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The Five Stages of Masculinity: A New Model for Understanding Masculinities

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The Five Stages of Masculinity: A New Model for Understanding Masculinities

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Abstract

The article uses the so-called “crisis of masculinity” as a jumping-off point for proposing a new model for understanding masculinities called the Five Stages of Masculinity. The five stages outlined in the article are: Stage 1, Unconscious Masculinity; Stage 2, Conscious Masculinity; Stage 3, Critical Masculinities; Stage 4, Multiple Masculinities; Stage 5, Beyond Masculinities. A content analysis of news and magazine articles is provided to give some initial indication as to the proportion of public conversations taking place at each stage. The article concludes by discussing the implications of the Five Stages of Masculinity for the study of men and masculinities, as well as some new thoughts on the nature of the crisis of masculinity via a mobilization of Giorgio Agamben’s concept of the “state of exception.”

Keywords: crisis of masculinity, stages of masculinities, content analysis

Los Cinco Estadios de la Masculinidad: Un Modelo Nuevo para Entender las Masculinidades

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Resumen

El artículo utiliza la llamada "crisis de la masculinidad" como punto de partida para proponer un nuevo modelo para la comprensión de las masculinidades, este nuevo modelo se concreta en cinco etapas. Las cinco etapas descritas en el artículo son: Etapa 1, masculinidad inconsciente; Etapa 2, masculinidad consciente; Etapa 3, masculinidades críticas; Etapa 4, masculinidades múltiples; Etapa 5, más allá de las masculinidades. De este modo, se proporciona un análisis de contenido de noticias y artículos de revistas para dar alguna indicación inicial como indicador de la proporción de conversaciones públicas que tienen lugar en cada etapa. El artículo concluye con un análisis de las implicaciones de las cinco etapas de la masculinidad para el estudio de los hombres y las masculinidades, así como algunas nuevas ideas sobre la naturaleza de la crisis de la masculinidad a través de una reformulación del concepto de Giorgio Agamben: "estado de excepción".

Palabras clave: crisis de la masculinidad, estadios de la masculinidad, análisis de contenido

The idea that masculinity is “in crisis” has taken on a mantra-like quality in both popular and academic domains. This discourse of crisis is aided by the fact that it can mean different things to different people, which results in constituencies with wholly different—and typically perceived as mutually exclusive—worldviews both confidently claiming that masculinity is in crisis. James Heartfield (2002) notes three types of crisis discourse: first, masculinity perceived as pathological (for example, Horrocks, 1996); second, the perception of the death of male pride (for example, Faludi, 1999); third, skeptical responses to crisis discourse (for example, Bruegel, 2000). Heartfield’s title, *There is No Masculinity Crisis* contains his argument in a nutshell, but even if we do not want to deny the reality of the crisis in totality, we can at least see that the conversation is far from new, and has indeed be going on for a long time (Kimmel, 1987).

The crisis of masculinity is used here as a jumping-off point for a new model for thinking about masculinity called the Five Stages of Masculinity (FSM). The model is developmental in nature, and shows the different ways masculinity is framed: both at the macro level (commonly-held worldviews, such as the three types of crisis discourse outlined above), and at the micro level (how an individual can move through FSM on his or her understanding of masculinity). FSM is then, in some ways, a “crisis map.” The crisis is most evident at the lower stages of the model and less so at the higher stages; as such, the map leads us away from crisis discourse to a masculinity that is not in crisis.

The following is divided into four parts. First, a discussion of previous models of identity stage development that have paved the way for FSM and the nature of stage structure within FSM. Second, an outline of the specific character of each of the five stages. Third, a preliminary content analysis demonstrating how each of the five stages can be seen in recent news and magazine articles. Fourth, a closing discussion of the implications of FSM for the study of men and masculinities, as well as some new thoughts on the nature of crisis discourse via a mobilization of Giorgio Agamben’s concept of the “state of exception” (Agamben, 2005)¹.

Stage Development

Existing Stage Models

Identity stage development models have been employed for many years in various contexts, and FSM has echoes of these, albeit not explicitly employing them. For example, William E. Cross (1971) formulated “Nigrescence,” which proposed stages of: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment². Clearly, Cross sought to outline the development of a minority identity, which is at odds with the current context of masculinity which is normatively dominant. A closer analogy is the white identity development model formulated by Rita Hardiman (1982):

(1) Lack of Social Consciousness which is characterized by a lack of awareness of racial differences and racism; (2) Acceptance, marked by the acceptance of White racist beliefs and behaviors and the unconscious identification with Whiteness; (3) Resistance, characterized by the rejection of internalized racist beliefs and messages and rejection of Whiteness; (4) Redefinition, marked by the development of a new White identity that transcends racism; (5) Internalization, marked by the integration of the new White identity into all other aspects of the identity and into consciousness and behavior³.

