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Theorizing Men and Men's Theorizing: Mapping the Trajectory of the Development of Victorian Masculinity Studies

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Abstract

This article presents an overview of critical studies on Victorian men and Victorian masculinity. It begins by defining masculinity and delineating how its sociology is typically understood as consisting of three main 'waves.' It then proceeds to tracing the early beginnings of Victorian Masculinity Studies through the late 1970s to the early 1980s. Subsequently, it provides a reading of major works on Victorian masculinity from the 1990s to the 2000s. In so doing, it argues how the trajectory of both literary and historical scholarship has moved away from the traditional focus on a unitary, homogeneous, and culturally sanctioned form of Victorian masculinity to the plurality of Victorian masculinities. Drawing from Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, which posits a hierarchy of multiple masculinities engaged in power relations, the article reviews works that examine a series of dominant as well as subordinate masculinities as created, negotiated and sustained in the Victorian era. The article finally shows how the analysis of multiple forms of Victorian masculinity points toward the fluidity and instability of masculine identities thereby constructing the subject of Victorian masculinity as an ever-changing theoretical phenomenon embedded within historically, culturally and socially embedded discourse that is crucial not only to an understanding of Victorian studies but also to the academic study of both literature and history.

Keywords: hegemonic masculinity, masculinity vs. masculinities, subordinate masculinity, Victorian gender ideology

Introduction

(a) Defining Masculinity

What is 'masculinity'? Is 'masculinities' a more appropriate term? If yes, then how are Victorian masculinities socially, culturally and historically constructed? What are some of the ways in which Victorian masculinities have been conceived, researched, studied and theorized? It is imperative to state here that because the answer to the first question paves the way for answers to the remaining three, this article characteristically begins by tracing the origin and meaning of the basic term—masculinity.

The concept of masculinity or masculinities in its current form was first used in the mid-1980s, although prior to that, it had already been employed in psychology (Brod & Kaufman 1994). In 1985 a classic article by Carrigan, Connell, and Lee was called "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity." This was followed by Jeffrey Weeks' *Sexuality* (1986), a text that coined the term 'masculinities.' A year later, a collection edited by Brod was called *The Making of Masculinities*, and by 1989 Jeff Hearn referred to 'masculinities' as a term describing issues and research about men. This being its foundation, what indeed does masculinity mean? The closest answer to this question is perhaps that masculinity encompasses all those values, perspectives, behaviours,

practices, gestures, forms of speech, and body language which are typically associated with males and therefore culturally defined as not feminine. In this sense, masculinity is dependent on its *others* (e.g., women and gay men) for its definition. It follows then that masculinity is inherently relational rather than merely the product of genetic coding or biological predispositions (Clatterbaugh 1990; Whitehead & Barrett 2001). Because each culture that treats men and women as bearers of polarized character types embodies and exercises this concept of masculinity (Alsop et al 2002), it becomes important to pay attention, as the next section of this article does, to historical change and historical specificity that illustrate the social construction of masculinity, and to the plurality of ways in which masculinity is lived, practiced and sustained.

(b) The Sociology of Masculinity

The sociology of masculinity comprises the critical study of men and as such, it not only originates from but is also influenced by, and aligns itself with, feminist theories. But where feminist thinking tends to oversimplify the position of men in the gender order by upholding and amplifying their socioeconomic advantages against women, and viewing them in a somewhat universalist and unidimensional mode, as heads of family and state who wield power in a patriarchal society, Masculinity Studies strives to problematize this largely reductionist interpretation and challenges the portrait of men as essentialist. Masculinity Studies, then, in many ways, is the double of feminist criticism as it examines the social construction of and changes in ‘masculinities’ (as opposed to ‘masculinity’) based on men’s differences in sexuality, class, race, nationality and other such factors.

