Matthew Andler

What is Masculinity?[*]

> I see all the flaws of men, all the ways their fragility makes them dangerous and powerful and dismissive and sure that they know it all, and I love being a man […] I feel so much joy living in a man's body, my natural physicality, and I am trying to find a path toward becoming a good man.[1]
> – P. Carl

While analytic philosophy has taken notice of gender *identities* such as "woman," "man," and "nonbinary,"[2] it has yet to develop a literature on the metaphysics of gender *archetypes* such as "masculinity."[3] Relevant philosophical material can be found in social scientific work on the topic, which tends to emphasize the importance of recognizing multiple masculinities.[4] For example, in stark contrast with the masculinity envisioned by P. Carl in the epigraph, consider so-called "incels" or "involuntary celibates." Many incels identify as "beta males" and believe that women are evolutionarily predetermined to be attracted to "alpha males." Also known as "Chads," alpha males are imagined to be muscular, successful, and charismatic. While resentful of Chads, incels harbor misogynistic anger towards women who "deny them sex."[5]

The multiplicity of masculinities raises a *unification question*, which asks how archetypes as varied as "incel" and "chad" could aptly be described under a single label of "masculinity." With this unification question in mind, I argue in favor of the following theory of masculinity:

> **Homeostatic Property Cluster Kinds**: Individual masculinities such as *butch masculinity*, *clone masculinity*, *incel masculinity*, and *playboy masculinity* are distinct homeostatic

---

[1] P. Carl, *Becoming a Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020), 75.
[2] See R. A. Briggs & B. R. George, *What Even Is Gender?* (Routledge: London, 2023); Robin Dembroff, "Beyond Binary: Genderqueer as Critical Gender Kind, *Philosophers' Imprint* (2020); Katharine Jenkins, "Toward an Account of Gender Identity," *Ergo* (2018); Talia Mae Bettcher, "Trans Identities and First-Person Authority," in *You've Changed": Sex Reassignment and Personal Identity*, ed. Laurie J. Shrage (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[3] For related normative discussion, see esp. Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò, "Stoicism (as Emotional Compression) is Emotional Labor," *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* (2020).
[4] See R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2005), 76.
[5] See Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex: Feminism in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021), 73-91.

property cluster kinds. Each individual masculinity is a kind, and *masculinity* is a higher-order kind.

> **Gender Structures**: An individual homeostatic property cluster kind is a member of the higher-order kind *masculinity* in virtue of being causally-historically related to gender structures via processes of adherence, failed-adherence, selective adherence, and/or reinterpretation (specified in §2) with respect to male-coded social norms.

Here's the plan. In (§1) and (§2), I analyze *playboy masculinity*, *incel masculinity*, *clone masculinity*, and *butch masculinity* in order to develop the theory of masculinity sketched above. Section (§3) considers alternative theories of masculinity. To conclude, in (§4), I briefly discuss ameliorative masculinities as part of a call for future philosophical research.

1. Masculinity: Homeostatic Property Cluster Kinds

Properties are unevenly distributed. For example, imagine that residents of the second floor of such-and-such apartment building tend to be very tall men with green eyes. Here the following properties tend to co-occur in members of the kind *second floor resident of such-and-such apartment building*: the property *being very tall*, the property *being a man*, and the property *being green eyed*. Let's suppose that the co-occurrence is accidental.

There are also cases in which property co-occurrence is non-accidental. For example, consider the properties *being colorless*, *being odorless*, and *being miscible*. These properties are instantiated in members of the kind *water* without exception. The fact that *being H_2O* is the essential property of the kind *water* explains that fact that members of the kind instantiate the properties *being colorless*, *being odorless*, and *being miscible* without exception.

Properties can also non-accidentally co-occur on account of homeostasis. Here is Richard Boyd's famous statement of the phenomenon:

> There is a family (F) of properties that are […] clustered in nature in the sense that they co-occur in an important number of cases [… and their] co-occurrence is, at least typically, the result of what may be metaphorically (sometimes literally) described as a sort of *homeostasis*. Either the presence of some the properties in F tends (under appropriate

conditions) to favor the presence of the others, or there are underlying mechanisms or processes that tend to maintain the presence of the properties in F, or both.[6]

Along these lines, let's say that a homeostatic property cluster kind (HPC kind) exists just in case the following three conditions are satisfied:

(1) Kind Condition: There exists a kind K.

(2) Clustering Condition: Properties $P, P_1, \ldots P_n$ tend to co-occur in members of K (i.e., properties $P, P_1, \ldots P_n$ cluster in K).

(3) Homeostatic Condition: Properties $P, P_1, \ldots P_n$ cluster in K *because of homeostasis*; that is, properties $P, P_1, \ldots P_n$ tend to co-occur in members of K because (i) for any of these properties ($P, P_1, \ldots P_n$), the instantiation of the property (e.g., P) in a member of K creates conditions in which other properties (e.g., $P_1, \ldots P_n$) tend also to occur in members of K and/or (ii) there are underlying mechanism(s) which create conditions in which $P, P_1, \ldots P_n$ tend to co-occur in members of K.

