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Masculinity? What Masculinity?!

Three things about this book

I would like to make one final argument in this chapter. I want to finish this book with a discussion of the relationship between gender and identity, but before I do this, however, I would like to make a brief review of the arguments in the book. It is not so much intended as a thorough review of all the arguments I have made so far, but as a pointer to their most important aspects.

First of all, in this book I set out to take on dominant models of masculinity (and fatherhood), which propose that men – all men, always, universally, and some particular men regularly – are incapable of feeling, expressing or talking about their emotions. I do know men like that, but I also know women like that. I have had conversations with both men and women in which I showed myself as emotional, but I have also had conversations, with both men and women in which I constructed myself as unemotional. It all depended on my conversational goals. The world of such models seems too unproblematic, too broadly swept. Life is more complex than that, and men are more complex than that.

I hope to have shown that evidence against such models is somewhat double-sided. On the one hand, my data showed that the ‘lived’ model of masculinity – the ways people construct masculinity in their discourse, not prompted by questions about masculinity – does include emotionality. Men are represented as emotional. On the other hand, I also showed that men talk about their emotions, and in a variety of ways, contexts, constructions, presumably depending on who they are, what they want to say, and a host of other reasons that, perhaps, do not concern the fact that they are men at all.
Second, I have offered a problematisation of the ‘lived’ model of fatherhood, and by extension, I hope, masculinity (a point I shall elaborate on a bit more later). I hope to have dissociated biological fatherhood from ‘father-discourse’. In other words, the fact that a biological father speaks about or to his children does not mean that the analyst can assume that it is in the guise of a father that he is speaking. Certain identities, even if easy to point to given the context, need not necessarily be taken: biological fathers could, in fact, be parents. This is my first step towards laying out the ‘un-gendered’ view of reality I shall develop below.

Third, I would also like to remind readers of my argument that emotions do not need to be constructed with recourse to ‘emotion discourse’. In the argument I referred to helplessness, which I took to be an emotion not only because I thought it was an emotion, but because I had data which suggested that people might think of it as an emotion. I hope to have shown that speakers can construct *feeling* helpless by lexico-grammatical resources of language which are not normally associated with emotionality. Although I have not explored the possibility of other emotions being constructed in such a way, I would hypothesise that they can: there is no reason why not, if you like. Such an exploration would, in fact, be an interesting follow-up to this study.

I would like to stress that the book is a not a result of my – however wonderful, systematic and disciplined – thinking about reality and men (or drawing upon my own experience as a man). My arguments are data-driven. I did not need to invent categories or constructions because I had data. There are actually men and women who talk like this. And this point brings me to one last thing I would like to remind readers about. The data showed that the interviewed men speak about emotions in particular ways. When they speak about their relationships, they tend to – it is important to note the non-universalness of practice – distance themselves from the emotions they have. When they speak about their emotions which are targeted at them themselves, they tend to speak of them directly. But there is a fundamental question to be asked here. Are these patterns anything to do with men? Are they to do with masculinity, or perhaps masculinities, or perhaps gender? Do these patterns tell us anything about masculinity? What I would like to explore in the next section is the issue of gender (and particularly masculinity, of course) and its relationship to identities. Are identities necessarily gendered, and is gender omnirelevant in interaction? I could ask, am I always a man?

The question of to what extent the practices of speaking about emotions are to do with masculinity has already been dealt with in