

Manly Bodies: Theorizing Masculinities Through Affect

by

Stephanie Bethune
BA (Hons), Acadia University, 2015

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Supervisory Committee

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Supervisory Committee

Dr. Steve Garlick, (Department of Sociology)
Supervisor

Dr. Martha McMahon, (Department of Sociology)
Departmental Member

Dr. Simon Glezos, (Department of Politics)
Outside Member

Abstract

This thesis examines theoretical paradigms within men and masculinities studies (MMS), introducing a new materialist lens through the work of Elizabeth Grosz and Brian Massumi. Two affective dimensions of MMS are explored through the application of this new materialist lens: the affect of wonder and flat affect. These two concepts can be understood as expressions of Spinoza's two types of affects; joyful affects, or those affects that increase a body's capacity for movement, and sad affects, or those affects that decrease a body's capacity for movement. The affect of wonder, a joyful affect, is theorized in conversation with antiviolence and therapeutic masculinity initiatives. Flat affect, a sad affect, is theorized in conversation with Canadian men's suicide rates. This thesis argues that dominant forms of masculinity orient subjects away from wonder and towards an unlivable state characterized by flat affect. Men and masculinities studies theory lacks applied engagement with affect, and this thesis contributes to efforts to address this lack.

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Dedication

This thesis arose out of a set of relations that affected and continue to affect me in such a way as to continuously remind me that the contours of my flesh do not mark the ends of my body. Firstly, my relationship with two men, I. and H., who taught and showed me how gender restricted, frustrated, and hurt them with openness and vulnerability. These men were confident in themselves, but those selves did not fit many culturally coded masculine types or roles. Becoming emotionally involved with I. and H. led me to experience their bumping up against the tensions between their masculinity and culturally recognized masculinities from a place of intimacy and concern. Secondly, this thesis arose out of my relationship with L., a woman who introduced me to contemporary theory and taught me about love and companionship. The relationships I have with these people are singular and precious, and all share one thing—they each undid me.

My arrival at this project emerged out of an applied statistics project at Acadia University wherein male varsity athletes reported heightened pressure to reciprocate sexual advances, leading me to consider masculinity a fruitful and important area of academic study. This, combined with my relationships with I. and H., two men who struggled in differing ways with cultural notions of masculinity, led me to masculinity theory. My investment in new materialist theory, specifically focusing on affect, emerges out of an anxious experience of the world. Moving about the world with chronic and sometimes severe anxiety makes reading affect theory feel like reading an alien diary of my own thoughts. These theories are convincing and useful to me because they validate and take seriously the ways in which I know with my body, and the ways in which my

body is always already thinking and knowing. As someone who is gendered into thinking and feeling in a particularly emotional way, however, there is value for me in applying this framework of emotion and intimacy to a gendering that predominantly excludes emotion and intimacy. Both academia and masculinity survive in their current manifestations in and through a rejection of always already present intimacies and emotions. This rejection contributes, in part, to the lack of livability of both of these worlds.

Introduction

“Matter and life become, and become undone. They transform and are transformed. This is less a new kind of materialism than it is a new understanding of the forces, both material and immaterial, that direct us to the future.”

(Grosz 2011, 5)

Gender and materialism can feel like a dangerous combination. The legacy of sociobiology and essentialism haunts contemporary gender studies—this tradition of naturalizing, or presuming a linear and deterministic relation between the biological and the social, and using that naturalization to facilitate inequity and oppression. A notable moment for many introductory sociology students is learning and adopting the assertion that gender is “a social construct”. This relatively banal statement becomes a battle cry, a meditative mantra, and a performance of left-leaning politics. In my first days studying gender this narrative freed me. My discomfort with gender was because gender was not *actually* real, but merely a social norm enforced on me, ‘me’ consisting of a real subject with a real body. “Gender is a social construct”, and therefore you cannot tell me how to act, dress, dance, or speak. “Gender is a social construct”, and therefore you, too, can be free from this oppressive binary social categorization. “Gender is a social construct”, and therefore why are you so invested in it?

This claim, rather than revealing something revolutionary about gender, reveals something about dominant conceptions of the social. In asserting gender as a social construct, one is relying on an implicit refutation of the claim that gender is real, natural, and therefore fixed. This claim easily lends itself to further claims that as a social construct, gender is not “real” in any true sense. In the rejection of paradigms of gender as materially or naturally rooted such as sociobiology and gender essentialism, feminists

and gender theorists turned to this narrative of the social construct, cultural constructs, and discursive formulations to understand gender. Although far from all of these responses discredited the “real-ness” of gender, this became a popular public reading of them.

From its inception in Connell’s *Masculinities*, Men and Masculinities Studies (MMS) has been invested in exploring the gendering of masculinity and refuting arguments premised on the ‘natural-ness’ of masculinity (1995). In fact, *Masculinities* was published just a few years after the publication of poet Robert Bly’s 1990 book *Iron John: A Book About Men*, which was initially lauded and later widely critiqued for its decrying of contemporary American “soft men” and emphasis on “primitive” cultural traditions, rituals, and norms of masculinity (1990). Bly asserts, “every modern male has, lying at the bottom of his psyche, a large, primitive being covered with hair down to his feet” and advocates for a return to this masculine form contained within men (1990:6). Stoking the fire of the emerging mythopoetic masculinities movement wherein men could, and ought to, recognize and free themselves from the constraints of feminism and the feminization of their lives, *Iron John* became widely cited by proponents of the mythopoetic, anti-feminist movement and critiqued by masculinity scholars.

Iron John and the subsequent calls to return to a lost, natural masculinity are the very claims to which the aforementioned “gender is a social construct” chant is addressed. In this framing, there exists two paradigms for understanding gender. One paradigm, encapsulated in *Iron John*, is that gender is natural, primordial, and mutilated by cultural practices and expectations. The opposing paradigm asserts that gender is a social construct, a product of collective behaviour, and a set of norms which are not fixed

but are maintained through collective buy-in. This binarization of the natural as fixed and the social as superficial or mutable is sidestepped in New Materialist theories. As such, the broad project of this thesis is to contribute to a growing body of literature conceiving of and theorizing masculinities through New Materialisms.

In theorizing through and with New Materialist literature, focusing on the concept of affect, the very real and violent experience of gender, specifically masculinities, can be considered both *natural*, i.e. involved in the tangible and material, as well as *social*, i.e. mutable and co-constructed. Gender can still be understood as a social construct in the liberatory sense that policing gender performances is not enforcing any natural or ideal set of norms. However, conceiving of gender involves considering the influence of sexual dimorphism, patterns of hormone distribution, and secondary sexual characteristics. By including the very fleshy-ness of gender, bodies are not excluded or subordinated as that upon which gender is inscribed.

The two guiding concepts or affects of this thesis, the affect of wonder and flat affect, appear contradictory or even diametrically opposed. Grosz and Massumi both rely on Early Modern philosopher Benedict de Spinoza's notion of affect, as well as Gilles Deleuze's theorizing of Spinoza's affect. As such, I return to Spinoza's notion of affect to orient the relationship between these two guiding concepts. Spinoza defines affect as follows: "By affect I understand affectations of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished" (Spinoza 1992:154). This distinguishes between two types of affects, those that increase the body's power of acting or those that diminish the body's power of acting. These two types of affects can be understood as joyful and sad, respectfully, wherein joy is "that passion by which the mind passes to a greater

perfection” and sadness is “that passion by which it passes to a lesser perfection” (Spinoza 1992:161). The affect of wonder, within this delineation, can be understood as a joyful affect, as it increases the body’s capacity for acting and being acted upon. Flat affect, in contrast, can be understood as a sad affect, wherein it decreases the body’s capacity for acting and being acted upon. These affects are not diametrically opposed, however, but rather express each of the two types of affects as articulated by Spinoza. By exploring two affects in the context of masculinity, one joyful and one sad, I demonstrate the productivity and openness of bringing affect theory into conversation with masculinity theory with the aim of theorizing the complexity of contemporary gender. In line with Grosz and Massumi, rather than providing a careful reading and application of Spinoza’s theory, I take up Spinoza’s ideas and concepts as guiding inspiration. As such, I do not directly address Spinoza with significance in this thesis.

In this thesis I examine a range of texts in the field of masculinity theory, examining and discussing the concept of the material in these works. As few of these works explicitly theorize the material, my reading of the material will predominantly come out of reading the ways in which each theorist discusses bodies. In chapter one I examine a number of key texts in men and masculinities scholarship through the following guiding questions; in what way is materialism currently theorized in MMS scholarship, and how is this reflected or expressed in discussions of bodies. I then introduce new materialisms as an area of theory I will work within to provide a new reading of bodies in masculinity theory, through the writings of Elizabeth Grosz and Brian Massumi. In chapter two I discuss an anti-violence and therapeutic masculinity initiative, situating it first in the relevant literature then providing an affective

engagement. My guiding concept in this chapter is the affect of wonder. In the third chapter I discuss Canadian men's suicide rates, again situating this topic in the relevant literature then providing a theorization through affect. My guiding concept in this chapter is the affective topology of flat affect. My guiding question in this chapter is "how can it be that the subject turns against itself?" The concept guiding chapter two, the affect of wonder, also involves turning against oneself in a willingness to wonder at oneself as a novelty when one previously did not have to experience such wonder. An element of one's own undoing, or an openness to become undone, is contained both in wonder and in suicide.

Grosz notes the association between freedom and joyful affects, when she asserts "freedom is thus not an activity of mind but one primarily of the body: it is linked to the body's capacity for movement and thus its multiple possibilities of action" (Grosz 2011:72). This positive conception of freedom challenges dominant constructions of masculinity as power over, or freedom from constraints, by reframing freedom as capacity of movement and therefore a result of joyful affects. Understanding freedom as freedom from constraints reifies notions of the individual, independent, and un-affected man. Shifting to a conception of freedom-*to*, masculinities can become oriented towards a notion of freedom aimed at an expansion of one's capacity to affect and to be affected.

Chapter 1: Theorizing Masculinities and Affect

Introduction

In the article “Caution! Hazards Ahead”, Australian masculinities scholar Chris Beasley notes a significant gap within Gender and Sexuality Studies caused by the lack of engagement between the subfields of Men and Masculinity Studies (MMS) and the more theoretically embedded subfields of Feminist and Queer Studies (2014). This gap can be seen when contrasting the postmodern and anti-essentialist commitments of contemporary feminist and queer studies with MMS’s reliance on ‘modernist’ foundations and gender attachments in MMS, such as an ongoing commitment to the category of ‘men.’ I explore how this gap is expressed in key masculinity theorists’ treatment of the material dimensions of life. The traditional conception of materiality, which Beasley implies in her charge that MMS literature is invested in a masculinity that is defined in relation to a material, sexed body (2014:573) is indebted to the Cartesian dualism. This Cartesian dualist account of reality asserts that there exists two substances, one characterized by extension and the other characterized by thought—the body and the mind, respectively (Descartes 2012:77). Historically, the separation of these substances can be seen in theorists’ ontological prioritization of *either* the body or the mind, the material or the cultural/ideological. A prioritization of the material can be seen in early materialist feminisms’ focus on capitalist economic structures as the critical site through which to interrogate gender inequity (Garlick Forthcoming:4). Contrastingly, the poststructuralist turn, largely critiquing these early materialisms, prioritized the immaterial ontologically. However, the poststructuralist turn was limited by “[its] over-emphasis on language, discourse, and culture to the exclusion of the materiality of

embodied life” (Garlick Forthcoming:3). Both the materialist consideration of the economic realm as a site of patriarchy, and the poststructuralist focus on discursive and cultural conceptions of gender rely on and reify this Cartesian dualism of mind and body as mutually exclusive ontological categories. The legacy of these approaches is expressed through notions of the material, or matter, as stagnant and ontologically distinct from the immaterial in MMS literature. This following review of key literature will examine the limitation of predominant theorizations of the material in MMS, and argue that an engagement with new materialist and affect theory can begin to address these limitations through providing and developing a monistic, rather than dualistic, ontology.

The aforementioned gap in gender and sexuality studies introduces my framework for examining these key texts—in what way is materialism currently theorized in MMS scholarship, and how is this reflected or expressed in their discussions of bodies? What are the subsequent limitations of this explicit or implicit version of materialism, and how can a new materialist theorization begin to address these limitations? To this aim I will examine a few key MMS theorists’ materialisms with a lens attuned to their theorization of the material and of bodies. These theorists, R.W. Connell, Victor Seidler, Michael Kimmel, and Michael Messner, are recognized as major theorists in MMS, and each theorizes the material and bodies in a differing way. Following this, I examine what each of these theorists have said about the main topics with which this thesis will engage: therapeutic/antiviolence masculinity initiatives, and health and suicide. A vignette reflecting on a Men’s Circle in Victoria, B.C. orients the first of these chapters: a local and contemporary instance of an antiviolence masculinity initiative. The guiding concept for this discussion is the affect of wonder. The second chapter is oriented by a vignette

that examines Canadian men's suicide rates as an opening up of the discussion of men's health, specifically men's mental health. The guiding concept for this discussion will be flat affect. Following this review of key theorists' perspectives on my areas of interest, I will introduce the work of Susan Bordo and Jeff Hearn, two theorists attempting to open up conceptions of the body and the material in MMS. Finally, I will introduce affect as a concept from new materialisms through which to theorize bodies in masculinity through the works of new materialist theorists Elizabeth Grosz and Brian Massumi. New materialisms broadly describes a movement in contemporary theory in response to the cultural or discursive turn, away from considerations of discourse and epistemology towards considerations of the material and ontology. This involves an "emphasis on materialization as a complex, pluralistic, relatively open process" (Coole and Frost 2010:7), wherein matter itself is examined without being reduced to mute or stagnant. In this, new materialist theories aim to return from the poststructuralist turn to discourse to a materially oriented ontology, while maintaining a monism that rejects the Cartesian division of the material from the immaterial.