Regarding the kind condition, in the context of this paper, I'll assume that a posited kind can be said to exist in case the kind can be used explanation and induction.[7] For example, in contrast to merely posited kinds such as *Virgo*, kinds such as *water*, *grey warbler finch*, and (as I'll argue) *masculinity* are epistemically significant.[8]

Next is the clustering condition. For example, consider again the posited kind *Virgo*. With the exception of *being born between approximately August 23rd and September 22nd* alongside associated properties such as *being born in the same season as Freddie Mercury*, properties do not tend to co-occur in members of the kind *Virgo*. In contrast, the kind *second floor resident of such-and-such apartment building* satisfies the clustering condition: the properties *being very tall*, *being a man*, and *being green eyed* tend to co-occur in members of the kind.

---

[6] Richard Boyd, "Homeostasis, Species, and Higher Taxa" in *Species: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. R.A. Wilson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 143.

[7] Here I remain agnostic about the causal non-redundancy of homeostatic property cluster kinds. Instead, I focus on the theoretical role of masculinity concepts in explanation and induction. For discussion of explanatory kinds in the context of social ontology, see Sally Haslanger, "Theorizing with a Purpose: The Many Kinds of Sex," in *Natural Kinds and Classification in Scientific Practice*, ed. Catherine Kendig (New York: Routledge, 2016), 129-132. See also Richard Boyd, "Homeostasis, Species, and Higher Taxa," in *Species: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, 143.

[8] Thanks to Ross Cameron for the example.

The homeostatic condition is only satisfied if property co-occurrence is due to homeostasis. Because property co-occurrence in members of the kind *second floor resident of such-and-such apartment building* is accidental, it fails the homeostatic condition. The kind *water* also fails the homeostatic condition, yet for a different reason. While the properties *being colorless*, *being odorless*, and *being miscible* non-accidentally co-occur in members of the kind *water*, it is also the case that co-occurrence is due to the instantiation of an essential property. Water is colorless, odorless, and miscible on account of being H_2O – not on account of homeostasis.

So, what kinds satisfy the aforementioned conditions? Species are plausible candidates.[9] For example, Robert Wilson, Matthew Barker, and Ingo Brigandt argue that "[e]ach species taxon (e.g., *Homo sapiens* or *Mus musculus*) is an HPC natural kind, with species members (merely) typically sharing several biologically real and scientifically important features."[10] For purposes of illustration, I'll consider the species *Certhidea fusca* or *grey warbler finch* known from Darwin's research on the Galapagos Islands.[11] Given that the kind *grey warbler finch* is used in scientific explanation and induction, it satisfies the kind condition (as formalized above).

Next is the clustering condition. Several properties tend to co-occur in member of the kind *grey warbler finch*. As I'll discuss in what follows, these properties include *being sharp-beaked*, *being an eater of small arthropods and nectar*, *being in a dry environment*, and *being grey-green*. In that case, the kind *grey warbler finch* satisfies the clustering condition (as formalized above).

Why do the aforementioned properties tend to co-occur in members of the kind *grey warbler finch*? On the homeostatic property cluster kind theory of species, an essentialist explanation is not available: "in accord with the intrinsic heterogeneity of biological kinds, there is no single phenotypic or genotypic property that could serve as the essence of a species taxon."[12] Instead, Wilson, Barker, and Brigandt argue that "surface features (morphological, physiological, developmental, behavioral) characteristic of a particular species cluster largely in virtue of causally basic features—properties, mechanisms, and so on—that promote species cohesion."[13] These basic

---

[9] See Richard Boyd, "Homeostasis, Species, and Higher Taxa," in *Species: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, 164-168; Robert Wilson, Matthew Barker, and Ingo Brigandt, "When Traditional Essentialism Fails: Biological Natural Kinds," *Philosophical Topics* (2007), 202-204. Note that I don't endorse any particular theory of species in the context of this paper.
[10] Ibid., 202.
[11] Catalogue of Life, *Certhidea fusca*, www.catalogueoflife.org/data/taxon/T4V2.
[12] Robert Wilson, Matthew Barker, and Ingo Brigandt, "When Traditional Essentialism Fails: Biological Natural Kinds," *Philosophical Topics*, 202.
[13] Ibid., 202-3.

features include "common ancestry," "ability of species members to inbreed," "same or similar ecological niche," and "genetic and developmental constraints."[14]

For example, consider the properties *being sharp-beaked* and *being an eater of small arthropods and nectar*. The instantiation of either property creates conditions favorable to the instantiation of the other (among members of the higher-order kind *Aves*).[15] Having a sharp beak is quite useful for eating small arthropods and nectar.[16] Similarly, instantiating the property *being in a dry environment* creates conditions favorable to the instantiation of *being grey-green*. Birds avoiding predators in dry environments will benefit from being grey-green.[17] The properties *being sharp-beaked*, *being an eater of small arthropods and nectar*, *being in a dry environment*, and *being grey-green* cluster in the kind *grey warbler finch* on account of homeostasis. In that case, the kind *grey warbler finch* satisfies the clustering condition (as formalized above).