Cross (1971) proved influential in the realm of identity development in the gendered domain. Nancy E. Downing and Kristin L. Roush (1985) proposed the following stages in the development of women’s construction of feminist identity: passive acceptance, revelation, embeddedness-emanation, synthesis, and active commitment; a model which has itself been mobilized and extended on numerous occasions (for example, Bargad & Hyde, 1991; Erchull, et. al., 2009). The intersection of race, gender and staged development has also been explored in the context of masculine identity (Scott & Robinson, 2001, p. 418). Further still, the development of masculine identity (albeit not necessarily formulated as stages) has been a preoccupation of the psychological study of men and masculinity since the inception of this field, before that in the study of sex roles, and more

recently to a lesser extent in Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities in the humanities and social sciences.

FSM also shares some commonality with another staged model: that of Ken Wilber’s integral theory, which spills over from the developmental into the evolutionary (and thus inhabiting a liminal space between academic and new age thinking). Wilber builds upon Jean Gebser (1985), who suggested evolution unfolded via the following stages: “the archaic, magical, mythical, mental, and integral” (p. 42). Wilber then provides various other lines of development including: the “Great Nest of Being” built on the following trajectory: matter/physics, biology/life, psychology/mind, theology/soul, mysticism/spirit (Wilber, 2000, p. 444); egocentric, ethnocentric and worldcentric (Wilber, 2006, p. 6); and the stages of spiral dynamics developed by Don Edward Beck and Christopher C. Cowan (1996). Integral theory does not see itself as a gendered theory, however its masculine weighting has been noted (Gelfer, 2014; Wright, 1995, 1996).

The Nature of Stages in the Five Stages of Masculinity

In this initial formulation, FSM is a hypothesis. FSM starts with normative and unchallenged masculinity and works its way up through various levels of critical awareness and analysis. As we rise through the stages, three things happen: first, each stage is inhabited by a decreasing number of people; second, each stage has characteristics that become increasingly complex and more nuanced; third, each stage reveals more methods for identifying and mitigating normative masculinity or—to touch base with the introductory discussion—the crisis of masculinity. A quantitative study of FSM is currently under development to test the accuracy of the FSM hypothesis: specifically, the relative number of people at each stage. The penultimate section below makes some tentative steps in this direction by providing a content analysis of news and media articles sorted by stage.

Before we progress, an important caveat: These are not *the* stages of masculinity but, rather, *some* stages of masculinity. Moreover, the stages are porous and overlapping. When visualizing the stages it is tempting to imagine a triangle akin to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). The overall direction of this is sound, but it is too crude. A more useful way of visualizing the stages is a pyramid-shaped Venn diagram, with different-sized circles indicating numbers of inhabitants and clear points of overlap

(Figure 1). In reality, the stages are more numerous, their characteristics more multifaceted, and their relation less linear. But for the sake of simplicity, the Venn pyramid will serve the purpose.

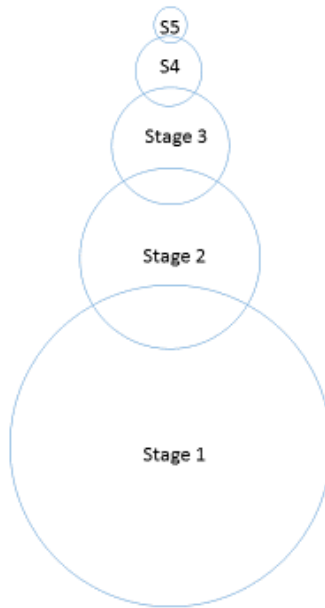


Figure 1. The Five Stages of Masculinity Venn Pyramid

The overlapping and porous nature of the stages also points to the reality of simultaneously existing at different stages in different domains in a way similar to the lines and levels of Wilber’s integral theory (Wilber, 2006, pp. 62-64). Another model that normalizes occupying different parts of FSM is the “multiple self-aspects framework” which shows that multiple identities are an inherent part of the ostensibly unitary self, and that we are all “composed of multiple, contextually activated selves” (McConnell, 2011, p. 4). Further still, Hubert Hermans and Harry Kempen (1993) refer to the “dialogical self” in which the self comprises various elements that are in continual dialogue with each other, that permit “one and the same

individual to live in a multiplicity of worlds with each having its own author telling a story relatively independent of the authors of the other worlds” (p. 46). Within the context of masculine identity, holding different simultaneous positions may even be inevitable (Gelfer, 2012, pp. 134-135). FSM not only allows for this kind of multiplicity, it is a fundamental part of its trajectory (as will be explored in the discussion below of Stage 4 and 5).

A further area of hypothesis is that most people will require moving through each stage as their identity develops over time. This also has precedent in Wilber’s integral theory with the notion of “transcend and include” (Wilber, 2006, pp. 128-129) in which levels (or, here, “stages”) of personal development eclipse the previous level, thus honoring the partial truth claims revealed within them rather than negating them. Here transcend and include works in two ways: first, how each individual may pass through each stage on their path of identity development; second, how those at higher stages can view the claims of those at lower stages as being relevant to their stage rather than negating them (as will be explored in the discussion below of Stages 3).