Literature Review: Men and Masculinities Studies

Theorists within MSS have diverse attachments to modern gender categories. For example, Beasley reads prominent masculinities theorist R.W. Connell as theorizing a weak modernism regarding gender (2014:572). In Beasley's account of feminist theory, *modernist* conceptions of gender rely on singular or plural identity categories of 'man' and 'woman', wherein *postmodern* conceptions of gender are fluid, "[challenging] adherence to gender categories" (2014:570). Connell's *weak modernism* is then demonstrated in her simultaneous theorizing of multiple masculinities, while maintaining

an attachment to gender categories (such as the category of ‘men’) and a structural understanding of power (Beasley 2014:570; Connell 1987:108, 1995:76).

The material as addressed in Connell’s work, however, is largely limited to economic terms (1995:55). Connell predominantly approaches the materialism of gender through the concept of the patriarchal dividend, referring to the material gain men receive as a result of the structural subordination of women (1995:82). This reflects aforementioned trends in feminist materialisms wherein the realm of the material is theorized through an account of political economy.

In *Masculinities* Connell is trying to move beyond the dominance of social constructivism in social theory. She writes “with bodies both objects and agents of practice, and the practice itself forming the structures within which bodies are appropriated and defined, we face a pattern beyond the formulae of current social theory” (1995:61). In this, Connell is critiquing a contradiction of treatments of the body in social theory, wherein the body is frequently considered simultaneously an agent and an object, and as constituting the very systems that constitute bodies themselves. This critique of the theoretical limitation of social theories of the body has since been central to social theories concerned with developing understandings of embodiment and materiality.

In Connell’s critique of social determinist approaches to theorizing masculinity and bodies, she develops a richer, albeit underdeveloped, account of the material in her concept of bodily reflexive practices. Connell notes, “the body...is inescapable in the construction of masculinity; but what is inescapable is not fixed. The bodily process, entering into the social process, becomes part of history (both personal and collective) and a possible object of politics” (1995:56). For Connell, bodies matter, and are

comprised of the material, however unlike other material *things*, bodies are open to change—therefore, through practices, bodies can become otherwise. Connell’s theory of bodily reflexive practices, which work between bodies and social structures, develops an account wherein both bodies and structure occupy roles of both subject and object of the practice, inconsistently yet simultaneously (1995:61). These repetitive actions “are not internal to the individual. They involve social relations and symbolism; they may well involve large-scale social institutions. Particular versions of masculinity are constituted in their circuits as meaningful bodies and embodied meanings” (1995:64).

In line with Jack Halberstam’s theorizing of masculinity as not being attached to particularly sexed bodies (1998), Connell’s work on multiple masculinities and body-reflexive-practices both provides a useful and non-reductive account of the mutual and simultaneous co-construction of gendered bodies and systems of gender, and provides a connection to new materialist theories in gesturing towards a theorizing of the material and the immaterial as intertwined. The concept of body-reflexive practices connects to a new materialist notion of the material as not merely conforming to the systems imposed on it, but simultaneously creating those very systems. As Connell states, “the practices that construct masculinity are onto-formative in this sense. As body-reflexive practices they constitute a world which has a bodily dimension, but is not biologically determined” (1995:65). Despite the movement towards new materialism in Connell’s concept of body-reflexive practices, Connell’s theory is here lacking due to the absence of an ontology of bodies.

Victor Seidler’s article *Masculinities, Bodies, and Emotional Life* is aimed at providing a robust critique of what he understands as the postmodern masculinities

coming out of Connell's work (2007). By postmodern masculinities, Seidler is referring to "postmodernities that suggest...that identities can be easily constructed...[and] that conflicts between different spheres of life are easily handled" (2007:12), contrasting these postmodernities with those that affirm fragmented identities and their conflicts as opening up new possibilities, rather than being resolved. Seidler critiques Connell's reliance on a structuralist conception of power, and cites Connell's notion of power as generating her subsequent 'postmodern' (identities as easily constructed) masculinities (2007:20). These postmodern theories, for Seidler, develop into individualism, which Seidler sees in understandings of gender, specifically masculinity, as an individualized experience. Seidler critiques these individualist postmodernities as being insufficient to examine the "vulnerabilities and...complexities of power and emotion" (2007:12). Seidler wants to focus on the relationships involved in power and emotion without reducing these accounts to individualism.

This tension between structuralism and postmodernism is a result of the "Enlightenment vision of modernity [that] still works within postmodern culture" (2007:9). In Seidler's critique, the structuralist conception of power in Connell's work fundamentally limits the possibility for men and masculinities to change. This comes out of a reading of Connell's work as implicitly reproducing the Cartesian dualism of mind/body and the subsequent gendering of rationalism and embodiment as masculine and feminine, respectively. As a result, "men have learned to assume an external relationship with bodies that are not 'part of' [their] identities as rational selves but part of a dis/enchanted nature" (2007:15), externalizing the feminized body from their self-identity.

Seidler identifies ways in which ‘postmodern’ theory can unwittingly reproduce dualisms, such as Connell’s reproduction of the dualisms of structural/personal pain, men/women, and straight/gay, through the postmodern tendency to “view the body as an external space on which culture inscribes prevailing representations” (2007:15). However in this work Seidler does not provide solutions to this other than asserting we need to “[think] in new ways about transformations of diverse cultural masculinities that can heal unsustainable splits between men’s power, bodies, emotions, and pleasures” (2007:20). Although Seidler’s critiques bear convincingly on Connell’s theorizing of power, pain, and emotion, Connell’s concept of body-reflexive practices remains relevant and convincing as body-reflexive practices escape the subordination of the body to culture through the mutual constitution and complex intertwinement of the material and the immaterial.

Masculinity scholar Michael Kimmel avoids falling into Seidler’s critique of “postmodern masculinities” by employing a Marxist-influenced historical materialism, basing his work on the premise that material conditions are the cause of ideology. That is, for Kimmel, one can understand society through examining the historical developments of the material conditions of that society. As such, Kimmel walks through how the fantasy of contemporary masculinity was previously lived and acted out through religion and/or nationalism. However today these same fantasies can be seen in sport (2012b). This notion of fantasy comes from Kimmel’s adoption of the psychoanalytic notion that culture is composed of collective fantasies attempting to compensate for something that is felt to have been lost, but in reality was never had. In Kimmel’s account, contemporary

masculinity is a fantasy attempting to recreate that which is felt to have been lost, but really was never had.

In Kimmel's work *Consuming Manhood*, he briefly overviews a historical materialist development of contemporary American masculinity and male anxieties. Kimmel's work relies on what Seidler and Beasley would term the 'modernist' gender category of men, examining men as a fixed, identifiable, and materially located identity category. The conception of the material in Kimmel's work is then that material conditions pre-exist ideology, and that sexed bodies are stationary, fixed, and predictable. In contrast with new materialist notions of the material, Kimmel conceives of the material as stagnant and as pre-existing ideology. Material in this conception affects ideology, but ideology or the discursive cannot impact the material. As a result, Kimmel's work is an example of MMS literature wherein bodies are treated as cohesive, material unities in which identity and gender subsist. Kimmel notes the association of masculinity with control over one's body (2012b:39). However, he does not critically examine what it means for an embodied subject to control that very embodiment. Although this comes up, Kimmel notes that "the body [does] not contain the man; it [is] the man" (2012b:49), failing to take up how the man-as-body could have knowledge of, or control over, that very body.

Michael Messner is less concerned with the historical development of contemporary masculinities, but rather focuses on the construction of masculinity and the ongoing process of gendering. Messner develops a theory of soft essentialism, wherein soft essentialism is "premised on a belief in natural differences between boys and girls, but...no longer posits this difference to be categorical" (2002:20). This soft essentialism,

for Messner, is an ascendant ideology of gender, wherein “the liberal feminist ideal of individual choice for girls and women...” coexists with a “...largely naturalized view of boys and men” (2011:155). Contrasting this with prior gender ideologies; hard essentialism, binary constructionism, and multiple constructionism, Messner argues that within an ideology of soft essentialism women and girls have the opportunity to choose from a number of roles within a socially constructed framework, whereas men and boys are essentialized as competitive, stoic, athletic, and masculine.

Messner walks through how the aforementioned gender ideologies historically framed the body and nature in relation to gender, sex, and specifically sport. Within hard essentialism, both men and women are understood within a framework of essential traits that are dictated by the natural, fixed, and deterministic relationship between gender and the sexed body (2011:155). The particularly sexed body still determines one’s gender in binary constructionism, wherein gender and sex roles are constructed however in that construction maintain a rigid binary. However the social construction of the genders (as Messner notes in the context of sex segregated sports) constructs and maintains inequitable social standing. For Messner, multiple constructionism as a gender ideology emerged out of a critique of the homogenization of diverse experiences within the binary categories of men and women, and consisted of a transition towards an intersectional constructionism (2011:159). This was reflected in two conflicting ideologies, one, an intersectional approach aimed at equitable distribution among strategically constructed identity groups, while the other, more radical, approach turned towards a queering of gender and sex themselves (2011:159). Messner then argues that soft essentialism

emerged out of multiple constructionism, largely as a result of the strategic essentialism to gain social capital in institutional realms such as sport (2011:161).

Messner's engagement with and contribution to MMS and masculinity theory largely lies in his studies of sport, however in addition to this work Messner has contributed to men's antiviolence work discourse and men's rights studies (1998, 2016). Throughout his work, Messner frames bodies as the canvases upon which social structure is enacted and through which social structure is constructed. In framing bodies as subordinate to social structures such as culture and gender, Messner fails to consider the mutual co-construction of the material and the immaterial, or how bodies *affect* and are *affected* by the immaterial in such a way that their respective boundaries cannot be neatly or properly delineated.

Vignette: Therapeutic/Antiviolence Masculinity Initiatives

Therapeutic masculinity initiatives as well as anti-violence masculinity initiatives are subject to heated debate both within the academic scholarship on masculinities as well as in popular discourse. Connell recounts the historical development of masculinity therapy in *Masculinities*. She first introduces the emergence of masculinity therapy; "no sooner had issues about masculinity and the male role been raised by Women's Liberation at the end of the 1960s, than they were reinterpreted as therapeutic issues" (1995:206). Masculinity therapy was firstly a response to critiques of masculinity and the male role, premised on "men [needing] therapists' help in breaking out of the male role and becoming more sensitive and emotionally expressive" (1995:207). Moving into the 1980s, Connell notes that previous iterations of masculinity therapy were largely replaced by "[attempts] to restore a masculinity thought to have been lost or damaged in recent

social change” (1995:207). This introduced the mythopoetic masculinity therapy movement, focused on restoring traditional masculinity and explicitly targeting the women’s movement and feminism in general as disturbing natural masculinity. As Connell notes “the initial commitment of the movement to feminism was shallow, and an anti-feminist shift readily occurred” (1995:211), referring to the mythopoetic masculinity therapy’s development into contemporary ‘men’s rights’ activism and misogyny. Seidler, however, holds a more optimistic view of masculinity therapy both historically and looking towards the future, as “[helping] us challenge the notion that emotions and feelings are essentially ‘irrational’, and so [opening] up different ways of relating to the self” (2003:72). This self, to which Seidler is interested in relating, is a self-contained and cohesive unit.

In Connell’s analysis of masculinity therapy she reduces such endeavors to solely occupying one of two binary roles—the therapeutic or the political. This results in a depoliticization of the emotional, as well as an explicit exclusion of politics or structural factors from the emotional. Seidler critiques Connell’s account of emotions and therapy for her “structural analysis that tends to treat emotions and feelings as “therapeutic” (2007:18). Rather, Seidler wants to move beyond the binary Connell asserts between therapeutic and political endeavors, asserting “we need to be able to engage with the emotional processes through which boys have grown up to be men and the ways in which they have shaped their emotional bodies to affirm dominant masculinities” (2007:18). In this critique, Seidler rejects Connell’s individualism in her delineation of the emotional and the political as he attempts to conceive of emotional processes and emotional bodies as collectively constructed and experienced. Seidler is in some ways extending his

aforementioned critique of ‘postmodern’ theories of gender by premising his work on an intertwining of emotions and politics, feelings and bodies, however shallow.

In contrast to the mythopoetic masculinity therapy movement, although additionally informed by previous iterations of masculinity therapy, men’s antiviolence work initiatives emerged as spaces for men to engage in antirape and antiviolence activism. The line between masculinity therapy and men’s antiviolence work, however, can only be properly drawn through accepting and reifying Connell’s delineation of the emotional and the political sphere. As such, I focus on masculinity-based initiatives that approach therapeutic spaces for masculine identified persons as political and antiviolence projects.

Seidler’s discussion of masculinity therapy centers around his experiences with both individual professional therapy and group therapy aimed at rediscovering emotions, following Reich’s work on the embodiment of emotions and the importance of bodily movement in therapeutic work (2003:87). As such, Seidler begins the work of conceiving of emotional processes as both political and embodied, however focuses predominantly on how bodily movement can hold therapeutic value and fails to discuss how emotional or cultural movements shape bodies.

Contrastingly, Kimmel’s discussion of emotions or therapeutic masculinity work is limited to discussing masculine anxieties as rooted in sexual anxieties stemming from the rise in public imagery of the sexually liberated woman absent an increase in how much men are having sex. Due to this disjunction, Kimmel asserts that men turn to pornography as an attempt to feel the power they are expected to feel due to their membership in a structurally powerful group (2009:172, 2012a:39). Kimmel’s work,

although addressing bodies to some degree in the discussion of embodied sexuality and desire, delimits the potential of masculinity therapy and antiviolence work by only addressing masculine anxiety as sexually rooted.

Messner continues the genealogical work Connell began, updating this examination of masculinity therapy specifically in the context of men's antirape work (2016). Messner traces a historical loss of connection between antirape activism and feminist projects, citing the radical feminist activism of the 70's and 80's as "guilt-imposing, antimale monologues that shut off conversation, rather than...[opening] dialogue to engage and ask men to change themselves and their communities" (2016:3). Acknowledging this historical limitation to men's participation in antiviolence work, Messner then argues that rather than challenging or transforming masculinity, contemporary men's antiviolence work utilizes dominant masculinity, appealing to notions of responsibility and masculine honour (2016:6).