Since its beginnings, the sociology of masculinity has traversed across three distinctive theoretical ‘waves,’ almost in tandem with corresponding shifts in the theoretical patterns of feminist thinking. Influenced by the initial activity of the Men’s Liberation Movements located in Britain and North America, the first of these waves emerged during the 1970s and was concerned with the problematic of the male role, and the accompanying socialization processes and social control. It contended that men too, like women, are harmed by sexism in internalizing and attempting to conform to dominant expectations of masculine ideology, a process that Joseph Pleck (1981) has termed “male gender role discrepancy” (13). After the first developments were made under the paradigm of gender-role theory, the second wave of Masculinity Studies began to form following third wave feminism in the late 1980s. During this phase, Masculinity Studies focused on the experience of marginal and minority men and was concerned with issues pertaining to class, ethnicity, sexual identity and so forth. Exemplified by the work of Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985), second wave theorizing introduced hegemonic masculinity as the touchstone concept of Masculinity Studies, and consequently the notion of plurality was established as a central tenet of masculinity. Derived from the Gramscian notion of hegemony, Connell defined hegemonic masculinity as the dominant masculine ideal of a culture (1987:183; 1995:77). This was followed by third wave theorizing in the early 1990s that viewed gender as a main discursive metaphor for exercising power. Prevalent even today, it is chiefly concerned with unraveling the complex relationship between men’s identities, and the naturalization of, as well as resistance to, patriarchal power. This cultural turn within the sociology of masculinity has been primarily influenced by feminist post-structuralism as well as theories of post-modernity (Butler 1990; Nicholson 1990), and focuses on questions of normativity, performativity and sexuality.

It is against such a background that this article charts the trajectory of the development of Victorian Masculinity Studies. Because the discourse on Victorian Masculinity Studies cannot be separated from the larger discourse within its parent field, that of Masculinity Studies, any

overview of the former must necessarily begin with, and be informed by, an outline of the latter. This overarching context of the meaning and sociology of masculinity therefore equips us with the tools required to examine the growth of Victorian Masculinity Studies from its early stages to the present day.

Methodology

Drawing from Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell's theory which disrupts the notion of a singular, uniform masculinity to argue that there exist, instead, multiple forms of masculinities, each engaged in the power struggle to gain ascendancy over the other, this article employs her classification of the categories of hegemonic and subordinate masculinity (1987; 1995). Because the trajectory of Victorian Masculinity Studies essentially involves academic forays into both these hierarchical groups of masculinities—one that fits into the dominant or hegemonic ideal (heterosexual and therefore viewed in the Victorian era as normative), and another that qualifies as a subordinate type (homosexual and therefore viewed in the Victorian era as non-normative)—the article oscillates between providing a recapitulation of works that deal with the social and historical pressures which conditioned, characterized and bolstered the former with all its concomitant cultural denominations, complexities, contradictions and conflicts; and a summation of those that set out to tabulate the history, anxieties and the ideological as well as iconographical representations of the latter. In so doing, some of the research questions asked are: What distinguishes hegemonic and subordinate forms of masculinity? If social constructs such as the heterosexual and the gentleman are read as hegemonic, how are these located in the history, culture and ideology of the Victorian era? If non-normative figures such as the homosexual and the effeminate man are read as subordinate, how does this reflect questions of masculine identity and sexuality prevalent at the time? Finally, how does the dialogic framework between these two different kinds of male gender behavior operate in the context of the development of Victorian Masculinity Studies?

Discussion

(a) The late 1970s and early 1980s: Early Beginnings of Victorian Masculinity Studies

One of the earliest studies that took as its subject matter the constraints of hegemonic Victorian masculinity is Carol Christ's "Victorian Masculinity and the Angel in the House" that appeared as a chapter in Martha Vicinus' influential feminist anthology *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Women* (1977). The phrase, which has come to typify the Victorian ideal of womanhood, is taken from Coventry Patmore's poem "The Angel in the House" (1854-62), and Christ employs it not only as a means to reconsider the stereotype but also as the basis to explain its relationship to male ambivalence about normative manhood. Drawing upon feminist insights, she uncovers instances of idealized visions of femininity found in the works of Patmore, Tennyson, John Ruskin and Charles Dickens in order to examine "the pressures the age brought upon the Victorian man" (1977:147). These male writers not only defined but in fact, valorized womanhood as passive and inert, yet at the same time, in keeping with Victorian gender ideology, they were also acutely aware that the onus of sexual responsibility which included both intercourse and conception was to be carried by men alone. This was no small responsibility as both Christian precept and the discourse of reason inherited from the Enlightenment stated that sexual passion should be tamed and controlled. The leading writers of the period were therefore both drawn to and re-

constructed these “fantasies” of feminine virtue in their works which represented the qualities that men wanted to embody but were excluded from in their Victorian role as the sole bearers of sexuality (146-162). Christ shows how the writers’ expression of deep fears of the sexual energy within man and the consequent fragility of manhood itself was the result of historical pressures affecting conceptions of hegemonic masculinity as well as femininity.

