

## FEMINISM AND MASCULINITY: RECONCEPTUALIZING THE DICHOTOMY OF REASON AND EMOTION

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In the context of feminist and postmodern thought, traditional conceptions of masculinity and what it means to be a "Real Man" have been critiqued. In Genevieve Lloyd's *The Man of Reason*, this critique takes the form of exposing the effect that the distinctive masculinity of the "man of reason" has had on the history of philosophy. One major feature of the masculine-feminine dichotomy will emerge as a key notion for understanding the rest of the paper: the dichotomy of reason-feeling, a parallel and a foundational aspect to the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity. In exploring the history of symbolic conceptions of masculinity in ancient Greece, the Renaissance, and the present, one finds that the oppression of women is integrally linked to the traditional tie between masculinity and reason. There have been many efforts in recent feminist philosophy to rewrite or redefine "Woman" in such a way as to alleviate the oppression of women.<sup>1</sup> I argue that the effectiveness of rewriting Woman for this purpose is problematic, primarily because any rewriting of this type must occur in the current historical context of hierarchical dualisms, like Man-Woman, masculine-feminine, male-female. These binary oppositions arguably find their roots in Pythagorean philosophy and can be traced through the Renaissance to our current historical context.<sup>2</sup> It is these dualisms that have traditionally valued the masculine side of the Man-Woman dichotomy more than the feminine.<sup>3</sup> Further, it will be argued that the hierarchical dualism of Man and Woman is so pervasive that if we rewrite or redefine the inferior, deprivileged side of that dualism, we cannot correct its devalued status. Instead, we redefine that which is undervalued but retain its devalued status. This particular aspect of attempts to critique hierarchical dualisms like reason and feeling has been reflected in the writings of many feminists, male and female. This paper will show that in cases where women attempt to redefine the dichotomy by revaluing the traditionally feminine (like feelings

and emotions) over the traditionally masculine (like reason) their work is often mistakenly criticized for being purely political; conversely, when men attempt to redefine the same dichotomy in an attempt to allow men to "get back in touch with their feelings," to be nurturers, their work is described in terms of providing a better epistemology. The current literature on masculinity explores alternatives to rewriting or redefining Woman that try to avoid the problem of status remaining with redefinition. This alternative is rewriting or redefining Man. Through redefining Man, one may be able to reconceptualize the privileged side of the hierarchical dualism in such a way that it is no longer privileged. Deprivileging, as well as redefining Man, is argued by theorists of masculinity to be possible because while the devalued status of the inferior side of a hierarchical dualism tends to keep the same status when redefined, it may be possible to redefine the privileged side of the dualism in such a way that it loses its privileged status. Unfortunately, many of these attempts to rewrite or redefine masculinity have detrimental faults of their own. Finally, this paper will discuss more promising possibilities for new definitions of Man, as well as a vision for better interaction between the work of women and men in general.

### **I. Feminist Reconceptualizations of Reason and Emotion**

It is the historical foundation of the relative status of femininity to masculinity, and by analogy Woman to Man, that has made the notion of rewriting or redefining Woman so attractive. It has seemed plausible that if we rework the symbolic associations Woman has been assigned through the centuries, we could somehow relieve the oppressed status ascribed to Woman as well.

While such a redefinition of Woman seems to be a noble project, it unfortunately suffers from many problems. Any shift or change in meaning at the level of the symbolic meaning of Man and Woman must take place within an historical context. As many examples in feminist literature show, our current historical context still places Man and Woman in a hierarchical dichotomy with Woman, female, and the feminine severely undervalued. Any rewriting of Woman

done while it occupies this subordinate position will leave itself open to maintaining its devalued status, as well as misinterpretations that will serve to perpetuate the hierarchical status quo. As Lloyd points out, "our ideas and ideals of maleness and femaleness have been formed within structures of dominance - of superiority and inferiority, norms' and 'difference', 'positive' and 'negative', the 'essential' and the 'complementary'" (Lloyd 1984, ix). And the male - female dichotomy itself has operated not as a straightforwardly descriptive principle of classification, but as an expression of values. It necessarily follows that any redefining of Woman or Man, what counts as male or female, will take part in these same valuations and contextual issues. And when motivated by the hope of achieving a political goal such as the removal of oppression for women and men who are currently forced to live with and within these constraining notions of masculinity and femininity, redefining Man must pay attention to this same problem.

Lloyd describes the focus of her book as the pervasiveness of the historical conception of reason as masculine, noting that

Past philosophical reflection on what is distinctive about human life, and on what should be the priorities of a well-lived life, has issued in character ideals centered on the idea of Reason; and the supposed universality and neutrality of these ideals can be seriously questioned...The maleness of the Man of Reason is no longer superficial bias. It lies deep in our philosophical tradition (Lloyd 1984, ix).

