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**The Angry God in the Mirror Stage: Applications of Lacanian Psychoanalysis to the Naturalization of
Violence in Men's Studies in Religion**

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Naturalization of Violence in Men's Studies in Religion

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Kyle Green

Abstract

In this thesis I discuss some relationships and conversations that occur—and some that could occur in the future—among authors in men’s studies in religion and those who work with Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytical model. I focus on how “male violence” is discussed in men’s studies in religion. I do this to make projections about why trends in men’s studies in religion regarding concepts about violence appear as they do.

In the first chapter I attempt to present my theoretical and methodological bias. I locate my interpretation in Judith Butler’s theories regarding performance and citation. I then present significant working definitions for the following chapters that remain consistent throughout the thesis.

In the second chapter I present a literature review regarding men’s studies in religion. I present French feminist ideas about God and masculinity as contributing to motivational ideologies in the field. I then identify mythopoetic and masculinist authors as producing the field’s momentum. I lastly present a number of current authors and themes that show a central focus regarding a link between masculinities and violence in the field.

In the third chapter I present a literature review about Lacan’s psychoanalytic theories regarding the subject and signification. I begin by analyzing Lacan’s primary sources in his two most substantial works: *Ecrits* and *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. I then explore how contemporary Lacanian theorists shift his ideas in productive and interesting ways. I lastly show how Lacanian

signification can be used to interpret the ways in which authors who contribute to men's studies in religion signify such concepts as "masculinities" and "violence".

In the fourth chapter I build upon a Lacanian theoretical model using a Foucauldian framework regarding institutional knowledge. I show how authors in men's studies in religion methodologically and implicitly cite a perceived institutional understanding about violence. Using Jeremy Carrette's focus on the importance of utterances in institutions, I will show that feminist ideologies compose "mechanisms of coercion" for authors who signify violence and masculinity.

In the fifth chapter I combine Foucault's work concerning institutional knowledge with Lacan's theories about signification. I show that signification in men's studies in religion is coerced by a feminist re-definition regarding violence. I argue that this re-definition is best defined as Lacanian trauma, and that this trauma is so effective in the field because the traumatic event has to do with re-defining Jewish and Christian conceptions regarding God's masculinity.

This thesis has implications for possible ways in which authors in men's studies in religion can approach violence in future work. This thesis composes, or highlights, a conversation between Lacanian psychoanalysis and studies about masculinity. The contribution is thus to two fields because it presents new avenues for discussion that are not yet explored, while drawing on current, relevant and productive work from significant contemporary authors.

Chapter 1: Emasculating Violence

In short, there is only cause in something that doesn't work.

(Lacan 1977, 22)

1.1: Discourse and the Possibility of Violence

The above quotation by Jacques Lacan is a necessary point of departure for this thesis for two reasons. Firstly, Lacan refers to the purpose of psychoanalysis: to help a patient understand and thus live with his or her pathologically neurotic tendencies. Lacan sees an ambiguous and “anti-conceptual” gap between cause and effect, or psychologically between pathological neurosis and discursive reality (22). While “causes” and “effects” are identifiable, the processes through which they are connected are unintelligible. The search for a cause is a sign of perplexity; to imagine that a thing does not work, or that it inadequately performs the function for which it is designed, one requires a reason or cause; nothing can break ‘just because’. The possibility of conceiving a cause for the malfunction then precedes the possibility of the malfunction itself.

The implicit counterstatement is also significant: there is no cause in that which works. If a theory or a method – or more generally an idea or a tool – seems to perform its designed function, the conceivability of questioning its cause is not available until the degree to which it fulfills its function is also conceivably questionable. Problematizing a concept effectively exposes gaps within it and enables its cause. French feminists critically approach hegemonic Christianity through a radical imagination of malfunctions within theological structures that allow for gender privileging. Gender theory requires one to view the category of gender

itself as malfunctioning and sometimes harmful. Critical theorists of religion make similar arguments about the analytical functionality of “religion” as a concept. Any critical analysis that problematizes a hegemonic operation thus does so under a rubric of malfunction.

The second reason why Lacan’s quotation is necessary for the thesis that will commence is that through it Lacan also refers to the practice of institutional knowledge. Lacan writes the quotation in the context of having been barred from the psychoanalytic community in which he worked as an analyst. His ideas regarding the subject and the process of signification, which will be investigated in this thesis’s third chapter, were interpreted as being contrary enough to the pre-existing discursive framework that they, and the thinker from whence they came, had to be expelled from the very framework itself. Both Lacan’s expulsion and the French psychoanalytic community then functioned under rubrics of malfunction; Lacan saw a flaw in expelling radical ideas from a discourse in order to preserve a status quo – or that the value of tradition *caused* the institutional body to reject a new idea – and the anthropomorphised institution understood that the damage that Lacan’s ideas could cause would be irreversible to its discursive framework. The practice of contributing to a discourse thus engenders the possibility of violence, either by the contributor or by the discourse, or possibly by both. Any critical analysis that problematizes a hegemonic operation thus also does so under the possibility of violence.

This thesis is about violence. More specifically, this thesis is about male violence, the idea that male violence has gained cultural capital in recent decades, and the ways in which concepts deemed “religious” have been essential to

redefining a cultural imagination. As such, this thesis itself is violent in a way, since it will examine several existing bodies of discourse in a way that exposes rubrics of malfunction in discussions about masculinity, and thus operates under the possibility of violence, either by the thesis or by the discourses to which it hopes to contribute.

The inclusion into academic discourses of: 1) the contextuality of 'male violence'; 2) the notion that violent acts perpetrated by men possess a sort of cultural currency; and 3) the arbitrary nature of the assignment of gender roles, are topics that are by no means new or revolutionary. However, what is lacking in regard to these subjects are critical questions related to: 1) why violent acts perpetrated by men against women, children and other men must be gendered (Longwood 2006); 2) how violence in masculinity is normalized and gains cultural capital through false anthropologies about generic 'primitive tribes' (Clément 2002); and 3) when the concept of male violence became reified into something to be dealt with like an addiction (Kennedy 2008). W. Merle Longwood, Catherine Clément, John W. Kennedy and others – a representative selection of authors whom I will discuss at length in chapter 2 – implicitly refer to a rubric of malfunction when writing about masculinity. Underlying my thesis will be a methodological critique regarding the problematic ways in which masculine identity statements are culturally presumed to be categorically pathological.

The inclusion in academic discourses of the arbitrary nature of identity statements is also neither new nor revolutionary. Judith Butler, whose work most notably in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* revolutionized and expanded the scope of gender studies in the 1990s, is foundational for this commencing project. My theoretical point of departure, based in Butler as much as

in Lacan, is that gender identities are performative, citational and most importantly discursive (Butler 1993), or dependent upon linguistic constructions. Underlying my thesis is a theoretical model of social constructivism evident in but not explicated as such in Lacan's theories.

This thesis will contribute to a fuller inclusion of Lacanian theory within men's studies in religion, particularly in regard to signification that is formative of the "I function". As will be explained more fully in chapter 3, Lacanian psychoanalysis has not had an impact on men's studies in religion. Many of Lacan's theories and concepts do not directly reference religious studies and are seldom used in anthologies within the field of psychology and religion. As I hope to show, however, his use of masculine signifiers such as the Father and the Phallus, his central focus on discursive limitations and his radical theory of the subject create interesting intersections between identity claims regarding pathological masculinity and the discursive possibility of male violence.

This thesis aims to advance Lacanian psychoanalysis within religious studies by bringing into conversation the concept of violence that authors in both psychoanalysis and men's studies in religion handle quite differently. Authors in both fields write about male violence, masculinity and religion in a variety of ways that question common-sense understandings and further the academic investigations of each concept. Very few however acknowledge what appears to hold the three concepts so very close together: the feminist re-definition of Jewish and Christian concepts regarding God.

The thesis will thus contribute to investigating contemporary, productive and important discussions of masculinity or masculinities by bringing authors together

who seldom communicate academically. I hope that the work begun here will add to the current discourses of violence in psychoanalysis and religion.