Homeostatic property cluster kinds are not restricted the natural domain (assuming for the sake of argument that a principled distinction might be made between nature and culture).[18] Being socially constructed is compatible with being a homeostatic property cluster kind, I'll argue that masculinities satisfy the (1) kind condition, (2) clustering condition, and (3) homeostatic condition.

The social construction of masculinity is especially evident in historical perspective. For example, at a distance from masculinities rooted in consumer capitalism, David M. Halperin reports:

---

[14] Ibid., 203.

[15] Peter Grant, *Ecology and Evolution of Darwin's Finches* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017), 116-117.

[16] The specification to biological class is important because instantiating the property *being an eater of small arthropods and nectar* doesn't universally create conditions favorable to instantiating the property *being small beaked*. Birds who eat small arthropods and nectar tend to have sharp beaks as opposed to hooked beaks or short beaks.

[17] Peter Grant, *Ecology and Evolution of Darwin's Finches* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017), 364-371. Furthermore: "Geographical variation in warbler finch colors may possibly be adaptively related to geographical variation in the colors of the dry season vegetation in which they feed," ibid., 374.

[18] For example, Ron Mallon argues that social kinds are homeostatic property cluster kinds in which property co-occurrence is due to complex patterns of representational activity among individuals, see Ron Mallon, *The Construction of Human Kinds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 92-93. While I expect that Mallon would agree that masculinities are homeostatic property cluster kinds, I emphasize that a theory of masculinity needs to explain why certain social kinds such as *incel masculinity* are masculinities, as opposed to other social kinds. Section (§2) provides a candidate explanation.

> In the culture of the military elites of Europe, at least from the ancient world through the Renaissance, normative masculinity often entailed austerity, resistance to appetite, and mastery of the impulse to pleasure […] Those men who refused to rise to the challenge, who abandoned the competitive society of men for the amorous society of women, who pursued a life of pleasure, who made love instead of war – they incarnated the classical stereotype of effeminacy.[19]

In contrast, playboy archetypes link conspicuous consumption to male identity. For example, the eponymous magazine ran a series of advertisements that depicted playboys as wealthy, fashionable, heterosexual, and hedonistic,[20] ultimately establishing a new consumer demographic. Natalie Coulter, working in the field of communication studies, explains:

> The persona of the playboy was not the actual reader […] The playboy persona provided men with a symbolic reference of masculinity that could be used to help them make sense of their place within the shifting cultural landscape of the late 1950s and 1960s. But in doing so, the persona provided new references of masculinity that met the needs of the postwar economy to expand into new markets.[21]

The playboy archetype satisfied the clustering condition as follows:

(1) *Being disposed to believe ideological upward mobility narratives*
(2) *Being a conspicuous consumer*
(3) *Being in conformity with corporate dress codes*
(4) *Being outwardly heterosexual*

Coulter further explains that the playboy ideal was a man who unabashedly expressed his heterosexuality as a consumer, such that "[a]ppreciation of both the female figure and luxurious consumer items were rolled into one."[22] Properties (2) *being a conspicuous consumer* and (4) *being outwardly heterosexual* tended to co-occur, and the homeostatic condition is satisfied as follows.

---

[19] David M. Halperin, "How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality," *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* (2000), 93.
[20] See Natalie Coulter, "Selling the Male Consumer the *Playboy* Way," *Popular Communication* (2014), 144.
[21] Ibid., 147.
[22] Ibid., 149.

Unlike being outwardly heterosexual, being outwardly queer would not have been conducive to a career in corporate America during the "lavender scare" of the 1950s and 1960s. Along these lines, instantiating property (4) *being outwardly heterosexual* created conditions favorable to the instantiation of property (3) *being in conformity with corporate dress codes*. Additionally, considering the role of corporate culture in perpetuating the myth of the American Dream, instantiating property (3) *being in conformity with corporate dress codes* created conditions favorable to the instantiation of property (1) *being disposed to believe ideological upward mobility narratives*. An interesting result here is that instantiating property (4) *being outwardly heterosexual* created conditions favorable to the instantiation of (1) *being disposed to believe ideological upward mobility narratives*.

At this point, I turn to argue that the playboy archetype satisfies the kind condition. To get started, it'll be useful briefly to consider how the kind *grey warbler finch* can be used in explanation and induction. For example, suppose that Ava learns that Birdie is a member of the kind *grey warbler finch*. If Ava also knows that the properties *being sharp-beaked*, *being an eater of small arthropods and nectar*, *being in a dry environment*, and *being grey-green* tend to co-occur in members of the kind *grey warbler finch*, it would be reasonable for Ava to infer that Birdie is sharp-beaked. Of course, Ava could have used the higher-order kind *Aves* to infer that Birdie is sharp-beaked, but that inference would have carried more risk inasmuch as some birds are blunt-beaked.

Similar epistemic points hold with respect to kinds such as *playboy masculinity*. For example, suppose that Jenna and Barry are living together, and Jenna hears that Barry has invited John to visit. Curious, Jenna decides to find John on social media. In addition to a few photos from first-class flights, Jenna notices that John has retweeted content that equates wealth and sexual desirability.[23] At a certain point, Jenna accrues strong enough evidence reasonably to believe that Barry is a member of the kind *playboy masculinity* (or an analogous contemporary masculinity).