Besides noting the pervasiveness of masculinity in our conceptions of the good life, Lloyd views the very nature and definition of this maleness as ripe for critique. Lloyd outlines the symbolic associations by which maleness has traditionally been defined, noting that maleness was "associated (by the Pythagoreans) with a clear, determinate mode of thought, femaleness with the vague and indeterminate" (Lloyd 1984, 3). The association of maleness with clarity of thought persisted and was incorporated into the form-matter distinction that was so central to Greek thought. "Maleness was aligned with active, determinate form, femaleness with passive, indeterminate matter" (Lloyd 1984, 3).<sup>4</sup> In the later Platonic

dialogues, the distinction between form and matter is inextricably related to the distinction between body and soul. For Plato, the rational, active, thinking soul rightfully rules over not only the body, but also the two non-rational parts of the soul: the appetitive and the courageous.<sup>5</sup> Platonic philosophy posits a constant struggle between the rational and the non-rational soul, which must by definition be subordinate. Lloyd notes that later Judaic and Christian thinkers elaborated on this Platonic theme in ways that connected it explicitly with the theme of man's rightful domination of women, aligning woman with the non-rational soul that must be subordinate to man, the rational soul (Lloyd 1982, 7).<sup>6</sup>

Evelyn Fox Keller further describes how these ancient notions of reason and masculinity were not only maintained but strengthened with the rise of science in the Renaissance and the seventeenth century. "Our inquiry confirms that neither the equation between mind, reason, and masculinity, nor the dichotomies between mind and nature, reason and feeling, masculine and feminine, are historically invariant. Even though the roots of both the equations and the dichotomies may be ancient, the seventeenth century witnessed a marked polarization of all the terms involved – with consequences as crucial for science as for our own understanding of gender" (Keller 1985, 44). An example is Sir Francis Bacon, arguably a founder of modern science. Bacon describes the proper goal of science to be a "chaste and lawful marriage between Mind and Nature that will bind [Nature] to [man's] servitude and make her [his] slave" (Farrington 1951, 187). Bacon's marriage would be one in which "the emphasis was on constraint, on the disjunction between mind and nature, and ultimately on domination of woman by man" (Keller 1985, 44).

Attempts to revalue the feminine often fall prey to the trap of their underlying societal and intellectual structures. Theorists of masculinity argue that a redefining of masculinity or 'the masculine' should be able to shake the underlying normative structures. The central aspect of these hierarchical dichotomies which this paper will

focus on is that of reason and feeling. As Lloyd has shown, it is the association of masculinity with reason, femininity with feeling, that has had such a profound and lasting effect on our cultural consciousness in numerous historical contexts.<sup>8</sup> While Lloyd clearly illustrated the historical alignment of masculinity with reason and femininity with feeling, Alison Jagger presents an attempt to revalue the feminine or 'feeling' side of that alignment. Jagger gives a new description of emotion which claims that emotion is an important part of all knowledge, and can be used by feminists as an important part of women's experience.

Jagger notes how the rational has typically been contrasted with the emotional, but points to the fact that emotion was never excluded completely from the picture: "the emotions were thought of as providing indispensable motive power that needed to be channeled appropriately. Without horses, after all, the skill of the charioteer would be worthless" (Jagger 1989, 145). In the modern period, the relationship of reason and feeling changed: "reason was reconceptualized as the ability to make valid inferences from premises established elsewhere...the validity of logical inferences was thought independent of human attitudes and preferences; this was the sense in which reason was taken to be objective and universal" (Jagger 1989, 146). Furthermore, Jagger claims that this modern redefinition of rationality required a corresponding reconceptualization of emotion, achieved by portraying emotions as nonrational and often irrational urges that regularly swept the body, rather as a storm sweeps over the land (Jagger 1989, 146). According to Jagger, this view took many forms, most notably evolving into British empiricism and its successor, rationalism. Jagger attempts to challenge these views by suggesting that "emotions may be helpful and even necessary rather than inimical to the construction of knowledge" and proposes a new epistemological model that reflects the importance of both reason and feeling (Jagger 1989, 146).