Throughout the literature, masculinity therapy and men's antiviolence work are addressed either as mutually exclusive projects or as different facets of the same overarching project. Within Connell's historical overview of masculinity therapy, she depoliticizes therapeutic practices and critiques the shift towards anti-feminist attitudes within some practices of masculinity therapy (1995). Seidler critiques the exclusion of the emotional from the political in Connell's work, approaching an analysis of masculinity therapy and men's antiviolence work from an understanding of emotions as subsisting in the body and as having political relevance (2003). Kimmel turns to sexuality in order to understand masculinity therapy, bringing men's antiviolence work into the realm of masculinity therapy by noting the sexual anxieties of masculine identified

persons as expressed through physical violence (2009). In contrast, Messner addresses the therapeutic aspect of men's anti-violence work, and asserts that rather than disrupting hegemonic masculinity these initiatives merely recycle traditionally masculine attributes (2016). In contrast to these approaches, in considering the vignette of a Men's Circle in chapter two I approach men's antiviolence work as a form of masculinity therapy, and masculinity therapy as a form of men's antiviolence work. This approach involves a new materialist ontologization of movement and an affirmation of the intertwinement of the material and the immaterial such that the affective circulations and primings of masculinity as a gendering will be central to an analysis of masculinity therapy and men's antiviolence work.

Vignette: On health/Suicide

One way in which to understand the effects masculinities have on the lives of masculine-identified people is through looking at the disproportionate rates of male suicide in comparison to women. Although Connell does not address the link between masculinity and health in *Masculinities*, she dedicates a chapter to health in her later work *The Men and the Boys*. Connell reminds us that “gender for men is not simply received from agencies of socialization or from discourses, but is very actively made, both individually and collectively” (2001:178). As a result, health phenomena are not simple products of either sexed bodies or social conditions of gender, but are rather “products of human practices...in relation to the gender order” (2001:178). This provides a space for a re-engagement with Connell's concept of body-reflexive practices, and a theoretical re-working of her conception of health through the interweaving of practice, bodies, and gender. Connell acknowledges the primacy of gender as a determinant of

suicide, however fails to connect this to her notion of body-reflexive practices (2001:180).

Seidler attributes young men's suicide to a fear of expressing their inner turmoil or emotions, "sometimes [finding] it easier to take their own lives than to reach out for help" (2006:99). Seidler cites this isolation and lack of help-seeking behaviour as highly correlated to lack of male friendships. For Seidler, men "have always been told that our happiness would come with our individual success and achievement" (2003:26). As a result, men learn to attribute value to individualistic pursuits, failing to develop and maintain close friendships. This gendered individualism then leads to the internalization of male feelings, "which has produced high rates of male suicide," however Seidler proposes that men "can instead learn to draw the love and support they need from other men also involved in the processes of change" (2006:122). Although Seidler convincingly attributes self harm among young men to a lack of close connections, his work fails to address how configurations of bodies construct and are constructed by gender in such a way that men die by suicide at a higher rate, and additionally this work fails to account for the increase in men's suicide rates throughout the life course.

Although his work lacks explicit focus on men's health, Kimmel briefly addresses the suicide pandemic among young men in his book *Guyland*, stating that "their suicide rate is the highest for any age group except men over 70" (2009:40). Kimmel only mentions in passing the prevalence of death by suicide among men over 70, and this mentioning is merely to serve the purpose of establishing a crisis in young men's health. In this, Kimmel reifies the cultural trend of ignoring mental health in aging populations, and fails to analyze how the material and immaterial configurations of gendered

masculine bodies might help explain men's suicidal behaviour. Although Messner never directly addresses gender and suicide, merely noting it in passing (2002:150), his work maintains relevance here in his analysis of men's health as it relates to sport, specifically examining the health risks athletes take in pursuit of athletic success (1989, 1990). In this, Messner contributes to a discussion of how the social structures of sport and gender configure, and are configured by, bodies in such a way that masculine identified persons take less care of their bodies in pursuit of athletic success.

There is a breadth of topics and a lack of direct and involved analysis throughout the literature on masculinity and health in the context of men's death by suicide throughout the life course. While Connell provides a productive starting place for understanding gender as a key social determinant of suicide through her concept of body-reflexive practices, this analysis fails to follow through with a cohesive discussion of bodies, gender, and suicide (1995). Seidler focuses his discussion of men's health and suicide on how the individualization involved in hegemonic masculinity leaves young men emotionally detached, which in turn leads to suicide. Seidler focuses on emotions as part of an individual realm that ought to be supported in the social, however failing to address either the collectivity of emotions or the significant suicide rates among older men (2007). Kimmel does not address men's health or suicide to any significant degree, merely noting a suicide crisis among young men, failing to expand this discussion to health throughout the life course or gender and suicide broadly (2009). Messner does not address gender and suicide, however his work on risk taking behaviour and gender opens up a potential to discuss suicide as a part of a spectrum of risk taking behaviour or self harm behaviours, and how these behaviours can be understood in the context of gender

(1989, 1990). Building on and moving forward from this literature, I approach masculinity, men's health, and suicide through the concept of flat affect. In doing so, I integrate a new materialist conception of bodies and affective topologies to provide a non-deterministic discussion of the statistical phenomena of men's rates of death by suicide throughout the life course.

Reconsidering Materialisms: Bordo and Hearn

Susan Bordo and Jeff Hearn are two theorists who have attempted to open up conceptions of the body and the material within MMS. To this end, their work provides a stepping-stone from which to develop new materialist and affect based considerations of masculinity.

In *The Male Body*, Susan Bordo attempts to trace male bodies in American popular culture. Although she does not reduce masculinity to male sexed bodies, she focuses on the penis as a cultural site of masculinity. In this, she distinguishes between the penis and the phallus, rejecting the "male phallus" for the "masculinist phallus" (1999:101). In line with Halberstam and Connell, as noted earlier, neither masculinity nor the phallus are necessarily connected to a particularly sexed body in Bordo's work. The penis, however, maintains a crucial role in understanding masculinity, and is theorized by Bordo as a "biometaphor" (1999:87). The biometaphor is Bordo's mechanism for understanding the material, linguistic, and cultural matrix that gives the penis its meaning. The biometaphor aims at theorizing the way in which metaphors are physical, tangible, and material, in this case the metaphor of the penis as mechanistic. In this, Bordo is interested in examining the ways the material and sexed body is portrayed and created in popular culture. As such, Bordo's concept of the biometaphor examines the

entwinement of the biological and the social, opening her work up to new materialist theories of the body as open, fluid, and emergent.

Hearn is also trying to complicate the distinction between socially constructed gender and biological sex, critiquing Connell's work on masculinity for "not [going] far enough in deconstructing gender and gender relations" wherein Hearn wants "somehow to be both more materialist and more discursive" (2014:10). However, Hearn's work lacks both clarity and prescriptive value. Hearn is interested in examining men's practices, taking a modernist gender attachment as necessary for practical interventions around men and violence, and relying on the pragmatic necessity of gender categories in violence prevention strategies (2004). This binary constructionism, to use Messner's terminology, although heavily critiqued in contemporary feminist theorizing, allows for an engagement with gender and violence that is difficult to do if one rejects gender categories rooted in the body.

This approach to the materialization of gender is frequently avoided in gender studies, due to the fear that materializing gender would essentialize gender. However, Hearn argues for a "materialdiscursive" approach to MMS (2014:5), arguing that "materialism can now be understood as more complex, as the economic/technological, the 'reproductive', and the bodily/corporeal (including sexuality and violence), as well as the materiality of discourse. This view of materialism is itself also discursive" (2014:7). This concept of the materialdiscursive moves Hearn's work towards a new materialist approach, without ever committing to a conception of the material as fluid and with agency. Hearn arrives at his concept of the materialdiscursive through a rejection of the Marxist materialism expressed through Connell's use of the concept of hegemony in her

concept of hegemonic masculinity. In contrast to the traditional historical materialism implied in a Marxist concept of hegemony, wherein ideology results from the material conditions of everyday life, and hegemony's coercive power is facilitated by ideology, Hearn conceives of ideology as caused by the material, and equally the material as caused by ideology. Hearn then rejects theorizing hegemonic masculinity in favor of theorizing the 'hegemony of men', in an attempt to avoid the materialism implied in the former.

The agency of the material in Hearn's work however is limited by his commitment to the category of men, which he sees as rooted in material bodies. Hearn notes that he is "still influenced by a very social constructionist version of sexual difference theory – a form of social, that is social structural, essentialism" (2004:11). In this, Hearn's work lacks clarity as to what exactly a social structural essentialist version of sexual difference theory entails, and its implications. Despite both Bordo and Hearn moving towards new materialist theories of gender and bodies, their works fall short in ontological commitment. In this thesis I will draw on new materialist theories to build on the beginnings Bordo and Hearn provide.

New Materialisms and Affect

New materialism can be considered a reorientation of the poststructuralist focus on discourse and culture towards the material. Crucially, new materialisms "emphasize the productivity and resilience of matter...alert to the myriad ways in which matter is both self-constituting and invested with—and reconfigured by—intersubjective interventions that have their own quotient of materiality" (Coole and Frost 2010:7). The conception of matter in new materialist theories departs significantly from previous conceptions of the material, including bodies, as subordinate to discourse, stagnant, and mechanistic. Within

new materialisms, theoretical work is “animated by the desire to rethink the ways that bodies...are inextricably involved in social and political processes” (Garlick 2016:48). As such, an engagement with new materialisms can productively contribute to theories of masculinity in order to provide a dynamic and complex conception of bodies. Within new materialist literature, the concept of affect occupies one of the multiple and often self-contradictory areas of theorizing. Due to its complexity, affect is frequently defined peripherally or through negation. In affect, bodies “are the lively sites of intensities and transversal movements that are only partially captured by the conscious experiences and emotions of individual subjects” (Garlick 2016:49). These intensities and transversal movements are affect. Affect theory offers a productive way to conceptualize bodies in the context of masculinity theory due to the concern in affect theory with “the ways that bodies participate in social life at a nonconscious level” (Garlick 2016:48). In my engagement with new materialist literature, specifically aimed at a theorizing of affect and gender, my primary theorists will be Brian Massumi and Elizabeth Grosz.

Brian Massumi is a Canadian social theorist and philosopher widely known for translating Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). Massumi’s seminal work in affect theory, *Parables for the Virtual*, elaborates the notion of affect through a reading of Spinoza’s theorizing of the dual function of affect, as both the power to affect and the capacity to be affected (2002). In brief, the return to Spinoza is aimed at moving away from the legacy of Cartesian dualism in continental philosophy, towards a conception of a monistic ontology drawn from Spinoza’s *Ethics* (1992). Massumi’s conception of affect draws on an ontology of complexity, wherein affects are both the forces that inhabit bodies by virtue of the way bodies interact in the world, and the way bodies are open to

forces that flow through them. In the chapter *The Autonomy of Affect*, Massumi articulates, “affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is. Formed, qualified, situated perceptions and cognitions fulfilling functions of actual connection or blockage are the capture and closure of affect.” (2002:35). For Massumi, intensity, which he equates with affect, “is narratively delocalized, spreading over the generalized body surface like a lateral backwash from the function-meaning interloops that travel the vertical path between head and heart” (2002:25). I am interested in how this delocalized affect or intensity becomes restricted between bodies and within bodies.

Elizabeth Grosz is an Australian philosopher and theorist whose work is primarily concerned with sexed difference and new materialisms. Although her work rarely deals explicitly with affect, Grosz provides the groundwork for a new materialist feminist project in her engagement with gendered and sexed bodies within new materialisms. Grosz brings gender and sex to the forefront of her new materialist theorizing through a turn to Darwin’s texts on natural and sexual selection in a consideration of the concept of life (2011:26). Grosz focuses on “sexual selection, in introducing sexual difference into the universe, [as] forever [orienting] life in two different incalculable directions, two directions not governed by the size and number of gametes but by the unpredictabilities of desire” (2011:141). As such, Grosz introduces addressing the very real and inequitable existant social structures through a new materialist understanding of life and culture that is grounded in the primacy of sexual difference as the open-ended fuel of human life. By rooting her theorizing in the Darwinian concept of sexual selection, Grosz develops a new materialist ontology wherein she can begin to address a central concern, which is,

“how does biology—the structure and organization of living systems—facilitate and make possible cultural existence and social change?” (2014:14). This concern with the “structure and organization of living systems” is not limited to bodies, but expands beyond and within bodies to involve living systems that a traditionally understood subject is part of, and living systems that are part of a traditionally understood subject.

As such, although Massumi is considered foundational in accounts of affect, I intend to approach Massumi’s affect *through* Grosz’s ontological framework. Grosz asserts, regarding new materialisms, “matter and life become, and become undone. They transform and are transformed. This is less a new kind of materialism than it is a new understanding of the forces, both material and immaterial, that direct us to the future” (2011:5). Grosz is widely critiqued for the trans-misogyny present in her early works, especially *Volatile Bodies* (1994), however in approaching her as a primary theorist I will provide a strong reading of her theory, reading her early works as a productive movement towards her more recent thought and publications.

In Grosz’s conceptions of new materialism, movement is ontologically primary, as “movement preexists the thing and is the process of differentiation that distinguishes one object from another” (2011:1). Movement, for Grosz, is becoming, and is more than an immanent quality or state that fixes itself to things and merely moves them, but rather is the transformative power through which “repetition [produces] difference” (2004:141). Affect is a central concept to new materialist theory, and to conceive of affect I turn to Massumi’s writings. In Massumi’s account of affects he considers two types of affects, those that increase a body’s capacity for action and those that decrease a body’s capacity for action (2002). This emphasis on movement is also reflected in Grosz’s development

of a concept of freedom wherein it is “conceived not only or primarily as the elimination of constraint or coercion but more positively as the condition of, or capacity for, action in life” (Coole and Frost 2010:140). By both ontologizing movement and affirming a conception of freedom-to, new materialist literature is not concerned with the questions of ‘what kind of body is this, what kind of body is this not,’ but rather “what it does, how it functions, what it affects, what it produces” (Grosz 1994:170). In this, considering bodies in gender involves considering what gender orientations allow for, facilitate, or legitimate.

Grosz provides a reading of Bergson regarding matter and life, wherein “the intellect transforms matter into things, which render them into prostheses...things become the measure of life’s action upon them...life itself becomes extended through things” (2011:139). This notion can be seen at work in Massumi’s discussion of Stelarc’s projects of bodily suspensions and technological experimentation as projects of extending bodies into the unintelligible (2002:89). Through integrating these projects with Garlick’s theorizing of gender as a technology of embodiment¹, masculinity can be considered as a technology which holds the potential to extend bodies, to make them unrecognizable, but which currently is dominated by affects which decrease men’s bodies’ capacity for certain types of action.

