gendered identities and divisions rather than the reverse.

One important factor in the construction of masculinity is the possibility of exclusive sharing of physical space with other men. Such sharing may vary according to the degree of openness or closedness of this space and the extent to which it is officially approved and supported. Thus at one end we have all-male total institutions such as prisons, boarding schools, the traditional military and some occupations such as deepsea fishing. Next there may be institutions and organisations such as single-sex day schools or the boy scouts where the boys spend a portion of their time in the company of other boys but will normally spend other time, on a day-to-day basis, in more mixed groupings. Or, again, there may be other groups such as gangs which are all-male but which lack official sanction. It is perhaps difficult to provide a clear picture as to whether the sum total of all the opportunities, within a life time, for spending time exclusively with members of the same sex, have declined or remained more or less stable. What would seem to be the case is that even where these institutions persist (such as schools, gangs etc) the amount of time spent in the course of a life in the exclusive company of other men has probably declined. However, the rise in the prison population in recent years suggests that these developments will be unevenly distributed amongst the general population. Symbolically, the dominance of all-male institutions would seem to be less important with the introduction of women into areas such as the military and the police.

There can be little doubt that exclusive male spaces continue and that, in addition, there are a variety of masculine practices that persist to perpetuate exclusive male space even in the face of what may be perceived as an 'invasion' of women. However, such forms of opposition are not inevitable and do not necessarily persist over time. At the very least, codes of practice may be developed to deal with some of the more obvious masculine practices such as sexual harassment or more overt forms of discrimination. All in all we can see a parallel weakening of dominant and unchallenged exclusive male representations just as we see an erosion, at least in some areas, of exclusive masculine experiences.
The increasing problematization of representations of masculinity and the partial erosion of exclusively masculine symbolic and physical spaces are together part of wider shifts in the gender order. While this cannot be described straightforwardly as a shift in the direction of greater equality it nevertheless represents increasing uncertainties in the relationships between men and women in both the public and the private spheres. While, taking a longer historical view, the shifts undergone by women have been the more substantial and far-reaching, in more recent years the impact of these changes on men and masculinities has been more obvious. Here, as elsewhere, it is important to attempt to distinguish between the public representations of these gendered disquiets and what these may mean at the level of day to day practices. Public debates are not necessarily or directly paralleled by questionings of individual activities. However, it is possible to argue for an increasing calling into question of several aspects of taken for granted masculinities and men’s practices.

Two examples may be provided at this point. The first is to do with fatherhood, fathers and fathering. One recent, if limited, survey of media representations found that references to fathers and fatherhood outnumbered references to mothers and that in most of these cases the references were to the darker side of fathering, involving abuse or neglect. A variety of competing images of fathers and fathering come to occupy central stage in opposition to the relatively stable, if idealized, representation of the Victorian patriarch or the male breadwinner. Among the more negative images there are the absent father, the father who is absent in almost all but financial provision and some leisure activities, the abusive father and the fathers who, more collectively, noisily assert their paternal rights in relation to children, born or unborn. A slightly less negative image is that of the father who, while physically present, fails to do what might be regarded as his ‘fair share’ in the more practical aspects of child-care. Among the more positive images, ideally or in actuality, are those of men seeking to play a more active role in child-care. It can be seen that while there is this diversity of images around the notion of fatherhood they do not constitute a coherent unity. If it be a unity, it is a unity of contradictions.