Jagger outlines this new model by arguing that emotions are best understood as social constructs. We tend to experience our emotions

as involuntary, individual responses to situations, and infer that those emotions are presocial, instinctive responses determined by our biological constitution (Jagger 1989, 150). Jagger argues that this view is mistaken, and that emotions are actually social constructs. This is evidenced by the fact that children are taught deliberately what their culture defines as appropriate emotional responses to certain situations (Jagger 1989, 150). Another aspect of the social construction of emotion is their intentional structure: "if emotions necessarily involve judgments, then obviously they require concepts, which may be seen as socially constructed ways of organizing and making sense of the world" (Jagger 1989, 151). In addition, Jagger asserts that emotions are active engagements, that they do not simply overtake us as the modern model would assert. The social-constructivist approach of Jagger's model for a new epistemology may be the first place to look for a possible explanation for why women's attempts to rewrite or redefine hierarchical dualisms like reason and feeling tend to be seen as purely political, rather than having epistemological importance. Perhaps understanding emotions as socially constructed simply goes against the 'common sense' understanding people have of their emotions. Moreover, as other feminists may assert, the exposing of emotions as social constructs leaves itself open to devaluing those emotions as mere social constructs.

Jagger further asserts that in the context of western culture, people have often been encouraged to control or even suppress their emotions. Consequently, it is not unusual for people to be unaware of their emotional state or to deny it to themselves and others (Jagger 1989, 155). This lack of awareness, especially combined with a neopositivist understanding of emotion that construes emotion as just a feeling of which one is aware, lends plausibility to the myth of dispassionate investigation (Jagger 1989, 155). It is this myth of dispassionate investigation, the use of reason unaffected by emotion to gain truth, which Jagger hopes to argue against by exposing that values and emotions do always enter into all aspects of theorizing, including problem choice as well as the scientific method itself (Jagger

1989: 156). Further, Jagger argues that women are the main group in our society that tend to be allowed and expected to feel emotion; while men, and primarily white men, are expected to always be in control of their emotions. "White men's control of their emotional expression may go to the extremes of repressing their emotions, failing to develop emotionally, or even losing the capacity to experience many emotions" (Jagger 1989, 158). Thus both men and women are at a disadvantage with regard to norms of emotional expression or non-expression, but Jagger argues that women are in the most deprived position.<sup>9</sup> With regard to how the silencing of women can be remedied, Jagger advocates the use of what she calls "outlaw emotions." Outlaw emotions are conventionally unacceptable emotions, emotions that people experience and which deviate from the norm. These emotions, when experienced by a group, can form the basis of a subculture which systematically opposes the prevailing perceptions, norms and values (Jagger 1989, 160). Jagger claims that "feminists need to be aware of how we can draw on some of our outlaw emotions in constructing feminist theory and also of how the increasing sophistication of feminist theory can contribute to the reeducation, refinement, and reconstruction of our emotional constitution" (Jagger 1989: 160).

While this vision for resistance sounds very promising, I think it is important to be wary of two different ways in which the use of outlaw emotions may actually work against women. First, women banding together and expressing outlaw emotions at first blush seems like a vision which does not challenge the stereotypical view of women as overly emotional – we may simply replace our devalued deprived emotionality with new sets of emotions. More importantly, women who utilize these outlaw emotions run the risk of being misunderstood as hysterical or insane because of our current societal context. Secondly, it would be wise to explore cases in which the dominant group, white males, experience outlaw emotions. It would seem, based on Jagger's account, that if white men do experience outlaw emotions that those emotions would somehow no longer be outlaw emotions at some point – the subversive culture

would be taken up into the dominant culture. And if some outlaw emotions for men might be showing such feelings as nurturance for their children, then our later discussion of May and Strikwerda will provide an interesting example of men utilizing such emotions to their families and their own advantage. The suggestion of outlaw emotions is promising, but it is clearly open to critique.

## II. Reconceptualizing Masculinity In Terms of Reason and Emotion

Jagger's attempt to revalue emotion stands as an important example of how a feminist theorist might rework hierarchical dualisms like reason-feeling in working towards the goal of alleviating the oppression of women. But potential difficulties with Jagger's work also point to the fact that any attempt to redefine Man or to rework the hierarchical dichotomies like masculine-feminine and reason-feeling needs to pay careful attention to previous attempts to redefine those dichotomies so that it may avoid the problems and criticisms which affected those attempts. Promising sources of redefining or reconceptualizing masculinity have grown in number and diversity in recent years. Many of these reconceptualizations of masculinity show an awareness of and deference to feminist concerns, such as removing women's oppression; but they also explore the more general goal of doing away with oppressive normative gender roles under which both men and women live. The reconceptualizations of masculinity described in the collection *Rethinking Masculinity* may provide some promising revisions and redefinitions of Man. The text begins with an outline of two of the more extreme reconceptualizations of masculinity, one presented by John Stoltenberg, the other by Robert Bly.