1.2: The Question

In the field of men's studies of religion, many authors write in response to a belief that central problems throughout history have been caused by men. The men who cause these problems have established cultures, economies and religions that privilege men, objectify women, and colonize others when possible. Authors in men's studies in religion actively set themselves apart from such patriarchal men of past and present who comprise the field's primary objects of study. These authors typically present arguments that interrogate and attempt to remediate aspects of specific culturally contextual masculinities. In the terms of the projects they undertake, it must be noted that these authors are most often quite successful; indeed, much good work is being done in men's studies in religion. However, a central and important problem has emerged within the field as a result of the problematization of masculinity: if some aspect of masculinity is dysfunctional and requires remediation, how did the cause of the malfunction enter into contemporary discursive imaginations? Who or what in this instance construct the rubric of malfunction?

In the case of men's studies in religion it seems quite clear that the authors who first noticed the malfunction that men's studies in religion authors identify come from feminist, and oftentimes French feminist backgrounds. However, the ways in which French feminist ideas challenge previous discursive assumptions has not

been subject to enough critical examination in men's studies in religion. By accepting a pathologized masculine identity and attempting to remedy it, more specifically, by linking the concept of violence to the concept of masculinity, authors in the field effectively construct the objects of their deconstruction.

Many authors in men's studies in religion, participating in a culture strongly influenced by academic feminism, problematically link normalized and pathological violence to contemporary masculinities. This attachment of violence to masculinities in men's studies in religion and "anti-conceptual" gaps between that attachment's historical origins and its unrecognized effects compose the problem that I will interrogate in this thesis. In what ways and to what ends do authors in religious discourses use the term 'male violence'? What trajectories for future research in masculinit(y)/(ies) can be projected from current trends?

My thesis will address this problem through Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical model. The problem with the redefinition of masculinity is a problem of language and a culturally accepted symbolic order. Lacan's theories regarding the subject, its relationship with "the other", and the role that language plays in the masculinity or masculinities that authors in men's studies in religion construct thus compose a useful theoretical toolset to understand the problem and history of this normalized pathologizing of masculinit(y)/(ies).

The thesis will argue 1) that the practice of institutionalizing pathological 'male violence' is only possible when the signifying chains from which masculine identities emerge are pathologized as well; 2) that the authors contributing to this discourse refer primarily to western masculinit(y)/(ies); 3) that the references in these primarily western masculinit(y)/(ies) are Jewish, Christian or Christianized

concepts of God; and 4) that French feminist authors from the 1960s to the 1980s re-signified God as a masculine reference in a way that allows for the categorical pathologization of masculine identity statements.

1.3: Why the (Re)problematization? Violence and Concentrated Economy

To posit such a broad and prevalent misstep as the naturalization of violence seems counterintuitive; a feminist counter-argument might immediately suggest that the pathologization of masculinity is a necessary political and ideological manoeuvre, since in many senses gender imbalances that favour masculinity continue to exist. Indeed, questions about gender equality within international and governmental policy frameworks focus on increasing the importance and highlighting the victimization of women. The United Nations operates a Division for the Advancement of Women, from whence comes the *2009 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women's Control over Economic Resources and Access to Financial Resources, including Microfinance (WSRWD)*. This influential publication reports that “[w]hile women have an increasing presence in public life, they remain significantly under-represented in most areas, in particular in economic decision-making” (Kabeer 2009, 84).¹ Likewise, the 2008 statistical report *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2008* released by Statistics Canada highlights, among other data, that “[f]emales continue to be the most likely victims of police-reported

¹ At the time that this thesis was written, neither the 2009 nor the 2010 WSRWD reports had been made available.

spousal violence, accounting for 83% of victims compared to 17% males. This holds true for every province and territory in Canada” (Ogrodnik 2008, 6).

These two influential reports are part of a continuing trend of publicizing the effects androcentric economies have for gendered political systems. This relationship between economy and politics is explored by Alain Badiou (and will be discussed further in chapter 3) in his Leninist argument that “[p]olitics is the concentration of the economy.’ Even, I would say, when it is a matter of libidinal economy, the economy of drives” (Badiou [1982] 2009, 30). Kabeer and Ogrodnik’s expositions of women are of course politically motivated; each seeks to increase the inclusion of gendered discourses within governmental policy frameworks for the purpose of eventually equalizing the political climate. Their projects become reiterations of the feminist mantra “the personal is political”. They investigate issues that have been overlooked in the past due to their historical categorization as “personal” and thus not necessarily included into public politics. If politics is concentrated economy, and if political centrality correlates with economical strength, then the two reports show that in the climates of Canada and the broader contexts of the United Nations, gendered ideologies gather and maintain significant cultural capital. Studies that question hegemonic constructs in ways that increase or emphasize the importance of women – and, as I will argue, that do so sometimes by approaching the cultural importance of men under a rubric of malfunction – thus apparently continue to be both politically and economically viable.

A re-problematization of masculinity is essential due in some respect to the political and fiscal viability of arguments about gender inequality. The re-problematization is also essential however due to contemporary portrayals of

masculinities in popular media. In *Media and Male Identity: The Making and Remaking of Men*, J. R. Macnamara studies 1799 written, visual and audio-visual texts distributed by mass media channels. Macnamara writes:

Analysis found that men are overwhelmingly represented negatively in mass media news, current affairs, talk shows and lifestyle media, with 69 percent of mass media reporting and commentary on men unfavourable, compared with just 12 per cent favourable and 19 per cent neutral or unbalanced. (Macnamara 2006, 98)

Macnamara categorizes leading media messages about men, noting that the four most prominent messages in descending order are that men are: criminals, aggressive, violent and sexual abusers or predators. (143). When men are defined as men, and not generalized into neutral organizations, governments, or groups, there is a strong probability that they will be defined in negative ways.

This trend continues in media reporting on masculinity pertaining to 'religious' subjects. In the highly contentious legal debates concerning polygyny in Eldorado, Texas and Bountiful, British Columbia, a rhetoric of deviant sexuality is commonly applied to the men who govern the communities in question. Among other allegations, the men allegedly brainwash the women into serving as sex slaves. This rhetoric is applied consistently, whether legal charges of sexual crimes have led to prosecution, as in the case of Lehi Barlow Jeffs in Eldorado, or to dismissal, as in the case of Winston Blackmore in Bountiful.

Iain A. G. Barrie studies the media exposure of sexual abuse committed against young boys by clergy members in Alfred, Ontario. He finds that from the 1950s to the 1980s reporters dealt with cases such as in Alfred as "cops and courts stor[ies]" (Barrie 2002, 66) and omitted analyses of the "religious dimensions of life" (75) due partially to a cultural hesitation to problematize religious relationships.

Barrie argues that a media portrayal of sexual abuse in the church only became possible when the church as an institution lost its own cultural capital: “[w]hen respect for the church weakened enough to allow coverage, most of it focused on the secular story—sex, greed, avarice, power, abuse, exploitation, and/or tragedy” (75). Islamist suicide bombers from extremist Muslim sects are almost exclusively male, as are any depictions of Muslims with reference to violence; the few women portrayed in mass media sources are typically shown in relation to the practice of veiling, where they are victimized as unwilling participants in a patriarchal culture.²

The brainwashing polygynist, the child-abusing priest and the Muslim extremist compose significant trends in media portrayals of masculinity in religion. The reasons why these three character types receive the media exposure they do are manifold and are embedded within a culture that prefers violence in news articles. One reason is quite important, however, when read with Badiou’s Leninist perspective: the exposure of types, practices and attributes of masculinity in the media parallels issues of male domestic violence against women and increasing female representation in financial decision-making because the exposure of each is dependent upon political viability, which itself is dependent upon economic viability.

The most significant reason why the concept of violence with regard to masculinity needs to be examined in the manner in which I will is that discourses necessarily focus on certain topics to the exclusion of others. Authors in men’s

² Male suicide bombers are seldom defined as men. Reports tend to use the neutral pronoun “the suicide bomber” or “the terrorist” instead of “he”. This might be an example of the dehumanization of the other that Butler talks about in her 2008 article “Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Time”. The aversion to give a gender to the bomber would be representative of a more significant aversion to recognize humanity and vulnerability in him. This would perhaps help to resist from feeling for the family that he might have left behind and the correlation to the viewer or reader. In these cases the other’s call to identify by gender comes second to the call to identify by humanity.

studies, as well as men's studies in religion, informed by feminist ideologies, uncritically apply the modifier of violence onto definitions of masculinity and onto the various masculinities that scholars in each field study. Authors are highly critical of the legitimacy of patriarchal and misogynistic practices, but as this thesis will show, many approach the central issues of contemporary masculinities by uncritically adopting the pathologizing ideologies of their feminist precedents.

