Suggested further reading

Brady, A. and Schirato, T. (2011) *Understanding Judith Butler*, Los Angeles: Sage.
Ginsberg, E.K. (ed.) (1996) *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.
Lloyd, M. (2007) *Judith Butler: from norms to politics (key contemporary thinkers)*, Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press.

4 Regarding patriarchy

An important question that needs to be asked, in any discussion of gender issues, is the following: what are the conditions for the formation of (gendered) subjectivity? We have addressed this matter to some extent in exploring gender in terms of ideology and discourse, which in turn has brought into consideration the historical and material factors affecting the development of the gendered subject. However, one key element that we have not addressed directly (although in referring to the social dominance of men and the privileging of masculinity we have glanced at it obliquely) is the notion of *patriarchy*. One sense of "regarding" in the title of this chapter, then, is "concerning" or "about" patriarchy.

Activity 4.1

- Before continuing with this chapter, answer the following questions:
  - Are you acquainted with the word "patriarchy"?
  - If so, what do you understand by it?

Although it is a key concept, "patriarchy" is a problematic term in the discussions and debates around gender. That this is the case is reflected in the absence of handbooks about and introductions to the notion of patriarchy itself, although one can find many works that discuss patriarchy in relation to women, men, feminism, and so on. However, there is (at least at the time of writing of the present work) no *Complete Idiot's Guide to Patriarchy*, no *Patriarchy for Dummies*, nor is there a volume titled *Patriarchy* in Routledge's New Critical Idiom series. Of course, both authors and publishers are doubtless wary of producing a text that might seem to promote and confirm patriarchy as a positive structuring of gender, subjectivity, and, more broadly, society – or that might invite men, especially young men, to become better or more effective "patriarchs." This would surely irritate and anger women, especially feminists, as well as the many men who support feminist ideals or harbor their own misgivings about or criticisms of patriarchy. It would also seem historically regressive after the achievements of

feminism and the various women's movements of the past 40 years. There are, of course, books that do promote such a backward-looking intellectual, philosophical, and social position; but they rarely, if ever, feature on their front covers the word "patriarchy."

What is "patriarchy"?

Much of the discussion centered on gender is embedded in a strong sense of historical and cultural specificity. However, "patriarchy" by contrast tends, especially in nonscholarly contexts, to be used as a free-floating, transhistorical, and transcultural term and point of reference. Thus, although cruder forms of feminist critique may imply that "patriarchy" or, sometimes, "the patriarchy" has always been around and has always oppressed women, what has been more rarely addressed are questions such as: has patriarchy always taken the same forms, historically and socially speaking? If patriarchy has indeed always oppressed women, has it always been in the same ways? In other words, universalizing and generalizing the concept of "patriarchy" can be helpful only in broad-brush representations of gender politics and issues. Any closer inspection of such representations inevitably reveals flaws and gaps in the history, the logic, and the argument.

Moreover, we need to distinguish between what we might call a *formal* patriarchy and a *symbolic* or *informal* one. The word "patriarchy" itself means "rule of (or by) the father." Formal patriarchies are those social structures in which the power held and wielded by a male individual over all other members of the community is commonly acknowledged as deriving from his position as the sire of his people either literally (that is, he has fathered many, if not indeed most, members of the community) or symbolically (he is regarded as the father-figure of his people). There are many examples of such social structures in the ancient world: to take an instance from the founding text of Judeo-Christian culture, in the Bible the dynasty that establishes the Hebrew people is that of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who are referred to commonly as "the patriarchs." In such a structure, the patriarch's rule may be absolute. Moreover, often he controls the sexuality of his people, and particularly that of other men who might conceivably become rivals to his power, by the taking of women into his own household, or the distributing of women among selected and favored males within the tribe or clan.

A much later variation of this form of control can be seen in the medieval practice of the *jus primae noctis* (Latin for "the law of the first night"), known in French as the *droit du seigneur* ("the lord's prerogative"), by right of which the lord of a domain or territory might take the virginity of the bride of any of his serfs or peasants. Such a practice, of course, asserted the nobleman's power over those he owned by right of title or by seizure of land, but it also established the possibility of producing a population through whose veins ran the blood of the noble master, consolidating still further his claim to power over the peasantry and to their allegiance and loyalty.

A symbolic or informal patriarchy, by contrast, is a social structure or community within which power is dispersed among the male subjects. Such power is not necessarily vested self-evidently and officially in a single male individual, although often, of course, we do find men heading large organizations and corporations as well as governments. However, we are left with the troubling question: where does this power originate? It cannot be simply the sum of the power possessed and wielded by all men. Power, especially in the Foucauldian sense, does not work like that. Moreover, this does not explain the apparent unequal access to and sharing of power among men. Rather than see masculine power as something *owned* by individual males, therefore, it is more productive to think of such power as *something held out as promised* to men, and as *always only provisionally held* by individual males. Thus, although individual men may indeed run and control organizations and communities ranging from the family through to complex multinational corporations, and although they may accrue varying levels of power thereby, they nevertheless remain implicated in an overarching system of power *that remains finally beyond their own control.*

A more nuanced understanding of the way a symbolic patriarchy works, then, is to see it as a discursive formation by means of which sex, sexuality, and gender become intelligible and legible within a particular economy of power. "Economy" is here to be grasped as a system of checks and balances that regulates the flows of power to and among individuals. As with the national financial economy, with which we are more familiar, in an economy of power there are connections and interrelations among the various social systems (for example, religion, government, commerce, or education) that constitute the sources of power in the society. These in turn produce the various cultural discourses that characterize a society at a specific historical moment. An economy of power generates not only benefits but also costs. The advantaging of some necessarily implies the disadvantaging of others – indeed, often, the disadvantaging of the many in favor of the few.

We may understand an informal patriarchy, then, as a particular kind of economy that ranges across the multiple, interrelated institutional systems to whose organization we give the name "society." The power inherent in those systems not only governs the activities and practices of the individual system itself but may also be harnessed in the service of giving meaning to sex difference, and hence also to gender and sexuality. Take, for instance, the case of a high-born woman in the medieval feudal system. In this system land ownership, together with the ownership of the peasants or serfs resident on one's land, was central. It defined one's social and political position. A noblewoman, no matter her personal attributes, such as intelligence, beauty, or social grace, was thus the vector of dynastic concerns, chief among which were the transfer of property from generation to generation, and from family to family, and the provision of offspring who would be the inheritors of that property.

Under the burgeoning capitalism and colonial expansionism of the later eighteenth and nineteenth century in Britain, the question of dynastic wealth and power remained, but this time as a middle-class concern; this is one of the themes

in as early a work as Samuel Richardson's novel *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1747–48) (Richardson, 2004). The decay, in Britain at least, of the hereditary aristocracy and its power, together with the increasing wealth of the middle class, who sought not only to acquire the property of the old nobility but also to emulate their manners and customs, meant that traditional class boundaries were becoming more permeable, opening the way for a particular understanding of the principle of individualism. It is at this time that the figure of the self-made man, the individualist who struggles with and overcomes all odds, begins to populate not only the pages of novels in both Europe and the United States, but also the actual social world. The counterpart to this outgoing, thrusting, ambitious and (presumably eventually) successful male was the nurturing female, whether mother or wife. She preserved the family hearth and home, and ensured for her man a safe haven away from the pressures of the social and financial world when he returned. The private and the public worlds thus came to be defined and distinguished from one another in gendered ways that would have seemed somewhat foreign 200 years earlier.

The patriarchal order and the patriarchal economy

"Patriarchy," then, is today less an overt, explicit social structure than a rather nebulous set of discursive strands that constitute for people in the culture an order and way of thinking of themselves as subjects within a sexed and gendered economy. Even so, we should not make the error of believing that, because we may think of "patriarchy" as an abstract thing, it has no material effects in the real social world. Because it is a way of organizing and directing how we think of ourselves and others, and the ways we behave both towards and against others, the discursive formations of patriarchy exert a powerful influence in our lives. Those formations, moreover, change and adapt to changing sociohistorical contexts. Thus, even when it may appear that gender identity and behavior remain stable historically, it is likely that the discursive formations have adjusted to changing conditions in order to preserve and maintain that identity and behavior.