As FSM is outlined below there is an inverse proportion of discussion about the stages. In other words, Stage 1 is hypothesized to represent the largest number of people, but is discussed the least; Stage 5 is hypothesized to represent the smallest number of people, but is discussed the most. This imbalance exists because the lower stages are more familiar and have been discussed in the subject literature at length, whereas the higher stages (at least as they are proposed in FSM) have been little discussed, and therefore require greater elaboration simply to articulate FSM in its most basic sense, which is the ultimate objective of this article.

The Five Stages: An Overview

Stage 1: Unconscious Masculinity

Stage 1 is defined as “unconscious masculinity,” which means that the standard social construction of masculinity has been adopted by someone—both men and women—without them even thinking about it. Stage 1 is the site where most typical analyses of masculinity take place: normativity masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, homophobia and patriarchy. Stage 1

thinking is responsible for a good deal of the processes in which masculinity negatively impacts the world: violence, domination, power, economics and the overall mismanagement of the environment.

More people inhabit Stage 1 than any other stage and its mitigation is an enormous challenge for reasons beyond its statistical significance. Chiefly, in Stage 1, normativity, patriarchy and so on are seen as intuitive, common sense, and natural to the point where they are completely internalized and operate under the radar of consciousness and awareness. In order to engage a critical analysis of masculinity at Stage 1, one first needs to bring these issues to consciousness, which is a challenge in itself. Stage 1 masculinity is unconsciously passed on from generation to generation, and has been doing so for thousands of years.

The crisis of masculinity operates at Stage 1, but not—on the ground—by using the language of crisis discourse. For example, one can see the crisis at work in the theme of instability of men's identity as workers in the face of globalization (Blossfeld, Mills & Bernardi, 2006). However, to use the language of crisis discourse in such a context necessitates an awareness of the issue of masculinity that is absent at Stage 1.

Stage 2: Conscious Masculinity

Stage 2 is defined as “conscious masculinity” and has the most numerous permutations of all the stages. The common thread running through these different permutations is the awareness that there is a level of regulation that takes place around contemporary masculinity. The understanding of that regulation shifts depending on which form of conscious masculinity is embodied. In this initial formulation, FSM divides Stage 2 into four sub-groups: Naturalists, Men's Rights Advocates, Spiritualists and Agnostics.

Naturalists are similar to people at Stage 1 inasmuch as they perceive masculinity as intuitive, common sense, and “natural.” However, this is a conclusion drawn from contemplation rather than the blind embodiment of unconscious masculinity. Naturalists often believe masculinity is being denied and neutered by modern society. One clear example of a Naturalist is Harvey C. Mansfield whose book *Manliness* (Mansfield, 2006) seeks to recapture manliness by celebrating its occurrences from as far back as the classical Greeks through to Humphrey Bogart in *Casablanca*. Naturalists tend to have a conservative vision of masculinity⁴ that upholds the

unconscious power dynamics of Stage 1 and are firmly rooted in the crisis discourse of the death-of-male-pride variety.

Men's rights advocates identify certain problems with masculinity (such as physical and mental health, education, homelessness, violence, and incarceration) and perceive these to be ignored. Men's rights advocates often believe masculinity is being attacked by feminists (Flood, 2004) and are as such considered to be conservative. Certainly, there is a good deal of clear anti-feminist rhetoric in the men's rights domain, but it is not exclusively so. Indeed, one area that has been glossed over in previous analyses of what are labelled here as Stage 2 subgroups is the internal differences and even schisms between these groups⁵.

Spiritualists are similar to Naturalists inasmuch as believing in an authentic masculinity that should be recovered. They believe models for masculinity can be found in holy texts or more general spiritual principles. Spiritualists often believe masculinity is being denied by a society that has lost its spiritual way. The worldviews and cultural references of Spiritualists differ widely. At one end of the spectrum we can locate a conservative form of masculinity based on Biblical principles, such as the evangelical men's ministry of John Eldredge (2001). Occupying a curiously similar—yet non-Christian—domain we can find Spiritualists such as David Deida (2004) who mixes archetypal masculinity with a form of tantric sexuality. At the other end of the political spectrum we find Spiritualists such as Matthew Fox (2008), who mobilizes a spiritual archetypal masculinity but with a feminist political worldview.

Agnostics are a more general category of people who share certain beliefs with the above forms of conscious masculinity, but not all (in particular, they are put off by the typically conservative agenda). Agnostics generally believe there is a problem with masculinity, but struggle to fully articulate the nature of that problem, let alone a solution.

Stage 2 has the potential to overlap with Stage 1. For example, a men's rights advocate may have a conscious and detailed analytical framework explaining some social aspects of masculinity (such as health) yet operate unconsciously in regard to other aspects (such as fatherhood). Stage overlaps are examples of holding simultaneously different positions, as discussed above. Stage overlaps should, then, not be considered in a negative light. Indeed, areas of overlap are potentially the most fruitful in

terms of personal change and movement up the stages. Areas of overlap also muddy the waters as to which “camp” a person belongs to: the blurring of these boundaries and the new alliances that can be made as a result are also fruitful.