1.4: “Masculinities”, “Violence” and Other Working Definitions

A critical exploration of the ways in which a concept is used in a particular discourse is a necessary methodological point of departure. Alain Badiou elaborates the Hegelian dialectic of being to note that any being – which can mean a subject-being, an object-being and a concept-being, among others – never exists in a pure sense, 'A', but is always modified by a particular context, 'P'. In an uncritical rubric, A and A_p converge and become synonymous so that $A = A_p$, or $A = A(A)$, as has become common knowledge in the histories of race and gender. In these rubrics, authors do not take into account the particular context in which a concept is used and thus make general statements about particular situations. Under a critical—or more self-conscious—rubric, a concept is conceived in reference to the discursive realities within which one understands it. In such a practice the pure term can only exist in relation to discursive contexts so that $A = A(A_{p1}, A_{p2}, \dots A_{pn})$. This creates what Badiou calls a “scission” between pure and particularized being.

Badiou's practice of particularized being is apparent in many contemporary critical discourses about masculinity. 'Masculinity' as a technical term has begun to be understood as what Hegel or Badiou might call a pure Being. That is, in critical

masculinity studies “masculinity” as a term never actualizes in a discursive sense outside of particular uses of it that are informed by political and ideological structures. Most authors note this negation of singularity by preferring the plural term ‘masculinities’, which entails an understanding that the ways in which a person performs a masculine act is unique and is not necessarily representative of a cohesive singular whole.

Perhaps the uncritical approaches that authors in men’s studies in religion take in reference to the term ‘violence’ might have foundations in historical ideologies regarding masculinity. Due to the field’s Christian and Jewish origins, these approaches reflect Jewish and Christian ideologies. In what Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen in *My Brother’s Keeper: What the Social Sciences Do (and Don’t) Tell Us About Masculinity* calls the “biblical mandate” (Van Leeuwen 2002) the divinely mandated position as shown in the Bible of all men being required to be heads of their individual households unites men and masculinity toward a common goal. This theological metonymy denies the legitimacy of all but one ‘type’ of masculinity, presupposing that the biblical sources that legitimize a particular masculinity in fact refer to pure masculinity, or that $A_p=A$. In such a system “masculinities” are incompatible with the symbol structures already in place and a critical examination is pre-emptively disallowed. One can thus posit that masculinities comprise a necessarily pluralistic idea wherein multiple and possibly contradictory particular methods of performing what one imagines to be masculine are conceivable and legitimate.

The notion of “performing” a particular masculinity leads to a need for a working definition of performance in this thesis’ context. Judith Butler’s notions of

performativity and citationality, discussed at length in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (Butler 1993) inform the social constructivist way in which masculinities can be understood. Butler writes:

To claim that discourse is formative is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes; rather, it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body. In this sense, the linguistic capacity to refer to sexed bodies is not denied, but the very meaning of "referentiality" is altered. In philosophical terms, the constative claim is always to some degree performative. (10-11)

The method by which Butler approaches the generalized concept of gender can be accurately applied to a discourse analysis of masculinities. Both authors who accept singular $A=A(A)$ masculinity and those who accept pluralized $A=A(A_{p1}, A_{p2} \dots A_{pn})$ masculinities do so in constant repetition of and referentiality to previously known constative claims. Amy Hollywood clarifies Butler's position by noting that "[w]ithin Butler's account of the particularity of bodily practices and rituals are quickly subsumed into that of the speech act, suggesting that ritual remains an untheorized ballast for the force of language" (Hollywood 2006, 253). The notion that ritualized performances are demonstrative of "the force of language" embeds Butler's theory of linked materiality and discourse even more clearly in language. This notion facilitates a Lacanian analysis of constative claims since Lacan also acknowledges the primacy of language and the signifying chain. One can thus posit that performativity relates to the linguistic, ritualized repetition of discursively learned actions that allows for the conception of and reference to ideological and materialistic structures—including the ideology and reification of violence.

The primacy of language is equally important to the concept of violence as it is to that of ritualized action. This primacy is primarily due to the fact that violence is

embedded in discursivity. Like Butler's reference to a pure body that is always "a reference to a further formation of that body", a concept of violence always refers to and is formative of another concept of violence. Discourses that critically approach the concept of violence are thus also always already embedded within Badiou's particularized being: if each formation of violence is a reference to and a formation of another instance of violence, then each instance must be particularized within its own unique context, i.e. each performative instance can be represented as A_{p1} , A_{p2} ... A_{pn} etc.

The formation of each particular instance of violence both forms and refers to a specific symbolic order. Slavoj Žižek offers a useful method of analyzing violence that will inform the chapters to follow. Žižek writes that:

the opposition of mythic and divine violence is that between the means and the sign, that is, mythic violence is a means to establish the rule of Law (the legal social order), while divine violence serves no means, not even that of punishing the culprits [of a crime] and thus re-establishing the equilibrium of justice. (Žižek 2008, 199-200)

Working with other theorists, Žižek claims that there are two forms of violence: divine violence and mythical violence. Divinely violent instances are those that are not influenced by one's discursive symbolic order, while mythically violent acts do. An act of divine violence, such as a mudslide that kills numerous animals, has no cause that is influenced by one's symbolic order and serves no means. A robbery that culminates in a murder, however, is inspired by and has consequences rooted in several social institutions, all of which are performative and contextually particular. This thesis will focus on mythical violence, or the idea of violence and violent acts that are always already embedded within complex symbolic orders. These orders

set boundaries onto not only what is and is not violent, but also what is possible to be discussed in the context of violence.

The symbolic order works not only in particular constructions of violence, but also in constructions of “religion”. Each author in men’s studies in religion whom I will examine constructs a unique concept of “religion” that correlates with but is not equal to his or her peers’ concepts. To assume a unified concept of religion throughout a field would be to apply arbitrary assumptions onto each author that are not necessarily valid.³ In this thesis I examine the symbolic orders operating in men’s studies in religion, and not the concept of religion itself. It would therefore be impractical to construe a working definition of religion. Throughout the following chapters I will assume that authors who claim to study religion or religious individuals are genuine not in the validity of their claims but in the purpose of their work. The interrogation of ‘religiousness’ or religiosity in men’s studies in religion is an interesting and productive project, but it is not mine.

1.5: Toward Chapters 2-5

The next four chapters of this thesis draw together lines of communication between authors in men’s studies in religion and Lacanian signification theory. I will first focus on each idea separately in order to clarify the elements, authors and ideas of each discourse that are relevant to my project. My goal is to show the links between the two fields that are not currently evident.

In chapter 2 I will present a literature review of relevant work done about masculinity and religion. I will begin with MSR precedents in 1970-1980s feminist

³ For an investigation of arbitrary cultural assumptions, see Bayart 2005

thought, focusing on work that problematizes the masculinity of God and the privileged relationships that men possess within religious institutions. I will then move to present early literature created by MSR authors that cite feminist authority in analyses of religious institutions. The last body of literature I will examine is contemporary work done about masculinity and religion by authors in MSR. I will then focus a reading of the source data to show how authors prior to and within MSR write about violence. Isolating the subject of violence within the broader category of MSR work will allow for a deeper understanding of its centrality within the field.

After reviewing the relevant source data about masculinity and violence in MSR I will expand my particular theoretical framework, namely that of Lacanian signification. In chapter 3 I will describe Lacan's relevant work on signification and why his work comprises a useful theoretical model in which to study masculinity and religion. I will then introduce Lacanian and post-Lacanian scholars who expand and alter signification theory, paying special attention to those who write about Lacan and religious discourses. I will end this section with an exploration of what Lacanian signification theory adds to a discourse about violence, focusing on the work of Slavoj Žižek.

The next step will be to apply my Lacanian theoretical filter to the MSR data on violence I isolated from the literature review. In chapter 4 I will focus on Jeremy Carrette's Foucauldian method of discourse analysis and ways in which it shows a link between how "violence" is used and the historical context of the concept's particular usage. Carrette, in line with Foucault, understands religious discourses as controlling both speech and silence, or what can be included into the discourse and

what must be kept from it. These language controls structure institutionalized knowledge. By examining how Lacanian re-signification functions within institutionalized knowledge systems I will show how discussions of violence in MSR discourses implicitly incorporate institutionalized understandings of violence, masculinity and God. In agreement with the feminist foundations of MSR, instances of discussions of violence by MSR authors exist within broader understandings of masculinity and God, each of which that have been re-signified by feminist authors.