Of course, it is not difficult to see that, in general, men have fared better historically, in terms of the access to and the wielding of power, than have women. From this we may infer that, at any given historical moment, the patriarchal economy aligns itself with current institutional systems and their characteristic flows of power. However, we must recall that even among men the access to power is unequal. From this we may infer further that, by distributing power differentially and unequally among *both* men *and* women, the patriarchal economy produces subjectivities for both *groups* (men and women considered in broad terms, such as gender, sexuality, race, class, age, and the like) and *individuals* (men and women considered in particular terms, such as a black middle-aged working-class woman, a young Hispanic upper-middle-class man, an elderly wealthy white gay male, and so on).

Activity 4.2

- Think about the three specific examples given parenthetically at the end of the last paragraph.
  - Where do you think each is positioned in relation to power and privilege, and which traits or characteristics do you consider to be the most empowering or most disempowering?
- Imagine two or three other subject types in terms of gender, sexuality, race, class, and age (you may, of course, add other traits), and perform the same exercise as in the activity above.
- Have these exercises enabled you to think of subjectivity and power in ways different from how you have usually thought of them in relation to one another?
  - If so, analyse those differences in conceptualizing the connection between the subject and power.

So, rather than imagine patriarchy as a static, transhistorical monolith and thereby reify it (that is, turn it into an actual, physical thing or object: "*the* patriarchy"), we should instead understand it as functioning under two closely interrelated aspects. The first of these is as a social and conceptual *structure* that is capable of adapting to current social, economic, and cultural conditions. As a structure, therefore, patriarchy organizes sexual and social identity both differentially and preferentially. It thus produces gendered subjectivity within an order of rank and precedence that establishes not only the privileging of men over women but also the privileging of some men over others, on such grounds as race, social class, physique, or sexual orientation. We may think of this as the *patriarchal order*: a social structure that advantages men, as a class, over women, as a class; and that privileges men who possess or demonstrate certain characteristics over those who do not.

The second aspect of patriarchy concerns the ways in which the patriarchal order generates and distributes the flows of power within both social and institutional organizations. This we may call the *patriarchal economy*. Its connection to the patriarchal order is so close that one defines the other, such that they operate complementarily and synchronously. The patriarchal economy determines the nature and the extent of the power available to men and women, both as a class and as individuals. Although it may be impossible to disentangle the patriarchal order from the patriarchal economy, it is useful to be able to distinguish at least conceptually between them. That way we are less likely to make overbroad generalizations about the history and nature of patriarchy.

Two brief examples, both drawn from British history, may help to demonstrate a more nuanced understanding of "patriarchy." Queen Elizabeth I, who reigned in England 1558–1603, and Margaret Thatcher (later Baroness Thatcher), Prime Minister of Britain 1979–90, were both women with considerable political, economic, and social power. Yet neither noticeably advanced the cause of gender equality, whether by addressing (and redressing) the status of women in general, or by promoting women to positions of subordinate power. In the case of Elizabeth, "In order to maintain her position in a culture which conferred power chiefly upon men, [she] employed a number of strategies designed either to appropriate power under the sign of monarchy itself, or else to erase as far as possible the signs of her own femininity, and thus to assert her claim to masculine power" (Buchbinder, 1989). Thatcher, by contrast, established herself almost in rivalry with Queen Elizabeth II, and adopted by turns both hectoring and nannying strategies with regard to her ministers and public servants, and, indeed, to the public at large. She thereby represented herself as a kind of austere, disciplinarian maternal figure who remained nonetheless curiously unfeminine. Indeed, she became known as the Iron Lady. A feminist might argue that, given the pervasive effect of patriarchy, the only way a woman could rise to a position of power was to minimize her femininity and thus become symbolically masculinized. Although this is no doubt true, the point here is that these two powerful women preserved the patriarchal *order* while manipulating and benefiting from the patriarchal *economy*. The distinction between these aspects of patriarchy, then, suggests a second meaning of the term "regarding" in the title of this chapter, namely, the idea of looking at or observing patriarchy.

Activity 4.3

- Think about powerful female figures today, whether in political or institutional structures (Condoleezza Rice, under the George W. Bush administration, or Hillary Clinton, under the Obama administration, are examples of women in power within a political structure):
  - To what degree do such women foreground or background their status and identities as women in order to achieve their positions and administer power?
  - How do they negotiate the patriarchal order?
  - What power flows to them in the patriarchal economy?

Men, women, and the patriarchal order

As we have already begun to see, it would be mistaken to assume that, because men tend to benefit from the power afforded by a patriarchal order, all men therefore share equally in the wielding of power. To make such a claim would be to represent gender relations and politics in an extremely simplified form, reduced

to an understanding of women as locked in a permanent and perpetual hostile tension with men, and vice versa. Moreover, such a representation implies that women are, by definition, absolutely *excluded* from the patriarchal order. Yet, clearly, women are critically necessary to that order – otherwise, how is it to define itself, and to work? There is no parallel or complementary matriarchal order against which to distinguish itself, and by which a different structuring of power operates to the benefit of women.

A subtler way of understanding how a symbolic patriarchal economy works is to see it as hierarchical, so that *both* women *and* men must function within a structure that distributes power *differentially and unequally*. This is not to say, of course, that the empowerment or disempowerment of men is identical to the empowerment or disempowerment of women within a patriarchal economy; nor, for that matter, that, in most Western societies, the empowerment or disempowerment of white men is equivalent to that of men of color or of different ethnicity or sexuality. In this respect, feminist critics and theorists are no doubt right to deride the claims of some men that they (or, indeed, all men) are as disadvantaged as women by the patriarchal order. Nevertheless, it remains the case that, within such an order, men are not seen as all created equal, except in one respect: as *males*, they have traditionally possessed to some degree an advantage over females, in relation to authority over others, prospects of employment, and so on.

The patriarchal order: hierarchy and rivalry

If we imagine the patriarchal order as a hierarchical pyramid, we can understand the distribution of power, in the first place, as stratified horizontally. Accordingly, therefore, those with a good deal of power are situated towards the apex, whereas those (including most women) with less are positioned at different levels, all the way to the base. This structure may be understood as chiefly benefiting men (at all levels of the pyramid), who as a result tend, as a group, to wield power. The sociologist R.W. Connell[1] refers to this as the "patriarchal dividend," a phrase that neatly encapsulates, in a metaphor drawn from the stock exchange, the ideas both of investment and the return on that investment (see, for example, R.W. Connell, 2000: 25). That dividend includes:

> men's control of governments, corporations, media; men's better jobs, incomes and command of wealth; men's control of the means of violence; and the entrenched ideologies that pushed women into the home and dismissed their claims for equality.
>
> (R.W. Connell, 1995: 41)

However, the patriarchal dividend also implies the exercise of power by some men over others at the same level or in the same category; for example, within an organizational structure, peers or colleagues, within the category of physical type, physically imposing, "macho" males in relation to other men of a slighter

physical build or "feminine" appearance, and so on. The uneven distribution of power means that the benefits and advantages of accessing power encourage individual subjects to wield as much of it as possible, whether to maintain their current position in the pyramid, to reach a higher one, or even only to fend off the more aggressive applications of power by other men.

In the second place, we may think of the patriarchal pyramid as marked by vertical as well as horizontal axes. That is, men may contest one another for power in terms of positioning not only along and within the various levels of power available in the horizontal stratification, but also across levels in the vertical formation of the hierarchy. For example, in a corporate structure a man higher up in the scale of power allocated by formal rankings in the organization (the gamut of positions, from the president and/or CEO of a company down to the office "boy" employed to run errands as well as sort and deliver the company's mail) is likely to be driven both by an ambition for promotion upward not only in the organizational structure of the company but also in the hierarchy of power, and the equal or perhaps even greater desire to hamper and frustrate any efforts of his peers to compete with, discredit, and/or displace him. At the same time, of course, he will be keeping an eye on subordinates who might nurse ambitions regarding his own position in the organization and in the structure of power.

Activity 4.4

- Consider other structures and situations with which you may be familiar in which you perceive the horizontal and vertical workings of a patriarchal order. For example, these might include the dynamics of the classroom and/or the playground; behaviors and attitudes that characterize a sports team or game; the organization of clubs, fraternities or other similar societies; etc.
    - Analyse the specific nature of the power dynamic, and how it is put in play.
    - How does that dynamic affect the behavior of the males involved?
    - Does that dynamic affect women too, and if so, in what way or ways?
    - Do questions of race or ethnicity, age, physical ability or configuration, sexuality, etc., influence the dynamic in any way?