Stage 3: Critical Masculinities

Stage 3 is defined as “critical masculinities” and is largely aligned with feminism. Given there are various forms of feminist thinking, there are also various forms of critical masculinities. Some key commonalities that can be found among critical masculinities are: society operates via patriarchy, which oppresses women; society operates via hegemony, which oppresses atypical men (such as gay men and straight men who resist patriarchy); masculinity is not natural, rather socially-constructed; masculinity is not singular, rather plural masculinities (in other words, changeable). Depending on where we are in Stage 3, crisis discourse canvasses “masculinity perceived as pathological” and “skeptical responses to crisis discourse.” There is distinct commonality here with Hardiman’s Stages 3 and 4 of Whiteness, where an individual comes into awareness of the privileges they enjoy (and the discrimination they have no doubt committed) and seeks to rectify this.

Critical masculinities opens up a sophisticated level of analysis by doing justice—amongst many other things—to the nature of systemic power. This provides our first clear example of how thinking at different stages can often be at cross purposes, and consequently why the arguments between stages seem to never be resolved. In this example we see that Stage 3 looks at patriarchy as a systemic tool for power. However, men’s rights advocates at Stage 2 tend to think about men’s power not at the systemic level, rather the individual level. From Stage 2, men’s power under patriarchy is not a compelling narrative when considered in light of their friends who may be suffering inter-generational unemployment and ill health. In short, Stage 2 privileges individual experience whereas Stage 3 privileges systemic experience, and from their relative stages, both are correct. Of course, both people at Stage 2 and 3 have a responsibility to identify that the other is speaking from a different position. However, following Wilber’s “transcend and include,” it is Stage 3 that should have a greater ability of appreciating the position of Stage 2, not the other way around.

But for all its powerful analyses, Stage 3 has blind spots. As just stated, Stage 3 needs to do a better job of acknowledging the individual experiences of those at Stage 2⁶. As alluded to in the discussion of Stage 2, Stage 3 also does a suboptimal job of identifying the nuances of Stage 2, and tends to lump together all its sub-groups rather than acknowledging its constituent parts and internal schisms. This is something of a paradox, because while one of the characteristics of Stage 3 is the acknowledgement of plural masculinities, there is an odd resistance to acknowledging the existence of this plurality at Stage 2.

A further limiting factor to Stage 3 is a tendency towards essentialism. The category of “man” and “woman”—so fundamental to feminist thought—assumes a commonality within those categories that can be hard to justify. Indeed, in Stage 3 those categories of “man” and “woman” can look suspiciously like Stage 2 Naturalists⁷. Sometimes, those Stage 3 essentialisms may be strategic (such as Luce Irigaray’s *mimesis*), sometimes they are not (Stone, 2004).

Stage 4: Multiple Masculinities

Stage 4 is defined as “multiple masculinities” and is largely aligned with queer theory. FSM interprets queer theory as broader than the experiences of LGBTQ people, instead using it as a way to trouble categories for people of any and every sexual orientation. Stage 4 is thus based on three fundamentals: first, masculinity can mean anything to anyone (including being embodied by women); second, masculinity is defined and categorized through power dynamics such as patriarchy and hegemony as a way of regulating people; third, by rejecting categorization we subvert regulation and power.

Thanks to the decades of struggle by LGBTQ people, queer theory has opened up an extraordinary number of possibilities. As such, Stage 4 sees a temporal shift in orientation. Stage 1—being unconscious of the construction of masculinity—is largely atemporal in conscious thought and historical in unconscious thought. Stage 2 is firmly historical in its perception of masculinity. Stage 3 is also largely historical as its project is one of demonstrating the historical norm of patriarchy: it also has a secondary focus on the present, exemplified by a discourse of equality and

gender mainstreaming. Stage 4 starts with a focus on the present, but is ultimately future-orientated. The queerness of Stage 4 is about opening up possibilities, and not just modest possibilities that tinker with the status quo, rather fully Utopian possibilities (Drucker, 2015). At Stage 4, no longer is there masculinity and femininity (or even, really, men and women). Instead, each individual dwells in a category of sex and gender as unique as their fingerprint. Crisis discourse is not particularly important at Stage 4, unless its inhabitants are noting the problem people at lower stages have with Stage 4 masculinities. Indeed, as well as a temporal shift, Stage 4 is also the first stage that points away from the crisis (whichever of its three varieties) to some altogether different territory.

Despite the fact that queer theory is so potent, it is also wildly under-utilized, due to the common perception that it is only about LGBTQ people. The experiences of LGBTQ people are simply an amplification of the masculinity regulation that happens to everyone. All straight-identifying men should have an interest in this because it is only a few short steps from men being shut down for having a queer sexual orientation to being shut down for holding any counter-normative position: The “queer issue” is, therefore, not a “queer issue,” rather an “everybody issue.” As Marcella Althaus-Reid says, “Let us remember here that the Genderfucker may also be straight” (Althaus-Reid, 2003, p. 68).

There are a couple of drawbacks to queer theory, and with it Stage 4. First, despite its promises for all people, it is difficult for people who are not “gay” to fully get behind it. Second, queer theory and Stage 4 can also be subject to slipping into essentialism, which runs counter to the spirit of Stage 4. For example, it is inconsistent to work against the regulatory function of gender and sexuality categorization, yet routinely describe people as “straight” or “cis,” when this serves little purpose other than to place people in a category based on their gender and sexuality. Stage 4 also leaves us with a lingering question: If masculinity can mean anything you want it to mean, does it have any meaning at all?