Almost coinciding with Christ’s analysis of hegemonic Victorian masculinity is sociologist Jeffrey Weeks’ exploration of one of the forms of subordinated Victorian masculinity—the homosexual—encapsulated in *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Nineteenth Century to the Present* (1977). In surveying the “homosexual politics” of Victorian England based on political leaflets, manifestos, handouts and other such documents, Weeks details a history of the British Gay Liberation movement. He begins by identifying the differences between earlier attitudes toward sodomy and buggery and the late nineteenth century discovery of a group apart called homosexuals. This distinction is once again mirrored in Michael Foucault’s first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1978). Both writers contend that the law punished men and women who performed sexual acts contrary to accepted heterosexual norms. However, it was only in the nineteenth century that there emerged what Weeks calls the “homosexual consciousness” (1977:22) and “homosexual self definition” (125) of British radicals. Even as a new terminology, in particular the word “homosexual” was invented to describe this deviant subculture, same-sex desiring individuals constructed their own perception of identity and community through recourse to social and cultural discourses such as law, politics and the art. *Coming Out* was an important text of its times, it being one of the first studies to call attention to the myriad ways in which individuals defined their identities based on non-normative sexualities.

Weeks’ work was soon followed by Robert Hurley’s English translation of *The History of Sexuality* (1978), where Foucault argues that we generally tend to read the history of sexuality since the late seventeenth century to the early twentieth century in terms of what he calls the “repressive hypothesis” (15-36). This hypothesis supposes that sexuality as well as the open discussion of sex during these periods was repressed as a result of the rise of capitalism and the bourgeoisie. Consequently, sex was treated as a private matter that occurred only between a husband and a wife. Sex outside these confines was not prohibited but repressed through efforts to make it both unthinkable and unspeakable. Foucault argues against this hypothesis by positing that dialogue on sexuality, in fact, proliferated in the nineteenth century and was the result of nineteenth-century medical discourse, an “artificial unity” that “cobbled out of anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations and pleasures”(1978:154). This discourse on sexuality, contends Foucault, surreptitiously inveigles people into policing their own desires without any pressure from external forces. It was through these medical practices that people learnt to internalize both the notion of their “true” (69) sexual identities as well as how their sexual practices comprised the most fundamental truth about themselves (65-67). As a result of this medical regulation of sexual activity, what Foucault calls the “*scientia sexualis*” (53-73), the male homosexual emerged as a distinct sexual category, and a new “species” was born (37-49). Yet Foucault maintains that the nineteenth-century also saw the onset of a “reverse discourse” (101) on homosexuality in that it served as the particular historical moment in which the homosexual male first attempted to defend himself:

The appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and “psychic hermaphroditism” made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of “perversity”; but it also made possible the formation of a “reverse” discourse:

homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or “naturalness” be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified (101).

This reverse discourse remains to this day one of the basic political tactics of modern gay and lesbian liberationists.

Robin Gilmour's *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (1981) is another early work that analyzes the figure of the gentleman who, like the heterosexual male was yet another type of hegemonic masculinity that existed in the Victorian era. Even though, unlike its predecessors the text lacks a basic awareness of masculinity as a social construction, nevertheless it successfully combines Victorian notions of masculine gender identity with that of social class and the world of commerce. For Gilmour, the concept of “gentleman” is significant firstly because it was for most Victorians “a cultural goal, a mirror of desirable moral and social values” (1981:1), and secondly because this notion lay “at the heart of the social and political accommodation between the aristocracy and the middle classes” (2). For Gilmour it is the assumption, rather than the reality, of gentlemanly status that worked to satisfy middle class men and their “desire to be accepted by the traditional hierarchy”(9). By linking characteristics associated with the gentleman (which included physical appearance as well as moral character) to the idea (if not reality) of social mobility, Gilmour establishes how gender identity functions in a larger historical framework making the visibility of a certain type of hegemonic masculinity—in this case the figure of the gentleman— more vital than its actuality.