I will conclude the project with examinations of the effects that naturalized violence in masculinity has on two themes: transcendence and trauma. Transcendence and trauma are separated in terms of how each is discussed, but I will use both together to show how broad the effects of the re-signification of masculinity are. In my conclusion I will explore the possible ramifications that the redefinition of masculinity could have for future generations of men. I will use data gathered from sociological studies about recent Canadian educational patterns to hypothesize about why male students seem to seek to achieve fewer academic goals than female students do.

1.6: Introductory (Re)marks

The act of introducing a text in effect alters the reader's conception of it by offering a direction towards the author's desired conclusions. The act of concluding functions similarly, highlighting some details that the author finds substantially relevant while detracting from others' importance. Throughout this thesis readers will find introductions and conclusions – discourses that precede and introduce others – that partially control what can and cannot be spoken, written, and thought.

Theories that deny conclusions by denying the possibility of an autonomous entity can thus be useful, such as the introduction of theology to feminist ideology and the end of its practicality to authors in that field. In each of these instances mythically violent acts constitute a cause for both introductions and conclusions. The act of emasculating violence will function as this thesis' underlying goal. By using the theories and methods detailed in this chapter the following chapters attempt to mythologize male violence in men's studies in religion, and in doing so, eliminate the cultural and political viability of attaching the modifier of "violence" onto masculine identity statements and male constative claims.

This thesis itself is an introduction of sorts; by bringing discourses of men's studies in religion, Lacanian psychoanalysis and violence into conversation it will in a sense chair an introductory meeting. By using Lacanian theory to expose a rubric of malfunction in the ways in which men's studies authors write about masculinity and then historicizing this rubric in a particular context, this thesis will also introduce, or suggest, a theory of gender analysis that is both culturally relevant and politically viable. If "there is only cause in something that doesn't work" is a true statement, then hopefully this thesis will expose a number of causes, or at least one of some importance, while resisting becoming a cause of something itself.

Chapter 2 – (Re)view of the Practical Literature: Men's Studies in Religion

[W]e can say that sexual ideologies have reified Christianity.
(Althaus-Reid 2003, 42)

The dark side of men is clear.
(Bly 1990, x)

2.1. The Triadic Matrix

Marcella Althaus-Reid provides a significant impetus for the following chapter in her above quotation from *The Queer God*. The centrality of sexuality to Christianity – both endorsed and barred sexualities – and the similar centrality of sexuality to medicalized North American cultures are closely linked. If religious institutions sanction particular sexual ideologies, and if those ideologies are then reified by the assumption of scientific and biological proofs that attest to their naturalness, then the assumed reification of these ideologies in effect reifies the institution from whence they come. This process, theorized most famously by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, dismantles the empiricism of constative claims regarding sexuality. It will be difficult in this chapter, and indeed in this thesis as a whole, not to reify a particular politicized and strategic agenda in my deconstruction of violence in sexualized identities. I am as located within a particular context as are the authors whom I study, and must strive to recognize that, being contextual, my deconstruction must not appeal to common-sense, typicality or normalcy with regard to the sanctioned ideologies in men's studies in religion. To normalize or typify would be to privilege one context over another.

Men perform socially sanctioned phantasies of particular masculinities from which they assume citational authority and towards which they participate in formation and authentication. A problematic component of this formative and citational process is that concepts of “violence” have been integrated with concepts of authentic heterosexual masculinity. The sexual ideologies that, as Althaus-Reid notes, reify religious institutions, also work to reify violence. There exists then a politicized, triadic matrix amongst religious institutions, sexual ideologies, and violence wherein each concept is both formative of and constructed by the other two.

The field of men’s studies in religion comprises the data set which I will present in this chapter. Authors in this field critically engage with questions related to the triad. The authors, their references and their references’ references are all significant to an interrogation of their methods, goals and theo(retical)/(logical) foundations.

Why, however, is it even useful to interrogate the ways in which authors discuss masculinit(y)/(ies) in a particular field? One might offer the simplest answer: it is just as valid a topic as any other. A more elaborate answer however is much more productive, and grounds my motivation in this thesis: this particular topic appears to have exceedingly broad reaches in a variety of disciplines, from sociology to anthropology to psychology. The reaches exceed academia as well; media distributors, as noted in chapter 1, also both respond to and construct perceptions of masculinit(y)/(ies). The triadix matrix among religious institutions, sexual ideologies and violence in men’s studies in religion compose morphological topics that are thus not only useful for, but seemingly necessitate interrogation.

Björn Krondorfer has noted that “a critical study does not disapprove of religion in general but, instead, questions the implicit and normative gender assumptions of *men* as they engage in, and are engaged by, religious traditions” (Krondorfer 2009, xi).⁴ In this chapter I will highlight significant examples of how authors in men’s studies in religion engage critically with particular contextualized questions. However, before being able to understand the queering of “normative gender assumptions of *men*” within the field, some historical precedents are necessary. I will begin this chapter by presenting some feminist arguments that provide the impetus for men to want to create new ways of performing masculinity within religious traditions. I will then show how authors who would later form the field of men’s studies in religion interpret these feminist arguments and the ramifications that feminist theory has for foundational texts within the field. Next I will discuss how these foundational texts are currently being (re)configured within the field and the different constative assumptions that authors make towards the motivational feminist theorists. My last main focus will be to focus specifically on how violence is discussed within the field of men’s studies in religion and the particular transfigurations that the concept takes when discussed within specifically religious ideologies.

2.2. *Feminist Precursors*

Many substantial authors in men’s studies in religion trace the impetus for their work from feminist arguments that emerged in the 1960-1970s. Authors write

⁴ Krondorfer’s italics.

in response to ideas, pressures and challenges presented by feminist studies (Boyd 2009, Krondorfer 2007, Longwood 2006). Culbertson and Krondorfer note that

[f]eminists of the 1960s and 1970s drew attention to the devastating effects of patriarchy and hetero-sexism in Western culture. Their analyses deeply influenced women scholars of Christianity and Judaism so that by the end of the 1980s feminist interpretations of Scripture and theology had become part of the theological norm.” (Culbertson and Krondorfer 2005, 5862).

At least partially because of this history, many authors in Men’s Studies in Religion either classify themselves or can be classified as “profeminist”, or as agreeing with notions raised in feminist theory. Central to this agreement is that ‘male dominance’ and patriarchal institutions are social constructions that have been reinforced and reproduced over thousands of years, and are not biologically, ‘religiously’ or otherwise intrinsically natural phenomena (Longwood 2006).

Other authors specifically point to the impact that French feminist theory has on the field. Questions of sexual difference especially reference this theoretical model. Julia Baudzej notes several authors who specifically use Luce Irigaray’s ideas of sexual difference (Baudzej 2008). Irigaray focuses on how “sexual difference” is important for power dynamics. In a system that accepts that there are different sexualities to which people can attest, and if in that system sexualized persons make decisions, then gender is active in those systems regarding culturally accepted ideas about who gets to make decisions. In *Sexes and Genealogies* for instance, she writes that “to posit a gender, a God is necessary: *guaranteeing the infinite*” (Irigaray [1987] 1993, 41). Conceiving of a god with a male gender then legitimates men to be male; without an “infinite” reference point gender’s discursive origins would be prevalent, and it is possible that gender boundaries would not seem

as strict as they do for Irigaray. The only way Irigaray sees to correct this situation is to establish a god of equal importance as God, but gendered as female. "This margin of freedom and potency [...] can be ours only if a God in the feminine gender can define it and keep it for us" (Irigaray [1987] 1993, 48).

Likewise, in "The Forgotten Mystery of Female Ancestry", Irigaray writes about the way in which myths over time seem to have limited the extent to which female characters engage in relationships with other female characters. Noting that these erasures have occurred in patriarchal cultures, albeit "perhaps out of ignorance, perhaps unwittingly" (Irigaray 2002, 71), Irigaray analyses myths concerning Persephone and Eve to argue that myths in patriarchal systems tend to take agency away from women. In myths that mention Persephone, the male character, Hades, has full control. While Persephone can sin and is responsible for that sin, she sinned because of a rule not made nor known by her prior to her committing of it. As for Eve, it is possible that she sinned in eating the apple from the Tree of Knowledge because she, unlike Adam, had no relationship with a mother figure; while Adam could engage in a Father-Son relationship with God, Eve was disallowed a relationship with a female god. Irigaray presents the argument that this type of sin without knowledge is only possible because of women's separation from relationships with other women, most importantly relationships with their mothers. Ignorant or not of the erasure of female-female relationships, myths tend to legitimate a commerce of women amongst men. This way of sanctioning social commerce through cultural narratives is a fundamental feature, for Irigaray, of a patriarchal economy (Irigaray 2002, 75).