Behind the debates around actual fathering practices and what might be expected of individual fathers, there are also debates about the actual identification of the biological father himself. Debates about ‘test-tube’ babies, surrogate motherhood or lesbian parents appear to marginalize the presence of men as fathers right

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from the beginning. At the very least, much of the heat associated with the opposition to these practices on the part of men may be seen as reflecting a fear of increasing marginality in an area which was once seen as a key signifier of masculinity. In the broadest sense we may see this as an erosion of some of the more taken for granted aspects of masculine identity. From a stage where fatherhood might be said to constitute *the* parental identity, 24 we have moved through an understanding which sees it central in terms of support and authority to one which has seen the erosion and sharing of both. The mother is more likely to be defined as the key parent (a definition reflected in disputed custody cases) while the model of the 'male breadwinner' (always weaker in practice than it was in ideology) has been subject to steady erosion. Another way of considering the shift is in terms of a severe weakening of the links between public and private patriarchy 25 so that the former depends little on the latter. With some exceptions fatherhood has ceased to be the dominant metaphor for masculine authority.

The other example is perhaps in the area of sexual conduct. While it is unlikely that heterosexual relationships were ever as straightforward in the past as they might now appear — the continuing debates about the character of Victorian sexualities bears witness to this continuing uncertainty — it would seem that certain dominant themes recurred. Whether the man was engaged in seduction, courtship or simply sowing wild oats, he was constructed and constructed himself as the initiator in these matters. With the exception of the weak man helpless in the clutches of a femme fatale, a situation which was either tragic or comic, the man was expected to take the lead. Oral historical accounts reveal pictures of male led courtships whose rituals seemed to be as firmly established as weddings themselves, even though the search of sexual experience might lead to other models of gendered encounters. 26 The familiar distinctions between the nice girl and the slut were constructed by men although often appropriated by women. They both related to a world where men were supposed to be the initiators in heterosexual relationships; the difference between the two was in terms of the answer the woman gave. But it was the man who asked the question. This broad model, reflected in the code of conduct in dance halls, popular places for the meeting of sexual or marriage partners, carried on into married life with different expectations as to the initiation and the enjoyment of sexuality. Again, more detailed research has


revealed the complexities of and the exceptions within married sexuality from Victorian to our own times. However, it would seem that the dominant model was clear, however much the actual practice departed from it.

Again, it could be argued that these understandings of heterosexual conduct were rooted in wider constructions of masculinity and femininity which were, in their turn, rooted in a construction of the natural order of things. Notions of male and female needs in terms of sexuality underpinned these ideas and practices and are still influential today. However, shifts in the relative freedom of women in sexual matters have introduced elements of uncertainty in this taken for granted order of things. The changes were numerous: increasing ranges of opportunities for men and women to meet outside areas formally prescribed for such encounters; the weakening surveillance from other family member, neighbours, kin etc; the weakening of the connection between sex and marriage in theory and in practice; the understanding of sexuality as something to be valued in its own right and an integral part of personal identity and the ideal of shared pleasure between sexual partners. For men, the shift would seem to be one from where the rules were generally understood (if not always adhered to) and provided some kind of structure in advance of any sexual encounter, to one where the rules are open to negotiation in the course of each sexual encounter. These ambiguities, although often over-stated in the media or the courtroom, inform discussions about and cases of date rape as well as introducing new matters of etiquette around, say, the production of a condom.

Consequences
If it is possible to argue for a weakening of the relationship between gender, representation and experience in the case of masculinity, what might the consequences of this weakening be? It might be argued that one possible consequence might be the development of exaggerated or hyper forms of masculine representation. In this kind of context, the ‘Rockys’ and ‘Rambos’ become short-hand terms for a particular form of masculinity which emphasises not only hardness and a capacity to deliver and to receive violence but also the single-minded pursuit of a goal. Beyond these, Robocop and The Terminator movies develop the merging of man and machine as something capable of even greater feats of destruction in the pursuit of a particular end. It can be argued that these representations present models of masculinity which become ever more removed from experience or from the actual masculine practices in a modern world.