Stage 5: Beyond Masculinities

Stage 5 is defined as “beyond masculinities” and begins to tackle the fundamentally ontological question posed by the implications of Stage 4. It

is hypothesized that very few people consciously operate at Stage 5, although a larger number of people probably intuit its presence. The bottom line of Stage 5 is the simple truth that masculinity does not exist. As such, when there is no masculinity, there can be no crisis of masculinity. However, it is difficult to connect the dots for those at earlier stages and move them towards solutions to the problems of normative masculinity when one has to eventually concede that masculinity is not real (in which case, how can it cause a problem!). Of course, it is the reification of masculinity that is the problem. In other words, masculinity exists as a consensual hallucination which nevertheless has many real effects. Even so, the Stage 5 mind still wants to bring form to the concept of masculinity, as its eventual non-existence seems a rather cruel existential joke. As such, following are two tools and that can be employed to fashion some form out of Stage 5, acknowledging that we are teetering on the very edge of language: the first conceptual, the second methodological.

The first tool comes in the psychoanalytic concept of “individuation,” the process where individual consciousness is brought into being. “Pre-individuation” can be seen as the primordial state before personal identity—and with it, masculinity—is established. Locating masculinity in the space of pre-individuation would suggest a reversion to the womb, but “post-individuation” could be a space that resists the identity bestowed by individuated masculinity while remaining conscious of its nature. One vision of this space—oscillating between pre- and post-individuation—can be found in the “matrixial borderspace” of Bracha Ettinger (2004). Despite suggestions that the matrix is pre-ontological and thus pre-identity (Butler, 2004, p. 98), Ettinger articulates this space in an elusive manner that seems to fit Stage 5: “a web of movements of borderlinking, between subject and object, among subjects and partial-subjects, between me and the stranger, and between some partial-subjects and partial objects” (p. 76). Ettinger’s matrix is ostensibly “feminine” which also appears to problematize its inclusion as Stage 5. However, “the feminine under the Matrix marks not the phallus-negated other, but a different site of sexual difference that is not about binary logic” (Pollock, 2004, p. 11), which fits well with Stage 5. In short, Ettinger’s matrix is useful for Stage 5 as it is conscious of gendered identity, yet looks beyond this to a place where both the subject-object relationship and gendered identity has dissolved⁸.

The second tool is a method the medieval Christian mystics used for speaking about God called the “*via negativa*”—or apophatic theology (Davies & Turner, 2002)—which seeks to describe God not by what S/he *is* but by what S/he *is not*. This process aspires to bring form to the experience of God while accepting that S/he is ultimately beyond human perception. The *via negativa* could similarly be used to think around masculinity: if not to say what it is, then at least to answer attempts to contain and regulate it. People who are not sympathetic to a spiritual worldview may turn off at this point, but this is not some covert attempt to evangelize. This tool works just as well for atheists as spiritual people. It just so happens that religion has an extensive history of articulating *the beyond*, and in the end, Stage 5 is not a stage, rather a signpost to somewhere else.

The Five Stages: A Content Analysis

In the FSM hypothesis discussed above it was proposed that the number of people inhabiting each stage decreases with each stage (in other words, the largest number of people inhabit Stage 1, the smallest number of people inhabit Stage 5). A quantitative study is currently underway to identify what percentage of people operate at each of the five stages. However, to provide some preliminary context for this forthcoming study, a content analysis was undertaken to sort news and magazine articles by stage to indicate the level of public conversation at the different stages. For a duration of two months (January and February 2016), English language news and magazine articles were monitored via daily Google news searches on the terms “masculinity” and “masculinities”; the same terms were monitored daily on Twitter. The way each article framed masculinity was allocated to the appropriate stage in FSM: for example, an article that discussed how masculinity oppressed women was assigned to Stage 3; an article that discussed how masculinity was lacking in society was assigned to Stage 2. The articles identified are by no means exhaustive, but nevertheless serve as an indicative overview of this period. The list avoids articles on the same subject unless there is a significant departure in content. For example, there were three stories in this period that generated huge numbers of articles, but this is not apparent from the list: Donald Trump and how masculinity was mobilized in the 2016 presidential campaign; Jaden Smith’s modeling for Louis Vuitton’s

women's collection and his impact on black masculinity; Roosh V's neo-masculinity meet-ups and the consequent international backlash. Appendix 1 provides a list of 51 news and magazine articles from this period. Sorted by stage, the article breakdown is as follows: twelve articles at Stage 1; ten articles at Stage 2; 17 articles at Stage 3; ten articles at Stage 4; two articles at Stage 5.