Stoltenberg argues that because men have forced women to occupy subordinate gender roles, the very categories of masculine and feminine must be replaced with that of androgyny (May and Strikwerda 1992, xiii). It is to be noted that "what is positive in Stoltenberg's book is the 'idea' that men can choose something different from the traditional roles they seem to be thrown into" (May



and Strikwerda 1992, xiii). Stoltenberg's position is more subtle than May and Strikwerda's description: in essence, Stoltenberg argues that "manhood," defined as the personal, behavioral identity that is committed to gender, committed to "being the man there," cannot coexist with authentic, passionate, and integrated selfhood" (Stoltenberg 1993, xiv). I agree with Stoltenberg on this insight, but our prescriptions for what to do vary slightly. While Stoltenberg argues very carefully and effectively that reconceptualizations of masculinity are hopeless, I still seek a promising revision of masculinity. I would also argue that, because of the pervasiveness of the hierarchical dualisms discussed earlier, even if individuals can become androgynous as Stoltenberg hopes, other characteristics besides gender may then become the standards by which some individuals achieve a higher "symbolic status" than others.<sup>10</sup>

Another reconceptualization of masculinity is presented by Robert Bly. Bly claims that women, primarily since feminism, have created a situation in which men, especially young men, feel weak, emasculated, and unsure of themselves; and that older men must lead the way back to a tradition in which "the divine also was associated with mad dancers, fierce fanged men..." (May and Strikwerda 1994, xv). Bly holds up the myth of the Wild Man as an exemplar of the direction men must take. Like Stoltenberg, Bly never challenges the hierarchical dualisms that are so integrally linked to the tension he perceives between men and women. Arguably, the notion of the Wild Man merely reinforces clichés about "real masculinity" instead of trying to foster a new relationship between men and women, as well as the masculine and the feminine.

Four other revisionings of masculinity are present in *Rethinking Masculinity*. These are Brian Pronger's description of the "gay jock," Leonard Harris' essay on Martin Luther King, Jr., and May and Strikwerda's two essays on the father-as-nurturer and men's intimacy.

Brian Pronger gives an analysis of masculinity in *Gay Jocks: a phenomenology of gay men in athletics*. Pronger defines masculinity as a strategy for the power relations between men and women, and as a

strategy that serves the interests of patriarchal heterosexuality (Pronger 1992, 44). Through understanding masculinity in this way, gay men provide a very powerful example of how to reconceptualize masculinity. Pronger describes the ease with which gay men can be friends with women, and the mutually comfortable nature of such relationships: "all the gay men I interviewed told me their relationships with women are very good; the men feel themselves to be on equal terms with women, and women seem to trust these men more than they do other men" (Pronger 1992, 44). Pronger further notes that this "ease of social intercourse makes possible personal relations with women that are not patriarchal. The patriarchal signification of the masculine/feminine spectrum of behaviors, therefore, has little meaning to gay men in their personal lives" (Pronger 1992, 45). Although Pronger acknowledges that these descriptions only take place in the realm of personal interactions, and that gay men therefore probably do experience patriarchal privilege in wider social contexts, these experiences do provide an important insight into masculinity as a political strategy.

After exposing the strategy of masculinity, Pronger calls for a reinterpretation of the meanings of masculine and feminine behavior. "Gay men can come to see that the power relations for which the semiotics of masculinity and femininity constitute a strategy have little to do with their lives. The meaning of masculinity, consequently, begins to change. Although masculinity is often the subject of sexual desire for gay men, its role in their lives is ironic" (Pronger 1992, 45). By 'ironic', Pronger refers to a specifically gay irony.<sup>11</sup> Of course, this is an insight that is primarily known to gay men, and so serves only as a good starting point for raising awareness about what masculinity is. It is also important to note that not all gay men may take part in this insight, since frequently gay men have attitudes towards women and feminism that are as misogynist as the worst heterosexual men's attitudes (Connell 1995, 159).

One possible aspect of a redefinition of masculinity comes from Leonard Harris' *Honor: Emasculation and Empowerment*. This essay

focuses on the honoring of heroes such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Each man exemplified, in different ways, a vision of communal love for the black community. This "love, in both cases, represented a form of empowerment in a direct sense, i.e. it was a good through which one engenders, among other things, the ability of others to impose their will" (Harris 1992, 202). It is to be noted that this kind of empowering can be achieved in many ways: parents help empower their children by caring, nurturing, guiding, and partners empower each other by support dialogue and aid (Harris 1992, 202). Martin Luther King, Jr. especially presents a promising new model for masculinity, that of a caring, nurturing empowering man with a vision of communal love.