To continue the analogy, suppose that Jenna knows that the properties *being disposed to believe ideological upward mobility narratives*, *being a conspicuous consumer*, *being in conformity with corporate dress codes*, and *being outwardly heterosexual* tend to co-occur in members of the kind *playboy masculinity*. Given that Jenna reasonably believes that John is a member of the kind *playboy masculinity*, it would be reasonable for Jenna to predict that John will be outwardly heterosexual on the upcoming visit.

---

[23] There are several reasons to avoid directly quoting this sort of content, but I cite the following as a characteristic tweet (accessed May 2023) that has been viewed over half a million times: https://twitter.com/DanBilzerian/status/1642915650212605954?s=20

Importantly, Jenna could have used the higher-order kind *masculinity* to predict that John will be outwardly heterosexual, but that prediction would have carried more risk inasmuch as masculinities differ with respect heterosexual expression. In particular, while playboys tend to signal heterosexuality as hedonistic consumers, incels tend anonymously to express heterosexuality as aggrieved victims. Indeed, being self-assured is a trait that incels would resentfully associate with "Chads."

A masculinity such as *incel masculinity* satisfies the kind condition just in case it can be used in explanation and induction, regardless of whether it ought to be. Still, I deny that it is generally impermissible to "stereotype" incels and playboys.[24] More generally, while it might seem that making predictions on the basis of social kind membership is wrong *simpliciter*, I think that would be to overextend an otherwise reliable intuition about the wrongness of stereotyping members of marginalized groups.

The explanatory and inductive usefulness of a kind can even be a source of value for its members. For example, consider so-called "gay clones." In lieu of a deep-dive into queer history, I'll note that – as a way to navigate environments in which outward displays of same-gender desire would have increased the risk of homophobic violence – communities of gay men stylized straight masculinities in order to create the clone archetype. Martin P. Levine, who conducted relevant fieldwork in the late 1970s, provides the following report:

> The manner of clones expressed masculinity through such typically macho sign-vehicles as spatial distance, facial inexpressiveness, and loudness […] reserve, aggression, and coarseness in their motions, speech patterns, and facial gestures […] At the same time, they self-consciously differentiated themselves from straight men who might look similarly […] After all, those very men that the clone imitated also manifest the most sharply homophobic attitudes and were perhaps the most likely to be feared for physical violence.[25]

---

[24] On this point, I follow Erin Beeghly, who argues that it is permissible, under certain conditions, to make predictions on the basis of group membership; see Erin Beeghly, "Failing to Treat Persons as Individuals," *Ergo* (2018), 697-700; Erin Beeghly, "What is a Stereotype? What is Stereotyping?" *Hypatia* (2015), 686-688. For further discussion of identity-based social cognition, see Carolina Flores and Elisabeth Camp, "'That's All You Really Are': Centering Identities without Essentialist Beliefs," in *Mind, Language, and Social Hierarchy* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

[25] Martin P. Levine, *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone* (New York University Press: New York and London, 1998), 62. For related philosophical discussion, see Matthew Andler, "Queer and Straight," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Sex and Sexuality*, eds. Clare Chambers, Brian Earp, and Lori Watson (New York: Routledge, 2022).

A speculative upshot here is that property (5) *being disposed to recognize members of the clone kind* is actually part of what it is to be a gay clone,[26] such that the kind *clone masculinity* satisfies the clustering condition as follows:

(5) *Being disposed to recognize members of the clone kind*
(6) *Being a partygoer at underground discos*
(7) *Being in conformity with a "look"*
(8) *Being homosexual or bisexual*

Regarding property (7), gay clones conformed to "looks" such as "athlete" and "woodsman."[27] Levine explains:

> The vast majority of men on the streets [in gay enclaves in major American cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and San Francisco] are dressed in […] four principal looks: working man, lower-class tough, military man, and athlete […] To illustrate, a variant of the lower-class tough look demands a tight black tee shirt; faded, skin-tight, straight-legged Levis; work boots; and a black leather motorcycle jacket. All these styles call for short hair, muscular bodies, mustaches, closely cropped beards, and accessories such as chains and handkerchiefs […] Many social conventions associated with these styles are distinctly homosexual.[28]

Each look required precise interactions with artifacts such as tank tops and hiking boots that would otherwise have been coded as straight. Men who wanted safely to approach other men for sex had reason to become familiar with the aesthetic elements of clone masculinity, just as men who wanted to signal an interest in other men had reason to wear clone looks. Along these lines, the clone archetype satisfies the homeostatic condition as follows.

Threats of homophobic violence created conditions in which instantiating property (8) *being homosexual or bisexual* created conditions favorable to the co-occurrence of properties (5) *being disposed to recognize members of the clone kind* and (7) *being in conformity with a "look."* Men

---

[26] Instead of 'being disposed to recognize members of the kind *clone masculinity* as members of the kind *clone masculinity*', which would quickly become unwieldy, I'll use phrases such as 'being disposed to recognize members of the clone kind'.
[27] Martin P. Levine, *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone* (New York University Press: New York and London, 1998), 58-65.
[28] Ibid., 39.

would wear clone looks to gain entry at disco parties, which were a focal point of urban gay social life at the time.[29] The events were usually "carefully screened,"[30] such that instantiating property (7) *being in conformity with a "look"* created conditions favorable to the instantiation of property (6) *being a partygoer at underground discos*.