I will read Grosz and Massumi together in order to theorize the vignettes that orient each of the following chapters in new materialist terms. Massumi provides an introduction to my methodology of theorizing vignettes in *Parables for the Virtual*,

¹ “Gender is a technology that challenges forth material energies, which it then regulates and secures within a putatively natural order that seeks only to reproduce the reign of equivalence” (Garlick 2016:94)

which I adapt from his concept of exemplification, wherein, “as a writing practice, exemplification activates detail. The success of the example hinges on the details. Every little one matters...Every example harbours terrible powers of deviation and digression” (2002:18). Each vignette in this thesis will be considered and theorized with the goal of providing a space through which to examine the potential in an engagement between affect and masculinity, with the aim of not generalization to masculinity as a whole but rather a contextualized expansion of the potential of bodies in masculinity theory.

Conclusion

Within the canon of masculinity studies literature there exists a diversity of commitments to modernist gender categories and the Cartesian dualist conception of matter. The aim of this thesis is not to critique these works, but rather to provide a different orientation to the material through which to understand the same key topics. As such, the subsequent chapters of this thesis will each consist of a vignette which will be theorized through a new materialist perspective, with the goal of developing an affectively based account of two different realms of masculinity.

Chapter 2: Antiviolence and the Affect of Wonder

Vignette

At the University of Victoria in B.C., Canada a group of masculine-identified people meets bi-weekly in a Men's Circle. This circle meets with the aim of "challenging gender-based violence and dominant constructions of masculinity by creating a weekly space for men and masculine-identified folks", with specific goals such as community building, knowledge sharing, and "challenging gender-based violence and oppression."² This weekly space is open to anyone masculine identified, whether they are formally or informally involved with the university itself.

This Men's Circle is an initiative of the Anti-Violence Project, an internal organization of the undergraduate Students' Union. According to *The Martlet*, the University of Victoria student body's independent newspaper, the AVP first piloted the Men's Circle in January of 2011 "following incidences of gender-based violence on campus."³ The Anti-Violence Project (AVP) was born of a name change in 2004 to what had previously been known as the Open UVic Resource Sexual Assault Centre (OUR-SAC). The drive for the name change to the former sexual assault center was "in order to make [the] support, education, information and services more accessible to survivors of all forms of violence"⁴ In broadening the scope of the former sexual assault center, the AVP opened up the possibility to address gender-based violence from a more holistic approach than exclusively survivor-based support.

² The Anti-Violence Project, "Men's Circle at UVic", *AVP*, access date December 1, 2015, antiviolenceproject.org

³ <http://www.martlet.ca/uvic-wide-campaign-speaks-out-for-consent/>

⁴ <https://www.antiviolenceproject.org/about/history/>

Introduction

This antiviolence initiative aimed at masculine-identified folks exists in the crosshairs of a significant debate within Men and Masculinities Studies (MMS) literature regarding the relationship between masculinity and power. In Connell's work *Masculinities*, she develops a structural theory of hegemonic masculinity (1995). This structural account of gender, for Connell, provides an explanation for the "ongoing legitimization of patriarchal domination" (Garlick 2016:36). That is, for there to be a consistent relationship between masculinity and power, Connell needs to maintain a structural conception of gender. Seidler critiques the pragmatic structuralism in Connell's work at length for its simplicity in grasping the complexities of gender (2006). Garlick articulates Seidler's critique of these aspects of Connell's work; as "for Seidler, the theory of hegemonic masculinity is a structural theory that is too static and too dependent on power relations to be able to capture the contradictions and ambivalences that men experience in their lives" (Garlick 2016:36). Seidler wants to "[open] up spaces in the complex relation between men and masculinities to allow us to question a rationalist universalism that has made it difficult to reflect upon the emotional lives of men" (2006:14). This project entails examining masculinity and the lives of men through an intersectional lens for Seidler, while refuting a central assumption in Connell's work that *suffering* is structurally determined by material power relations and therefore cannot be experienced by men, while personal sufferings of men are understood to be merely emotional and individual experiences. This reduction of men's experiences of suffering to apolitical and superficial in Connell's work falls into broader cultural assumptions around gender and emotions wherein the emotional is gendered effeminate and is therefore excluded from the political.

Although some therapeutic men's initiatives have not been driven by a critical engagement with gender inequalities, others combine an awareness of men's sufferings with a critical analysis of masculinity. As noted in the previous chapter, anti-violence projects aimed at masculine identified folks came out of a critique, both from external and internal voices, of these depoliticized and self-involved practices of masculinity therapy. The Men's Circle at UVic then occupies a space within this critical project of trying to create and maintain spaces for masculine-identified folks to do anti-violence work within a framework of an intersectional and self-critical political involvement. The central topic changes with each bi-weekly circle, in 2016 varying from emotional labour, vulnerability, and settler colonialism, to workshopping on accountability.

In this chapter I contextualize the UVic Men's Circle within the literature on masculinity therapy and antiviolence masculinity initiatives mentioned in the previous chapter. I further develop my theoretical framework through a reading of the new materialist theories of Elizabeth Grosz and Brian Massumi. I introduce the work of Sara Ahmed into this framework to provide an account of the affect of wonder. For Ahmed, wonder is "an affective relation to the world" (Ahmed 2004:179), wherein wonder "is about learning to see the world as something that does not have to be, and as something that came to be, over time, and with work" (Ahmed 2004:180). Following my discussion of Ahmed's theorizing of the affect of wonder, I provide an argument that the affect of wonder is restricted among masculine-identified folks, as well as restricted in relation to the gendering of masculinity. This provides the basis for my argument that the Men's Circle provides a space where the restriction of the affect of wonder is temporarily

suspended for masculine-identified folks in relation to masculinity, offering the opportunity for the circulation of the affect of wonder.

Theoretical Framework: Grosz, Massumi, and Ahmed

Elizabeth Grosz's work on new materialisms and sexed bodies situates and opens up questions regarding affect and gender that I want to address in this chapter. As noted in the previous chapter, I read Massumi's theory of affect *through* Grosz's ontological theorizing of new materialisms. In Grosz's ontological prioritization of movement, the ways in which gendered and sexed bodies move and are restricted in their motion is fundamental to a theorizing of bodies (Grosz 2011:59). This motion, however, is not limited to bodies physically moving throughout a Cartesian space (which is a conception Grosz explicitly rejects (Grosz 2011:30)), but also includes the ways in which affects are circulated and restricted within and among bodies (Grosz 2011). Grosz's focus on sexual difference, rather than gender, comes from a deep consideration of the productive potential and expansiveness that a model of reproduction requiring at least two sexes allows. Grosz asserts "Sexual difference is entirely of the order of the surprise, the encounter with the new, which is why Irigaray invokes the emotion of "wonder" as its most sensible attribute" (Grosz 2014:176). For Grosz, newness and surprise are related to wonder, albeit the emotion⁵ of wonder. This fixation on wonder as opening up the virtual connects Grosz's theory to the affect of wonder as developed below. Although I am focusing here on gendered difference, as the Men's Circle is a space for masculine identified folks rather than sexed male bodies, this does not constitute a departure from

⁵ The distinction between emotion and affect will be discussed below.

Grosz's focus on sexed difference. Grosz is fundamentally interested in rethinking "the body as a, indeed, as *the*, primary sociocultural product" (Grosz and Eisenman 2001:30). This constitutes, for Grosz, a complication of the common separation of sex and gender. Far from essentializing gender as rooted in biological or sexed difference, Grosz is affirming that "there is always something in the organization of matter—matter at its most elementary—that contains the smallest but perhaps most significant elements of ideality" (Grosz 2017:250). Pragmatically, however, Grosz's ontological theorization opens up many questions and lines of thought without providing clear theoretical tools through which to follow these lines of thought. As such, I move towards Massumi for a theorizing of affect and bodies.

As introduced in the previous chapter, for Massumi, affect can be understood as intensity, wherein "intensity is the unassimilable" (2002:27). This unassimilable intensity, or affect, "is narratively delocalized, spreading over the generalized body surface like a lateral backwash from the function-meaning interloops that travel the vertical path between head and heart" (2002:25). Affect is not restricted to circulating over a generalized body surface, but is contagious, communicable, and moves between and through bodies in ways that challenge the neoliberal notion of the individual-subject-body. Massumi asserts "...human bodies never come in ones... from its first perception...the individual body [is] always-already plugged into a collectivity" (Massumi 2002:120). For Massumi, a body's *irritability* describes the ways in which bodies are primed for certain affects (Massumi 2005). This priming means that while some bodies are more primed for certain affective circulations, those same bodies might be primed against, or resistant to, other affective circulations. This process is far from

methodical and calculated, however, as affect for Massumi maintains a certain autonomy (for which he is critiqued (Leys 2011)).

Habit is a concept through which to understand Massumi's understanding of the priming of bodies for affective circulations (Massumi 2015:55). Habits constitute our identity, according to Massumi. The having of a habit creates the very subject that has that habit. Thus, by formulating different kinds of habits, we formulate different kinds of subjects (Massumi 2015:58). In considering gendered behaviour to be habitual, not in a superficial colloquial sense but rather through Massumi's understanding of habit, we begin to open up the potential for gender to become otherwise.

Here, as previously stated, I read Massumi through an ontological framework provided by a reading of Grosz. Starting from an ontology inherited from Grosz, which she developed primarily through her readings of Deleuze and Guattari, as well as Henri Bergson, means starting from a concept of life, wherein "life can only exist and perpetuate itself to the extent that it can extract from the whirling and experientially overwhelming chaos that is nature, materiality, and their immanent forces those elements, substances, or processes it requires, can somehow bracket out or cast into shadow the profusion of forces that engulf and surround it so that it may incorporate what it needs" (Grosz 2008:6). In beginning from the concept of life itself through a complication of the material/immaterial divide, Grosz's ontology prioritizes sexual selection as that which elaborates life, which opens matter up to the indeterminable uncertainty of the new. Grosz asserts, "wherever matter unwinds itself with the tiniest measure of indeterminacy, life has the chance to emerge, to undergo processes of self-organization" (Grosz 2011:34). Massumi brings to the fore an implicit relationality in Grosz's new materialist

ontology, turning also to the work of Deleuze to assert that “a relation has an ontological status separate from the terms of the relation” (Massumi 2002:70). From the affirmation of this situated in-between-ness, Massumi develops a wide and complex account of affect across a number of works (2002, 2005, 2014a, 2015). Co-reading Grosz and Massumi, the ways in which affects circulate (and fail to circulate) within and between bodies constitutes the very bodies and subjects through which these affects circulate. This circulation is in part impacted by habit or priming or the irritability of bodies, and in part this circulation is a habit or priming or irritability itself. Within Grosz’s ontological theorization aimed at sexed bodies and movement, gender becomes understood, as Garlick theorizes through Marcuse, “as a technology of embodiment that reduces or denies the liveliness and complexity of the socio-natural systems in which human beings are located” (Garlick 2016:90). In considering gender as a technology of embodiment, created or maintained or generated or regulated through habit, subjects and subjectivities are constituted and reconstituted through dominant affective primings or circulations. As such, through disrupting these primings or circulations, it is possible the very technologies and subjectivities they maintain could also be disrupted.

I also draw on the work of Sara Ahmed, a political and cultural theorist of affect. In her 2004 book *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* Ahmed provides a careful and political theorizing of the affect of wonder in the context of feminist attachments. This work overall aims to “explore how emotions work to shape the ‘surfaces’ of individual and collective bodies” (Ahmed 2004:1). As noted above, Ahmed equates affect with emotion in her writing. This is in direct tension to both Grosz and Massumi, both of whom are careful to distinguish between affect and emotion in that the former is

unmediated and the second is mediated (Grosz 1994; Massumi 2002:35). Ahmed adopts a phenomenological lens in theorizing affect. For Massumi, affect works at the pre-subjective level, whereas “for phenomenology, the subject is prefigured or ‘prereflected’ in the world” (2002:191). Massumi thus views phenomenology as the domain of the subject. Ahmed’s phenomenological approach is informed by her indistinction between affect and emotion. This informs a tension between the work of Ahmed and Massumi with regards to subjects, wherein Ahmed is interested in theorizing subjectivity and Massumi is interested in theorizing that which is prior to subjectivity. In order to navigate this significant tension between the works of Ahmed and those of Grosz and Massumi, Ahmed’s theorizing of wonder will be adapted through a careful reading of how and when wonder is conceptualized as an emotion in Ahmed’s theorizing, and when it is conceptualized as an affect in Grosz and Massumi’s terms. Similarly to Grosz, Ahmed provides a much more politicized and intersectional affect theory than Massumi, taking gender as central.

The Affect of Wonder

In Grosz’s writing, she emphasizes the newness in difference, in repetition. As matter unfolds, the possibility for previously unimaginable realities also unfolds. With every degree of indiscernibility there is the possibility for newness (Grosz 2011:94). Grosz places the concept of becoming as central, wherein becoming is an ontological concept aimed at addressing the complex and emergent reality of things, material and cultural (Grosz 2011:51). Becoming as ontologically central emphasizes, for Grosz, the ability for things to self-overcome—to become otherwise—directed towards new ways of life, new modes of living and being. This orientation towards the new and prioritization of

becoming in rejection of the predominant prioritization of *being* turns Grosz, when considering bodies, away from the questions of “‘what kind of body is this? What kind of body is it not?’, but rather ‘what it does, how it functions, what it affects, what it produces’” (Grosz 1994:170). In this, Grosz is invested in what can be understood as wonder. This fixation on the new, the new to me, or the ‘as if new’, leads Grosz’s ontology into conversation and collaboration with Massumi and Ahmed’s phenomenological understandings of the affect of wonder.