As promising as this vision of communal love might seem, it is not entirely without problems. Synthesizing Pronger and Harris, their work calls attention to the fact that masculinity is a socially constructed entity, and as such, masculinity cannot simply be incorporated into some of the more traditionally feminine virtues. These virtues are the kinds of feelings (such as love and compassion) that Martin Luther King Jr. was honored for, and which can be difficult to separate from the more negative behaviors of aggression, threats and demands: as Harris notes, the conflation of the traditionally feminine and masculine virtues with less desirable behaviors when we attempt to form them into one coherent whole is highly problematic.

May and Strikwerda attempt an analysis of this kind in both of their pieces, *Fatherhood and Nurturance and Male Friendship and Intimacy*. In *Fatherhood and Nurturance*, May and Strikwerda attempt to analyze the possibility for and the benefits of men gaining the traditionally feminine attribute of nurturance in the context of caring for their children. Central to this nurturance is paying attention to feelings; especially their children's feelings, but also their own. "Fathers will have to *face their own feelings* of regret or shame for having inappropriately punished as well as the need to rebuild trust and a positive sense of self-worth in the child... in addition, their work

in the family will be something about which they can feel a sense of accomplishment" (May and Strikwerda 1992, 88). Here May and Strikwerda offer an exciting possibility for a new vision of masculinity. Arguably, they address the problematic dualism of feeling-reason by giving men a role in which they must face up to their own feelings as well as those of their children. May and Strikwerda also have a means by which men's work in the home can be revalued – men can feel a new sense of accomplishment about their fathering role. May and Strikwerda carefully outline their project, contrasting their model of a nurturing father with older, traditional models. After arguing for men to take on a more nurturing role with their children, they acknowledge that a time of transition will be necessary. This time of transition will occur with the first generation of men to act as nurturers, who still have the traditionally socialized masculine attributes of toughness, aggressiveness, and an alleged prowess in the public sphere:

In this time of transition, nurturing fathers could use their socialized public skills to provide positive socialization especially for their girl children. Due to their socialization, men are better able to teach kids how to fend for themselves, especially how to assert themselves into a sometimes hostile world or sandbox. Given the differential socializations already experienced by adults today, fathers will be somewhat better at such roles than mothers. And by this we do not mean merely teaching girls to throw the ball "properly" (that is, not like a girl). Rather, we have in mind taking children on regular outings to the playground or museum or just to the corner store and talking to one's children about strategies for coping with disparate problems, especially with male strangers, that can be encountered along the way (May and Strikwerda 1992, 89).

This seems at first glance like a very sweet idea – fathers showing their children the ropes of how to get along in the world. Unfortunately, it falls short at many key points. The passage makes many dubious assumptions about men's prowess in certain areas of life. It is wrong to assume that men's prowess is indisputably a good thing, both on the level of essentialist claims about men and women's capabilities ("fathers will be somewhat better at such roles than mothers"), and that the male-socialized way of handling situations is the best way of

doing things ("men are better able to teach kids how to defend themselves"). It seems to me that there is great potential in May and Strikwerda's hypothetical situation for many of the negative socialized masculine roles to be passed on to either sex. Furthermore, this possibility for negative socialization to be passed on brings up the question when, if ever, will this transitional stage end? What keeps certain negative roles from being passed on?<sup>12</sup> Thus May and Strikwerda have a very promising notion in the model of the nurturing father, but they put the model to bad use.

### III. Broader Implications for Reason and Emotion Reconceived

In the final sections of the paper I will describe what I believe these contrasting examples from Jagger and May and Strikwerda can illustrate about current attempts to reconceptualize reason and emotion. I assert that the proper way to understand this issue is two-fold. When men do the work of revaluing a deprivileged side of a dichotomy like "feelings," they are perceived as achieving an epistemological goal: attempting to get at a more accurate vision of what men are really like, uncovering the hidden emotions, or some other piece of better truth that also fulfills a *practical* value in rectifying a perceived *lack*, an Aristotelian lack of intimacy or of full emotional growth. When women do the same work it is perceived as aimed primarily at political goals: removing women's oppression, and having the potential to reinforce stereotypically feminine behaviors via essentialism. This gendered double meaning of reconceptualizing dichotomies like reason and feeling, masculinity and femininity, is implicit in May and Strikwerda's project:

Much feminist writing has focused on a reassessment of female experience in order to counter oppression against women. The social practice of men failing to develop and express their feelings does have the consequence that men in general are more able to oppress than would be true otherwise. Phenomenologically speaking, however, men simply do not see themselves as oppressors in this way. It does not seem to us that most men intentionally oppress women by failing to disclose their feelings; rather, many men are not even aware that they could be acting otherwise. Nonetheless, they do increasingly see themselves as lacking in intimate relationships. Thus we try to

provide a positive sense of what male friendship could be like in a less oppressive society. It is our hope that if men do become more caring with each other, they will also become so with the women and children in their lives, thus making it less likely that oppression will continue at its present level (Strikwerda and May 1992, 96-97).