I'll note that gay clones would often gather before disco parties to "dish" sexually objectifying gossip and take empathogenic substances.[31] These social practices are not unique to gay culture, but I think that the "camp" of the clone archetype sets in relief the extent to which men are compelled to seek out friendship and intimacy from within the constraints of available masculinities.[32]

2. Masculinity: Gender Structures

A theory of masculinity ought to explain the unity of multiple individual masculinities: in virtue of what could kinds as varied as *clone masculinity* and *incel masculinity* be members of the same higher-order kind *masculinity*? In order to answer this unification question, a theory of masculinity will need also to have the resources to distinguish masculinities from other gender archetypes such as femininities. In this section, I appeal to gender structures in order to explain the unity and distinctness of masculine archetypes.

Gender structures are a type of social structure. With Haslanger, let's say that social structures are constituted by social positions (or nodes) and their relations:

> [A token family system] instantiates a more general structure shared by other families. In a structure, we can distinguish the individual in the system […] from the position within the structure (parent, spouse). That is, considering places – or what are sometimes called *positions* or *nodes* – as objects, we ignore the particular individuals that occupy the places, and focus on the relationships that hold between places.[33]

---

[29] Ibid., 70.

[30] Ibid., 75.

[31] Ibid., 71-73.

[32] For discussion of camp as a response to marginalization, see José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (University of Minnesota Press: London, 1999), 128-135.

[33] Sally Haslanger, "Systemic and Structural Injustice: Is There a Difference?" *Philosophy* (2023), 3-4.

For another example, consider an academic unit such as the Division of Humanities at Saint Louis University in Madrid. An academic unit is a social structure, which is constituted by social positions such as *professor*, *student*, and *administrator*. These social positions are characterized relationally, such that to be an administrator is to stand in certain relations to professors, students, and other administrators. Along these lines, distinct sets of social norms attach to each social position. Individuals who occupy social positions such as *professor*, *student*, and *administrator* tend to regulate their behavior in response to distinct sets of social norms, ideally in ways that facilitate coordinated activity and improve the social structure itself.[34]

Gender structures are also constituted by social positions. For example, Lakȟóta gender positions include *woman*, *man*, and *wíŋtke*. Margaret Robinson explains that *wíŋtke* social roles are assigned to individuals, "identified as male at birth who later combine masculine and feminine."[35] On the latter point, Robinson explains that "*wíŋtke* engaged in women's crafts, raised children, engaged in warfare as men did, and had sexual relationships with men."[36]

A gender structure is binary to the extent that it is constituted by an exclusively female-coded social position and an exclusively male-coded social position. Social positions in binary gender structures can arguably be characterized in terms of hierarchy involving perceived reproductive features.[37] Colonial gender structures are binary, making claim to universality through the misrepresentation, erasure, and destruction of indigenous gender structures.[38]

With this sketch at hand, I turn to consider the causal-historical relations of norm adherence, failed-adherence, selective adherence, and reinterpretation (as mentioned in the introduction). To begin, causal-historical relations between masculine archetypes and male-coded social norms can involve processes of *adherence*. Let's say that adherent masculinities are characteristically enacted in ways that successfully follow and thereby reinforce male-coded social norms. The playboy archetype is an example of a masculinity rooted in adherence.

---

[34] See Robin Zheng, "What is My Role in Changing the System? A New Model of Responsibility for Structural Injustice," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* (2018), 873-875.

[35] Margaret Robinson, "Two-Spirit Identity in a Time of Gender Fluidity," *Journal of Homosexuality* (2020), 1678.

[36] Ibid., 1679.

[37] See Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be," in *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*, 227-235. My point here is neither about the nature of gender identity nor the meaning of natural language terms such as 'woman' but rather the membership conditions of social positions in binary gender structures; for related discussion, see Elizabeth Barnes, "Gender and Gender Terms," *Noûs* (2020), 711-713.

[38] See Maria Lugones, "The Coloniality of Gender" in *The Palgrave Handbook on Gender and Development*, ed. Wendy Harcourt (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 27-32.

Second, causal-historical relations between masculine archetypes and male-coded social norms can involve processes of *non-adherence*. Let's say that non-adherent masculinities are characteristically enacted in ways that reinforce male-coded social norms though the effects of non-adherence. For example, incel activity on the "manosphere" is a response to status hierarchies that reward adherence to dominant male-coded social norms, which hold that men ought to have muscles and money. The extensive online discourse among incels reinforces those same male-coded social norms. More specifically, incels mistake the aforementioned social norms for biologically fixed aspects of human sexuality,[39] reasoning as follows: "Men feel pressure to be physically strong because women are evolutionarily determined to be attracted to physically strong men."