Drawing from the insights of both feminists and historians, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), offers an account of relationships between men and how these relationships impinge on men's relations with women. Sedgwick uses the term “male homosocial desire” to refer to all male bonds, including, potentially, everyone from overt heterosexuals to overt homosexuals. In this sense, Sedgwick combines in her study, a type of hegemonic masculinity with another type of subordinate masculinity. She differentiates between “homosocial” and “homosexual” positing that the former signifies a form of male-male bonding often accompanied by the fear or hatred of homosexuality. She rejects the notion that one can readily distinguish the three categories of hetero-, bi- and homosexual men from one another, because what might be conceptualized as ‘erotic’ depends on a series of unpredictable local factors. Borrowing from Rene Girard's theory of ‘mimetic desire’ to describe a triangular structure of desire, Sedgwick argues that when two men vie for the same woman, their potentially homoerotic desires get routed through the woman who then “can be seen as pitiable or contemptible” (1985:160) for she exists merely as an emblem of desire between men. In the latter half of her study, Sedgwick uses this paradigm in order to analyze a series of romantic triangles operating within eighteenth and nineteenth-century fiction such as Tennyson's *The Princess*, Eliot's *Adam Bede*, Thackeray's *Henry Esmond*, Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Sedgwick's was a seminal work because it argued that feminist analysis of gender roles in the nineteenth century is incomplete if it fails to also include an examination of erotic relations between men as these existed within mainstream ideologies of masculinity from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century.

(b) The 1990s: Burgeoning Period of Victorian Masculinity Studies

The achievements of feminist and sexuality studies scholars of the 1970s and 1980s laid the groundwork for the rapid development of Victorian Masculinity Studies in the 1990s when it came

into its own as a distinct and established academic field of literary, historical and cultural inquiry. Reiterating issues pertaining to the formation and practice of Victorian masculine identity, all of these studies sought to seek answers to questions raised by earlier critics: What are the differences between hegemonic and subordinate forms of Victorian masculinity? What is the relationship between the two forms of masculinity? How can these distinct forms, the patterns of creating, acquiring, embodying and sustaining them be classified and theorized, and their inter-relationship(s) articulated?

One of the leading accounts of subordinate masculinity produced during this period is Alan Sinfield's *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (1994) which insists, as the title itself indicates, on the cultural weight of Oscar Wilde's example. Dissecting the history of the image of homosexual men and its relation with effeminacy, Sinfield argues that Wilde's effete behavior did not necessarily suggest homosexuality to his Victorian contemporaries until during and after the conviction. Sinfield thus sees the series of 1895 trials involving Wilde as the defining moment in the production of the twentieth century male queer identity. Even though effeminacy is a social construct with a history of its own that is separate from the history of homosexuality, yet because of the typifying cultural force of Wilde's individual case which included his own life-history, the trials and their dissemination, effeminacy forever came to be inextricably linked to, and synonymous with, male homosexuality creating the "Wildean stereotype" (1994:149) that exists even to this day. Surveying the shifting connotations of effeminacy across English literary history from Marlow and Shakespeare, through Wycherley, Tobias Smollett and Sheridan, to Tennyson, Thomas Hughes and then to Wilde, Sinfield's ultimate aim is to show how "dominant twentieth century queer identity...has been reconstructed...mainly out of elements that came together at the Wilde trials: effeminacy, leisure, idleness, luxury, insouciance, decadence and aestheticism" (12).