May and Strikwerda show that their project is teleologically oriented not just to remove oppression – indeed, the removal of women’s oppression is a happy side effect of men achieving greater intimacy in relationships amongst themselves! Instead, May and Strikwerda are primarily interested in providing a positive sense of what intimate male friendship can be like, primarily to help remedy men’s lack of intimacy. My intention is not to criticize the whole of May and Strikwerda’s project based on this aspect of it, but it illustrates well the reasons why the feminist literature and the literature of masculinity are still treated in very different ways. Arguably, this difference in treatment goes back to those same hierarchical dualisms.

#### IV. How to Reconstruct Masculinity

The reading of women feminists’ work as primarily political and of men’s work as correcting perceived lacks as well as serving a better epistemological project harkens back to Aristotle’s distinction between a happy life as defined by political work and then the better happy life defined by a life of theory and study.<sup>13</sup> The charge of essentialism leveled against female feminist theorists seems to be a valid concern for other feminist theorists, because of the pervasiveness of these dualisms. Quite tellingly our exemplary male theorists’ vision of male friendship seems forced to buy into some of the old dualisms linked to the symbolic associations of the feminine and the masculine as well. On May and Strikwerda’s model, male friendships can begin with doing activities together (ancient Greek activity/passivity dichotomy revisited), and then slowly as men learn to reflect more on their emotions and be more in touch with their feelings, they can begin to express traditionally feminine emotions like caring (Strikwerda and May 1992, 106-107).

Another collection of current writings on masculinity offers a more plausible and optimistic suggestion for dialogues between genders, a suggestion which can also serve as a means towards escaping the problem of hierarchical dualisms. *Engendering Men: the Question of Male Feminist Criticism*, as its title suggests, reflects further work by men with attention to gender, feminist insights on gender, and the seemingly "genderless" quality of masculinity within patriarchy. This collection has a clear focus on literary theory, and includes selections with important insights into the work of women writers such as Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Wendy Wasserstein, as well as queer theorists and the concept of "gay reading." The most compelling suggestion found in this collection is the call for simultaneous reading of male and female traditions and canons, a notion credited to Myra Jehlen, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar. Such simultaneous readings allow (for example) the reading of work by Gwendolyn Brooks in comparison to Paul Laurence Dunbar and Claude McKay. All too often in Women's Studies courses, only the work of women is read; all too often when one thinks of literature on masculinity one thinks of male authors. Instead, the insights of both men and women, both members of the hierarchical dualisms which shape our societal context, should be read together. This notion of simultaneous readings is a promising way to avoid the problem of constructing women's and feminists' work as "Other."<sup>14</sup> The avoidance of "Otherness" is a promising first step towards alleviating the problem of the hierarchical dichotomy of masculinity and femininity. By reading the work of men and women together, and by analogy the work of members of different races and classes together, one can see the possibility for opening up new dialogues and a new, less hierarchical relationship between members of those groups.

Suggestions for how men can assume feminist viewpoints, and for how masculinity itself can be reconstructed in a feminist context, can be drawn from the literary theorists' concept of simultaneous readings. Rather than viewing the theoretical work of a woman as "Other," or as primarily political, that work should be viewed as

having the same value as that of a man. This means that feminist insights should and must be regarded as epistemologically valuable, as broadening and enriching our knowledge about the world. A necessary condition for this view is a "de-valuing" of the work of men: men's theoretical work and men's insights can no longer be given an unquestioned status as the final yardstick by which good knowledge and truth are judged, the work of women, and feminist women also holds means by which we can "get at the truth."

Arguably this "de-valuing" of men's work is actually not a devaluing at all; it is more plausible to say that such devaluing is really simply seeing men's work for what it is and for what it actually implies. Moral theorists, from Aristotle to Kant, describe moral agency in ways that actually have much in common with a feminist world view; it is an unhappy historical contingency and fact that they limited their descriptions of moral agents to the men of their time. For Aristotle, only male citizens of the Greek polis were fully moral beings for whom the life of contemplation was prescribed, not women or male slaves. For Kant, only the male landowners of his day were considered to be fully morally responsible. Yet, each of these moral theorists outline theories that, if taken to their conclusion without the historical influence of oppression of slaves and women, should include everyone as moral beings. For example, when Kant enjoins us, via a rephrasing of the Golden Rule in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, to "treat others never only as a means, but as ends in themselves," and to respect other human beings as rational moral agents, he really ought to mean that this rule holds for men as well as women. In essence, feminist theorists, and especially feminist theorists who maintain a focus and concern for issues of race, do Kantian moral theory better, and more consistently than Kant himself.<sup>15</sup>