Third, causal-historical relations between masculine archetypes and male-coded social norms can involve processes of "co-identification" or *selective compliance*. Let's say that co-identified masculinities are characteristically enacted in ways that reinforce some and disrupt other male-coded social norms. The clone archetype is a co-identified masculinity. Gay clones not only interacted with straight masculinities "as a new kind of camp," in which unfamiliar social meanings were attached to features traditionally associated with straight men, but also "as a vigorous assertion of a newfound, and passionately embraced successful masculinity."[40] Moral ambivalence tends to be an apt response to co-identified masculinities.

Fourth, causal-historical relations between masculine archetypes and male-coded social norms can involve processes of "disidentification."[41] Let's say that disidentified masculinities are characteristically enacted in ways that disrupt some male-coded social norms through disidentification, which José Esteban Muñoz explains as follows:

> [D]isidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its in escapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this "working on and against" is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within.[42]

---

[39] See Debbie Ging, "Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere," *Men and Masculinities* (2019), 11-12.
[40] Martin P. Levine, *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone* (New York University Press: New York and London, 1998), 29.
[41] The concept of disidentification is from José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (University of Minnesota Press: London, 1999).
[42] Ibid., 11-12.

For example, considering butch expression,[43] Jack Halberstam argues that "female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity," such that female masculinity is "a queer subject position that can successfully challenge hegemonic models of gender conformity."[44] While butch masculinity is causally-historically related to male-coded social norms, I emphasize the ontological significance of disidentification: queer/lesbian cultures have reinterpreted and redeployed male-coded social norms in ways that make it impossible to understand butch masculinity through the frame of adherence. Indeed, Halberstam explains:

> [M]ale and female masculinities are constantly involved in an ever-shifting pattern of influences […] If we shift the flow of power and influence, we can easily imagine a plethora of new masculinities that do not simply feed back into the static loop that makes maleness plus power into the formula for abuse but that re-create masculinity on the model of female masculinity [in ways that] transform the mechanisms of masculinity and produce new constellations of embodiment, power, and desire.[45]

At this point, an answer to the unification question is available. On my view, kinds as varied as *playboy masculinity*, *incel masculinity*, *clone masculinity,* and *butch masculinity* are members of the same higher-order kind *masculinity* in virtue of being causally-historically related to gender structures via processes of adherence, failed-adherence, co-identification, and/or disidentification with respect to male-coded social norms.

3. Alternative Theories of Masculinity

In order to provide some additional traction on the theory of masculinity developed in this paper, it'll be useful briefly to consider alternative theories of masculinity. To begin, I extrapolate a dispositional theory of gender archetypes from Jennifer McKitrick's dispositional theory of gender identity. McKitrick argues that gender identity is a matter of (i) having certain dispositions to

---

[43] For readers not yet familiar with butch expression, here is a description from Gayle Rubin: "*Butch* is the lesbian vernacular term for women who are more comfortable with masculine gender codes, styles, or identities than with feminine ones. The term encompasses individuals with a broad range of investments in 'masculinity.' It includes, for example, women who are not at all interested in male gender identities, but who use traits associated with masculinity to signal their lesbianism or to communicate their desire to engage in the kinds of active or initiatory sexual behaviors that in this society are allowed or expected from men," see Gayle Rubin, "Of Catamites and Kings: Reflections of Butch, Gender, and Boundaries," in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 472.

[44] Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 1 and 9.

[45] Ibid., 276.

behavior that are (ii) socially coded as feminine or masculine in relevant contexts. These dispositions to behavior include "modes of dress, posture and mannerisms, productive and leisure time activities, styles of communication and social interaction."[46] For example, on McKitrick's view, an individual who is predominately disposed to feminine-coded postures, leisure activities, and styles of communication would be a woman (viz. in social contexts in which the dispositions were coded as feminine).

Because dispositionalism about gender identity analyzes categories such as *man* in terms of masculine-coded behaviors, I worry that the theory might not have conceptual space for men who are less masculine than some women. McKitrick agrees with the inference, but she argues that it is not a counterexample as the dispositional theory of gender identity has conceptual space for feminine *male* individuals and masculine *female* individuals (in which McKitrick uses 'male' and 'female' to refer sex as opposed to gender).[47] Registering this disagreement, I think that McKitrick's dispositional theory is especially well-suited to analyze gender archetypes.

A dispositional theory of gender archetypes would hold that being feminine or masculine is a matter of (i) having certain dispositions to behavior that are (ii) socially coded as feminine or masculine in relevant contexts. To avoid circularity, it is important that the latter condition is satisfied just in case the relevant dispositions are *socially represented* as feminine or masculine.

While I agree with McKitrick that dispositionalism has resources to explain the variability of gender archetypes across contexts,[48] I'd like to consider the relative stability of gender archetypes such as *clone masculinity* within contexts. On this point, let's say that a masculinity can be described as stable to the extent that it has a property profile that remains constant across time within a context.

As discussed in (§1), the kind *clone masculinity* could be used to signal queer desire: enacting clone masculinity involved wearing looks that other clones could use to track homosexual interest. More speculatively, individuals who enacted clone masculinity signaled finer-grained sexual desires via interactions with specific features of the gender archetype. For example, styled with tight-fitting jeans worn in Greenwich Village, a light blue handkerchief would signal an interest in oral sex,[49] but the same handkerchief wouldn't signal anything if worn with pleated khakis.