The development of highly exaggerated or one-sided models of masculinity may be seen as a response to the kinds of shifts in the gender order, outlined above. But they may also be seen as part
of the 're-masculinization' of American culture since the end of the Vietnam war.\textsuperscript{27} Jeffords sees a wider cultural shift, reflected in movies that were directly or indirectly about the Vietnam war, towards a greater emphasis on masculine values, both individual and collective, a sharpening of themes of gender difference and a downgrading of things feminine together with an attack on the values of feminism itself. Her account allows for some variation; in a recent piece she points to the shifts in the two 'Terminator' films from the destructive, more hyper-masculinity of the former to a greater emphasis upon feminine or caring values in the second.\textsuperscript{28} However, her discussion is perhaps a little one-dimensional and, at the very least, does not fully account for the popularity of Rambo and Rocky in countries relatively untouched, at least directly, by the war.

While it might appear that there is a considerable distance between the lives of real men and their representations in some modern action movies, it is nevertheless the case that words like 'Rambo' have become part of the language with which we describe and talk about the world and the practices of men within it. Whether or not they actually inform the fantasies of actual men, they certainly become part of the way in which newspaper representations depict the violent acts of the Hungerford or the Dunblane killers.\textsuperscript{29} Whether these representations actually have any real effect on the practices of men (matters which are subject to continual debate) is perhaps less important than the fact that the representations become part of the way in which these seemingly inexplicable acts are made intelligible. Thus the symbolic meanings of Rambo become detached from the original movies just as, it may be argued, the Rambo character is one cast adrift from the ties of family and community and left to rely upon simplified and exaggerated understandings of masculinity.

It may sometimes be argued that these representations are part of a wider 'backlash' against feminism and the advancements made by women towards the end of the twentieth century. There may be something in this argument although it is likely that it is only part of the story. The undermining of the more established sources of masculine identity in home and work, while they are associated with shifts in the position of women, also have their own more direct or autonomous effects. The actual or relative loss of power and authority in the home, the workplace and on the battlefield is turned upside down in representations of seemingly limitless

\textsuperscript{27} Jeffords, \textit{Remasculinization}.
power, assisted by the use of modern weaponry and technology, and a capacity for destruction.

But the elaboration of hyper-masculine models, stressing awesome destructive power and ability to withstand and deliver violence, is only one possible response to the loosening of the relationships that we have mentioned. Indeed, the models of destructive masculinity merge into more parodic forms of masculinity in which the violent hero is, as it were, winking at the audience reminding it that it is all a game. Holmlund refers to representations of masculinity in Stallone's 'buddy body movies' as an example of multiple masquerade.30 Stallone and Schwarzenegger quickly evolve characters and parts which become knowing parodies of the earlier more serious representations. In a different vein, some of the comic representations of laddish behaviour depict men behaving badly in ways which seek to undermine our condemnation of the bad behaviour, the crudity and the sexism, by treating it as ironic parody. The strip cartoon, 'The Yobs' in Private Eye represents, in true Baudrillardian fashion, a representation of a set of representations, a parody of a parody.

Ironic and parody can, of course take many forms and in opposition to the hypermasculinity or its parodic versions, there may also be various forms of cross-dressing, literally or figuratively. Here the development of 'fantastic women' in (literal cross-dressing) may be less an act of homage to femininity and more an attempt to demonstrate the irrelevance of women.31 This would seem to be a possible interpretation of the popular Australian film, Priscilla, queen of the desert where the trio of cross-dressers show inventiveness, a spirit of adventure and toughness as well as a whole range of feminine characteristics and styles. Real women can scarcely get a look in. The worlds of irony and parody readily fit into recent discussions of 'queer theory' end the undermining of stable dichotomous representations and practices of gender and sexuality.32

However it would be wrong to concentrate exclusively on forms of parody or irony or of hyper-masculinity. In a sense these might be seen as representations detached, at least to some degree, from both experience and the more routine gender practices. The more important features of our present times would seem to be, first, the explicit naming and problematizing of masculinities and,

second, the development of the idea of a range of masculinities. In addition, and partly as a result of these, we may be looking at the possibilities of a weakening of gendered identities.