If the *Wilde Century* is concerned with the enmeshment of queer identity through the figure of the effeminate man and the male homosexual, then Joseph A. Kestner's *Masculinities in Victorian Painting* (1995) offers a detailed analysis of some compelling pictorial depictions of Victorian men in contexts ranging from the social, historical, anthropological, imperial to the literary, educational, institutional, legal, and aesthetic. Utilizing images from the works of Victorian artists such as Leighton, Waterhouse, Burne-Jones and Alma-Tadema to Dicksee, Pettie, Watts, Woodville and Tuke to name a few, Kestner's main argument is structured around the examination of "five pivotal representations of males which evolved a paradigmatic masculinity for nineteenth century British culture: the classical hero, the medieval knight, the challenged paterfamilias, the valiant soldier and the male nude" (1995:42). He posits that the portrayal of men in paintings both "constructed the paradigm of masculinity" as well as "interrogated it/conflicted it by proposing inadequacies, fissures, inconsistencies, incommensurabilities in the prevailing paradigm" (19). Kestner concludes that social institutions are influenced by, as well as influence and employ artistic representation which in turn leads to the formation of gender ideologies. However, it is not merely heterosexual masculinity that is of interest to Kestner but also male-male desire, or what he calls "homoeroticism" (250). In the final chapter, he explores pedagogic and pedophilic relations among men through the theme of Icarus (often embodying ephemic qualities) as represented in the art of Draper and Richmond. In addition, he also unearths swimming and bathing scenes involving men in the paintings of Fredrick Walker to reveal how the male gaze was centered on the male nude thus replacing the traditional female nude as the site of desire. The book can thus be seen to cover aspects of both hegemonic and subordinate Victorian masculinities. In this way, Kestner's work, as he himself points out, registers the plurality of masculinities by emphasizing that the term " 'masculinities' recognizes how the term

'masculinity' cannot be monolithic or essentialist in the sense of applying to all males, which would be to ignore differences among men of class, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity or nationality" (5).

Much like Kestner, Herbert Sussman's aim in *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (1995) is to see "masculinity as a historical construction rather than an essentialist given"(14). The subject of the book is to "refashion the notion of manliness and of artistic manhood" (2-3) as it emerged in the literature and art of the period from 1830 to 1860. He contends that early Victorian masculinity existed not as a "consensual or unitary formation, but rather as fluid and shifting, a set of contradictions and anxieties" (2) between hegemonic conceptions of masculinity and the lived experiences of men. Sussman aims to unravel this conflict, in particular, through a "discourse of monasticism"(57). For nineteenth-century men, "manhood was conceived as an unstable equilibrium of barely controlled energy"(13). Thus Sussman's main argument is that the figure of the celibate monk was used by "representative figures" (1) such as Carlyle, Robert Browning, Pater and the Pre-Raphaelite brothers for "turning male energy...to the production of art" (4). Because the Victorians classified masculine energy as being innate and were concerned with appropriate ways of channeling this energy, the lives of monks provided these Victorian writers with a means to negotiate a manly exterior with an artistic life which being "situated outside the male sphere...unmans the male writer and artist" (6-7). Bourgeois marriages also meant the sapping of male creative potency so much so that the monastery becomes for Sussman "an imaginative zone in which male writers negotiate the troubled boundary between the homosocial and the homosexual" (5). In examining speech patterns, actions, forms of physicality, degrees of self-control and emotional availability as component parts of masculine self-representation, evident in the "anachronistic" (2) figure of the artist monk in the work of these authors, Sussman identifies the development of a "masculine poetics" that is marked by heterogeneity and contradiction. This emphasis on "contradiction, conflict and anxiety" (150) points to the instability of Victorian manhood thereby establishing these aspects as "the governing terms of Victorian masculinity" (15).

In line with Sussman's *Victorian Masculinities*, James Eli Adams' *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (1995) is also concerned with rigorous moral (as well as economic) discipline of the Victorian male as the basis of claims to cultural authority. In exploring the ideal of manhood—self-discipline or *asceticism*—that was prevalent in the 1800s, Adams examines the ways in which Victorian writers such as Carlyle, Tennyson, Arnold, Dickens, John Henry Newman, Kingsley and Walter Pater attempted to construct a masculine identity for themselves via icons of middle class-masculinity as varied as that of the dandy, gentleman, soldier, prophet and priest. Given that the Victorian writer, both as a result of his vocation as well as the cultural forces of industrialization, was deprived of the traditional male roles of his father's or grandfather's generation, he sought these new styles of manhood since existing ideals, in particular, that of intellectual labour became associated with the feminine and the domestic. In order to avoid the charge of effeminacy and to masculinize intellectual vocations, these writers took recourse in these models of masculinity transforming them into a "paradigm of ascetic manhood" (1995:16). Adams argues that each of these theatrical roles of authorial creativity and self-fashioning involved a degree of group secrecy creating a sort of "homosocial intimacy" that threatened to disrupt "existing structures of authority" (230). Finally, Adams seeks to emphasize the performative dimension of manhood and delves into the interrelations, complexities and similarities between these types that are seen as an essential structure in the "rhetorical transaction" of masculine self-fashioning (11). Victorian masculinity is thus always a performance,

a 'style', that is at once both personal and social.