These horizontal and vertical flows of power within the patriarchal economy necessarily imply, in turn, a state of constant struggle among males to acquire or seize power, and to retain it against all other rivals. In short, it pits the individual man against most, if not, indeed, all other men. However, we should not think of this struggle as limited to environments such as the corporation: it functions in all

dimensions of an individual male's life. For example, in sporting events such as football, basketball, or baseball, the ostensible unity and homogeneity of the idea of the team, as a kind of organism, is contradicted by the singling out of the individual player as "most valuable player" or "man of the match (or game)," or by behaviors calculated to foreground individual players in various ways against their team members (for instance, through their endorsement of products in advertising).

Even close friends often find themselves competing with one another. For instance, how many times have you witnessed (or even participated in) drinking matches whose goal has been to demonstrate one man's superior capacity to hold his liquor over that of another or others? Knowledge and/or skill in certain fields may also lend themselves to rivalry, whether overt or covert. For example, one often hears men instructing others about repair, politics, social observations and truths, and the like. Sexual matters, too, may occasion more or less friendly rivalry amongst men: in terms of who engages first in sexual intercourse (a common competition amongst adolescent males, as is also the contest to see who can ejaculate the greatest volume of semen, or who can ejaculate the farthest), who is successful in bedding a woman desired by several men, and so on. Penis size also becomes something over which men compete, from childhood and adolescence onward, whether by explicit comparison or by more or less covert "sneak peeks" in communal showers, changing rooms, and public toilets. (We return to the issue of penis size later in this chapter.)

Activity 4.5

- Can you think of any other situations or contexts in which males may be understood as competing with one another?
    - Is the situation or context one in which the boys or men are conscious of the competition?
    - What are the terms of the competition: for example, physical prowess and strength, intellectual agility, technical ability, etc.?
    - What is the "prize" gained by the "winner"? For example, in an athletic meet, there may be an explicit prize: a trophy, prize money, or the like. However, in less obvious contests the prize might be something less tangible (respect or adulation, for example) or something more tangible but less official than a trophy (for instance, invitations to social events, or even the offer of sex).
    - What is the consequence for the "loser"?

We noted above that Connell's formulation "the patriarchal dividend" is a metaphor drawn from the stock market. If that dividend confers power, authority, and control on men in general, and on particular men in specific situations, as the

return on an "investment," we might wonder what that investment could be, and what its cost might be to the individual male. The answer to both questions is: the submission of that male to the dynamic of the patriarchal hierarchy, in what I have elsewhere called the "Masculinity Stakes, a race or competition in which only winners count" (Buchbinder, 1994: 35).

However, this is not a contest from which an individual male can choose to withdraw fully. The patriarchal order preexists our individual births; and to be born is to be required to negotiate that order so as to find our place in it. That some men might later in their lives opt bravely to refuse its dynamic and demands nevertheless requires them first to have understood its workings by participating in them. Moreover, any such refusal will no doubt be judged as a repudiation in some degree of their own manhood and, hence, masculinity. The consequences, therefore, of an individual man's disengagement from the patriarchal dynamic is likely to be severe, and felt by that man, despite his courage in resisting the pressure of the patriarchal order.

The phallus and phallic power

In order to create the divisions and consequent categories through which power flows in different measures to individuals, recognizable signs of difference need to be established. The primary sign, of course, is that of sexual difference. Within a patriarchal order, the group designated "male," by which is meant "possessing a penis," constitutes the principal beneficiary of those flows of power. For many, this is sufficient to define what they understand as "patriarchy." However, there are certain problems inherent in so stark an understanding of the nature of the patriarchal order. For example, as we saw in chapter 2, there are individuals in possession of a penis who nonetheless either regard themselves or are regarded by others as not-male. Clearly, a more subtle understanding is required about who benefits from patriarchal power.

Moreover, if the simple possession of a penis were sufficient to authorize men to share equally in the privileges and power of patriarchy, how are we to explain the clearly observable fact that not all men share equally in those privileges and that power? Such factors as sexuality, age, race or ethnicity, and social class or level of wealth play a critical part in the nature of an individual man's access to power, and in the attribution of power to that man by others in the social structure. And what of female-to-male transsexuals: to what degree does such a subject's possession of a penis, artificially produced and implanted in the body, enable him to share in that privilege and power? Instead of considering the penis as an absolute guarantee of masculine power, therefore, let us think of the actual, fleshly penis as a kind of promissory note to its possessor, or like the lottery ticket that admits the possessor of a penis to the chance of winning millions of dollars, but does not *guarantee* that success. The possession of a penis is simply *a necessary precondition* to the accrual of power under a patriarchal order. Power itself is actually vested elsewhere, in a symbol called *the phallus*.

A Greco-Roman word signifying the penis,[2] the phallus should be thought of as *the abstract representation of male power*, focused and figured as a penis, because this is how, culturally, we identify the male, as against the female. Imagined culturally as gigantic and as permanently erect, unlike the actual penis, the phallus is that to which all penises refer, and for which every fleshly penis is, in some sense, a metaphor or a sign. However, no physical penis, no matter how large, can ever rival the imagined grandeur and splendor of the phallus, which we may think of as engorged, not with blood (as a real, erect penis would be), but with power. By representing the sum of potential masculine power, the phallus becomes also an object of desire, because (notionally anyway) the individual who attained it would wield all the power that it both possesses and represents.

However, such an ambition is necessarily doomed in advance, not merely because the phallus is symbolic only, but also because it would bring to an end the very dynamic (masculine rivalry through hierarchical positioning) that motivates and sustains patriarchy itself. The phallus, then, may be thought of as always *to be attained*, but as ultimately *unattainable*. It is this essential contradiction that motivates the desire for power within the patriarchal economy: there is always the hope that the promissory note represented by the possession of a penis will be honored; that the number on the lottery ticket will, in the end, prove to be the winning one.

For a man to gain phallic power, it is not required that he demonstrate explicitly that his penis approaches the size of the symbolic phallus, or even that it is bigger than those of other men. Such power may be signified, first, by a series of symbols that indicate power, such as actual power within an organization ranging from the family to the multinational corporation and the government; or that signal power through such possessions as wealth, large houses, cars and other vehicles, expensive clothing, or such attributes as the company of attractive, well-dressed women, and so on.

Second, these symbolic signifiers and displacements of phallic power tend to form chains of equivalences, so that, in a kind of patriarchal algebra, the final term turns out always to be the phallus. For example, a wealthy man who owns an expensive and powerful car or motorbike clearly wields economic power, and hence has access to the symbolic phallus. We may render this sequence thus: powerful vehicle = wealth = power = the phallus. A different sequence might focus on a man's sexuality. For instance, a bevy of attractive women who are themselves drawn to a particular male would signify not only his sex appeal but would also imply something about his genital power, whether this was simply penis size or, less obviously, his sexual technique. Here the equivalence in relationship between actual penis and symbolic phallus is much closer, and we may express this sequence thus: desirable women = the capacity to be sexually attractive (for whatever reasons) = desirable penis = power = the phallus. One might multiply such equations infinitely, not only by finding different configurations of power and its manifestations, but also through combinations. For instance, a wealthy man with a lot of "stuff" that signals his wealth (a mansion, perhaps, a holiday home, expensive vehicles, financial generosity, and so on)

might attract women, for a number of reasons: the seductive effect of wealth and its companion, power; financial security; social status, and so on. We would then perceive a sequence expressed as follows: the ownership and possible flaunting of expensive goods = attraction of women = the attribution of a generous genital endowment and/or formidable sexual technique = power = the phallus.

Activity 4.6

- Consider the cultural mythology of penis size attributed to difference of race: for example, the black man's "super-penis" or the Asian male's "micro-penis":
  - How do such popular myths construct the masculinity of the "raced" subject concerned, and what other attributes (for example, overt sexuality, the acquisition of such goods as jewellery, clothing or automobiles, the display of wealth, ambition to succeed socially and economically, etc.) might such a male seek in order to confirm those myths or subvert them?
  - In what ways do these myths affect the construction of dominant white masculinity, and what strategies might be invoked to support or counter that construction?
- Think about males of your acquaintance who, in your view, either wield obvious phallic power or, conversely, seem to wield little or no such power:
  - To what can you attribute this presence or absence of masculine power?
  - How is it manifested: that is, through which possessions, behaviours, or actions is the presence or otherwise of power made clear?
  - What do you perceive to be the "payoff" for the possession of such power, in terms of how it positions the individual male in relation to other males, and in relation to females?