---

[46] Jennifer McKitrick, "A Dispositional Account of Gender," *Philos Stud* (2015), 2581.
[47] Ibid., 2586-2587.
[48] See ibid., 2582-2585.
[49] Martin P. Levine, *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone* (New York University Press: New York and London, 1998), 66.

I argue that the kind *clone masculinity* could be used to signal queer desire because it was relatively stable. Gay clones could recognize other members of the kind *clone masculinity* on the basis of stylistic features, but it might not have been feasible to recognize other gay clones (or enact clone masculinity) had the kind been unstable. Training attention on a stable property profile, gay clones learned reliably to infer kind membership, which was an especially important skill in contexts in which gay bashing was not uncommon. On this point, Levine argues that the "potential confusion between gay clones and the working-class men they imitated […] provides the origins of 'gaydar' or gay radar."[50]

In (§1) and (§2), I argued in favor of theory of masculinity on which being disposed to recognize members of the kind *clone masculinity* is part of what it is to be a gay clone. The same does not hold on the dispositionalist view. While dispositionalism is compatible with members of the kind *clone masculinity* having exceptional gaydar, the theory does not build the disposition into the gender archetype inasmuch as being disposed to recognize members of the kind *clone masculinity* is not socially coded as masculine.

At this point, I turn to consider R.W. Connell's canonical analysis of masculinities as *configurations of gendered practice*.[51] Connell argues that *hegemonic masculinity* "embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women."[52] I agree with Connell that masculinities are indexed to gender structures, which Connell describes as "structures of social relations […] among people and groups organized through the reproductive arena [… of] sexual arousal and intercourse, childbirth and infant care, bodily sex difference and similarity."[53]

Hegemonic masculinity varies across axes of power such as race, class, and sexuality.[54] On this point, while Connell argues that "[h]egemonic masculinity establishes its hegemony partly by its claim to embody the power of reason,"[55] she also emphasizes that rationality is a contested feature

---

[50] Ibid., 62. For related discussion, see Nicholas O. Rule, "Perceptions of Sexual Orientation from Minimal Cues," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2017).

[51] See R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2005); R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society* (2005).

[52] R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2005), 77.

[53] Ibid., 71 and 72.

[54] See ibid., 75.

[55] Ibid., 164.

of hegemonic masculinity inasmuch as meritocratic assessments of rationality can cut against the interests of unjust class structures.[56] Important here is the work of Tommy J. Curry, who explains that Black masculinities are often harmfully misrepresented as reproductions of hegemonic white masculinities.[57] To the contrary, Curry explains that "Black manhood is a proactive and adaptive identity that anticipates and reflects upon the obstacles and barriers placed before Black men."[58]

Connell argues against projects that aim to describe masculinity as "a coherent object about which a generalizing science can be produced."[59] Pace Connell, I think that the existence of multiple masculinities points to the existence of an encompassing higher-order kind, and I've developed an alternative structural theory in order to answer the unification question: *masculinity* is a higher-order kind, such that individual masculinities (e.g., *clone masculinity* and *incel masculinity*) are homeostatic property cluster kinds related to male-coded social norms via processes of adherence, failed-adherence, selective adherence, and/or disidentification.

4. Conclusion: Ameliorative Masculinities

Here I return to the incel problem, which can be productively described as follows: incel masculinity is "on offer" to self-identified incels, and normatively preferable masculinities are not. Let's say that a masculinity is "on offer" to an individual just in case the individual can sustainably enact the masculinity. For example, I think it's telling that self-identified incels fixate on the musculature, affluence, and sociability of "Chads." Incels are aggrieved on account of having been denied the social status that comes with these traits. The aggrievement is difficult to dislodge because incels rely on the attitude in order to make sense of their experiences: "[u]nderneath it all is a deep well of confusion and disorientation."[60] None of this is exculpatory, but it does make evident the troublesome fact that *incel masculinity* provides many men with a route towards a coherent sense of self, which is part of the reason why *incel masculinity* can be sustainably enacted.

---

[56] Ibid. 180-181.

[57] Tommy J. Curry, *The Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood* (Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2017), 211-217.

[58] Tommy J. Curry, "Decolonizing the Intersection: Black Male Studies as a Critique of Intersectionality's Indebtedness to Subculture of Violence Theory" in *Critical Psychology Praxis: Psychosocial non-alignment to modernity/coloniality*, ed. Robert Beshara (New York: Routledge, 2021), 150. Thanks to Lionel K. McPherson for the reference.

[59] R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2005), 67.

[60] Richard V. Reeves, *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male Is Struggling, Why It Matters, and What to Do about It* (Washington, D.C., 2022), 122.

To conclude, I'd like to register the possibility of *ameliorative masculinities*: pro-social masculine archetypes that are "on offer" in the sense described above. The idea here is to create environments in which men at risk of enacting harmful masculinities have access to alternative socially intelligible ways of being a man. In terms of implementation, I think that ameliorative masculinities ought to be developed in a bottom-up fashion via the processes of selective adherence and disidentification. There is so much to explore here, which I leave to future philosophical work. In the meantime, I emphasize that the social conditions underlying any imperative of critique also demand a reimagination of what masculinity could be.