Julia Kristeva also contributes to this particular reading of gender in religion. In "Approaching Abjection and Semiotics of Biblical Abomination" she argues that conceptions of "the Sacred" lead towards abjection. Located within the "maternal anguish" of primal separation, the abject is such because it causes the weak boundaries of the symbolic subject. Kristeva analyses this othering as a means of self-identification: "'I' do not assimilate it, 'I' expel it. But since the food [that is vomited, the feces excreted, etc] is not an 'other' for 'me', who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*" (Kristeva 2002a, 96-97). These expelled self-identified abject materials within "religious" establishments are essentially "taboos".

Kristeva uses as an example Leviticus 10:9-11, in which Jews are forbidden to drink wine while in the temple to show that the construction of wine as abject is what allows for the conception of the temple as holy; "The sacrifice has efficacy then only when manifesting a logic of separation, distinction, and difference that is governed by admissibility to the holy place, that is, the appointed place for encountering the sacred fire of the Lord Yahweh" (Kristeva 2002a, 99). These distinctions between purity and filth are lastly applied to the "maternal body" (Kristeva 2002a, 102) to argue that most acts definable as female are categorically transitional in patriarchal systems. The child serves as authentication for the mother, and the child is meant to cast off the mother, to make her abject, in gaining autonomy through language. As such, the female itself can be interpreted as abject for the purpose of the purification and possibly sacralisation of the male.

In a similar argument, Kristeva marks Judaism in “Reading the Bible” as introducing a concept of “religion” in which text overshadows ritual. She notes that “the Book dominates the Judaic religious experience. It overshadows and ultimately governs the ritual, which enables it to bypass the ritual in favour of the letter” (Kristeva 2002c, 163). This literary dominance in religion for Kristeva begs the question “*Who is speaking in the Bible? For whom?*” (Kristeva 2002c, 164); if the Bible is written by and for a male audience, and the written text is more important than ritual, then what are the ramifications for the representation of women? Perhaps more importantly, what are the ramifications for the way in which women view themselves within this deritualized tradition?

Mary Daly’s work is enormously important to the authors who compose men’s studies in religion. Daly, as opposed to Irigaray and Kristeva, writes from a similar American context as do many authors in the field in question. Her book *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* is cited often and continues to be representative of a particular kind of feminist theology. It is included as the first chapter in Krondorfer’s anthology *Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism*, a position which seems to correlate with being given a privileged position in the field to which the anthology is a substantial contribution. As an introduction to Daly’s chapter, Krondorfer notes that

Daly promoted perhaps the most radical and uncompromising critique of patriarchal religion. Even though she would not want her work to be understood as a stepping-stone toward a study of *men* and religion, her writings put men into the discomfiting position of explaining what they have so far taken for granted. (Krondorfer 2009, 3).

Daly's stated project in her book gives substance to the hesitation with which Krondorfer describes her impact on the field. She does not call herself a feminist theologian, because "'theology' even as 'new theology' usually means that the basic assumptions of patriarchal religion will be unchallenged and that they constitute a hidden agenda of the work. I am concerned precisely with questioning this hidden agenda" (Daly [1973] 1985, 6). The challenges presented to theorists attempting to adopt, or use her ideas as a "stepping stone", are thus justified. They, as men as well as theologians, are included in precisely the groups apart from which she desires to set herself.

Her influence, however, is quickly evident in the field. Like Irigaray in *Sharing the World* (which I will discuss at length in chapter 5), Daly is interested in finding a new language for theologically masculine terms such as "transcendence". She writes that

[t]he various theologies that [...] in one way or another objectify 'God' as a *being*, thereby attempt in a self-contradictory way to envisage transcendent reality as finite. 'God' then functions to legitimate the existing social, economic, and political status quo, in which women and other victimized groups are subordinate. (19)

This perspective is significant on its own, but is more so when understood alongside her notion that "myth takes on cosmic proportions since the male's viewpoint is metamorphosed into God's viewpoint" (47). Daly in effect criticizes not only the concept of "God", but the male viewpoint that reflects and is a reflection of that concept. Therefore since the concept of "God" makes "women and other victimized groups" subordinate, the problem does not just belong to the concept, but to men. Daly works inevitably to pathologize the way men define themselves by suggesting

that men compose the sole group to which “women and other victimized groups” are subordinate.

The authors whom I will discuss in the remainder of this chapter assume, as do Irigaray, Kristeva and Daly, that historically religious traditions have legitimated particular “social, economic, and political status quo[s]” often to the benefit of men and that “transcendent” notions of “God” are often portrayed as masculine or male. The authors to whom I will now turn criticize masculinit(y)/(ies) constructively. They do not, however, wish to redefine “God” as female or to move past a gendered God, but rather they wish to change the ways men define themselves in the contexts from which that concept emerges.

2.3. Mythopoetics: Foundational Texts in Men’s Studies in Religion

The earliest and most substantial group of men who actively interrogate dominant conceptions about masculinity do so by bringing into question the narrative structures that give “masculinity” meaning. Merle Longwood has noted that “[t]he men’s movement that has received the greatest attention in the national media was the spiritual movement that is often called the ‘mythopoetic’ movement” (Longwood 2006, 55). In mythopoetics, authors use cultural narratives and folktales to illustrate allegorical points about contemporary contexts. It has been noted to be useful in terms of personal transformation, but has been criticized for its essentialist tendencies (Longwood 2006).

Longwood notes Robert Bly as being a founding author in the mythopoetic movement (55), and thus is of foundational significance to men’s studies in religion.

Bly uses mythopoetics to interrogate masculinity in North American cultures. In his landmark book *Iron John* he argues that “[w]e are living at an important and fruitful moment now, for it is clear to men that the images of adult manhood given by the popular culture are worn out; a man can no longer depend on them” (Bly 1990, ix). He directly places the men of whom he writes as being impacted by feminist ideas from the 1960s. He notes that “[t]he strong or life-giving women who graduated from the sixties, so to speak, or who have inherited an older spirit, played an important part in producing this life-preserving, but not life-giving, man” (3).

Bly recognizes that feminist ideas have reshaped the ways that men think about themselves, their sexualization and the ways they can perform their sexualized identities. He is interested in how particular narratives have lost cultural capital and how men can regain these former guides. He argues that “[w]hen the Church and the culture as a whole dropped the gods who spoke for the divine element in male sexual energy – Pan, Dionysus, Hermes, the Wild Man – into oblivion, we as men lost a great deal” (249).

Eugene Monick argues similarly to Bly in three books: *Phallos: Sacred Image of the Masculine*, *Castration and Male Rage: the Phallic Wound*, and *Potency: Male Aggression as a Path to the Soul*. Like Bly, Monick is influenced by Jungian archetypes as well as the work of Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell. Differently than Bly, however, Monick uses mythopoetics only as a basis for his thoughts about masculinity; he accepts the political contexts surrounding his books’ creation much more than Bly appears to do.

Phallos, being the first of a series of books, is more of an outline of Monick’s project than an argument in itself. Monick writes this book as a means of

maintaining a sense of the masculine during what he sees as the decline of “patriarchal attitudes and values” (Monick 1987, 9). In his introduction he writes: “Men need to understand the psychological underpinnings of their gender and their sexuality better than they do. One might think that in a patriarchal society males would grasp the basis of masculine identity naturally and spontaneously. They usually do not” (9). Coming from a Jungian school of psychoanalysis, he locates the “psychological underpinnings” of masculinity within the phallus, or Phallos, the “fundamental mark of maleness, its stamp, its impression” (9). According to Monick, if one accepts that there is a thing called masculinity that is either natural in and of itself, a social construction, or a combination of the two, then a person who defines him or herself in a way that he or she understands as being masculine does so in a way that reflects the archetypal Phallos.