I take this point to be similar to that behind the quotation with which John Stoltenberg opens his book, *The End of Manhood*: "The core of one's being must love justice more than manhood"<sup>16</sup> Here Stoltenberg illustrates the guiding premise of his book, that justice



and fairness to everyone's selfhood should override the concerns of traditional manhood. Similarly, I would argue that once we realize the historical contingencies affecting male theoretical work (in a sense, de-valuing it), and re-value feminist insights, not only as political but as epistemological, then the path which a feminist man should follow becomes somewhat clearer. This realization has commonalities with Starhawk's statement that "if men want to be liberated, they must be willing to let go of the institutionalized advantage they have in every arena of society. Sometimes the advantage is clear to behold—higher pay for the same work, for example" (Starhawk 1992, 29).

While the examples above are primarily aimed at the level of theory, a similar prescription holds for the everyday lives of men and women. Instead of viewing a woman who works in a predominantly male field as merely a political anomaly, a "token," or an example of affirmative action, views which all share in a construction of Otherness; such women should be consciously viewed as qualified, capable, hired for their ability to do a job, not to fill a quota. This entails a "de-valuing" of the male-dominated field, in the sense that the job can no longer be seen as inherently more valuable simply because more men do it. One example would be physicians and surgeons as opposed to midwives and nurses: traditionally, the work of the doctor is seen as more valuable because it takes more schooling, steady hands, and experience; but the work of nurses and midwives is traditionally dismissed as non-complicated, rote temperature-taking, dispensing of medicine, assistance at birth, or mere emotional nurturance and care. Slowly this view is changing, and is being exposed as a caricature of what nurses and midwives actually do. A major force in this "de-valuing" to "re-valuing" process is the emergence of PhD programs in Nursing Science, such as the Nursing PhD program at the University of South Carolina. In the process of studying for the PhD, nurses do research on various aspects of their work, and expose the complicated nature of nursing. For example, insights from hermeneutic analysis of texts as well as feminist philosophy of science have been used to voice the

complexities of caring for patients and helping patients deal with stress. Such literature goes beyond the merely political goal of attaining status for nurses, it also argues effectively that the knowledge of a nurse has as much value as that of an MD or surgeon.<sup>17</sup> Similar changes in how women's and men's works should be utilized by men interested in adopting a feminist point of view: work traditionally done by men has no monopoly on insights and truth-getting, and the work of women can, and does, have insight and promising ways to get at truth.

The pervasive influence of hierarchical dualisms like feeling-reason permeates both everyday experience and theoretical work. While attempts to redefine the feminine or to revalue traditionally feminine ways of knowing and doing have been sharply criticized or devalued as mere politics, the same kind of work when done by men is couched in terms of a better, more well-rounded epistemology. While I find both men's and women's explorations of hierarchical dualisms to be important work, I also believe that it is important to realize how pervasive and ingrained certain hierarchical dualisms are in our collective consciousness. One way in which we can learn to appreciate, be aware of, and possibly supersede these hierarchical dualisms is by avoiding constructions of Otherness and opening new dialogues between all members of society. Through new dialogues a "de-valuing" of the masculine side of the ancient hierarchical dichotomies and a revaluing of the traditionally feminine or female will occur. In this way, a realization of the epistemological value of feminist insight will result for men and women.

### **Biographical Note**

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## Notes

1. "Rewriting or redefining Woman" has held different meanings for different theorists. This paper will primarily employ the Judith Butler sense of the phrase, in which "Woman" does not really signify any one woman, but rather a performance of womanhood that is in line with certain symbolic meanings of femininity, certain gendered codings of masculine/feminine behavior, dress, etc. Thus a redefining or rewriting necessarily entails some change in these symbolic structures and codings.

2. One example can be found in the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of masculine and feminine. Echoing the ancient Greek association of masculinity with activity and femininity with passivity, the OED defines these terms so that power is the distinguishing feature of masculinity, while lack of power is the distinguishing feature of femininity. "Masculine" is defined as having the appropriate excellences of the male sex: "manly, virile, vigorous, powerful" while feminine is defined in a deprecatve sense as "womanish, effeminate." The OED definition of effeminate provides an even clearer example of how femininity and masculinity are still entwined: the OED

defines effeminate as "to make unmanly, enervate. To grow weak, languish" (Pronger 1992, 44).