However, phallic power, as we have seen in the earlier examples in this chapter of Queen Elizabeth I and Margaret Thatcher, is not limited strictly to biological males only. Women who achieve status and power in various kinds of organizations may be considered also to wield phallic power, not because they possess a penis, but because the organization itself runs, as it were, on the fuel of phallic power. Thus, the resentment often felt and expressed by both women and men towards a woman in a position of power may be traced to a sense of disorientation created by the apparent contradiction of a nonpossessor of a penis occupying a position traditionally evolved for and held by those who do possess one, within

the context of an organization motivated by phallic power. Such a woman is likely, as a consequence, to be represented as "mannish," and caricatured accordingly – sometimes even with the implication that she might be a lesbian, and all that this implies in the cultural imagination about lesbians and their lack of femininity.

Moreover, women in positions of power often tend to dress in ways that downplay their femininity; for example, in suits that are often described as "power dressing," a telling term. By contrast, we may think of such a costume as a form of protective mimicry, to enable such a woman to "fit in" within a context of masculine, that is, phallic, power. Veronica Palmer, the character played by Portia de Rossi in the TV series *Better Off Ted*, is clearly intended as a caricature of such a woman. Largely humorless, severe in her hairstyle and way of dressing, often quite incapable of understanding emotion or of empathizing or sympathizing with others (unlike a "real" woman, presumably), Veronica, the executive responsible for Research and Development at Veridian Dynamics, is terrifying to many of her underlings, not least because she seems so masculine both in appearance and in the way she wields power (*Better Off Ted*, 2009–10). (Incidentally, this is not to say that we would find a man with similar characteristics – humorlessness, severity of demeanor, and coldness of behavior – any more palatable; however, we are more likely to accept such traits in a man.)

Jeff Lindsay's *Dexter* novels provide a further couple of examples. Deb Morgan, Dexter's sister, is represented as aggressive and ambitious, both traits usually assigned to men. *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*, for instance, she resents being made to wear what she calls a "sex suit" (Lindsay, 2004: 19) in order to work undercover as a prostitute:

> A good-looking young woman working vice on the Tamiami Trail usually ends up as bait on a sting, standing outside almost naked to catch men who wanted to pay for sex. Deborah hated that. Couldn't get worked up about prostitution, except as a sociological issue. Didn't think bagging johns was real crime fighting. And, known only to me, she hated anything that overemphasized her femininity and her lush figure. She wants to be a cop; it was not her fault she looked more like a centerfold. …
>
> … I had never seen a beautiful woman dressed in such a revealing costume who looked less sexually appealing than Deb did.
>
> (Lindsay, 2004: 16–17)

She is capable of physical violence, as, for example, when, in frustration, she "kicked out savagely and put a small dent in my metal desk" (Lindsay, 2004: 45), or when she punches Dexter in the ribs and shoves him because she believes he failed to notify her when he came up with a lead on the killer that the Miami police are hunting (Lindsay, 2004: 97–99). Driven by her desire to become a "real" cop and thus to emulate her beloved father Harry (Dexter's foster father), Deb tends to deny both her body and her femininity, and so masculinizes herself by desiring the phallic power embodied in and by the figure of the "real" cop.

In Detective Migdia LaGuerta, both Deb's and Dexter's superior, we are offered a different instance, this time of a woman who wields that phallic power, albeit ambiguously:

> There was a rumor going around a few years back that Detective Migdia LaGuerta got into the Homicide Bureau by sleeping with somebody. To look at her once you might buy into that. She has all the necessary parts in the right places to be physically attractive in a sullen, aristocratic way. A true artist with her makeup and very well dressed, Bloomingdale's chic. But the rumor can't be true. To begin with, although she seems outwardly very feminine, I've never met a woman who was more masculine inside. She was hard, ambitious in the most self-serving way, and her only weakness seemed to be for model-handsome men a few years younger than she was. So I am quite sure she didn't get into Homicide using sex. She got into Homicide because she's Cuban, plays politics, and knows how to kiss ass. That combination is far better than sex in Miami.
>
> (Lindsay, 2004: 26)

Unlike Deb, LaGuerta knows how to work the system to her own advantage; and, again unlike Deb (at least in this novel), she is sexual: indeed, predatory. For example, Dexter, drawn by a combination of dream and intuition, pursues a refrigerator truck late at night, only to be driven off the road by the driver of the truck, who hurls a woman's severed head at his car. He subsequently finds himself the object of LaGuerta's sexual attentions:

> At a little after 8 AM LaGuerta came over to where I was sitting on the trunk of my car. She leaned her tailored haunch onto the car and slid over until our thighs were touching. I waited for her to say something, but she didn't seem to have any words for the occasion. Neither did I. So I sat there for several minutes looking back at the bridge, feeling the heat of her leg against mine and wondering where my shy friend had gone with his truck. But I was yanked out of my quiet daydream by a pressure on my thigh.
>
> I looked down at my pants leg. LaGuerta was kneading my thigh as if it were a lump of dough.
>
> (Lindsay, 2004: 88)

It becomes apparent, as the narrative unfolds, that LaGuerta seems to believe that she has a sort of *droit du seigneur* over Dexter, in much the same way as a male boss might think that a female employee is part of his private sexual domain (a situation explored and implicitly criticized in the TV series *Mad Men*, set in the 1950s, and hence in the era before Women's Liberation and second-wave feminism [*Mad Men*, 2007–]). Put otherwise, LaGuerta's interior masculinity finds its expression, in part, in exterior, predatory sexual behavior. Dexter "manages" both Deb and LaGuerta, although in different ways; but the masculine behavior of each is implicitly criticized (Deb's for making her less than feminine, and LaGuerta's for using her femininity as a mask for her masculine ambitions).

Conferring masculinity: patriarchy as panopticon

In the end, however, no matter how "power-dressed" a woman might be, she is unable to confer masculinity upon men. Only other men can do that, although women may *confirm* a man's masculinity, whether through verbal praise, attitudinal behavior, emotional demonstrativeness toward the man, or making herself sexually available to him. Because, within the patriarchal order, an individual man must take his place (indeed, must carve out a place for himself) alongside other men, it follows that his attempt to do so is both monitored and evaluated by other men, which in turn affords them considerable power over him.

This necessarily puts the individual male in a difficult and inevitably anxiety-producing position. His status as masculine depends on the judgment of those against whom the patriarchal order pits him as a competitor for phallic power. Their assessment of him as masculine or not-masculine will then be conditional on whether other men judge him as like themselves, superior to themselves, or different from/inferior to themselves. In this way, *the criteria for being judged masculine function to reproduce the current notion in the culture of what constitutes masculinity.*

To understand how this works, let us turn to Foucault's deployment, in *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison* (Foucault, 1977), of the idea of the panopticon, a design for a disciplinary or correctional facility developed in 1785 by the British Utilitarian philosopher and social reformer Jeremy Bentham:

> at the periphery, an annular [ring-shaped] building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. … Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness …Visibility is a trap.
>
> (Foucault, 1977: 200)

If we think of the patriarchal order as functioning in a manner comparable with the panopticon, Foucault's remark about the isolation and theatricalization of

each "actor" becomes peculiarly apt, especially if we take into consideration Judith Butler's notion of the performativity of gender. That is, *each individual male is required to perform his masculinity before an observer of some kind*; an observer, moreover, who judges each man's rendition of masculinity.

Foucault goes on to add that each individual in the cells of the panopticon can be viewed by the supervisor but not by the inmates of neighboring cells, so that there can be no communication among those in the cells. The individual "is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication" (Foucault, 1977: 200). Foucault remarks further:

> Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that ensures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.
>
> (Foucault, 1977: 201)

Foucault here is working his way to explaining that the device of *the panopticon is both the product and the agent of power*. Its chief function is to cause the cell inmates individually to monitor their own behavior, so that the surveillance from the central tower, which represents the source of power, need not be constant (indeed, need not even take place) *because the inmates will carry out that surveillance upon themselves, by themselves*. In the panoptic structure, power, says Foucault,

> should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so. In order to make the presence or absence of the Inspector unverifiable, so that the prisoners, in their cells, cannot even see a shadow, Bentham envisaged not only venetian blinds on the windows of the central observation hall, but, on the inside, partitions that intersected the hall at right angles and, in order to pass from one quarter to the other, not doors but zig-zag openings; for the slightest noise, a gleam of light, a brightness in a half-opened door would betray the presence of the guardian. The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen.
>
> (Foucault, 1977: 201–2)

The analogy between the panopticon and patriarchy is not exact. For example, in the culture men are not kept physically separate from one another; yet there has never been a mass revolt of men against the regulations and the imperatives of patriarchy. The reasons for this are severalfold. In the first place, of course, there is the issue of masculine power: because the patriarchal order makes power and status available to those males who conform to its requirements and prohibitions, it is in men's vested interests to preserve that order. However, there are other reasons that emerge in the light of Foucault's use of Bentham's imagined panopticon. Because *both* the inmates of the cells *and* the concealed observer consist of the collectivity of men, the panoptic effect of the patriarchal order is carried out on individual men by all other men. In other words, each man must perform his masculinity to the satisfaction of other men, and, in turn, must function, with other men, as the observer and judge of the gender performance of other males.