Ahmed theorizes the affect of wonder, citing Descartes’ description of wonder as the first passion, as “premised on ‘first-ness’: the object that appears before the subject is encountered for the first time, or as if for the first time” (2004:179). This wonder has a politicizing power, as Ahmed notes “...the wonder I felt at the way in which the world came to be organized the way it is, a wonder that feels the ordinary as surprising...” facilitated her coming to feminism, and politicized her relationship to gender (2004:171). Wonder involves not merely an experience of newness, but additionally a component of conscious marveling or cherishing that newness. As noted in the prior section, however, Ahmed and Massumi have different understandings of affect. As such, here I read Ahmed’s affect of wonder through Massumi’s conception of affect as unmediated (Massumi 2015:7). From this point forward, when I refer to affect I will be adopting the concept of affect as provided by a reading of Massumi. As such, Ahmed’s wonder can be understood as the affect of wonder after being cognitively mediated and culturally coded.

As an affect, we can understand wonder through Massumi’s description of intensity, which he pragmatically equates with affect. Affect, for Massumi, is “simply a body movement looked at from the point of view of its potential – its capacity to come to

be, or better, to come to do. It has to do with modes of activity, and what manner of capacities they carry forward” (Massumi 2015:7). As such, the affect of wonder is “a body movement looked at from the point of its potential” (Massumi 2015:7). The moments of conscious marveling or cherishing of newness, then, are actualizations of that potential for body movement.

Ahmed theorizes wonder with caution, noting, “wonder...is about seeing the world that one faces and is faced with ‘as if’ for the first time. What is the status of the ‘as if?’” (2004:179). Rather than interpreting this ‘as if’ as a gesture erasing the history of that about which one wonders, Ahmed suggests that “wonder allows us to see the surfaces of the world *as made*, and as such wonder opens up rather than suspends historicity” (2004:179). Considering these passages through Massumi, the *affect* of wonder can be compared to the affects of anger and laughter (Massumi 2015:8–9). The affects of anger and laughter are notable to Massumi as they interrupt, they jar, they make the moment present to one’s attention. In these moments, “there’s a kind of thought that is taking place in the body, through a kind of instantaneous assessment of affect, an assessment of potential directions and situational outcomes that isn’t separate from our immediate, physical acting-out of our implication in the situation” (Massumi 2015:9). The affect of wonder is a less jarring affect than those of anger and laughter, however it similarly “[interrupts] the flow of meaning that is taking place: the normalized interrelations and interactions” (Massumi 2015:8). This is where, through Ahmed, “wonder opens up rather than suspends historicity” (2004:179). Wonder as an interruption of normalized relations to the world offers the potential for the world, in all of its complex and intertwined materiality and immateriality, to be seen as made.

As noted in the discussion of Massumi in the previous section, bodies are primed for certain affective circulations, and this priming is a result of patterning or habit (Massumi 2005). As these primings are not fixed or predetermined, we can work towards priming bodies for the circulation of the affect of wonder. For Massumi, the very practice of philosophy is aimed at wonder: “Wonder. This is where philosophy comes in. Philosophy is the activity dedicated to keeping wonder in the world” (2002:239). The relationship between philosophy and wonder is one of priming bodies’ irritability for the circulation of the affect of wonder. Philosophy is dedicated to wonder in that through the practice of seeing the contours of the world as made, our bodies can become primed for wonder. In Massumi’s understanding of philosophy, this is done with and through one’s body. Grosz reiterates this, stating “philosophy is best undertaken dancing, with joyous bodily affirmation, with revelry and delight” (1995:214). The Men’s Circle, then, is potentially a site for philosophy as defined by Massumi. This philosophy oriented towards wonder stands in contrast to the tradition of philosophy as knowledge-possession wherein this tradition historically considers philosophy to be a masculine discipline. Grosz asserts that “knowledge is the consequence of bodies, and in turn enables bodies to act or prevents bodies from acting, expanding themselves, overcoming-themselves, becoming” (Grosz 1995:214). This notion of knowledge as that which enables or prevents bodies from movement refutes conceptions of knowledge as the possession of truth or objective fact.

Double Restriction of Affect of Wonder

Masculine identified persons experience a double restriction of the affect of wonder regarding gender and masculinity. Ahmed asserts “what is ordinary, familiar, or usual

often resists being perceived by consciousness” (2004:179). In contrast with that at which we wonder, the ordinary often melts into the non-notable texturing of the world. Ahmed notes this style of erasure in her reading of Audre Lorde’s writings that “show how bodies and worlds are racialized, how it feels to inhabit a black body in a world that assumes whiteness as a norm” (Ahmed 2014:95). The gendering of masculinity, just as the racialization of whiteness, is assumed as the norm. Masculinity, understood as ordinary, is difficult to perceive with our consciousness. But beyond being difficult to perceive at the level of consciousness, the repetitive movement of bodies in such a way that assumes masculinity as neutral *primes* bodies against the affect of wonder with regards to masculinity. This constitutes the first restriction of the affect of wonder; it is difficult to wonder about that which melts into the ordinary, that which asserts itself as so mundane we hardly perceive it, that which has been repetitively embodied as neutral. Masculinity itself restricts being wondered about.

The second restriction of the affect of wonder has to do with the ways in which gender is associated with knowledge-having. Part of the traditional rational masculine subject is the possession of knowledge, as Seidler notes in his discussion of men’s identification with a rational self (Seidler 2007:15). To be masculine is to be a rational knowledge-haver who is free from the feminine irrationalities of emotions and the body. This freedom from emotions involves a controlling of affect, both on the level of men’s bodies themselves as well as on the level of masculinity as a gendering. Massumi addresses the control of affect in his discussion of the post 9-11 terror alert system under the Bush administration (Massumi 2005:31). Taking this alert system as aimed at affectively provoking fear, Massumi states that despite differences in location and social

milieu, “the population fell into affective attunement” (Massumi 2005:32). This affective attunement did not constitute a consensus of behaviour, however, “jacked into the same modulation of feeling, bodies reacted in unison without necessarily acting alike. Their responses could, and did, take many forms. What they shared was the central nervousness. How it translated somatically varied body by body” (Massumi 2005:32). This notion of affective attunement is reflected in Grosz’s discussion of the round dance performed by bees, “bees do not observe the round dance...; they feel it, with their bodies, their antennae, in the contagious movements they themselves come to enact” (2011:21). Animal bodies, including but not limited to human bodies, share affects in ways not limited to visual or audio communication. In the case of the post 9-11 terror alert system, nervousness was central to the affective attunement. In the case of masculinity, the affective attunement is one of flat affect, of a rejection of affective irrationality, of an identity of knowledge-having. This affective attunement, as Massumi notes, varies body by body, as “instinct is sensitive to the relations between the particular elements composing the lived situation” (Massumi 2014b:13). As such, the ways in which masculine identified bodies respond to the affective attunement of flat affect or knowledge-having is contextual and relational—there is no standardized or formulaic response to masculine gender norms. The masculine subject as a rational knowledge-haver, however, is in contrast to experiencing and circulating the affect of wonder.

There is a joy involved in wonder, a joy at not knowing; “wonder is a passion that motivates the desire to keep looking; it keeps alive the possibility of freshness, and vitality of a living that can live as if for the first time” (Ahmed 2004:180). This joy of experiencing something for the first time, or as if for the first time, is un-masculine. This

lack of knowledge becomes a lack of masculinity. The affect of wonder is evoked precisely in these moments of joy at the unknown. To wonder—to cherish the open possibilities of the virtual when the actual is not yet actualized—becomes antithetical to masculinity. Wonder is not restricted to one’s first experience of a thing—we also are filled with wonder when we experience something as if for the first time. Far from merely feigning ignorance, this wonder is filled with political potential. Grosz asserts that the political potential of feminist theory is to “make us become other than ourselves, to make us unrecognizable” (2011:87). To imagine something as possibly different from its current reality, to consider the possibility for the world to be otherwise, we need to be able to wonder. However this wondering is un-masculine.

Wondering about masculinity, then, is doubly restricted for masculine identified folks. Wonder requires an object to wonder about. The erasure of masculinity as a gendering problematizes wondering about masculinity, not only for those persons gendered masculine. Simone de Beauvoir famously characterized women as the “other sex”—as posed in opposition to men (1949:221). With masculinity as neutral, natural, and femininity a derivation of this neutrality, masculinity (discursively) does not exist. To be without gender is to be a man, to be gendered is to be a woman. This parallels narratives of white bodies as being without race, and this erasure serves a political function. One cannot critique that which does not exist, and to feel delimited or controlled by something lacks validity when that which is delimiting or controlling is not recognized or recognizable.

This has constituted a historical double barrier to wondering about masculinity—although one of these barriers is limited to masculine-identified persons. However, the

erasure of masculinity can be seen as shifting. In Michael Atkinson's *Deconstructing Men and Masculinities*, he notes an increase in men communicating about the ways they perform masculinity aesthetically, placing this in the context of a perceived masculinity crisis (2010). Atkinson states, regarding the perceived masculinity crisis, "an identity like masculinity, then, is no longer culturally taken-for-granted as a single thing but rather a status that is subject to contextual negotiation and construction...the crisis pertains to men who struggle with how to define and then be appropriately (read *flexibly*) gendered as male across many social situations" (Atkinson 2010:11). Atkinson ties the subsequent increase of openly communicating aesthetic performances of masculinity to his concept of pastiche masculinity in the context of the emergence of ornamental, increasingly representational culture (Atkinson 2010:8). This discussion of representational culture comes from Atkinson's reading of Hardt and Negri's discussion of the weakening of identities in late modern societies, resulting in pastiche masculinity, understood as contextually specific and consciously constructed performances of masculinity.

Due to the weakening of identities and consequent cultural shift in representing and performing masculinity, that which generally restricts an engagement with masculinity is losing hold, however that which restricts men from wondering remains. The contemporary situation then, is one wherein masculinity can be culturally treated as a gendering, but to perform this gendering of masculinity involves always already knowing what it is to be a man. Here Kimmel's workshoping with young boys as covered in a New York Times article becomes particularly poignant (Bennett 2015). Kimmel, in one session, asks a group of young boys to identify characteristics of a man's man, then characteristics of a real man. The responses were predictable: strong, rational, in control,

non-emotional. He then asks for characteristics of a good man. Again, the responses are predictable: kind, caring, emotionally available, generous. The following conversation surrounds the contrast, and even the contradictions: a good man cannot be a real man, and a real man cannot be a good man. This juxtaposition opens up the space for a conversation about the ways the contradictions of masculinity impact these boys' lives. In this, Kimmel opens up a space, however temporary, for the circulation of the affect of wonder. We have the cultural space to think through masculinity.

Men's Circle as a Space of Suspension

Following a long and tense historical lineage of masculinity therapy and men's anti-violence work, the UVic Men's Circle takes up the space Kimmel temporarily opens in his workshops. In its very *modus operandi*, the Men's Circle promises a space for wonder, maybe even requests its participants to try prime themselves for wonder. The Men's Circle introduces masculinity as an object of inquiry in its very *modus operandi*, then begins the work of priming its participants to experience and circulate the affect of wonder, or undoes the gender based priming *against* the affect of wonder they have always already experienced.

The restriction of the affect of wonder is complex. Far from merely a restriction of consciously wondering about the world, which seems to be far simpler to understand and remedy, the restriction of wonder is expressed at the affective level, the restriction is embodied. Ahmed speaks of the discomfort of being in a body that does- or can-not effectively fulfill the regulative ideal in the context of queerness and compulsory heterosexuality. This discomfort corresponds to Connell's assertion that very few men fulfill the hegemonic masculine role (Ahmed 2004:152; Connell 2005:79). Bringing

Ahmed's theorizing again into conversation with Massumi's concept of affect, this discomfort is experienced, unmediated, without any necessary relation to a cognitive registering or cultural coding of the discomfort. This discomfort of one's gender performance not fitting into the world comfortably is embodied and tangled up in the intertwining of the material and immaterial.

Ahmed speaks to the restriction of affects, asserting "through repeating some gestures and not others, or through being oriented in some directions and not others, bodies become contorted; they get twisted into shapes that enable some action only insofar as they restrict capacity for other kinds of action" (Ahmed 2004:145). As noted previously, for Massumi this repetition is habit: "Habit is an acquired automatic self-regulation. It resides in the flesh. Some say in matter" (Massumi 2002:11). Grosz elaborates on how these habits or repetitions are not individual actions but social processes, wherein "the processes of social inscription of the body's surface construct a psychological interior" (Grosz 1995:104). In the actions and restrictions of the actions of persons of all sorts of gendering, the potential for masculine identified persons to "[learn] to see the world as something that does not have to be, and as something that came to be, over time, and with work" (Ahmed 2004:180) through the circulation of the affect of wonder fundamentally limits the potential for masculine identified persons to politically engage with their gendering.

The question becomes: how does it feel to be one of these bodies that fail to properly perform hegemonic masculinity? In taking seriously the contemporary anxieties of men, we recognize that "discomfort is not simply a choice or decision...but an effect of bodies inhabiting spaces that do not take or 'extend' their shape" (Ahmed 2004:152).

Men's bodies inhabit spaces such as the public and the private, their home and professional spaces, as bodies that do not fit. In Ahmed's discussion of discomfort she is referring to the discomfort queer bodies experience in inhabiting heteronormative spaces—spaces that are directly or indirectly antagonistic to their bodies. In contrast to this, when applying Ahmed's notion of discomfort to male anxiety, the spaces discussed are not necessarily designed for men's bodies to fit or not fit, but the discomfort arises in that without wonder, masculine identified people have neither the framework nor the grammar to understand or articulate when and why they do not fit. By failing to properly perform hegemonic masculinity, men's bodies do not properly fit spaces where, for masculine identified persons, hegemonic masculinity is the expectation. Additionally, the cultural assumption of the neutrality of masculinity as a gendering means that to recognize or note how one does not fit in a space would be to bring up a taboo subject. This question directs us towards the Men's Circle as a space in which masculine identified persons can address and try to negotiate their embodied discomfort as a result of being embodied in a space that does not conform to their bodies. Additionally, the ability to address this otherwise taboo experience of discomfort opens up a possible navigation of the isolation and anxiety masculine identified persons experience as a result of the individualizing need to simply perform masculinity better, to not experience wonder, to appear secure in their gendering.