In keeping with questions regarding the hegemony of such styles and constructs of masculinity, is Angus McLaren's *The Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries 1870-1930* (1997) that argues how nineteenth and twentieth-century western society created what we now take to be the traditional model of the heterosexual male. By examining a series of cultural documents ranging from court records, medical texts and journalistic reports to literary representations, McLaren reveals the process of social construction whereby "normal sexual behavior, and male gender identity" (1997:7) were selected, delineated, and maintained. The central argument of the book is that the ideal of manhood, or what McLaren calls "dominant" (10) masculinity was constructed historically by default, legitimized as it were, against new "negative" (10) categories of deficient masculinity such as the cad, the weakling, the homosexual, the exhibitionist and the transvestite thereby suggesting the pluralized formation of masculinity. The essential limits of what constituted the masculine or the "boundaries of masculine comportment" (7) were policed through the collaborative discourses surrounding legal "trials" and the "medicalization of male sexual deviancy" (134). This reinforced the notion of the heterosexual male as being normative and embodying "the hegemonic model of masculinity" (231). He concludes by asserting that the domains of law and medicine worked under the assumption that "there was one essential form of masculinity...What they did not realize is that the model of masculinity that they took as given was one that they were actually helping to construct" (238).

In John Tosh's *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle Class Home in Victorian England* (1999), as opposed to the commonplace tendency shown by feminist scholars of treating domesticity as an aspect of women's history, the author attempts to redefine men's relationship to the domestic sphere by using a sample of sixty Victorian families and the advice literature of the period. Tosh contends that "hegemonic masculinity" exercised its influence across the classes because it "not only emphasized the authority of the paterfamilias over his wife and family, but also stigmatized masculine traits that undermined this position" (1999:44-45). Even though the ideology of separate spheres held sway during this period in terms of masculine and feminine gender identities, roles and responsibilities, yet, the relationship between masculinity and domesticity is far more complex than it has been usually understood. If the Victorian man spent too much time at home, where women, in the role of wives and mothers, exercised their influence, then he was seen as infringing upon domestic authority, becoming feminized himself and thus not 'manly' at all. On the other hand, if he devoted too much time to the public sphere, he was seen as guilty of neglecting his duties as the paterfamilias—a role that was the very basis for Victorian 'manliness.' Tosh argues that the domestic man was thus caught in a precarious balancing act between the private and the public. The pressures, contradictions and dilemmas entailed a negotiation of Victorian 'manliness' (or what we understand today as 'masculinity') between the divergent demands of the home and the world, one that is analyzed by Tosh across a gamut of familial roles and relationships via which masculine gender identities in the period were constructed: husband and wife, father and child, boyhood and manhood, the homosocial environment of the public world and the heterosexual intimacies of the private home. In so doing, Tosh conclusively shows how the notion of domesticity as "women's sphere" was for the Victorians, "a convenient shorthand, not a claim to exclusivity" (50), and that indeed, the doctrine of separate spheres "has been more dogmatically asserted by modern scholars than it ever was by the Victorians themselves" (77).

(c) The 2000s: Upsurge of Academic Interest in Victorian Masculinities

Whereas the 1990s were concerned with establishing the plurality of Victorian masculinities, the 2000s have focused on problematizing Victorian masculinity by conflating its intrinsic plurality with issues of imperialism, race, class, and economics. As a result, these works tend to be interdisciplinary in nature rather than exclusively devoted to the subject of Victorian masculinity as in the 1990s. By addressing men in contexts which may not, at first glance, lend themselves easily to gendered analysis, the scholarship of the 2000s points toward the popularity of the subject and the variety of topics as well as methodologies being pursued within studies of Victorian masculinity.