This means that there must necessarily exist a distance between one male and others, because each seeks the approval of those others with regard to his performance of the masculine, and, at the same time, assesses the equivalent performance of the others. In this, at least, although there is no physical barrier separating one man from his peers, as in the actual panopticon, there are self-imposed boundaries that mark men off from each other. It is useful, therefore, to think of the patriarchal order as a kind of panopticon, keeping all males under observation in order to control their behavior to ensure that the criteria of masculinity are observed and maintained. (At the same time, of course, a complementary panoptic patriarchal surveillance of women seeks to reproduce the criteria of femininity.) In practical terms, this means that men are simultaneously panoptic subjects (the agents of the patriarchal panopticon) and panoptic objects (the focus of the surveillance of the patriarchal panopticon). They both observe, and are observed by, one another, as a way of keeping male behavior in line with the current norms of masculinity and acceptable gender standards. Any failure in this regard by an individual male inevitably and often instantaneously incurs some form of disciplinary action, ranging from comparatively harmless censure, teasing or ridiculing, through to more serious forms of response, such as ostracism, physical punishment, even the infliction of death.

Each man, therefore, is always-already the potential victim of a band of gender "policemen" whose task it is to patrol the boundaries of gender and to ensure that all members of the culture respect these and act accordingly. All too often, such a patrol can turn into a form of vigilantism, overt and usually self-appointed, as when, for example, gay men are badly beaten, tortured, or even killed by other men who perceive male homosexuality as a threat, whether to their own masculinity or to the criteria established by the patriarchal order as determining what constitutes the masculine. An instance of this is the case in Wyoming, in 1998, of Matthew Shepard, who, at the age of 22, was beaten and killed because he was gay, a news story that made international headlines. Such is the power of the kind of covert panoptic surveillance encouraged by the patriarchal order that, *even in private, men tend to behave according to the norms of masculinity as if they were under actual and continuous observation.*

Activity 4.7

- Reflect on your own observations or experiences of the patrolling and controlling functions of the patriarchal panopticon:
  - What were the circumstances of such incidents?
  - Who were the instigators, overt or covert, of the pressure or action?
  - Was the event intended to punish, to act as a warning to others, or both?
  - What was your own reaction?

Male homosociality and male homosocial desire

Nevertheless, we should not imagine, under the patriarchal order, a state of affairs in which every man's hand is set permanently and immutably against his fellow man. The desire for "male bonding" is promoted strenuously in various quarters. These include discussions about father–son relationships, the schooling of boys, especially in same-sex educational institutions, and the encouragement, by Robert Bly and others in the mythopoetic men's movement, to men to spend time with one another rediscovering their masculinity. This suggests that although men may function in an agonistic or combative relationship with one another in a patriarchal economy, they also *require* the companionship of other males. Such bonding may occur in a variety of contexts, for example, common hobbies or pursuits (such as fishing, auto repair and maintenance, or carpentry) or the establishment of a buddy or group of buddies (with whom one drinks, watches television, attends football matches and the like, or just "hangs out").

Even so, despite extreme closeness and camaraderie among male friends, there remains a certain distance, and the maintenance of certain boundaries. Too close a friendship or bond, and the men concerned risk the perception that they are sexually as well as socially involved. Moreover, some element of the dynamic of competitiveness encouraged within the patriarchal order often characterizes the behavior of even the closest of male friends, disguised as such rivalry might be in the form of joking at one another's expense, egging one another on to undertake various exploits, or trying to outdo one another as the more sexually active friend.

This ambivalence in male–male relationships is explored by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her important study *Between Men: English literature and male homosocial desire* (Sedgwick, 1985). She defines "homosocial" as

> a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same-sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with "homosexual," and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from "homosexual." In fact, it is applied to such activities as "male bonding" which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality.
>
> (Sedgwick, 1985: 1)

Sedgwick is interested in the relationship between homosociality and desire:

> To draw the "homosocial" back into the orbit of "desire," of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of the continuum between homosocial and homosexual – a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted.
>
> (Sedgwick, 1985: 1–2)

She compares the ruptures in that continuum to what she sees as the much more consistent sets of relations among women:

> At this particular historical moment, an intelligible continuum of aims, emotions, and valuations links lesbianism with other forms of women's attention to women: the bond of mother and daughter, for instance, the bond of sister and sister, women's friendship, "networking," and the active struggles of feminism. The continuum is crisscrossed with deep discontinuities – with much homophobia, with conflicts of race and class – but its intelligibility seems now a matter of simple common sense. However agonistic the politics, however conflicted the feelings, it seems at this moment to make an obvious kind of sense to say that women in our society who love women, women who teach, study, nurture, suckle, write about, march for, vote for, give jobs to, or otherwise promote the interests of other women, are pursuing congruent and closely related activities. Thus the adjective "homosocial" as applied to women's bonds … need not be pointedly dichotomized as against "homosexual"; it can intelligibly denominate the entire continuum.
>
> (Sedgwick, 1985: 2–3)

The "particular historical moment" to which Sedgwick alludes encompasses feminism and the women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s (her book was published in 1985), when the notion of the "sisterhood" of women had a greater currency than it perhaps possesses today. Nonetheless, it no doubt remains true that the continuity between "woman" and "feminine," on the one hand, and, on the other, "lesbian," whatever the ambivalence that some may feel about it, is less troubled and fragmented than that between "man/masculine" and "homosexual male," because for many men the latter term is definitively excluded by the former terms.

Sedgwick is careful to explain that, by "male homosocial desire," she does not mean to imply "genital homosexual desire as 'at the root of' other forms of male homosociality." Rather, she uses the term "desire" "to name a structure," that is, "the affective or social force, the glue, *even when its manifestation is hostility or*

hatred or something less emotively charged, that shapes an important relationship" (Sedgwick, 1985: 2; emphasis added). She goes on to propose that such important relationships may be structured according to a "triangle of desire," an idea that she borrows and adapts from René Girard's study *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: self and other in literary structure* (Girard, 1972). Girard argues that, in a number of European novels, an inexperienced and often younger male takes another, more worldly and often older male as a model for attaining a certain goal: social status, an advantageous marriage, wealth, romantic love or, more simply, the satisfaction of sexual desire. Often these apparently discrete aims may be reconciled and combined in the one character. Thus, for example, a female object of desire may offer social status and wealth through advantageous marriage, as well as romantic love and the satisfaction of sexual desire.

Girard perceives the protagonist's desire for that goal as being rerouted through the other, more experienced male, who functions not only as model but also as rival. In discussing this "calculus of power … structured by the relation of rivalry between the two active members of an erotic triangle," Sedgwick observes:

> What is most interesting for our purposes in his study is its insistence that, in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of "rivalry" and "love," differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many cases equivalent. For instance, Girard finds many examples in which the choice of the beloved is determined in the first place, not by the qualities of the beloved, but by the beloved's already being the choice of the person who has been chosen as a rival. In fact, Girard seems to see the bond between rivals in an erotic triangle as being even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved.
>
> (Sedgwick, 1985: 21)

Sedgwick reworks this triangular structure by particularizing the goal as a woman or, often more specifically, a woman's body, and by rerouting the flow of desire to demonstrate the functioning of homosocial desire within the texts she examines. In this reconceptualization of the triangle of desire, desire flows initially from the first male character towards the second. However, because that desire has been traditionally proscribed among men, it is redirected so that the woman becomes both its pretext and the alibi. In effect, then, the woman becomes the site on which the men can meet and develop their homosocial bond under the sign and protection of a "natural" heterosexuality. However, it is important to note that the homosocial bond does not necessarily imply homosexual activity or even overt sexual desire. Rather, it is often in an effort to *avoid* any such implication *for the participants in the bond themselves as well as any observers* that woman's presence is required.