The restriction of wonder for masculine-identified folks regarding masculinity dictates the kind of subjectivities and actions possible for masculine-identified folks, and the past Men's Circle topics: emotional labour, accountability, consent. In contrast to the mythopoetic masculinity therapy movement, wherein an anti-feminism stance

compounded with a desire to ‘return’ to a romanticized past masculinity, the Men’s Circle is an example of masculinity therapy as Seidler imagined it, as “[helping] us challenge the notion that emotions and feelings are essentially ‘irrational’, and so [opening] up different ways of relating to the self” (Seidler 2003:72). This integration of the emotional into one’s identity, or perhaps better said, this acceptance and embrace of that which already is involved in one’s identity, stands in direct contrast to the assumption of a masculine identity as composed of the rational self (Seidler 2007).

The Men’s Circle here offers an ephemeral and collectively constituted space, repeated bi-weekly, of suspension. Suspension of the restriction of the affect of wonder, suspension of the gendered norms around emotional support among masculine identified persons, suspension of the spaces that fail to accommodate masculine identified bodies that do not conform to hegemonic masculinity. For Massumi, “it is through the expectant suspension of that suspense that the new emerges” (Massumi 2002:27). The new is a guiding concept for Grosz, “*at its best*, feminist theory is about the invention of the new: new practices, new positions, new projects, new techniques, new values” (Grosz 2011:83). This Men’s Circle, a space informed by enacting feminist theory, participates in the generation of the new by embodying a space of suspension. In suspending some affective restrictions, the Men’s Circle potentially enacts Grosz’s conception of feminist theory, wherein it “can become the provocation to think otherwise, to become otherwise...[it] has the potential to make us become other than ourselves, to make us unrecognizable” (Grosz 2011:87). In direct contrast to Messner’s evaluation of masculinity therapy in the context of men’s antiviolence work, wherein he argues that men’s antiviolence work reifies and relies on dominant forms of masculinity (Messner

2016), the Men's Circle potentially suspends the social, affective expectation of the performance of these dominant forms of masculinity. Although these spaces can fail to achieve this suspension, potentially even reifying the very forms of masculinity they aim to disrupt, it is the potential rather than the actualization that I consider here. Rather than formally intellectual or analytic mechanisms, predominantly thought of as subsisting and enacted in the rational and masculine mind, the Men's Circle is a gathering of bodies, gathered for the sake of supporting one another in collective emotional work. The emotional work that the Men's Circle explicitly aims at is not affective work per se. However, through understanding emotions as culturally coded or cognitively processed affect, the Men's Circle's aim of emotional (or therapeutic) work calls to attention the affects that are being coded into these emotions. Through examining the emotional work for which masculine identified people are making space, the affective circulations and restrictions underlying these emotions can be made visible. In offering a space with the intention of intention of "challenging...dominant constructions of masculinity"⁶, the body of the Men's Circle can offer what the outside world may not. The Men's Circle creates a space wherein the frictions bodies experience as gendered can be articulated and discussed. Within this space of suspension, however ephemeral and precarious, the *new* with regards to masculine identified bodies has space to emerge.

Conclusion

Affect disorients—brings one outside of one's self; this is the site of *excess*, of escape. This excess/escape is what prevents the world from being pure entropy (Massumi

⁶ The Anti-Violence Project, "Men's Circle at UVic", *AVP*, access date December 1, 2015, antiviolenceproject.org

2002:35)—this excess is wonder. Affect wonder-s us. In this chapter, I theorized the affect of wonder in the context of a therapeutic masculinity initiative, the Men's Circle. The discussion of this initiative rests on a body of literature largely concerned with the relationship between the therapeutic and the political in masculinity initiatives. The concern about this relationship evolves out of Connell's seminal work *Masculinities* wherein she delineates between therapeutic and political endeavors, excluding emotions from politics (1995:206). The integration of an account of the affect of wonder in this discussion disrupts the binary of therapy and politics through the affirmation that as subjects are constantly reconstituted by affective flows and restrictions, and as norms and affective flows co-constitute one another, the potential to alter or disrupt these affective flows implies a potential to alter or disrupt the very subjectivities constituted by them. The constitution of subjectivities is a political question, as these subjects constitute the subjects of politics. The affect of wonder provides one way to think through an affective dimension of therapeutic and anti-violence masculinity initiatives.

In the next chapter I turn to the concept of affective topologies and flat affect to theorize Canadian men's suicide rates.

Chapter 3: Suicide and Flat Affect

Vignette

Philosopher Albert Camus famously articulated suicide as the only serious philosophical problem and question (1955). Suicide is a deeply personal act, and is sometimes described as a last resort, a decision as to whether life is worth living, an act of desperation, or as the loss of a battle with one's own demons. While suicide is a personal act done to oneself, it is also a socially experienced phenomenon. Suicide blurs the distinctions between the individual and the social as an act that involves oneself as both subject and object. In Canada, men die by suicide at a rate over three times that of women.⁷ In North America, "Caucasian males 60 and older have the highest rate of lethal suicide, even surpassing the rate for young males" (Sabo 2005:10). The trend of men's rates of death by suicide⁸ as significantly higher than women's rates, with this gap widening throughout the life course, is widely documented as a trend in sociological literature (Berk 2006; Cleary 2012; Durkheim 1897; Giddens 1971; Oliffe et al. 2011; Schmutte et al. 2009; Scourfield and Evans 2014; Wray, Colen, and Pescosolido 2011). This crisis in Canadian men's health is compounded by Statistics Canada's predictions that nearly a quarter of the Canadian population will be over 65 by 2036 (2016).

Introduction

Sociological studies of gender and suicide have a long and rich history. In contemporary studies of suicide, gender is widely accepted as a social determinant of suicide (Braveman and Gruskin 2003; Graham 2004). Gender as a social determinant of

⁷ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-624-x/2012001/article/11696-eng.htm>

⁸ Coded as "Death by intentional self-harm" in Statistics Canada's database.

suicide builds on a broader framework positing gender as a social determinant of health. Gender can thus be understood as a determining factor in the inequity of physical and mental wellbeing. The gendering of health inequity is generally understood to examine the health outcomes that result from the general social and structural subordination of women (Hankivsky 2012; Sen and Östlin 2008). Suicide, however, adds to the complexity in understandings of gender as a social determinant of health (Smith, Mouzon, and Elliott 2016), due to the disproportionate rate of death by suicide among men in comparison to women.

Locating the conception of power at work is crucial to understanding different frameworks through which to examine gender and suicide. As noted in Chapter One of this thesis, there exists a debate in MMS regarding masculinity and power, most explicitly expressed in the debate between Connell and Seidler. Connell states “the main axis of power in the contemporary European/American gender order is the overall subordination of women and dominance of men” (1995:74). Seidler critiques this structuralism in Connell as limiting the potential for men and masculinities to change (2007). This debate regarding power is reproduced and re-presented in studies of gender and suicide. Within structural or Durkheimian examinations of suicide, power is conceived of in hierarchical and constrictive terms. Within discursively oriented post-structuralist examinations of suicide, power becomes more complex, located both in social structure and in subjects. In both of these loose theoretical groupings, the act of examining suicide is an enactment of biopolitics, a form of politics wherein “what bodies are meant to produce is essentially their own economically productive lives—integrally self-converting into ‘human capital’” (Massumi 2015:109). These examinations of

suicide are attempts to govern at the level of life and death. In studying suicide with the aim of deterring suicidal behaviour or attitudes, these research paradigms participate in the reduction of bodies into “human capital” as Massumi notes, failing to accept or recognize the notion of an unlivable life. This biopolitical paradigm, which Massumi identifies as a politics wherein bodies ideally self-convert into “human capital”, understands life as that which is primarily productive, if not exclusively so. Within this paradigm politics becomes a project of managing life. Part of managing life is keeping productive lives or human capital alive, such that they can keep producing. As such, the notion of an un-livable life holds no political relevance, whereas the notion of an un-productive life becomes deeply political.

By studying suicide with the aim of preventing suicidal behaviour or attitudes, studies of suicide participate in the biopolitical agenda of keeping unlivable lives alive to avoid forsaking their productive capacities. Turning to affect and new materialisms, I “emphasize the active, self-transformative, practical aspects of corporeality as it participates in relationships of power” in discussing Canadian men’s suicide rates (Coole and Frost 2010:19). As such, I am interested in the ways in which conceptions of power and gender play out in, on, and with bodies in the context of suicide, and how theorizing masculinity through the concept of affect changes the ways in which notions of power play out on bodies.

In this chapter I provide an overview of literature on Canadian men’s suicide rates, in conversation with literature on North American men’s suicide rates, men’s health, and men’s help-seeking behaviours. I contextualize this overview by first providing a discussion of Durkheim’s *Suicide* and continuing into a discussion of

contemporary studies of suicide within health sociology and MMS. In order to move beyond the existant frameworks of materiality implicit in examinations of men's suicide, I demonstrate and critique the legacy of Durkheim's structuralism in both structuralist and post-structuralist studies of suicide. I then re-introduce the new materialist theories of Elizabeth Grosz and Brian Massumi, providing the basis for my theorizing of the affective topology of masculinity and its relation to men's suicide, guided by my central concept of flat affect. Theorizing an affective topology of masculinity, I argue that masculinity is aimed at flat affect, an unlivable goal oriented towards suicide, wherein the gendered masculine body is affectively *flat*, and oriented or made comprehensible through the biometaphorical landmark of the phallus.

Literature Review: Suicide

Emile Durkheim's seminal sociological work *Suicide* was aimed at studying the social fact of suicide (1897). This work is widely considered to be foundational to sociology as a rigorous scientific analysis of a social phenomenon. Durkheim studied the difference in suicide rates between Catholics and Protestants, in part in order to demonstrate the scientific rigor of sociology, however Durkheim also believed that demonstrating the social fact of suicide would reveal other social facts. For Durkheim, "the term suicide is applied to all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself [sic], which he [sic] knows will produce this result" (1897:xlii). Durkheim methodically worked through a large European dataset on deaths by suicide, developing four types of suicide. Egoistic suicide, the first type Durkheim develops, emerges out of Durkheim's analysis of suicide data by religious affiliation (1897:108). In explanation of the pronounced trend of higher rates of death by suicide among

Protestants, in contrast with Catholics and Jews [sic], Durkheim concludes that the individualism promoted through the Protestant facilitation of knowledge and biblical interpretation results in less close social ties among Protestants, and as a result Protestants have higher suicide rates (1897:174). Broadly, egoistic suicide results from a loss of integration or a breakdown of social bonds. The second type of suicide Durkheim develops is altruistic suicide. In contrast to egoistic suicide, resulting from weak social integration, altruistic suicide results from strong social integration (1897:185). Regarding altruistic suicide and egoistic suicide, respectively, Durkheim claims “one is related to the crude morality which disregards everything relating solely to the individual; the other is closely associated with the refined ethics which sets human personality on so high a pedestal that it can no longer be subordinated to anything” (1897:185). Although Durkheim sees altruistic suicide primarily in pre-modern societies, within modern societies altruistic suicide is predominantly seen in soldiers. The third type of suicide Durkheim develops is anomic suicide, resulting from social or economic upheavals. Durkheim asserts that human nature is governed by a collective or social consciousness, “but when society is disturbed by some painful crisis or by beneficent but abrupt transitions, it is momentarily incapable of exercising this influence” resulting in an increase in suicide (1897:213). Durkheim’s fourth type of suicide is merely noted in contrast to anomic suicide, wherein fatalistic suicide, for Durkheim, “has so little contemporary importance and examples are so hard to find...that it seems useless to dwell upon it” (1897:239). However, fatalistic suicide comes from excessive regulation of the individual, as seen in the examples of suicides of slaves (1897:239). As a structuralist, Durkheim was invested in developing discrete explanations of human social

behaviour, and as a quantitative researcher these social facts were presumed to be knowable and generalizable.

Durkheim remains widely cited in contemporary studies of suicide (Cleary 2012; Coleman, Casey, and Kaplan 2011; Scourfield et al. 2012; Shiner et al. 2009), although his typology of suicide has lost popularity. Post-Durkheim, sociological studies of suicide predominantly fall into two groups—those attempting to rework or improve Durkheim’s theory, and those attempting to debunk or refute Durkheim’s theory. This tension in the literature is primarily articulated in relation to Durkheim’s failure to consider or give weight to individual suicidal circumstances, and results in debates about the relevance of generalizable quantitative explanations, generally premised on some reality external to the social experiences, and about the usefulness or validity of qualitative and discourse analysis based projects. Durkheim’s work holds relevance regarding masculinity and suicide in his initial identification of the gender paradox in suicide, as well as in his articulation of the importance of social bonds and cohesion, both of which will be discussed below.

Durkheim noted the gendered discrepancy in death by suicide in 1897, and this trend has been widely documented and questioned since. Max Atkinson claimed that suicide statistics were reflections of the social construction of suicide and suicidal behaviour, rather than expressing actual rates of suicide (1968). This sentiment is reflected in later studies, wherein “high rates of nonfatal suicidal behaviour in females, as compared to males, may be an artifact of biased data collection” (Canetto and Sakinofsky 1998:2). Canetto and Sakinofsky conclude, however, that although “the gender paradox of suicidal behaviour is a real phenomenon...it is a more unstable and more culturally

bound phenomenon than traditionally assumed” (1998:19), wherein the gender paradox of suicidal behaviour is that men die by suicide more frequently than women, however women display more suicidal behaviour than men. Scourfield et al. test Canetto’s conclusions about gendered interpretations of suicide in the context of the UK, wherein they confirm the importance of Canetto’s “gendered ‘cultural scripts’ in relation to suicide” (2007:255), wherein the association between death by suicide and masculinity, and between para-suicide or attempted suicide and femininity, impacts what gets interpreted as suicide. Shiner et al. also critique Atkinson’s claim of the social construction of suicide verdicts as it “[precludes] any consideration of suicide as a meaningful act and does little to improve understanding or aid prevention” (2009:740). Canetto and Stice, however, do affirm that “cultural scripts of suicide define the conditions under which suicidal behaviour may be permissible, and even expected” (2008:5). In the context of masculinity and suicide, the definitions of conditions of permissible suicidal behaviour can result either in the inaccurate labeling of suicidal behaviour based on these cultural scripts, or in a reluctance to participate in certain suicidal behaviours that do not fit normative cultural scripts.