Following the Venn pyramid offered in Figure 1, one would expect Stage 1 articles to be the most numerous. This was not the case, but there are plausible explanations for this. The simple act of engaging the terms "masculinity" and "masculinities" that would flag the articles for inclusion in the content analysis suggests a consciousness of the subject that transcends the definition of Stage 1. Indeed, Stage 1 articles are largely articles written *about* Stage 1, not *from* Stage 1. This in turn raises an interesting question about how articles are sorted. Is a Stage 3 critique of Stage 1 allocated to Stage 3 or Stage 1? In these instances, articles have been sorted by the stage we learn most about: the source or the object of criticism. As expected, Stage 1 articles contain the standard masculine signifiers: sex, sport, violence, and meat consumption. If numerous similar articles about Trump, masculinity and politics had also been counted the number of Stage 1 articles would have been significantly higher.

Stage 2 articles should be less in number than Stage 1, which is supported by the article breakdown. Hanging over from Stage 1, politics makes an appearance at Stage 2, along with mainstream cultural products. If numerous similar articles about Roosh V's neo-masculinity meet-ups had also been counted the number of Stage 2 articles would have been significantly higher.

Stage 3 articles should be smaller in number than Stage 2, but proved the largest in number of all the stages. Stage 3 articles were mostly represented by more subtle masculine performances in cinema, television and literature. One can speculate that the reason that Stage 3 has a greater representation among the articles than expected is due to the worldview of the people who typically produce media content, who are not statistically representative of society in general.

Stage 4 articles are predictably smaller in number and queer in theme. It is important to remember that Stage 4 is not LGBTQ-queer, rather category-troubling-queer. As such, while the number of articles at Stage 4

are small, it is possible that there were more applicable articles out there that were using the vocabulary of queerness rather than the terms “masculinity” and “masculinities,” and as such were not caught by the capturing method of the content analysis. If the number of articles were indeed higher, this would again be disproportionately high, and again would be speculatively attributable to the fact that people who typically produce media content are more interested in this theme than society in general.

Stage 5 articles were particularly small in number, which was to be expected. As Stage 5 is really a signpost to somewhere else rather than a specific stage, and because Stage 5 is operating at the edge of language, Stage 5 is the least likely to have been caught by the capturing method of the content analysis. There were only two Stage 5 articles: one talking about the erasure of “he” and “she” in favor of “zhe,” and another calling for the removal of gender from UK passports and driving licenses. Both these articles have interesting things to say about how language and categorization might impact people’s perceptions of self in regard to masculinity.

Conclusion

The crisis of masculinity was used as a jumping-off point to consider the different ways people perceive masculinity. Heartfield’s three types of crisis discourse included: masculinity perceived as pathological; the perception of the death of male pride; skeptical responses to crisis discourse. FSM was introduced as a model for viewing a large spectrum of perceptions about masculinity, and from a theoretical perspective, we saw how these three different forms of crisis discourse can be located on FSM and how identifying the crisis discourse (and indeed, all gender politics) from within the relevant stage rather than from another stage has the potential to de-escalate groups talking at cross-purposes. From a more “real life” perspective, the content analysis demonstrated how public conversations about masculinity can be mapped onto FSM and offers an indication of which stage can be allocated to most public conversation about masculinity (albeit not necessarily being replicable to society in general).

There is another vision of crisis discourse that does not appear to have been explored that can be surfaced via a reading of Giorgio Agamben's concept of the "state of exception" (Agamben, 2005). Similar to a state of emergency, the state of exception is used by governments to leverage exceptional powers that inevitably curtail the freedoms of citizens. Reinforcing Walter Benjamin's assertion that "the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule" (Benjamin, 2003, p. 392), Agamben (2014) argues we are now "having to face a continuous state of exception." This continuous state of exception has an application to the crisis of masculinity when we consider the two as, in effect, synonymous. For some groups at Stage 2 it makes absolute sense to cast masculinity in crisis, as to do so invokes exceptional powers to assert normative masculinity that in non-exceptional circumstances might appear unreasonable. The crucial pivot here is that masculinity is not *in* crisis, rather masculinity *demand*s crisis. To stay within the material of the above content analysis, if Donald Trump and Roosh V did not have a crisis to which to respond, they would have nothing at all.

The trajectory of FSM moves away from crisis discourse. It does not seek to counter the demand for crisis with an analysis of the validity of crisis, rather by having an altogether different conversation (a tactic that online commentators of Donald Trump and Roosh V could learn from). And herein lies the great potential for FSM: the ability to have a different conversation. There are a limited number of choices in how one typically approaches the study of men and masculinities: Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities, which is largely a subset of regular Women's Studies; Men's Studies, which is sometimes considered politically ambiguous (Hearn & Pringle, 2006, p. 5); Male Studies, which is largely reactionary in nature; Queer Studies, which is largely concerned with the experiences of LGBTQ people. All these approaches have elements of value (some more than others), but all have their limitations and a habit of constructing new orthodoxies while simultaneously attempting to deconstruct the old. FSM provides an opportunity to take something from all these approaches and does not have an endgame—yet another new orthodoxy—rather, it points to something undefined that is yet to come.