Monick introduces the subject by outlining Phallos’s primacy in Freudian psychoanalysis and the significance of Jung’s “first dream” wherein Jung as a child dreamt of what he called a “ritual phallus” (47). Informed by Freudian and Jungian modes of psychoanalysis, Monick then analyses a series of artworks and mythic figures [from Greek figures such as Priapus (104) and Hermes (79) to Christian images of Jesus (59) and Satan (40)] in terms of phallic representation and the contextual significance of sexualisation or desexualisation of each figure for the audience that the myth or artwork was intended. Each representation is filtered through a dichotomy taken from Erich Neumann: Cthonic/Solar Phallus, or as Monick analyses, Sexual/Spiritual Phallos (57). By locating masculinity within Phallos, he seems to desire to preserve not the patriarchal histories of how Phallos

has been used, but rather a general binary relationship between masculinity and femininity.

In *Castration and Male Rage*, Monick continues the work done in *Phallos* to make an interesting thesis: male rage is performed due to a fear, real or imagined, of castration. Monick recapitulates the ways in which the phallus can be understood to be spiritual. If Phallos is “sacred to men as the manifestation of inner self” (Monick 1991, 9), then the fear of castration is the fear of losing that inner self. He then details the ways in which castration is important within Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis, particularly with regards to Freudian castration anxiety and Jungian symbols of transformation and the integration of the feminine within the hero/masculine archetype. To offer an alternative to Freud, Monick uses Karen Horney’s work about male dread to posit that male rage possibly “refers back to the mystery of motherhood from which the male is excluded” (1991:51).

Monick constructs six categories of castration that create male rage: male-male; female-male; auto; societal; by fate; and ontological. Contrary to perhaps “common-sense” conceptions that patriarchy is created by the masculine, he argues that conforming to social patriarchal norms is itself a form of castration. “He may not even know he suffers, a condition that is, in its own way, equally devastating. The outer reward for [...] buying into the power structures of the Father is substantial. But the man becomes a clone” (92). He ends the book with methods of not overcoming, but “coming to terms” with castration (108). These methods focus on creating a sense of community based on respect. “Castration is never cured, in the sense that it is eliminated as a masculine problem. But a man need not leave his castration as he finds it” (108).

The book answers important questions raised in *Phallos*. Most importantly, if Phallos is the sacred symbol of the masculine, what are the ramifications when one believes one's masculine identity is being attacked? It is equally important to note that Monick upholds the Jungian idea that integration of the feminine and the masculine is a key stage in the development of the psyche (64). While he reifies Phallos as well as castration with universal and spiritual terminology, he also implies a sort of social constructivism regarding how patriarchy shapes conceptions of masculinity. He couches all of his theories within the understanding that conceptions of the masculine refer problematically to conceptions of patriarchal history. The ways in which male rage is expressed are deeply embedded within the acceptable norms to which the male subscribes, and these subscriptions contribute heavily to his castration.

In *Potency*, Monick's final work on masculinism, one finds not so much an argument as an interpretation of masculinity, and more precisely potency, through an entirely spiritual lens. Potency for Monick is "the psychological as well as physical talismanic image of identity for maleness" (Monick 2006, 7). Although the project is interesting, the author's confession that the book is "a mystical quest more than an intellectual one" (7-8) is apparent throughout. The book consolidates masculinity as power and activity, making the feminine powerless and receptive. This approach to binary qualities of masculine and feminine, however, is quite similar to Irigaray's most recent conceptions—a congruence indicating an acceptance on the part of some theorists of the culturally normative qualities each carries.

In order to approach this conception of the masculine, Monick focuses on the mystical and ecstatic ways in which a person confronts his or her own masculinity. Primarily here he focuses on aggression as “intrinsic” (63) to this mystical/ecstatic experience, noting that “the aggressive quality in erection is physiologically necessary for phallus to serve its natural purpose to penetrate” (63). By reducing masculinity to the sexual act for which Phallos is the sacred symbol, the penetrative and the aggressive – as opposed to receptive and passive, which would be feminine in his dichotomy - quality of Phallos transfers to the totality of the masculine. This seems dangerous when one considers, as has been mentioned, that Monick foresees a decline in patriarchal norms. To preserve values such as aggression, penetration and, by extension, control, Monick implicitly preserves the dominating patriarchal notions that have been so problematic in the past. By expecting the feminine to accept a receptive role Monick essentially reproduces the same patriarchy that he believes “sidetracks men, keeping them from genuine masculine experiences” (37).

John Boswell has also been instrumental in motivating men to question the ways in which they are depicted in dominant narratives. His work in *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* has been called “a witty and unrelenting argument for tolerance and repentance” (Culbertson and Krondorfer 2005, 5864). Boswell very thoroughly traces historical instances in Christian cultures wherein homosexuality is depicted, attempting “not to praise or blame but merely to record and explain” (Boswell 1980, xv). His examination of homosexuality in Christian traditions significantly features in the fact that gay men’s issues in

religious studies developed two years prior to men's studies in religion. For instance, the two fields were adopted as groups in the American Academy of Religion in 1988 and 1990, respectively (Culbertson and Krondorfer 2005, 5862).

2.4. The Current Focus in Men's Studies in Religion

Authors such as Bly, Monick and Boswell interpret old narratives to (re)imagine the ways that those myths present masculinity or masculinities. They are motivated by the feminist idea that the then contemporary conceptions of masculinity are dysfunctional, and that this dysfunction is due to the mythical figures that men use to define themselves. Bly, Monick and Boswell draw on pre-Jewish and pre-Christian gender practices and conceptions to present their Jewish and Christian audiences with historical precedents of current models as well as bases for alternative methods of performing these culturally assumed gender roles.

It would seem then that the case is that: a) authors in men's studies in religion currently interrogate mainly Jewish and Christian questions of masculinity; or b) that authors in the field recognize a mainly Jewish and Christian audience and structure non-Jewish and non-Christian arguments to be best understood by their ideal audience; or c) that persons who edit major publications and then tout them as relating to men's studies in religion include mainly authors in men's studies in religion who interrogate Jewish and Christian questions; or d) that these editors imagine the Jewish and Christian audience and produce collected editions and published works that will appeal to the imagined audience and will thus sell more copies. These options are not mutually exclusive. The implications for each way that institutionalized knowledge production might function in the field are similar—

each option results in the same literature being evaluated. I will go into more detail about institutionalized knowledge and men's studies in religion as an institution in chapter 4.

For the moment then, what is important to this literature review is that the literature consistently points to Christian and Jewish references within the field, and even more so, to a mainly Christian database. General bibliographies on men's studies in religion provide significant evidence for this argument. *The Encyclopedia of Religion* is an exhaustive and well-known source for topics within religious studies. Being a repository for information on "religion", the article within it on men's studies in religion is an excellent starting point.

The 2005 entry entitled "Men's Studies in Religion" in the *Encyclopedia* is written by Philip Culbertson and Björn Krondorfer. On the topic of the field's outlook the authors note that

Men's studies in religion as an emerging field of inquiry is still heavily located within the scholarly traditions of the West, specifically Christianity and Judaism. It has not yet sufficiently engaged other religious traditions and been tested seriously as a topic of interreligious dialogue. (Culbertson and Krondorfer 2005, 5864)

While I will not engage with the problematic assumption that any tradition can substantively be called "religious", what I will engage with is the truth to the authors' statement. The authors direct the reader to a suggested bibliography that comprises twenty-four major works in the field. Of these works, nineteen are primarily about masculinity within Christian or Jewish traditions. The other works regard either gay or queer men's issues in religion or commentary on the field itself.

The article defines four sub-disciplines within the field. This delineation is substantially more reflective of Judaeo-Christian contributions to the field than are

other such lists. By interpreting men's studies in religion in this manner, the authors construct boundaries within the field that are not necessarily unproductive, and indeed allow for a focused analysis of the state of the field. The four categories seem to reflect both other authors in the field and general critiques of religious studies, which also locate religion substantively within Christian and Jewish terminology.

2.4.1. "Men Reclaiming Religion and Faith"

Under "Men Reclaiming Religion and Faith" the authors notice a significant amount of scholarship given to Christian men's movements of the 1990s. Common to these movements, the authors argue, are beliefs held by groups of men that "women were moving into the sphere of the sacred and were taking over religious institutions" (5862). Few movements are represented as contributing to these authors' data sets, which seems validated by the references to men's movements in other authors' work. Studies on the Promise Keepers, the Muscular Christianity movement, the Million Man March and the Stonehenge riot compose the majority of sociological work done in the field.