Anne Cleary, in a study interviewing young male participants within 24 hours of suicidal action, studied “the subjective meanings and patterns generated by these stories of suicide, and on the processes through which men conduct gendered lives in their socio-economic environment” (2012:499). Cleary focuses on emotions and discovers that participants reported significant emotional distress that they predominantly had endured for at least a year prior to the suicidal action. Cleary takes this qualitative and narrative based approach in explicit rejection of Durkheimian approaches to sociological studies of

suicide that “[adopt] a quantitative, macro-level, approach” (2012:498). In addition to participants’ history of emotional distress, Cleary discovered low suicide and mental health literacy among these men. Cleary concluded that these men did not engage in help-seeking behaviours because this contradicts the hegemonic masculinity wherein men are constructed as invulnerable. Cleary notes, however, that “this does not imply that masculinity is a consistent concept, but rather that masculinities of various kinds can attain relative stability in some social contexts and fluidity in others” (2012:504). In Cleary’s examination of emotions and suicidal behaviour, she determined that the men interviewed had very low mental health and suicide literacy (2012). Oliffe et al. studied Canadian men, corroborating Cleary’s conclusion that men had low suicide literacy and mental health literacy, and adding the finding that women had a better understanding of men’s mental health than men did (2016).

Much of the aforementioned literature rejects Durkheim’s deliberate exclusion of individual cases and narratives of suicide, however this rejection predominantly entails turning to discursive examinations of men’s accounts of their own suicidal behaviours (Cleary 2012; Oliffe et al. 2011, 2012), men’s accounts of help-seeking behaviours (Harding and Fox 2015; Johnson et al. 2012; Ridge, Emslie, and White 2011), boys’ gendered associations with suicidal behaviour (Mac An Ghail and Haywood 2012), and interviews with family members of men who have died by suicide (Ziółkowska and Galasiński 2017). The aforementioned qualitative studies explicitly or implicitly critique structuralist, or quantitative, Durkheimian analyses of suicide as “[providing] a profile of suicide patterns in contemporary society...[and as offering] little insight into the process of suicidal action” (Cleary 2012:498). This aforementioned literature contributes to

sociological literature on masculinity and suicide by examining the processes of suicidal action in masculine identified persons' lives. For Oliffe et al. and Cleary, this begins from a place of considering the mental health literacy and knowledge of suicide men have, understanding suicidal action not simply as an event but rather as a part of a broader, lifelong and dynamic relationship to suicide and mental wellbeing (Cleary 2012; Oliffe et al. 2016). In examining men's accounts of, and relationships to, help-seeking behaviours, researchers again stretch the conception of suicidal action as event to a process-based account, wherein the ability to seek help and the ways in which that help-seeking is received and responded to in gendered ways contributes to understanding the process of suicidal action (Harding and Fox 2015; Johnson et al. 2012; Ridge et al. 2011). In interviewing youth between the ages of 9 and 13 about the formation and regulation of gender in the context of the school environment, Mac An Ghail and Haywood contextualize men's suicidal processes within a framework of masculinity not as a homogenous and structurally regulated identity, but rather as a dynamic process involving self, other, and society, resulting in diverse experiences and accounts of masculinity (2012). In Ziólkowska and Galasiński's discursive analysis of the notion of fatherly suicide, they frame the process of suicidal action within a normative masculine role of the father, examined from the point of view of adult children (2017).

Cleary's work interviewing young male participants within 24 hours of suicidal action aims to contribute to what she sees the broader literature as lacking, that is, insight into the processes of suicidal action (Cleary 2012). By conducting interviews in close temporal proximity to suicidal action, Cleary affirms the dynamic and fluid relationship one has to gender and suicide. As such, although Cleary does not extend her discussion to

address the dynamic and fluid relationships between gendered bodies, this work crucially notes and discusses the dynamism of the relationship between masculinities and suicidal processes. In the subsequent section of this chapter I introduce and theorize a discussion of suicide and masculinity that, through an affect-based framework, takes bodies to be as dynamic and fluid as genders.

In the literature discussed above, the homogenization of social groups such as gender, religious affiliation, and race in Durkheim's study and subsequent macro-level analyses is also critiqued (Harding and Fox 2015). Studies that adopt mixed methods approaches, combining discursive analysis with quantitative data, fall into the previously discussed category of literature aimed at rejecting Durkheim's exclusion of individual cases and narratives (Canetto and Sakinofsky 1998; Mahalik and Rochlen 2006; Scourfield et al. 2012; Shiner et al. 2009). In contrast with this literature, there is another body of literature that attempts to adopt, revise, or rework Durkheim's theoretical approach. This is evident in contemporary studies that examine Durkheim's macro-theory at the micro-level (Berk 2006; Wray et al. 2011) or structuralist population-level statistical studies of men's suicide rates (Schmutte et al. 2009). In Schmutte et al.'s study, they assert "death from suicide is largely a White male phenomenon, and suicide rates increase with age" (2009:190), critiquing existant literature on gender and suicide as focusing on proximal risk factors such as mental illness, "rather than mitigating factors that culminate in heightened risk, such as personality traits, physical illness, and social isolation (2009:195).

Although many of these studies self-identify within a binary of structuralism or post-structuralism, wherein post-structuralism is understood as a turn to discourse in

critique of and in response to structuralism, this binary fails to adequately capture post-structuralism. In part, this is due to post-structuralism's amorphous character, with porous boundaries and room for theoretical contradictions. Additionally, this binary of structuralist/post-structuralist studies of suicide fails to account for research that does not commit to either a structuralist or post-structuralist framework. Although Schmutte et al. (2009) employ structuralist analyses, as noted above, they turn to discursive policy recommendations, exposing a commitment to post-structuralist notions about the primacy of discourse. Oliffe et al.'s article interviewing older men who experience depression is more explicit in blurring the structuralist/post-structuralist binary, by integrating a quantitative scale for measuring depression with interview data (Oliffe et al. 2011). Parent et al. takes a different approach in combining quantitative and qualitative analyses by measuring traditionally understood as qualitative variables quantitatively, such as depression and help-seeking behaviours (Parent et al. 2016).

The approach of combining statistics with discourse analysis, rather than escaping or effectively challenging this aforementioned binary, reifies a notion of individual bodies with separate and coherent agencies. Effectively, in my approach examining suicide from the point of view of affect, I avoid fixating on singular bodies and how they construct meaning, or on how a population acts in quantifiable patterns, rather affirming the ways in which masculinity and affective flows within and across bodies are mutually co-constructing.

This brief literature review demonstrates a trend in contemporary sociological studies of suicide wherein the legacy of Durkheim's canonical structuralist study of suicide results in a focus on structuralist and quantitative frameworks, post-structuralist

discourse oriented frameworks, or a mixing of the two in studies of masculinity and suicide, such as attempting to measure traditionally qualitative factors (adherence to masculinity ideals, coping mechanisms for emotional distress) through a quantitative survey (Mahalik and Rochlen 2006). I argue, however, that suicide exposes the limits of these frameworks in their disregard of subjectivities, prioritization of the discursive, or attempts to reconcile these two paradigms through bringing them together, without challenging the boundaries of them. Arguments for the primacy of discourse, or of discursive subject formations, are ruptured at the end of a life. Similarly, structural examinations of the “social fact” of suicide stemming from Durkheim lose accountability in contemporary studies due to their disregard for subjectivities and diverse social situations. New materialisms’ turn to theorizing bodies can be understood in part as an attempt to address the insufficient theorizing of materiality in post-structuralist thought (Fox 2016:67). Suicide can be understood as an instance where the body cannot be conceived of as subordinate to the mind, nor vice versa. As such, a new materialist theory is necessary, although insufficient, to the explicitly material and de-centering act of suicide.

Theoretical Framework: Grosz and Massumi

Reading Massumi again through Grosz’s new materialist ontological prioritization of movement and sexed bodies, I focus here on the concepts of life and power. New materialist theories are framed here, in the context of the above literature review, as a *reorienting* rather than a critique of post-structuralisms. New materialisms reorient post-structuralisms towards materiality without abandoning the discursive, as new materialist frameworks affirm the intertwinement of the material and the discursive. Within new

materialist scholarship, power is conceived of as productive, in line with Foucault (Coole and Frost 2010:34). The concept of biopower provides the poststructuralist bridge between body sociology and new materialisms. Sociologist Nick Fox addresses the relationship between body sociology and new materialist theories, stating “body sociology provided the basis to shift sociological focus from epistemology to ontology and to center attention firmly upon materiality—not only the materiality of flesh but also all other physical and biological stuff with which bodies come into contact, along with the sociocultural constructs that also affect bodies materially” (2016:67). A guiding question in developing Grosz and Massumi’s theory to examine the vignette of Canadian men’s suicide rates is: how can it be that the subject turns against itself?

Grosz encapsulates her reorientation towards new materialisms, as well as foreshadows her turn to Darwinian concepts, when she asks “what happens to conceptual frameworks if the body stands in place of the mind or displaces it from its privileged position defining humanity against its various others?” (Grosz 1994:160). In displacing the mind from its privileged position, without merely reconstituting this hierarchical binary such that the body stands above the mind, Grosz returns the human to its place among animals, and affirms processes of becoming over concepts of being. In this, Grosz turns towards Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the Body-Without-Organs, articulated by Massumi as bodies without organization, defined by the affects of which they are capable (Massumi 2002). Regarding the Body-Without-Organs, Grosz asserts that the question is never ‘what kind of body is this, what kind of body is this not,’ but rather “what it does, how it functions, what it affects, what it produces” (Grosz 1994:170). In conceiving of bodies in terms of how they can affect and be affected, the individual shifts

and decomposes to the dividual (Massumi 2014a). The individual is the subject of ideology, whereas the dividual is connected to biopower. Affect, for Massumi, is a way to theorize the way biopower and biopolitics work on preindividual or presubjective embodied existence (Massumi 2002). In the realm of biopower, people are continuously modulated across spaces rather than contained in spaces. There are no longer any ‘figures’ (i.e. the figure of masculinity, the figure of death) as this is antithetical to an ontological prioritization of movement. Figures rely on identity as premised in *being*, conceiving of identity through becoming, figures are transformed into attractors, generating negative feedback loops.

For Massumi, “affect holds a key to rethinking postmodern power after ideology. For although ideology is still very much with us, often in the most virulent of forms, it is no longer encompassing” (2002:42). As noted in the previous section, statistical studies of suicide rates tend towards biopolitics, while qualitative studies of suicide tend toward individualism. In the move from individuals to dividuals, from ideology to biopower, the concept of affect allows us to rethink power in terms of suicide and gender without reducing suicide to a generalized statistic or an isolated and individual experience. This relationship between power, gender, and suicide is not restricted to merely considering the power enacted in death by self harm, but more broadly considering power as a productive force wherein power constitutes the very subjects and their potential actions, including the choice to end one’s own life. Gender, here, can be considered a *quality* in Massumi’s terms. For Massumi, “[qualities] envelop a potential—the capacity to be affected, or to submit to a force...and the capacity to affect, or to release a force” (1992:10). Massumi uses the example of a woodworker to explore this notion of a

quality. While a woodworker has the skills and agency required to manipulate a piece of wood, the potential for the transformation of that wood is enveloped in the grain of the wood. The quality or grain contains the capacity to submit to, or release, a force or affect. Similarly, gender envelops the capacity or potential for bodies to affect and be affected.

When asking the question, how can it be that the subject turns against itself?, the first step is to consider the constitution of the subject itself. Grosz asserts, “acts are free insofar as they express and resemble the subject, not insofar as the subject is always the same, an essence or an identity, but insofar as the subject is transformed by and engaged through its acts, becomes through its acts” (2011:66). In asserting that the subject *becomes* through its acts, Grosz notes the self as both subject and object of action. Importantly, however, the subject is never *itself*, as it does not have the self-referentiality of stable identity or essential and defining qualities.

The subject is constituted, both in Grosz and Massumi, in an ongoing becoming, a constant self- and re-constitution, and this constitution is affective (2011; 2002). As noted in the previous chapter, for Massumi affect “is narratively delocalized, spreading over the generalized body surface” (2002:25). This delocalized flow and spread of affect is “autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is. Formed, qualified, situated perceptions and cognitions fulfilling functions of actual connection or blockage are the capture and closure of affect” (2002:35). In my discussion of the men’s circle I focused on how affects are restricted *among* gendered bodies. Here, in discussing Canadian men’s suicide, I focus on how affects are restricted on the surfaces of bodies, and how affective circulations and restrictions constitute the very bodies through which they flow.

Affective Topologies and Flat Affect

Both Grosz and Massumi write at length on architecture, wherein for Grosz “inorganic matter, transformed into an immense organ, a prosthesis, is perhaps the primordial or elementary definition of architecture itself” (2014:139). Architecture, for Grosz, illuminates and exemplifies the ways in which objects or things are prostheses to bodies, and bodies and organs are prostheses to objects, things, and buildings. This is made explicit through architecture in the design and construction of structures intended to coordinate, alter, deter, or facilitate the movements of bodies. Massumi convenes on this, stating “the thing, the object, can be considered *prostheses* of the body—provided that it is remembered that the body is equally a prosthesis of the thing” (2002:95). In considering the thing, the object, inorganic matter to be a prosthesis or extension of the fleshy body, questions of architecture become questions of bodies, and questions of bodies become questions of architecture. Both Massumi and Grosz are interested in topological or non-Euclidian shapes⁹ both in architecture and in theorizing bodies. This topological account of architecture refutes notions of space as a cohesive box or set of coordinates into which things are placed. Similarly, when applying concepts of topology to bodies, the surface of bodies no longer constitute merely containers in which subjectivities are contained, but rather subjectivities are understood “in terms of the complexities, specificities, and materialities of bodies *alone*” (Grosz and Eisenman 2001:31). This does not entail a rejection of notions of discourse or identity, but rather reformulates these concepts so that they are contained, formulated, and constructed in and through bodies.

⁹ “‘Topology’ and ‘non-Euclidean’ are not synonyms. Although most topologies are non-Euclidean, there are Euclidean topologies” (Massumi 2002:184).