Notes

- ¹ Thanks to Bill Harryman and Sarah Nicholson for their thoughts on the initial formulation of FSM.
- ² Cross went on to refine this model over time (for example, [Cross, 1995](#)).
- ³ As outlined in the doctoral abstract of Hardiman ([1982](#)).
- ⁴ The characterization of Mansfield as a conservative is not suggested just by his position on masculinity. Jane Mayer ([2016](#)) documents that Mansfield has been the recipient of significant amounts of funding from right-wing foundations, along with another Naturalist—George Gilder—who has written about conservative and natural sex roles for men and women ([Gilder, 1986](#)) and who straddles the Stage 2 sub-groups of Naturalist and Spiritualist.
- ⁵ Such schisms are demonstrated in the articles gathered in the content analysis exercise below. One masculinity story that garnered enormous global attention during the analysis time period was the planned global meet-ups of neo-masculinity groups led by Roosh V. Roosh V was routinely described as a “men’s rights advocate” (for example, [Farthing, 2016](#)), however it is common to find both Roosh V and men’s rights advocates making it clear they do not share the same agenda.
- ⁶ This is arguably a natural extension of intersectionality. Indeed, it is surprising that the more intellectually-inclined men’s rights advocates have not mobilized intersectionality in response to what they would perceive as the multiple factors that combine to problematize an uncritical acceptance of patriarchy.
- ⁷ This slippage in stages also has an analogy with Wilber, who proposed the “pre/trans fallacy” ([Wilber, 2000, p. 212](#)), where worldviews of lower stages can be mistakenly elevated to higher stages, and those of higher stages reduced to lower stages.
- ⁸ Something similar might be seen in Deleuze’s spatial metaphors: “The variability, the polyvocality of directions, is an essential feature of smooth spaces of the rhizome type, and it alters their cartography. The nomad, nomad space, is localized and not delimited” ([Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 382](#)). Further still, a spiritual form of this comes in the Eastern concept of Ātman, which represents one’s eternal soul or essence. In this context, masculinity is but one of many illusions from which we must be liberated before experiencing transcendence.

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Appendixes

Appendix A

News and Magazine Article Sorted by the Five Stages of Masculinity

Stage 1

Teenage boys' attitudes to risky sex 'can help predict what type of father they will be': <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/love-sex/young-male-attitude-to-risky-sex-can-predict-their-attitudes-to-fatherhood-northwestern-school-of-a6893321.html>

From jousting to football: The ideal man hasn't changed much since medieval times: <http://theconversation.com/from-jousting-to-football-the-ideal-man-hasnt-changed-much-since-medieval-times-54920>

Men think they need to eat meat to be manly—and it's making them sick: <http://qz.com/622306/men-think-they-need-to-eat-meat-to-be-manly-and-its-making-them-sick/>

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Masculinity continues to be the norm in Punjab:

<http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/masculinity-continues-to-be-the-norm-in-punjab/198550.html>

Manliness is a warm gun:

<http://takingnote.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/02/12/manliness-is-a-warm-gun/>

What the Malheur Occupation teaches us about masculinity:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/susan-m-shaw/what-malheur-occupation-patriarchy-masculinity_b_9116064.html

Boots? Marco Rubio wants to talk guns and football:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/19/us/politics/boots-marco-rubio-wants-to-talk-guns-and-football.html>

Meat heads: New study focuses on how meat consumption alters men's self-perceived levels of masculinity: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/zoe-eisenberg/meat-heads-new-study-focuses_b_8964048.html

Trump's angry white men: <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jan/08/angry-white-men-love-donald-trump>

Obama's tears, America's tragedy:

http://www.salon.com/2016/01/06/obamas_tears_americas_tragedy_behind_fox_news_mockery_lies_uncomfortable_truth_about_our_failed_politics/

Odell Beckham Jr. vs. toxic black masculinity:

http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2015/12/29/odell_beckham_jr_gay_rumors_show_the_problem_with_black_masculinity.html

Murder in the suburbs: chilling book investigates masculinity in Australia: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/30/in-the-suburbs-chilling-book-investigates-masculinity-in-australia>

Stage 2

Final Fantasy VII's Barret portrays positive virtues of masculinity:

<http://blacktridentmedia.com/2016/02/03/barret-portrays-positive-virtues-of-masculinity/>

Wanted in China: More male teachers, to make boys men:

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/07/world/asia/wanted-in-china-more-male-teachers-to-make-boys-men.html?_r=0

Brands are challenging the worst parts of masculinity, just in time for the Super Bowl: <http://qz.com/606392/brands-are-creating-super-bowl-commercials-that-challenge-the-worst-parts-of-masculinity/>

Daryush ‘Roosh V’ Valizadeh cancels neo-masculinist meetings over safety: <http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/feb/04/daryush-roosh-v-valizadeh-cancels-neo-masculinist-meetings-over-safety>

‘Goat’ takes aim at college frat hazing, modern masculinity: <http://www.thewrap.com/goat-takes-aim-at-college-frat-hazing-modern-masculinity-with-help-from-nick-jonas/>

Europe’s tragedy: Too much Angela Merkel, too little masculinity: <https://www.rt.com/op-edge/329241-europes-tragedy-merkel-immigration/>

Creed and the secrets of a male tear-jerker: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/creed-and-the-secrets-of-a-male-tear-jerker-from-field-of-dreams-to-good-will-hunting-a6796501.html>