In keeping with this trend, Bivona and Henkle's "central contention" (4) in *The Imagination Class: Masculinity and the Victorian Urban Poor* (2006) is that "many of the images that [the Victorians] constructed served the purpose of self-definition of an emerging—and largely male—professional class" (4). The authors argue that the representation of poverty served not only to document the living and working conditions of England's urban poor but also to establish the difference between the bourgeoisie and the working classes. Such documentation of the urban poor on the part of male, largely middle-class, writers helped construct a new definition of the gentleman that associated him with the Victorian ideal of manhood—self-discipline—yet at the same time, distinguished him from older, rank-based categories of masculine gender identity, such as that of the dandy, that were increasingly being perceived as effeminate. In particular, Bivona and Henkle argue how investigating and writing about the urban poor could be construed as a "new sphere of manly adventure" (2006:6). In examining this figure of the middle class writer as a slum-adventurer stepping into the slums to document the poverty therein, Bivona and Henkle view him as part of a project that equates writing to physical labor thereby legitimizing male writers as hard-working men. This construction of writing as a means of physical and manual labor at once distances as well as brings closer men from the middle-class and the working-class. The factory worker is filthy, uneducated, and a hired labourer while the middle-class man is clean, educated, and in charge of his own labour yet both are similar in that they work hard in the public sphere. In order to advance their thesis, Bivona and Henkle cover a wide variety of texts ranging from the works of James Greenwood, Charles Dickens, Beatrice Webb, Margaret Harkness, Arthur Morrison to George Gissing, H.G. Wells, Jack London and W.T. Stead. The book can thus be seen to represent how exercises in male hegemony are enacted and how these performances "could be brought within the hegemonizing of middle-class culture" (123).

The depiction of writing as an intellectual activity equal to physical action that is tied to the establishment of a dominant middle class is also the subject of Joseph Sramek's "'Face Him Like a Briton': Tiger Hunting, Imperialism, and British Masculinity in Colonial India 1800-1875" (2006). Sramek argues how the importance of establishing the middle-class author as active (both mentally and physically) led to the representation of real men as those who were physically aggressive, and in particular, traveled far from their homes to engage in wars or explore the colonies. These representations of active soldiers and colonizers served as models of appropriate masculine gender identity in the Victorian era. Sramek also contends that early-to-mid-century tiger hunting in India was largely symbolic in that it offered the British a means to demonstrate their physical and mental strength, and thereby validate their superiority over the colonized people. By interweaving the three thematic strands of hunting, imperialism and masculinity, he explains how this "gentlemanly chivalric ideal" became a "powerful rationale for British tiger hunting [as it] began to develop in India: the supposed need for British hunters to protect Indian men, women, and children from the savage creature" (2006:667). Imperialism demanded that the British not only shield their own families but also "supplant the traditional roles of contemporary

Indian rulers as benevolent protectors of Indian men, women and children against tigers and other large beasts”(668). Even though Sramek analyses here a type of masculinity that existed in the colonial period and one that he terms as “the British imperial masculinity” (662), the construction of this type depends on the association of physical action with masculine gender performance, and is therefore not very different from notions relating to hegemonic masculine gender identity that were prevalent in Victorian England.

This is not to say, however, that the engagement of earlier critics with various forms of nineteenth-century subordinate masculinities or the lives of sexually non-normative men in the Victorian era has altogether vanished. In fact, as Joseph Bristow’s “Remapping the Sites of Modern Gay History” (2007) shows, there has been a renewed interest in revising this old theme through what he terms as “the new gay history” (2007:120). In this extensively researched essay, Bristow reviews H.G. Cock’s *Nameless Offenses: Homosexual Desire in the Nineteenth Century* (2003), Matt Cook’s *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914* (2003), Sean Brady’s *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913* (2005), and Morris Kaplan’s *Sodom on the Thames: Sex, Love and Scandal in Wilde Times* (2005). Bristow observes that these works, even though borrowing from Weeks and Foucault, have gone much beyond their predecessors, to bring out newer domains for research into Victorian homosexuality. Whereas Cock’s study aims to situate the patterns of arrest and the workings of the law for homosexuals within the context of history, Cook and Kaplan focus on the cultural understandings of homosexuality brought about through sex scandals and the popular press. Brady’s book is concerned with examining the development of masculinity as a social status through historical research that challenges the medical and legal construction of the male homosexual in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In summation, according to Bristow, these writers “who sometimes indulge in mismanaged revisions of Weeks’ and Foucault’s work succeed in remapping the intellectual terrain that their academic forebears began to chart three decades earlier” (2007:120).

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