The presence and power of the homosocial bond is exemplified in the TV series *How I Met Your Mother* (*How I Met Your Mother*, 2005–). Ted Mosby

(played by Josh Radnor) pursues an on-again/off-again relationship with Robin Scherbatsky (Cobie Smulders), whereas the relationship between Marshall Eriksen (Jason Segel) and Lily Aldrin (Alyson Hannigan) similarly approaches and then withdraws from, only to return to, the possibility of marriage. Their friend Barney Stinson (Neil Patrick Harris), self-confident to the point of arrogance, is a womanizer who is cynical about these relationships, and frequently meddles in them.

However, across the series it becomes clear that the important connections are those among the men, who counsel and console one another, and whose friendships, although they have their ups and downs, generally remain stable: they are "bros," or brothers. The female characters, important as they are to the plots of the various episodes, tend to function as the sign of the male characters' masculinity. Were the female characters to be removed, the series would be left with plots dealing with male–male relationships the closeness and intimacy of which might invite the assumption or suspicion of homosexual desire on the part of the male characters. Indeed, it is the very presence of the female characters that inspires many of the plots, which, however, focus as much on the interaction among the men in relation to the women as on the interaction among the men and women themselves. In terms of the erotic triangle of which Girard and Sedgwick write, the women in this series tend to function as relays by means of which the men may safely interact with one another, and express their feelings for one another.

The Bro Code is a print spin-off from the series ostensibly written by the fictional Barney Stinson but more probably by Matt Kuhn, who takes a self-effacing secondary authorship (the title page informs us that the book was written by Barney Stinson "with Matt Kuhn"). The book articulates Barney's selfish and sexist ideology in such a way as to postulate that heterosexual men are always locked in a struggle with women for superiority and power. Indeed, the very first "article" is titled "Bros before ho's," [sic] which suggests that battlelines are always-already drawn between men and women. The use of the slang term for women, "ho's," signifying "whores," is both morally judgmental and socially demeaning, labeling women as an entire class ("Barney Stinson" and Kuhn, 2008: 11). In Sedgwick's terms, this misogyny (usually defined fairly strongly as "a hatred of women," but which perhaps more accurately might be construed as a rejection, exclusion, or dismissal of women) has the effect not only of uniting men as a class of "bros," but also of using women (the apparent object of desire) as a means by which to effect that male solidarity. Stinson's "bro code," like Barney himself in the TV series, thus operates simultaneously to promote sexual rivalry, whether actual or potential, and to provide a model for both male–male and male–female behavior.

Jason Segel stars also in *I Love You, Man*, a movie often characterized as a "bromance," a variation of the genre of romantic comedy, or "rom-com." The term "bromance" signifies a close emotional, but not necessarily sexual, relationship between two men; and movies so designated explore this idea (*I Love You, Man*, 2009). The frame of reference of *I Love You, Man* is that of a fairly typical

rom-com, a narrative about a (heterosexual) couple who undergo various situations before eventually being wedded, the ceremony providing the narrative closure for both the romance and the bromance. However, the movie focuses not on the female lead, but rather on the male within this frame of reference. Peter Klaven (Paul Rudd), a realtor, offers marriage at the beginning of the movie to Zooey Rice (Rashida Jones), and all seems set to progress according to schedule. However, because he has no close male friends, Peter must confront the problem of whom he will choose to be his best man. Moreover, he overhears Zooey's friends express surprise and some reservation about the fact that he has no male friends. Concerned and rendered anxious both by this lack and the implication that somehow he is incomplete as a man because of it (Zooey comments to her friends that Peter's best friend seems to be his mother, an observation that might incline the viewer to assume that Peter is fundamentally gay), Peter sets out to find himself a best friend.

Taking advice from his gay younger brother Robbie (Andy Samberg), Peter goes on a number of "man-dates" via introductions by Robbie and their mother, or Internet dating sites. These "meets" turn out to be disasters: one man has an annoying voice and personality, another is a lonely elderly person looking for some form of companionship, and yet another is gay and assumes that Peter is, too. At an open house that he holds for the Hollywood star Lou Ferrigno's property, for which he is the real estate agent, Peter encounters Sydney Fife (Jason Segel), an apparently free spirit who visits open houses in order to eat the food often set out for the potential customers. A friendship develops between Peter and Sydney, who encourages the rather staid, straitlaced realtor to open up and take various risks. Peter asks Sydney to be his best man at the wedding, but later withdraws his offer because, he decides, Sydney is immature, and has stirred up difficulties between Peter and Zooey. Moreover, he discovers that Sydney, who borrowed $8000 from him, has used the funds to put up various billboards advertising Peter's skill as a realtor, in order to improve Peter's property listings and numbers of customers. But Peter is embarrassed by these advertisements – although the strategy turns out to be extremely successful, and Peter is overwhelmed by clients seeking to place their properties with him, or to purchase the Ferrigno house, which he has been experiencing problems in selling.

The difficulties between Peter and Zooey resolved, the wedding proceeds as planned, but Peter mopes, clearly missing Sydney's company and friendship. Several scenes indicate that Sydney, too, misses Peter. On the day of the wedding ceremony, Peter's groomsmen turn out to be a motley crew made up of the men from the various man-dates he went on, and Lou Ferrigno. However, Zooey, noticing Peter's lack of *joie de vivre*, calls Sydney and invites him to the ceremony. Although it turns out that he always planned to attend, invited or not, Zooey's invitation legitimates his presence there. Despite its being relatively restrained, the reunion of the two men is emotional: clearly, they are both overjoyed to be friends once again. Zooey thus provides both the motivation for the friendship and homosocial bond between Peter and Sydney, and the

reconciliation between them when it looks like both friendship and bond have been seriously fractured. Again, she (and her group of female friends) function as a relay by means of which the two men are enabled to develop and cement their bond. In this way, the plot contrives to offer Peter a new, more "complete" way of enacting his masculinity, and engages Zooey in a relationship not only with the newly masculinized Peter but also with Sydney. Thus, the narrative avoids the implication of an exclusively homosocial bond between Peter and Sydney.

The triangle of desire discerned by Sedgwick as central to homosocial relationships is to be found also in the novel *Fight Club*, where it is made explicit:

> We have a sort of triangle thing going here. I want Tyler. Tyler wants Marla. Marla wants me.
>
> I don't want Marla, and Tyler doesn't want me around, not anymore. This isn't about *love* as in *caring*. This is about *property* as in *ownership*.
>
> Without Marla, Tyler would have nothing.
>
> (Palahniuk, 1996: 4; original emphasis)

Although the triangle is complicated by the fact that Tyler Durden is a projection of the narrator's mind, the former functions for most of the narrative as an independent character. In setting up the all-male Project Mayhem, Tyler establishes a rigid hierarchical structure. To become a member of this project (a "space monkey"), a candidate must undergo a period of trial (Palahniuk, 1996: 127–30), and is assigned to a group that operates in the same way as a spy cell. The candidate must obey Tyler's directives without question and to the letter – although, given Tyler's charisma, this requirement prompts little resistance among the men admitted into this "club." Project Mayhem becomes in effect an extreme and fairly overt form of patriarchal order, with Tyler as its absolutist head. The fact that the narrator experiences more and more reservations about Tyler's attitudes and behaviors leads to his marginalization from both Tyler (his own alter ego) and the space monkeys. This produces the psychopathology that leads to the struggle with Tyler atop the Parker-Morris Building, which concludes with the narrator shooting himself through the cheek.

In both the novel and the movie, homosocial bonds are created through the fight club itself. The men who attend form strong attachments through the violence meted out by one of them to another, and through the physical damage that they all share:

> A lot of best friends meet for the first time at fight club. Now I go to meetings or conferences and see faces at conference tables, accountants and junior executives or attorneys with broken noses spreading out like an eggplant under the edges of bandages or they have a couple of stitches under an eye or a jaw wired shut. These are the quiet young men who listen until it's time to decide.
>
> We nod to each other.
>
> (Palahniuk, 1996: 54)

Like members of a secret society, those who engage in fight club recognize and acknowledge one another; and Palahniuk's narrative is framed by its opening statement: "A lot of best friends meet for the first time at fight club." The secrecy of fight club and the tacit recognition by its members of one another thus merge into the homosocial bonding implied by "best friends."