A considerable number of authors who might still be qualified as "profeminist" subscribe to an idea that a kernel of masculinity persists through history in various incarnations. They believe that misogynist practices reflect maladaptive interpretations that are either correctable or salvageable (Hamman 2007, O'Brian 2008, Van Leeuwen 2002). These authors are typically more interested in the ways in which individual men can regain senses of religiosity – more often than not

generalized into “spirituality” – than in reclaiming the institutionalized forms of the traditions about which they write.

Another Christian theme includes authors who question participation in Christian organizations and how Christianity can possibly encourage more men to participate. This type of argument generally provides a rationale that current references for masculinities in Christian groups are soft, effeminate, or otherwise ‘unmanly’. As such, some authors try to find or recover a “manly” Christianity (Carrington 2009). The Muscular Christianity movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries attempted to reinstall ‘the masculine’ into Christianity by using physical strength and team sports as praise. This movement bears as a current evolution the more secularized organizations of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), which endorse Muscular Christian goals while not explicitly taking on theological requirements in their programs (Putney 2001). Members of the Promise Keepers movement, which started in the early 1990s, seek to provide Christian men with moral and ethical structures that question traditional patriarchal roles (Bartkowski 2004).

These movements, however, propose ideas that limit their cultural viability. Culbertson and Krondorfer note that they “[argue] for man’s rightful position as head of the family” (Culbertson and Krondorfer 2005, 5863). Supporters of the Muscular Christianity movement originally positioned presumably weak and ‘unmanly’ Christian men against an equally presumably strong and manly Jewish working class community. The anti-Semitic motivation for the movement has contributed to its diminished social impact and its change in focus to a secular presentation

through the YMCA and YWCA. The article's authors do not note the possible problems associated with touting patriarchy's benefits. These movements, and perhaps most work which attempts to show how "men [reclaim] religion and faith", strategically placed within a context wherein they are not as economically viable as other ideas, experience decreased political viability (to use Badiou's idea about politics as concentrated economy from chapter 1) and thus decreased cultural viability.

2.4.2. "Spiritual and Confessional Writings"

"Spiritual and Confessional Writings" apply to "issues of embodiment, sexual theologies, and the deconstruction of traditional masculine roles" (5863). By discursively linking spirituality with the very Augustinian and Foucauldian understandings of confession, Culbertson and Krondorfer seem to propose that only Christian concepts of spirituality are possible. They note that these issues are "of concern in the Jewish and Christian traditions" (5863), which further locates the field, or at least this particular discursive strain, within those two traditions. The authors note the dynamism that occurs when "spiritual and autobiographical voices [blend] scholarly analysis with a more personal and existential style" (5863). This method of blending "critical analysis and envisioned spiritual renewal" (5863) attracts criticism within the field, however. Others have noted that the confessional model that Culbertson and Krondorfer offer limits authors' probability of acceptance into some discourses. Scott Haldeman writes that "by separating out works that take as a central subject erotic experience, you may be (inadvertently?) implying [...] that they should not be considered as, for instance, serious contributions to constructive

theological or historical disciplines” (Haldeman 2007, 96). The blending of data with anecdote correlates to a blending of scholarly work with a personal “spiritual” journey which could significantly impede work in the field from being adopted as valid by other, possibly more stringent, conversations within religious studies.

Partially in response to Haldeman, Krondorfer argues for the benefits of confessional writing in his most recent book, *Male Confessions: Intimate Revelations and the Religious Imagination*. In this book Krondorfer argues that confessional models of interrelationality present more viable models for masculinity than the emotionally restricted models currently cited in many groups. Krondorfer argues that confessional practices in men can contribute to men’s recognizing “a truthful account of themselves” (Krondorfer 2010, 2). By displacing the centrality of emotionlessness and rigidity in culturally dominant definitions of masculinity, Krondorfer seeks to introduce an original depth and direction for men’s studies in religion. While I disagree that continuing to christianize masculine definitions through a confessional model is perhaps not the most productive direction for the field, it is an interesting direction for Krondorfer’s primarily Christian and emotionally constrained men.

Julia Baudzej presents an interesting argument that parallels Krondorfer’s in her article “Retelling the Story of Jesus: The Concept of Embodiment and Recent Feminist Reflections on the Maleness of Christ”. She notes that recent feminist work points to the embodiment of Jesus which is often related to female experience within theological discussion. “Far from denying Jesus’ masculinity, it is only in the context of his embodiment, which encompasses experience and subjectivity, that we can give it a new meaning—a move that will encourage Christology to go beyond androcentrism” (Baudzej 2008, 89). Krondorfer’s proposed direction for men’s studies in

religion is essentially that of an embodied discourse wherein the author is inextricable from his or her work. Focusing on subjectivity and embodiment in religious discourse could have an effect similar to focusing on confessional scholarship without necessarily tying the work to a Christian model.

A focus on embodiment would be, of course, not without problematic ramifications for work in the field. Stephen C. Finley works specifically on the problematic relationship between embodied theology and religious participation within African American groups. In his work with African American Christian groups, Finley notes that many of these communities face uniquely racialized as well as gendered perceptions of embodied theologies. An embodied Jesus – and thereby usually a receptive and emasculated Jesus – when combined with a lack of strong relatable male role models within the community and a history of culturally acceptable racism, arguably contributes to the significant decrease in church attendance by African American men that Finley notices (Finley 2007, Finley 2007a).

2.4.3. “Theological and Biblical Investigation”

In the next section, “Theological and Biblical Investigation”, Culbertson and Krondorfer note that many authors critically engage with such theologians as Augustine and Martin Luther, and with scriptural passages that “[highlight] the problems of contemporary men struggling with relationship and identity issues” (Culbertson and Krondorfer 2005, 5863). This method that the authors identify is similar to that taken on by Bly and Monick, but instead of appealing to pre-Jewish and Christian narratives as the earlier authors do, more recent authors attempt to solve the “identity issues” within their own traditions. These investigations appear to

be the most varied in the field: from interrogating the viability of patriarchal systems to reading sexual “perversion” onto South American liberation theologies.

Some authors who bring a Christian perspective to the dialogue maintain that a proper form of masculinity can be found in the masculinity that the Christian character of Jesus represents. In this type of argument social ailments are the result of cultural failure to strive toward a “biblical mandate” (Van Leeuwen 2002, Van Leeuwen 2005) wherein a father performs a patriarchal yet active role in the family. An absent father is argued to create most of the psychological distance between men and women, which then creates a hatred of the ever-present mother, a longing for the ever-absent father, and melancholia about a lost whole subject (Capps 2008, Janssen 2007, Van Leeuwen 2002). Important in all contributors to this kind of argument is an implicit acceptance that in order for a family to be “intact” (Van Leeuwen 2002) it must include a father, a mother, and children. If a family does not include persons fulfilling these three roles, it will be somehow corrupt, and will contribute to maladaptive social values and actions. Homosexual unions, unwed cohabitating couples and abortions, all which seemingly disrupt the “intact” structure, are seen as contributing factors to problematic social and gender relations. The discriminatory characteristic of this type of “biblical mandate” argument requires closer scrutiny than is apparent in the literature surrounding them with regard to the social implications that follow from their adoption, from homophobia to tax rebates for married partners and parents.

A more constructive way of approaching theological and biblical investigation relates to how the traditions that spawn the discourses construct limiting theological gender identities. Some authors investigate how the cultural importance of male

genitalia relates to constructions of masculinity in various groups (Schwartz 1994). In these arguments primacy is given to the veiling or unveiling of the penis in myths accepted by the group and the significance that group members attribute to these acts. In a psychoanalytic sense the supporters of these arguments can be understood to be attempting to locate—and thereby to possess—the authority signified by the phallus. This appears to be a progression from Bly and Monick's kind of foundational arguments; Bly and Monick use myths not to create a metonymy for masculinities out of the penis, but rather to provide totalized images of masculine characters that can be used to teach men how to be men essentially.