The problematizing of masculinities begins with, in Collinson and Hearn’s words, the naming of men as men. This entails a shift in focus whereby men, previously identified with humanity in general or simply taken for granted, are named as gendered subjects. In very simplified terms it can be argued that the first move was the discovery of the lives and experiences of women who had, until the recent past, been obscured in more general histories or discussions of ‘society.’ The second move was to look critically and problematically at men, those who traditionally occupied the foreground of historical or sociological accounts even where their gender had been obscured. This second move, which is still taking place, has rarely been straightforward but it has produced a range of gendered understandings of men in the workplace, in organizations, in families and in numerous other sites.

What this problematization means for our present analysis is that, as we have already argued, the easy links between masculinity, representation and experience have been partially exposed and partially fractured. What this also entails is the growing understanding of a plurality of masculinities. This plurality applies to the range of dominant or public representations of men and masculinity and the range of experiences of and understandings of what it means to be a man. While Connell’s influential idea of ‘hegemonic masculinities’ reminds us that these masculinities are, to some degree, hierarchically ordered and differentially privileged, at the same time there is greater recognition that variation exists and representations can be refused or treated as irrelevant as well as woven into everyday experience. In the increasing number of discussions of men and masculinities, the conferences, publications, weekend-schools and so on, men are discovering points of difference as well as commonalities. Theoretically it is still possible to relate these diverse ways of conceptualizing and experiencing masculinity as continuing to be related to and reinforcing a wider patriarchal system of domination. But at a more experiential level, these diversities, and their recognition, becomes more and more important and may, in the long run, be a source of change or challenge in the wider gender order.

Conclusion
This recognition of a range of ways of experiencing masculinity may also be linked with an overall weakening of gender as a

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34 Connell, *Masculinities*. 
principle for ordering social relations. Further, an understanding that reaches beyond the confines of nations or societies most readily defined as 'modern' might lead to an overall questioning of the usefulness of the notion of masculinity itself: 'Indeed I am forced to wonder whether "masculinity" is in itself a culture-bound concept that makes little sense outside Euro/American culture'.

Our object of knowledge, he continues, should be, instead of 'masculinity', 'men's places and practices in gender relations'. Such practices may become woven into an increasingly dominant world order but relate to the institutions and strategies of that order rather than to some universal masculinity. The spread of the 'Rambo' representation cannot be separated from these global processes.

Even without a growing awareness of the possible culture-bound nature of our constructions of masculinity or masculinities, it is likely that earlier models of masculinity were much too one-dimensional, presenting fairly crude stereotypical pictures of men that had little relationship to everyday experiences. Some of the earlier discussions appeared to adopt, even where criticizing them, some of the more dominant and forceful images of masculinity. This adoption ran the danger of leaving some of the subtler forms of male domination under-examined. A more finely nuanced understanding of masculinities developed and with this the increasing recognition that men, while they were indeed gendered subjects, were never just gendered subjects. Similar recognitions had previously developed in feminist deconstructions of the notion of 'woman' and 'femininity'. In other words, gendered subjects were also classed subjects and raced subjects as well as being influenced by numerous other bases for identification. While it would be difficult to imagine experiences and social encounters which did not have something of gender about them it might also be difficult to imagine situations which were simply and solely about gender. In some cases and under some circumstances, these other bases for identification might be the more important.

Another aspect of this possible weakening of gender, is the growing recognition of the many overlaps that exist between the experiences and understandings of women and men; conversely, the differences between different groups of men and different groups of women might be felt as being of more day to day relevance. While scientific models of men and women and masculinity and femininity have often stressed the differences, the

36 Ibid., 601.
self-same evidence frequently points to overlaps and similarities. Put at its simplest, men and women are not from different planets and while they frequently misunderstand each other or clash in the day to day play of sexual politics they can also, for all practical purposes, get along. The hope is, that as increasing numbers of sites become the legitimate locations for both men and women, that these overlaps will continue. The growing complexities in the relationships between representation, experience and masculinities reflect and perhaps contribute to these overlaps.