The homosocial bond between the narrator and Tyler, developed through the fight club established by the latter, is intensified further through Marla's presence. The more Tyler evinces sexual desire for her, the greater the narrator's sense of isolation and marginalization from Tyler. In this we may perceive a dysfunctional version of the erotic triangle. Yet, at the same time, Tyler's sexual involvement with Marla, whom the narrator despises, creates in the narrator a powerful desire for Tyler, one that is not necessarily homosexual but is certainly erotic. This is strongly suggested in the movie by such elements as the shots of Tyler's (Brad Pitt's) body, or the conversation between Jack (as the narrator [played by Edward Norton] is called in the movie) and Tyler while the latter is naked in the bath. A key symbol of the homoeroticism implicit in the Tyler–narrator relationship is to be found in the kiss Tyler bestows on the narrator. Having licked his lips so that the kiss will leave an imprint of saliva on the back of the narrator's hand, Tyler pours lye on it (Palahniuk, 1996: 72–73):

> Combined with water, lye heats to over two hundred degrees, and as it heats it burns into the back of my hand, and Tyler places his fingers of one hand over my fingers, our hands spread on the lap of my bloodstained pants, and Tyler says to pay attention because this is the greatest moment of my life.
>
> (Palahniuk, 1996: 74)

The elements in this passage (the kiss, together with its indelible scar, on the back of the narrator's hand; the two men maintaining physical contact through their hands, on the narrator's lap) combine to create an image that strongly suggests the erotic. And it is this presence of the erotic underlying the homosocial bond that, in Sedgwick's theorization of homosocial desire, both characterizes, yet troubles such a bond. It becomes both pleasurable *and* risky, because it threatens always to become open homosexual desire.[3]

Activity 4.8

- Reflect on movies or TV shows you have seen that have centered on men or boys, and their relationships with one another.
  - Can you perceive in these movies or shows the workings of homosocial desire and bonding?
  - Do these dynamics require the presence of a female character? If so, how is she represented?
  - How is homosocial bonding made to relate to the patriarchal economy represented?
  - Does it make a difference whether the movie or show is a comedy or a serious drama? That is, do the representations of homosociality, of woman's place in this dynamic, and of the centrality or otherwise of homosocial bonding to patriarchal power differ, according to difference of narrative genre?

Hegemonic masculinity and the repertoire of the masculine

If asked to define or describe what constitutes a man or masculinity, most people would respond with a list of traits that are likely to include such features as physical size, muscularity, strength, bravery and resourcefulness, faimess, competitiveness, stoicism in the face of adversity and pain, calm composure, and intelligence (but not to excess – the "brainiac," "nerd", or "geek" is not usually thought of in terms of an ideal masculinity). In addition, the "typical" man is expected to be physically active, fond of sports and the outdoors life, attractive and virile, (hetero)sexually active, and competent with mechanical objects. Of course, there are also less positive, even ugly characteristics, such as aggressiveness, violence, and ruthlessness (and we might include here the prejudicial tendency, in a white-dominated culture, to regard race as a determining factor of what constitutes the masculine). However, these are generally constructed in the cultural imagination as distortions or violations of (indeed, deviations from) the more positive aspects of the masculine.

It is significant that it is the conventional, hegemonic model of masculinity that operates in J.K. Rowling's extremely popular series of Harry Potter novels and the movies based on these, because these are aimed primarily at young readers and therefore are likely to confirm that model for them. If we strip away the glamor of magical abilities, we can see that Harry himself and his friend Ron Weasley are represented as two foolhardy adolescent boys, enthusiastically devoted to Gryffindor, their house at Hogwarts School, and desperate to compete successfully against the other houses, especially Slytherin. They rush to adventure and into danger, suffering the consequences, yet go back for more. On the other hand, Hermione Granger, who is largely backgrounded in all this adventure-seeking, functions as the "brains" and cautious adult member of the team. Yet it is she who is competent in researching histories and spells, and who warns Harry and Ron of the dangers into which they insist on thrusting themselves (Rowling, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2007; *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, 2001; *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, 2002; *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, 2004; *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, 2005; *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, 2007; *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, 2009; *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 1*, 2010; *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 2*, 2011).[4] However, in

recent decades, it has become customary to expect the "typical" man also to register emotion, feelings, and sensitivity, although his counterpart of the later nineteenth century and most of the twentieth demonstrated his masculinity through an emotional impassivity that went hand in hand with, and was often identified with, stoicism.

Activity 4.9

- Revisit your answers for the first activity in chapter 1.
  - What traits of masculinity did you note down that have been included in the present discussion?
  - Did you draw those characteristics from your actual knowledge and experience of men and masculinity, or rather from cultural texts such as movies, TV and literature, and/or popular cultural myths about men and masculinity?
  - Did you include any traits that have not been discussed in the present chapter? Are these, in your view, conventional ones, or are they characteristics of behavior and gesture that have only recently been added to the cultural notion of what constitutes the masculine?

The reality is that most men do not exhibit all of these positive characteristics; indeed, an individual male who did so might be thought ideally masculine, but also a kind of cartoon version of masculinity. Rather, we may say that the ensemble of these traits constitute a hypothetically ideal masculinity that men in the culture are enjoined to take as their model. But what of those men who manifest only a few of these traits, or even none at all? Such individuals might, in the popular cultural imagination, include gay men, effeminate heterosexual men, countercultural men (such as hippies, New Age men, and so on), or men from ethnicities and/or cultures in which such characteristics may not be valued, or may be ascribed to women as well as men. We may add to this group such types as sedentary men, overweight or obese men, pacific (that is, nonaggressive) males, men who appear to be conventionally heterosexual and masculine but whose interests extend to such things as needlecraft or cookery; and so on.

From this we may infer that "the masculine" is capable of embracing an extremely wide range of ways of being a man. However, the culture and, especially, the patriarchal order sanction only a limited number of these, albeit still a very broad variety of possibilities. It is to this constrained repertoire that Connell refers in his notion of *hegemonic masculinity*, an idea developed early in Connell's writing, for example, in *Which Way Is Up? Essays on sex, class and culture*, published in 1983 (R.W. Connell, 1983), but "systematized" (R.W. Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 830) in "Toward a new sociology of

masculinity," coauthored with Tim Carrigan and John Lee (Carrigan et al. 1985). So influential did this journal article prove that 20 years later Connell, together with James W. Messerschmidt, thought it timely to review the way the notion of hegemonic masculinity had been used by others, and to rethink the idea itself (R.W. Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

The concept of hegemony derives from the work of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci in the 1930s, and is related to the notion of ideology:

> it refers principally to the ability in certain historical periods of the dominant classes to exercise social and cultural leadership, and by these means – rather than by direct coercion of subordinate classes – to maintain their power over the economic, political and cultural direction of the nation. The crucial aspect of the notion of hegemony is not that it operates by forcing people against their conscious will or better judgement to concede power to the already-powerful, but that it describes a situation whereby our consent is actively sought for those ways of making sense of the world which "happened" to fit in with the interests of the hegemonic alliance of classes, or *power bloc*. Hence our active participation in understanding ourselves, our social relations and the world at large results in our complicity in our own subordination.
>
> (Hartley, 1994a: 133; original emphasis)

John Hartley observes further that

> hegemony naturalizes what is historically a class ideology, and renders it into a form of common sense. The upshot is that power can be exercised not as force but as "authority"; and "cultural" aspects of life are de-politicized. ... Alternative strategies – based on oppositional politics or counter-hegemonic consciousness – not only appear as "unofficial" in this context, but also are likely to be represented as literally non-sense; impossible to imagine, incapable of being represented.
>
> (Hartley, 1994a: 134–35)

He adds:

> However, the continuing conflicts of interest between classes, which forms of ownership and industrial organization of production cannot help but continuously reproduce, ensure that hegemony can never be total. There are always emergent forms of consciousness and representation which may be mobilized in opposition to the hegemonic order. This means that a lot of work, called *ideological labour*, goes into the struggle between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forms. And what's at stake in the long term in this struggle can be political and economic power itself.
>
> (Hartley, 1994a: 135; original emphasis)

To sum up: hegemony is the means by which a dominant class or group of classes (a power bloc) imposes upon the rest of a society its belief system and

the social and cultural practices that go with this, while at the same time encouraging in the subordinate classes the understanding that this is the way things "should be." The resulting effect is the complicity of those classes in their own subordination. However, that subordination can never be total or complete because of what Hartley calls "the continuing conflicts of interest between classes."