Massumi asks, “what if the body is inseparable from dimensions of *lived abstractness* that cannot be conceptualized in other than topological terms?” (2002:177). This lived abstractness can be understood as that which would be relegated to culture in a nature/culture binary. In asserting that the body is *inseparable* from this, Massumi reminds one of the necessary intertwinement of materiality and immateriality. Topology, for Massumi, allows us to conceptualize this intertwined body. Grosz wants to “think the subject in terms of the rotation of impossible shapes in illegible spaces” (Grosz and Eisenman 2001:31). In referring to topology as a way to think the subject, Grosz shares Massumi’s theoretical stance. The *lived abstractness* of the body requires a topological conception of the body, and Massumi conceives of this topology as spacialized or cognitively codified through landmarks, wherein “landmarks and their associated patches of qualitative relation can be pasted together to form a map, but only with an additional effort that must first interrupt the actual course of orientation” (2002:181). In terms of a topology of gendered bodies, the phallus stands out as a landmark. The phallus is not equivalent to the penis or to the male sexed body, but rather can be understood through Bordo as a biometaphor. For Bordo, the biometaphor is a concept that addresses how metaphors are material and subsist in bodies (1999:87). The phallus is a biometaphorical landmark orienting and codifying topological masculine bodies.

Considering the body topologically involves considering the surfaces and contours of bodies, which constitute and are constituted by affective flows. In this, the production of bodies and subjectivities is in part a result of the ways in which gender facilitates and restricts the flows of affects. In the previous chapter I discussed the restriction and flow of affects among bodies; here, in discussing affective topologies of

bodies, I turn to the restriction and flow of affects on the topological surfaces of bodies. In particular, I turn to the notion of flat affect.

Much of the surveyed literature on men's suicide focuses on violence towards one's self as a result of a lack of coping mechanisms among men, in addition to a lack of spaces for emotional vulnerability (Cleary 2012; Johnson et al. 2012; Parent et al. 2016; Ridge et al. 2011; Schmutte et al. 2009; Smith et al. 2016). These studies understand suicide, at least in part, as a result of a lack of emotional support. This focus on violence towards one's self as an expression of emotion that cannot be expressed towards the outer world fails to explicitly address how emotionality, or culturally codified affect, is not circulated homogenously across and over bodies.

Medical discourse around suicide frequently revolves around the term "flat affect", used as a synonym for, or symptom of, depression (Duschinsky and Wilson 2014:185). Flat affect as a pathologized and medicalized state, however, exposes the normative condition to which it is contrasted—being *full* of affect, being bodily stirred, having a topology wherein affect is not flat in Euclidian terms but rather is, in Grosz's terms, composed of "impossible shapes in illegible spaces" (2001:31). Lauren Berlant states "affect is...a coarse measure of a shift from a norm of modernist care for the historical resonance in the represented object to a postmodern investment in flatness and surface" (Berlant 2011:65). In discussing Lauren Berlant's theorizing of flat affect, Jackie Stacey states "flatness cannot be straightforwardly understood as the opposite of affective presence or fullness...To claim that flat affect is the reverse of emotional intensity, of infectious feelings or of palpable sensations, would miss the ways in which the flatness refers to the expectations designated by previous histories of generic conventions"

(2015:254). As such, flat affect will not be understood merely in itself as a lack of diverse affective topologies of a body, but always in conversation with the “normative valuing of emotional expressivity, especially in its feminized forms” (2015:254). This does not function as a binarization of masculinity and femininity, however, but rather simply notes that genderings of masculinity and femininity are mutually constitutive and implicated in one another.

Returning to Massumi’s discussion of the Body-Without-Organs as a body without organization, defined by the ability to affect and be affected, Massumi asserts that desire “is the tendency of one of the states created by the interplay of bodies without organs to remain in existence or return to existence, not for merely reproductive ends, but in order to actualize its potential to increasingly higher degrees: Spinoza’s *conatus*” (Massumi 1992:82). Again, Stacey asserts that “if affect is that which registers on the body and shows us we are subject to others and they to us, as a sense of something that makes us feel present to each other, then flat affect is the absence of such a sensual registering” (Stacey 2015:254). Flat affect is the absence of feeling present to one another. Flat affect is individualizing, in a way that erases our ‘subjectivity to others’ or our ability to *be affected*.

Flat Affect and Masculinity

In considering bodies topologically, affirming flat affect as a topographic orientation, I assert that masculinity as a gendering becomes aimed towards flat affect. Grosz compares norms to “savage inscriptions” in the ways in which they inscribe bodies (Grosz 1994:141–42). Gender is a set of these norms that inscribes bodies. These bodies,

topologically, are not blank surfaces upon which the norms of gender are inscribed, but rather are constituted in a continual process by active inscriptions.

The body is classically associated with the feminine—reproduction, menstruation, hysteria, being prone to the base human desires and emotions—whereas masculinity is frequently understood as a transcendence of those animal or base features of life. The masculine subject is marked by control over himself and nature, and only through the control and subordination of the feminine (body, emotions, nature, women), can the masculine subject become properly rational, political, etc. Intensity, in Massumi's usage as a synonym for affect, is not homogeneously distributed over the body (2002:25). Rather, the inscriptions of gender impact the ways in which affects flow over the generalized body surface. In particular, inscriptions of gender impact the way affects can flow over the topological body surface as specialized and conceptualized around landmarks which orient, and make comprehensible, the topological body surface.

Considering the phallus a biometaphorical landmark, as noted previously, the topology of masculine bodies is oriented around and inscribed by the phallus. One way to examine the flow and distribution of affective intensity throughout the body surface is through a consideration of which bodily landmarks can be affected, and on which sorts of body surfaces. This is notable in erotic literature, wherein women are *stirred*, in their entire bodies and selves. The brushing of an arm or caress of a neck is an erotic engagement with a gendered feminine body. This is an expression of the assumption that to be gendered feminine is to be affected holistically—to be at the whims of bodily affectation. In contrast, men's bodies when stirred are stirred almost exclusively through the biometaphorical phallus. The masculine body, properly gendered, is only affected

through the phallus, and this is demonstrated by the relegation of masculine sexuality to phallogocentric models.

In approaching bodies topologically, masculinity becomes associated with flat affect. Rather than the mountains and valleys of affectation available to bodies, gendered masculine bodies are aimed towards a flattening of these landscapes, to a flattened body affected only through the sexualized and biometaphorical landmark of the phallus. This affectively flattened masculine body is not exclusively presented as a lack of emotional presentation, however, as “the affective structure of any relation can manifest as a range of emotions...often the emotions vary, while the affective structure remains” (Berlant 2011:81). As such, flat affect can manifest as outward stoicism or as emotionality. Importantly, the biometaphorical landmark of the phallus, through which the masculine body is affected, expresses affectation through sexualized, mechanistic, and masculine acts such as penetration and ejaculation.

The concept of flat affect allows us to reconsider the gender paradox of suicide, wherein women demonstrate more suicidal behaviour but men die by suicide more frequently. Due to the constraint of working with existent data, addressing the gender paradox of suicide involves working within a limited and limiting binarization of gender, due to a lack of data collection mechanisms that capture gender as a spectrum. However, considering the ways in which gender directs and restricts the flow of affects within a binary conception of gender still provides a useful framework through which to consider the gender paradox of suicide. Considering Canetto and Sakinofsky’s claim that the gender paradox of suicide is culturally bound (1998), an affect based account corroborates this claim, adding the additional analysis that the gender discrepancy in

depression diagnoses is in part due to the normalization of flat affect for masculine identified persons, and additionally the masculine gendering of flat affect and the conception of emotional/rational as mutually exclusive could contribute to the discrepancies in labeling behaviour parasuicidal, as masculinity and flat affect are associated with rational and logical action, making suicide “attempts” or parasuicidal behaviour un-masculine. However, Canetto and Sakinofsky do not claim that the gender paradox of suicide is non-existent and simply a result of data collection practices, but rather that the phenomenon could be exaggerated by the gendered assumptions involved in data collection (1998). As a result, Canetto and Sakinofsky do not deny that there is a paradox in the suicidal behaviour of women and death by suicide of men. The concept of flat affect additionally articulates with the paradox itself. As previously mentioned, the gendering of affect results in a topological body oriented by the biometaphorical phallus, wherein topological bodies as gendered masculine are affectively flat and the phallus is erect and a site of sexual affect. This reduction of masculine bodies to affectively flat except for the phallus results in an un-livable state, exaggerated through the aging process wherein the penis typically has fewer and/or shorter erections. This sometimes termed “sexual dysfunction” or “loss of sexual performance” removes the landmark through which masculine bodies become topologically comprehensible.

The concept of flat affect also articulates with Cleary’s analysis of young men’s emotions and the processes of suicidal action. As noted earlier in this chapter, Cleary affirms the dynamic and fluid relationship one has to gender and suicide, however fails to address the dynamic and fluid relationships between gendered bodies. Affect theory importantly takes bodies to be as dynamic and fluid as genders. As such, relations

between bodies are not stable and constant but rather are constantly re-constituting and are in part constituted by the ways in which gender constitutes those very bodies. The gendered association between masculinity and individualism contributes to a restriction of affective flows between masculine identified persons, and indeed a restriction of the ways in which masculine identified persons can connect with others affectively in general. As a result, men's help seeking behaviours and ability to be vulnerable with peers, family, and health care providers could ultimately be less effective than those of women.

Rather than operating in opposition to the discursively based analyses previously discussed, however, an affect based discussion of masculinity and suicide both supplements and contradicts discursive approaches to understanding masculinity and suicide. New materialisms displaces without *replacing* the discursive in its hierarchical position in contemporary social analyses. As a result, discursive based analyses of masculinity and suicide such as Cleary's work on young men and emotional processes, Oliffe et al. on mental health literacy, Mac an Ghaill on suicidal processes, and Ziolkowska on fatherly suicide all benefit from the addition of an affect based analysis to their works.

Expanding out to ontological concerns, the scale of flat affect requires clarification. Sociological concepts and studies are typically characterized as macro-, meso-, or micro-level. Flat affect, however, conceptually ruptures the distinction between these levels and instead is situated at each of, and between, them. Micro-level analyses typically refer to one, two, or a small group of individuals and their actions. Meso-level analyses can range from small groups to small societies, and Macro-level analyses can

range from regional to global analyses. Each of these categories, however, relies on the ontological and stable category of the individual. New materialisms disrupts this, considering singular subjectivities and agentic subjects rather than individuals. Disrupting the prioritization of the individual, the concept of flat affect allows for a conception of affectively flat masculine bodies that do not necessarily correspond to neoliberal or autonomous subjects.

Men's Suicide and Flat Affect

Returning to the initial questions of this chapter; how and why is it that masculine identified folks die by suicide at a rate much higher than feminine identified folks? The previously discussed literature on masculinity and suicide provides a discussion of masculinity and violence, masculinity and help seeking behaviours, as well as the gendering of suicidal behaviours themselves. However, the reviewed suicide and gender literature fails to address the affective components of masculinity that contribute to this gendered discrepancy. Drawing again from Massumi's notion of the priming of bodies for affect (2005), trends among masculine identified persons can be understood as potentially a result or expression of an affective priming. In the case of men's suicide rates, I argue a key component to consider in understanding this gendered pattern of behaviour is the priming masculine identified folks experience towards flattened affect.

Tying back to the commonplace and medicalized understandings of flat affect and the associations between flat affect and suicide, flat affect can be understood as an unlivable state. As such, articulating oneself within a normative framework of masculinity involves orienting oneself towards an unlivable life. Importantly, this evaluation does not disregard the phenomena of suicidal attitudes and behaviours among

feminine identified persons, wherein “if one takes into account the large number of females who experience suicidal ideation or behaviour...women are, and continue to be, more suicidal than men” (Canetto and Sakinofsky 1998:16). Rather, the association between masculinity and flat affect results in an experience of flat affect as that which one ought to experience. This paradox, wherein one is driven towards an unlivable state in order to fit within a normative framework of masculine gendering, could be a contributing factor in both the lack of help-seeking behaviours among suicidal men and in the heightened lethality of suicidal behaviours of men.

Conclusion

As both a social action and a personal experience, examinations of suicide cannot help but feel reductive. Rather than attempting to account for suicide in all its variations and patterns, I argue that the affective component of masculinity can add to previously established frameworks of understanding gendered patterns of suicide. In conceiving of the masculine body as affectively flat and topographically spacialized through the biometaphorical landmark of the phallus, this chapter provides an opening for further examination of the notion of masculinity as oriented towards flat affect in masculinity studies.

Conclusion

This thesis aims at exploring a joyful and a sad affect in Spinoza's terms in the context of masculinity theory, in order to contribute to filling a gap in the literature wherein MMS predominantly relies on modernist conceptions of materialism. The assertion "gender is a social construct", as noted in the introduction, reveals much more about dominant conceptions of the social than about gender itself. The social construct narrative relies on a binarization of gender is natural and therefore fixed, and gender is social and therefore mutable—this binary is reflected in debates in early literature on men and masculinities. The infamous *Iron John* book as previously discussed calls for a return to a lost, natural masculinity, referred to as the mythopoetic masculinities movement. The subsequent critiques of this paradigm assert that there is no such natural masculinity, as masculinity has no root in nature and is rather a completely social, therefore mutable, construct. By addressing masculinity through a new materialist framework specifically through concepts of affect, this binarization of the natural and the social is displaced.

In this thesis I first introduced MMS literature broadly, as well as reviewed a few key figures in the field. I then read through and provided a critique of the conception of the material at work in their writings, introducing a new materialist framework through Massumi and Grosz to contribute to these conceptions of the material. I then worked through two vignettes or key areas in MMS: anti-violence/therapeutic masculinity initiatives, and men's suicide rates throughout the life course. This allowed me to demonstrate the need for, and usefulness of, an affective account of masculinity in understanding contemporary masculinities and social phenomena. Dominant expressions of masculinity are frequently characterized as unemotional or unaffected, therefore

understanding and writing on masculinity through the concept of affect provides a rich and productive area for theorizing.

Moving beyond the scope of this project, this work points towards further directions for masculinities studies that hope to address contemporary gender based issues. Vignette oriented projects aimed at understanding the lived reality of contemporary masculinity through affect allow for a traditionally phenomenological level of study to articulate on the ontological level of masculinity itself.

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