CHAPTER 3

The Male Self

Whatever decision we make, whatever action we take, is inevitably predicated on some implicit assumption of what we were like. Without the ability to view ourselves as objects, to assess our dispositions or other characteristics, and to consider these in relation to the particular situation, we are virtually immobilized (Rosenberg and Kaplan, 1982, p. xiii).

"Why, I am a man" ... usually is the first statement made by an American man when he is asked the question "who are you?" Following this statement, American men generally will go on to describe themselves in terms of their behaviors and attitudes about themselves learned from others. In doing so, they reveal, in addition to their gender identity—Richardson (1981) feels that few people are confused on this point—information about whether they think their behaviors and attitudes are consistent with society's norms for them (Richardson's contention here is that many more people worry about this). In other words, self-concept responses are frequently given in males' further elaborations on the "self." But, what is the male self? How does it come about? What is the "male self's" relationship to "male self-concept," "male self-esteem," "male behavior," and so on? Answers to these questions, as well as others, constitute the focus of this chapter.

First, it is important to distinguish between two related terms—socialization and self-development. Socialization, as we have seen, deals with the process whereby culture and the rules which guide social interaction are transmitted to persons. It occurs when statuses are assumed and social roles are learned (Hess et al., 1982). Socialization involves, but is distinct from, the "development of the self." Development of the self refers to the fact that persons develop role-taking abilities to the point whereby they are able to abstract generalized sets of definitions and expectations, thus enabling them to view themselves as objects and behave toward

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themselves as objects (Franklin, 1982). In addition, persons construct self-knowledge, self-feelings and numerous conceptions of self—all functions of interaction between themselves and others.

Given the above meanings of socialization and self-development, and the distinction between them, it is now possible to define the "male self." The "male self" refers to the process whereby males, by taking the roles of others, view themselves and behave toward themselves as social objects. Out of this process comes self-knowledge, self-conceptions, self-esteem and the like. Thus, a central concern for us will be the results of our hypothetical construct, "male self." Before examining these results, however, let us consider briefly the existing explanatory models often used to explain self-development. Our treatment, however is from a male perspective.

Explanations of the Male Self

The Freudian Male Self

Relatively few contemporary social scientists dealing with the male self explore it from a Freudian viewpoint. Nevertheless, Freud's ideas on the subject have played an influential role in shaping popular and academic thought on the subject. This seems true because there is no dearth of attitudes reflecting that male youth become men and female youth become women because they are biologically male and female respectively—a conclusion reached by many about Freud's feelings on this topic. Admittedly, *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917) and *The Ego and the Id* (1905) seem to support such a conclusion.

The idea that, ultimately Freud's conceptions of a person's sexual self are biologically rooted seems unfortunate given his point of departure on (primarily) male self-development. On the surface, Freud's views start out as decidedly androgynous ones. He contended that human beings were characterized by both masculine and feminine components. In males, the masculine components usually were stronger and in females, the feminine components usually were stronger. In addition, when Freud stated that "it seems probable that the sexual instinct is in the first instance independent of its object; nor is its origins likely to be due to its object's attraction" (Freud, 1905, p. 148), much of the male self was placed clearly outside of the biological. Thus, Freud's idea on the male self seems both androgynous and socialization-based.

Within the context of a more general concern with self-development, Freud's division of the mind into three well-known parts also