In Connell's idea of hegemonic masculinity, therefore, are embedded the notions, first, that the dominance of masculinity ensures the dominance also of the patriarchal order, which shapes the masculine in particular ways at any given historical moment of a society. Second, that dominance is naturalized in such a way as to seem only right and reasonable, so that people in the society accept it and so become complicit with it. However, as Hartley notes, this cannot be a once-and-for-all imposition. Because marginalized or disenfranchized groups and individuals are likely to chafe against their subordination and possible oppression (as happened in the case of the women's, civil, and gay rights movements), the hegemonic group is obliged to continue to find strategies by means of which its authority and power may be sustained.

A helpful overview of Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity is provided by Donald P. Levy in his entry on the topic in the *International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities*:

> Hegemonic masculinity describes: (1) a position in the system of gender relations; (2) the system itself; and (3) the current ideology that serves to reproduce masculine domination. ...
>
> Connell seeks to explain: (1) how some men succeeded in making it appear normal, natural, and necessary for them to enjoy power over other men and most women; (2) why it is that so many men and women participate willingly in their own oppression; and (3) how resistance to hegemonic masculinity can promote gender justice.
>
> (Levy, 2007: 253)

Connell stresses that gender is constructed within, and takes its meaning from, a historical context. It is thus subject to change as that context changes. Moreover, gender is *relational*: masculinity and femininity are not absolute, discrete, and independent categories, but rather derive from one another their meaning and significance. Importantly, Connell also underlines the fact that masculinity is not monolithic, and that the different masculinities functioning in a society at a given time are also relational. Levy identifies the four types isolated by Connell

> more as positions in relation to one another than as personality types: hegemonic, complicit, subordinated and marginalised. The hegemonic position is the currently accepted male ideal within a particular culture at a particular time. As such, the hegemonic male is an ideal-type. ... Connell notes that this image changes over time and place as well as being subject to contestation within a particular culture.
>
> (Levy, 2007: 253–54)

Hegemonic masculinity, then, functions more as an ideal or fantasy of the masculine than as a reality that actual men may embody.

"Most men," continues Levy, "fall within the second category, complicit":

> These men accept and participate in the system of hegemonic masculinity so as to (1) enjoy the material, physical and symbolic benefits of the subordination of women, (2) through fantasy experience a sense of hegemony and learn to take pleasure in it, and (3) avoid subordination.

He adds:

> The relations among the four positions are hierarchical. A man in the subordinated position suffers that fate [of being subordinated] despite appearing to possess the physical attributes necessary to aspire to hegemony. Men run the risk of subordination when they do not practise gender consistent with the hegemonic system and ideology. Marginalised men are those who cannot even aspire to hegemony, most often men of color and men with disabilities.
>
> (Levy, 2007: 254)

Thus, Connell establishes a spectrum of ways of being masculine which is dominated by a more or less unattainable model of masculinity. Accordingly, those men who seek to approximate the current hegemonic position both desire the approval of other men (here we might recall our earlier discussion in this chapter of our application of Foucault's idea of the panopticon to the way in which patriarchy surveils men's behavior) and reinforce the dominance and power of that position. By contrast, those men positioned in the categories of subordinate and marginalized masculinities are the most likely to contest the hegemonic, because it disadvantages them. It is also likely that resistance to the hegemonic position and any consequent shifts in how that position is constructed come from those men in the latter categories, because they have more to gain thereby, whereas those positioned as complicit with the hegemonic model have more to lose by any change in that model.

However, it should be emphasized that Connell's notion of complicit, subordinated, and marginalized masculinities should not be taken to indicate a severely restricted set of possibilities for men's actual daily practice or social behavior. Many kinds of masculinities are distributed across these three positions. Moreover, it is possible (notionally, anyway) for an individual man to migrate from one position to another, as, for example, in the case of a gay man who decides to "go straight" (although such a decision no doubt remains contentious, in the light of arguments for and against homosexuality as a genetic inheritance, the result of conditioning within a particular type of family, or a "lifestyle choice").

In a critical assessment of Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity, Demetrakis Z. Demetriou distinguishes between extemal hegemony (hegemony

over women) and internal hegemony (hegemony over men) (Demetriou, 2001: 341), and asks: "But what is the relationship between these two forms of domination? Are they one and the same thing; are they complementary to each other; or, is the one the result of the other?" (Demetriou, 2001: 343). He seeks to answer these queries by reference to Gramsci, who himself distinguished between "leading" and "dominating" classes, the former referring to classes allied to the leading class, and the latter to those opposed to it, and therefore to be dominated. Leadership in turn creates a "historic bloc" that "unites all the allied groups under the umbrella of the group seeking hegemony by making their conception of the world homogeneous and consistent with the project of domination, a process that inevitably involves subordinating some of the interests of the groups that are led" (Demetriou, 2001: 344–45). Demetriou thus draws an analogy between led groups and internal hegemony, and dominated groups and external hegemony.

He is careful to distinguish between what he calls "hegemony in the arena of gender relations" and class hegemony, but points out that "there are some striking structural similarities in the two processes that cannot be ignored" (Demetriou, 2001: 345). In thus invoking Gramsci, Demetriou critiques Connell for offering a less nuanced notion of hegemonic masculinity. His argument proposes instead that the notion of a "historic bloc" can be mapped onto the idea of hegemonic masculinity, to suggest a historical specificity that emerges from the negotiations between the dominant model of masculinity and those that are subordinated by or marginalized from it.

Hegemonic masculinity, then, constitutes a conventional or ideal(ized) masculinity. *It is that notion of the masculine to which men subscribe, whether or not they themselves embody it.* In the second place, it is important to realize that *masculinity itself is made up of a repertoire of possible ways of being a man (of performing "manliness"), out of which is constellated a set of particular traits, attitudes, and behaviors that become understood as hegemonic masculinity.* It follows, therefore, that hegemonic masculinity is both historically and culturally contingent: it means something different both to different cultures, and to a single culture at different moments in its history. To *hypostasize* that masculinity (that is, to assume its concrete reality, despite its being an abstract concept) and so to *reify* it (to make it into a tangible thing) is to attempt to fix it and render it stable *despite* historical circumstance and cultural context.

We need, therefore, as Frank Mort puts it, to "grasp masculinity as *process* rather than as static and unchanging" (Mort, 1988: 196; emphasis added). Mort discusses the shifting and varied masculinities of the young men of Britain in the 1980s, and their use of fashion as a way of articulating a particular kind of masculinity, however bound to a specific context, social group, or individual purpose it might be at a particular moment, both in the culture and in the male wearer's own life history. Nonetheless, as we saw in our consideration in chapter 3 of Judith Butler's notion that gender is performative, masculinity in a broader sense than in Mort's discussion may also be thought of as process. It is always-already a work in progress, undertaken and performed by individual males within a particular life, social, cultural, and historical context. What counts as the masculine is therefore liable to be adjusted and "tweaked" according to circumstantial need.

The very notion of a hegemonic masculinity implies, of course, that there are subordinate masculinities, which may be marginalized to a greater or lesser extent. However, we should not therefore assume that the hegemonic or dominant exists in a permanent, static relationship to the subordinate, any more than the hegemonic form itself is permanently fixed and stable. As Demetriou suggests, aspects of nonhegemonic masculinities may be coopted and/or adapted as a way of "leading," in Gramsci's terms, an internal hegemony; and those aspects vary from historical moment to moment, and from culture to culture. The two principal effects of this are, first, the fortification and maintenance of patriarchy, both as order and economy; and, second, the naturalization of both patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity as "common sense," simply the way things *are*. However, it is possible for subordinated forms of masculinity to move from the margin to the center, as the hegemonic masculine comes under pressure because of historical, social, or other changes in the culture, such as occurred during the 1960s. Indeed, the hegemonic masculinity current at a given historical moment may even become the object of interrogation, such that its authority and very hegemony are challenged, enabling the possibility for a new constellation of traits, attitudes, and behaviors to form.

Activity 4.10

- Select a movie or TV show you have recently watched, or a novel you have recently read.
  - Can you perceive indicators of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities among the male characters?
  - On what basis is that hegemony/subordination constituted?
  - Can you imagine a constellation of traits, behaviours, and attitudes that might make up a different kind of hegemonic masculinity? Of what might that constellation consist?
- How is the relation between hegemonic and subordinate masculinities, and the possible tension between them, played out in your own experience?

Suggested further reading

Adams, R. and Savran, D. (eds.) (2002) *The Masculinity Studies Reader*, Maldon, MA and Oxford: Blackwell.

Edwards, J. (2009) *Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick*, London and New York: Routledge.

Harper, P.B. (1996) *Are We Not Men? Masculine anxiety and the problem of African-American identity*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.