References

Andler, Matthew (2022). Queer and straight. In Chambers, Clare & Earp, Brian & Watson, Lori (eds.) *The Routledge handbook of the philosophy of sex and sexuality* (p. 117-130). Routledge.

Barnes, Elizabeth (2020). Gender and gender terms. *Noûs* 54(3), 704-730.

Beeghly, Erin (2018). Failing to treat persons as individuals. *Ergo* 5(26), 687-711.

Beeghly, Erin (2015). What is a stereotype? What is stereotyping? *Hypatia* 30(4), 675-691.

Bettcher, Talia Mae (2009). Trans identities and first-person authority. In Laurie J. Shrage (ed.) *"You've changed": Sex reassignment and personal identity* (p. 98-120). Oxford University Press.

Boyd, Richard (1999). Homeostasis, species, and higher taxa. In R.A. Wilson (ed.) *Species: New interdisciplinary essays* (p. 141-185). MIT Press.

Briggs, R. A., & B. R. George (2023). *What even is gender?* Routledge.

Carl, P. (2020). *Becoming a man*. Simon and Schuster.

Catalogue of Life, *Certhidea fusca*, www.catalogueoflife.org/data/taxon/T4V2.

Connell, R.W. (2005). *Masculinities*. University of California Press.

Connell, R.W., & Messerschmidt, James (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender and Society* 19(6), 829-859.

Coulter, Natalie (2014). Selling the male consumer the *Playboy* way. *Popular Communication* 12(3), 139-152.

Curry, Tommy J. (2021). Decolonizing the intersection: Black male studies as a critique of intersectionality's indebtedness to subculture of violence theory. In Robert Beshara (ed.) *Critical psychology praxis: Psychosocial non-alignment to modernity/coloniality* (p. 132-154). Routledge.

Curry, Tommy J. (2017). *The man-not: Race, class, genre, and the dilemmas of black manhood*. Temple University Press.

Dembroff, Robin (2020). Beyond binary: Genderqueer as critical gender kind. *Philosophers' Imprint* 20(9), 1-23.

Flores, Carolina & Camp, Elisabeth (forthcoming). "That's all you really are": Centering identities without essentialist beliefs. In Sally Haslanger et al. (eds.) *Mind, Language, and Social Hierarchy*. Oxford University Press.

Ging, Debbie (2019). Alphas, betas, and incels: Theorizing the masculinities of the manosphere. *Men and Masculinities* 22(4), 638-657.

Grant, Peter (2017). *Ecology and evolution of Darwin's finches*. Princeton University Press.

Halberstam, J. (1998). *Female masculinity*. Duke University Press.

Halperin, David (2020). How to do the history of male homosexuality. *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 6(1), 87-123.

Haslanger, Sally (2023). Systemic and structural injustice: Is there a difference? *Philosophy* 98(1), 1-27.

Haslanger, Sally (2016). Theorizing with a purpose: The many kinds of sex. In Catherine Kendig (ed.) *Natural kinds and classification in scientific practice* (p. 129-144). Routledge.

Haslanger, Sally (2012). Gender and race: (What) are they? (What) do we want them to be? In Haslanger, Sally *Resisting reality*: *Social construction and social critique* (p. 221-247). Oxford University Press.

Jenkins, Katharine (2019). Toward an account of gender identity. *Ergo* (5)27, 713-744.

Levine, Martin P. (1998). *Gay macho: The life and death of the homosexual clone*. New York University Press.

Lugones, Maria (2016). The coloniality of gender. In Wendy Harcourt (ed.) *The Palgrave handbook on gender and development* (p. 13-33). Palgrave Macmillan.

Mallon, Ron (2016). *The construction of human kinds*. Oxford University Press.

McKitrick, Jennifer (2015). A dispositional account of gender. *Philosophical Studies* 172(10), 2575-2589.

Muñoz, José Esteban (1999). *Disidentifications: Queers of color and the performance of politics*. University of Minnesota Press.

Reeves, Richard V. (2022). *Of boys and men: Why the modern male is struggling, why it matters, and what to do about it*. Brookings Institution Press.

Robinson, Margaret (2020). Two-spirit identity in a time of gender fluidity. *Journal of Homosexuality* 67(12), 1675-1690.

Rubin, Gayle (2006). Of Catamites and Kings: Reflections of Butch, Gender, and Boundaries. In Stryker, Susan & Whittle, Stephen (eds.) *The transgender studies reader* (p. 471-481). Routledge.

Rule, Nicholas O. (2017). Perceptions of sexual orientation from minimal cues. *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 46(1), 129-139.

Srinivasan, Amia (2021). *The right to sex: Feminism in the twenty-first century*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Táíwò, Olúfẹ́mi O. (2020). Stoicism (as emotional compression) is emotional labor. *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 6(2), 1-25.

Wilson, R., Barker, M., & Brigandt, I. (2007). When traditional essentialism fails: Biological natural kinds. *Philosophical Topics* 35(1/2), 189-215.

Zheng, Robin (2018). What is my role in changing the system? A new model of responsibility for structural injustice. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 21(4), 869-885.