The long, bristly history of beards and masculinity: http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/books/2016/01/of_beards_and_men_a_history_of_beards_by_christopher_oldstone_moore_reviewed.html

Star Wars: Men’s rights activists claim boycott cost The Force Awakens \$4.2m: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/star-wars-mens-rights-activists-claim-boycott-cost-the-force-awakens-42m-a6796146.html>

The relationship between Muslim men and their beards is a tangled one: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jan/28/muslim-men-beards-facial-hair-islam>

Stage 3

Lego creates stay-at-home hipster dad figurine: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/howaboutthat/12169574/Lego-creates-stay-at-home-hipster-dad-figurine.html>

Sense and Sensibility and Jane Austen’s accidental feminists: <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/02/sense-and-sensibility-jane-austen-emma-thompson/434007/>

There’s more than one way of being a black man: <http://www.voice-online.co.uk/article/there%E2%80%99s-more-one-way-being-black-man>

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How to be a man: A new generation of artists is rethinking the meaning of masculinity in Russia:

<http://calvertjournal.com/features/show/5472/post-soviet-youth-masculinity-boyhood-Russia>

How to be a good dad in 2016:

http://uk.askmen.com/dating/single_fathers/how-to-be-a-good-dad-in-2016.html

The Deadpool phenomenon and the American male:

<http://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/the-deadpool-phenomenon-and-the-american-male>

University isn't for men? No one told me or my students:

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/university-isnt-men-no-one-told-me-or-my-students>

Cam Newton and the burden of history:

<http://www.thenation.com/article/cam-newton-and-the-burden-of-history/>

The violence behind the words 'be a man': <http://www.alternet.org/sex-and-relationships/violence-behind-words-be-man>

Have Jews become obsessed with bro masculinity?:

<http://forward.com/opinion/333116/have-jews-become-obsessed-with-bro-masculinity/>

As a male feminist, I feel sorry for Roosh V's weak and easily manipulated 'neo-masculine' supporters:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/as-a-male-feminist-i-feel-sorry-for-roosh-vs-easily-manipulated-neo-masculine-supporters-a6855746.html>

Nobody has to "man up" here: Feminist shows "Jessica Jones" and "Transparent" are also a win for men:

http://www.salon.com/2016/01/22/nobody_has_to_man_up_here_feminist_shows_jessica_jones_and_transparent_are_also_a_win_for_men/

'Mad Dogs' doesn't celebrate American masculinity, it mourns it:

<http://decider.com/2016/01/22/mad-dogs-amazon-prime-loss-of-american-masculinity/>

Tom Hardy on being a real man:

<https://www.redbulletin.com/us/us/culture/tom-hardy-knows-what-being-a-real-man-means>

The athlete demolishing misconceptions about masculinity:

<http://www.sbs.com.au/topics/sexuality/article/2016/01/15/athlete-demolishing-misconceptions-about-masculinity>

College students join hands to redefine ‘Mardangi’:

<http://www.mumbaimirror.com/mumbai/others/College-students-join-hands-to-redefine-Mardangi/articleshow/50505040.cms>

Colombia’s peace requires disarming manhood, not just men:

<http://linkis.com/newint.org/blog/2016/AzI8H>

Stage 4

Tiger Maremela uses digital collage to examine black masculinities in the “Rainbow Nation”: <http://www.designindaba.com/articles/creative-work/tiger-maremela-uses-digital-collage-examine-black-masculinities-%E2%80%9Crainbow>

Why men fight: An empirical investigation of the extremes of masculinity: <http://qz.com/613980/why-men-fight-an-empirical-investigation-of-the-extremes-of-masculinity/>

Bro is an app that encourages men to explore sexual fluidity while retaining masculinity: <http://hop.media/read/culture/bro-app>

If a man with a vagina can be just as masculine as one with a penis, then just watch the patriarchy crumble: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/daniel-lyons/if-a-man-with-a-vagina-ca_b_9263132.html

Jaden Smith’s adventures in gender fluidity: What it means, who profits: <http://www.thewrap.com/jaden-smiths-adventures-in-gender-fluidity-what-it-means-who-profits/>

What I learned from being non-binary while still being perceived as a man: <http://everydayfeminism.com/2016/02/genderqueer-amab-experience/>

Gender fluidity has a toxic masculinity problem:

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/02/03/gender-fluidity-has-a-toxic-masculinity-problem.html>

How David Bowie changed the face of modern masculinity:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/how-david-bowie-changed-the-face-of-modern-masculinity/>

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Are feminism and the transgender movement at odds?

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/isaac-fornarola/are-feminism-and-the-tran_b_8882764.html

Living with a controversial Catholic sect helped me lose my religion and leave masculinity behind: http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/living-with-opus-dei-student-390

Stage 5

That's what zhe said: As genders blur, language is rapidly adapting:

<http://www.alternet.org/news-amp-politics/thats-what-zhe-said-genders-blur-language-rapidly-adapting>

Call to remove gender from UK passports and driving licences:

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/02/call-to-remove-gender-from-uk-passports-and-driving-licences>