3. Here I refer to the Pythagorean table of opposites which was formulated in the sixth century B.C., and specifically aligned the female with the bad or inferior side of ten hierarchical dichotomies, such as limit/unlimited, odd/even, one/many, right/left, male/female, rest/motion, etc.

4. This alignment is explicitly described in Plato's *Symposium*, as in Diotima's speech which metaphorically links the highest form of love with activities that are procreative and intellectually creative; and which only occur between men. A similar theme is present in much of Aristotle, as in the Aristotelean distinction between form and matter (*Metaphysics VII Z*, 15-17), and the relationship of that distinction to reproduction. On the Aristotelean view, the father was seen as providing the formative principle, the real causal force of generation, while the mother provided only matter which received form or determination, and nourished what had been produced by the father (Lloyd 1984, 3).

5. Plato describes the human soul in the *Republic* (book IV) as well as the *Phaedrus* (246a6). As presented in the *Republic*, the doctrine is traditionally traced to the Pythagoreans via Cicero's *Tusculanae Disputationes*, 4,5, and 10.

6. One example of these "later judaic and christian thinkers" would be St. Thomas Aquinas and his vision of an organic state: "Aquinas presented an integrated system of nature and society based...on hierarchical gradations. Each part had its own place, rights, duties, and value, which together contributed to the perfection of the whole universal community. Both nature and society were composed of parts so that the purpose or end of the lower was to serve the higher, while that of the higher was to guide the lower toward the common moral good. Each part sought the perfection of its particular nature, growing and developing from within" (Carolyn Merchant, *The Death*

*of Nature*, 1980, 72). Moreover, Aquinas posited a hierarchical order which ascribed descending rank to angels, men, then women.

7. "Unless the structural features of our concepts of gender are understood, any emphasis on a supposedly distinctive style of thought or morality is liable to be caught up in a deeper, older structure of male norms and female complementation. The affirmation of the value and importance of 'the feminine' cannot itself be expected to shake the underlying normative structures, for, ironically, it will occur in a space already prepared for it by the intellectual tradition it seeks to reject" (Lloyd 1984, 105).

8. Intricately related to the dichotomy of reason and feeling is the conceptualization of feeling as passive, reason as active.

9. This is another point at which Jagger may be critiqued. While Jagger correctly points to the devalued status of women on the traditional reason-feeling dualism, she incorrectly places the emphasis of her critique on the myth of dispassionate enquiry. It seems more plausible, given the arguable tracing of the reason-feeling dichotomy to the Pythagoreans, and the relatively recent advent of scientific enquiry as described here, that it would be more accurate to blame any silencing of women on the pervasively masculinist or pro-masculinist nature of those dichotomies rather than on the more recent myth.

10. By "symbolic status" I refer again to the relative values ascribed to the various sides of hierarchical dichotomies. After achieving androgyny, I would argue, we would simply find something other than gender to ascribe value, such as race (black-white) or class (rich-poor) and thereby keep people in their place. What we need to search for is a way to avoid dualistic valuing altogether.

11. "Gay irony is a unique way of knowing that has its origins in the social construction of heterosexist society" (Pronger 1992, 48). Thus gay irony reflects an awareness of masculinity as a fluid, flexible social construction: "for many gay men, masculinity and femininity cease

to be experienced as what one *is*, and they become, quite consciously, ways in which one *acts*" (Pronger 1992, 45).

12. It should also be noted that while May and Strikwerda's concern about sexual assault or abductions of children is good, one must remember that coaching children about male strangers is somewhat misled because the vast majority of those crimes are committed by someone who the child already knows and trusts (perhaps the male role model May and Strikwerda describe).

13. This reading of May and Strikwerda against Jagger is especially ironic, since Jagger's explicitly stated goal is a better, specifically theoretical, epistemological model that includes feeling and reason, while the notion that May and Strikwerda get at better truth about men's emotions seems to naturally follow from their discussion of men perceiving a lack in their own lives.

14. By the construction of Otherness, I mean the way in which work done by women in a given field may be pointed out as Other than or outside the norm, thus maintaining a hierarchical and dualistic relationship between male and female (for example, describing someone as "one of the best female jazz musicians", rather than as simply "one of the best jazz musicians").

15. For an example see the work of bell hooks (specifically on feminism, race and masculinity:1992, 116).

16. From *Refusing to Be a Man: Essays on Sex and Justice*, by Stoltenberg, 1990, New York: Meridian Book.

17. For examples of this literature see Anna Omery et al., *In Search of Nursing Science*, Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.,1995.