2.4.4. “Gay and Queer Studies in Religion”

The last significant sub-field that Culbertson and Krondorfer discuss is “Gay and Queer Studies in Religion”. The authors recognize that this sub-field developed separately from the main field of men's studies in religion, and has different aims and methods. Authors in the sub-field widely cite Boswell's exploration of homosexuality's history in Christian communities. It is interesting that, as a definition, the authors note that “[g]ay studies challenge hetero-normativity by focusing on diversity, pride and liberation” (Culbertson and Krondorfer 2005, 5864). If the authors intend to define gay studies against the heterosexuality on which the more general field focuses, and if gay studies focuses on “diversity, pride and liberation” then they seem to imply that heterosexual men's studies in religion focuses on uniformity, shame and suppression. While this dichotomy might not be the authors' intention, if true it is not representative of the other literature authors who identify with the field produce. Other authors who identify as contributing to gay

men's issues in religious studies focus more on the institutional exclusion of analyses by gay authors in mainstream volumes about men's studies in religion, which points, they argue, to a type of hetero-normative assumption of academic validity in the field itself—the general field is not named, after all, “heterosexual men's studies in religion”.

One interesting current dialogue in this stream analyses the participation of gay men who write about gay issues in academia, and the possibly general exclusion of their work from the majority of academic journals. Björn Krondorfer has argued that this exclusion has a variety of causes, ranging from homophobia to gay authors' primarily multidisciplinary foci and often sexualized articles (Krondorfer 2007). Other authors, however, note that the very categorization of discourses as “gay” or “straight” further marginalizes gay authors and leads to the reification of sexual stereotypes (Haldeman 2007). Another option is to actively disrupt sexual reifications through queer theory, which transgresses religious and sexual norms in order to expose reified norms (Althaus-Reid 2003, Goss 2009).

The categories proposed in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* entry are clearly non-exclusive. Baudzej's argument about Jesus is as much of a “spiritual” argument as it is a “theological and biblical reflection”. It is unclear, given the field's Jewish and Christian focus, what “spiritual and confessional” topics *are* outside theological ones. Likewise, Althaus-Reid's arguments in *The Queer God* would be included as “gay queer studies”, but also, under Culbertson and Krondorfer's rubric, “spiritual and confessional” (she uses sexual theology) and “theological and biblical investigation” (she bases many of her arguments in South American liberation theologies). Categories are of course ideal, but the ambiguity with which many

authors' work can be included in them necessitates a question about their practicality.

2.4.5. Intermediary Conclusions about the Field

Several questions about the contemporary foci of men's studies in religion emerge from Culbertson and Krondorfer's article as well as the apparently representative literature. If two main authors in the field emphasize so heavily the Jewish and Christian motivations and goals, is it appropriate to call the field "men's studies in religion"? Would "men's studies in Jewish and Christian traditions" more closely reflect the work done? With no precedent for "interreligious dialogue" or projections for the integration of non-Christian or non-Jewish representations of 'religious masculinity' into the pre-existing conversations, the field's ambassadors seem to limit the possibilities for future research. While this perspective is perhaps cynical, it seems to warrant serious consideration if the field is to continue aspire towards the general and ambiguous subject matter of "religion".

The authors whom Culbertson and Krondorfer represent are not without their own problems regarding definitions. It would seem that Stephen Boyd's position in *The Men We Long to Be: Beyond Domination to a New Christian Understanding of Manhood* that "[w]e men are not inherently or irreversibly violent" (Boyd 1995, 14) is not currently held by many authors. Even in their critical analyses of the ways that masculinities are performed, many contemporary authors take phenomenological stances towards the versions that they interrogate, a position which in many cases leads to essentializing and idealizing the conclusions that they come to. The Hegelian algorithm of $A=A(A)$ that I discuss in chapter 1, wherein the conception of a

concept is seen as correlative to the conception of that concept in an abstract sense and not in a particular context, appears evident in much of the work in the field. As I will show in the next section, equally problematic to the essentialization of masculinity in the field is the naturalization of violence.

2.5. Discussions of “Violence” in Men’s Studies in Religion

An overarching consensus in the vast majority of authors contributing to men’s studies in religion is that current conceptions, manifestations or interpretations of masculinity do not achieve the goals they set out to accomplish. While many authors add unique perspectives to ideas about masculinity, none argues that a viable model is currently practiced by any group. Authors in the mythopoetic movement argue that current masculinities fail because they have lost signifying references found in myths. Christian authors argue that men are not living up to Jesus’ example, or to the biblical mandate. Gay authors note that both heterosexual and homosexual men contribute to the negative portrayals of homosexual men both in social groups and in academia. All these failures amount to a culture of frustrated and anxious men who want to but are unclear about how to perform a masculine role—a factor which some authors see as the cause for the majority of male violence.

These ways of thinking about masculinities have roots in the field’s foundational texts. Bly for instance recognizes a seemingly universal attribute in masculinity prevents gender equality. He writes that:

The dark side of men is clear. Their mad exploitation of earth resources, devaluation and humiliation of women, and obsession with tribal warfare are undeniable. [...] We have defective mythologies that ignore masculine

depth of feeling, assign men a place in the sky instead of earth, teach obedience to the wrong powers, work to keep men boys, and entangle both men and women in systems of industrial domination that exclude both matriarchy and patriarchy. (Bly 1990, x)

Bly does not qualify this statement into any particular contexts. Instead, he understands violence as something to be “dealt with” and harnessed, much as Monick seeks to harness aggression without turning it into violence. Bly locates the harnessing of this ambiguously Jungian archetypal aggression in something he calls the “internal warrior”. He argues that

[i]f a culture does not deal with the warrior energy – take it in consciously, discipline it, honor it – it will turn up outside in the form of street gangs, wife beating, drug violence, brutality to children, and aimless murder.

“One major task of contemporary men is to reimagine, now that the images of eternal warrior and outward warrior no longer provide the model, the value of the warrior in relationships, in literary studies, in thought, in emotion. (179)

By stating that “the dark side of men is clear”, that this “dark side” manifests as various forms of violence, and by arguing that mythopoetic techniques can help (re)imagine masculine narratives, Bly allows for several assumptions to be made about violence and masculinit(y)/(ies)/.

Within the consensus of men who recognize malfunctioning models from which men perform masculine identities, many authors continue Bly’s position to argue that men are violent, and that “male violence” as such must be stopped. Culbertson and Kronenberg note that “[p]articularly they [authors who contribute to men’s studies in religion] counter the crippling effects of homophobia and abusive behaviour toward women as well as culturally or sexually marginalized men” (Culbertson and Krondorfer 2005, 5863). It appears from this position that it is only the actions by heterosexual men that contribute to cultures wherein homophobia and abusive actions towards women develop. Homosexual conceptions of masculinity

and male or female conceptions of femininity apparently do not cause violence; the quotation extrapolates a view that hegemonic heterosexuality can produce violence. Authors who form men's studies in religion thus contribute to a problematically implicit argument not only that heterosexual men are violent, but that violence is somehow a heterosexual male problem.

For some authors masculinity is linked to colonialism and the violent ways in which colonial agendas are executed (Hamman 2007). Some authors argue for a causal relationship between one's conception of masculinity and maladaptive practices such as sex addiction (Kennedy 2008) and sexual assaults by clergy members against children (Poling 2009). Some authors argue that male-led religious institutions "have exacerbated the problems of intimate [domestic] violence" (Livingston 2007, 86). Others show how violence is a perversion of unproblematic and possibly devotional forms of aggression (Putney 2001). Key in these arguments is that violence seems to be a component of masculinity that must be addressed. 'Male violence' has been called "one of the darkest features of masculinity" (Longwood 2006, 47).

James Newton Poling notes however that the ways in which authors in men's studies in religion understand violence is a relatively new phenomenon. He writes that "throughout most of the Church's history, [...] male violence against women has not been thematized as a theological and ethical problem. [...] This is a particular obligation of the present generation" (Poling 2009, 474). Poling's note – which he unfortunately does not develop – points to a significant critique of the field. While many authors notice that male violence is a problem, and for Poling, a "global problem" (474), most fail to recognize that "male violence" as a concept is as

contingent on its context as are the notions of “masculinity” that the authors take such effort to deconstruct.

By noting violence’s discursivity and the cultural embeddedness which allows for this particular discursive conception to come about, I do not intend to argue that violent actions perpetrated by men do not exist, nor that they should not have real consequences within the contexts from which they emerge. I simply intend to argue that it is ineffective to problematize an action by unproblematically essentializing it within a constructed category. Doing so, as is seen in work done on masculinity in religion, results in the reification both of the concept of “male violence” and of the apparently non-constructed “masculinit(y)/(ies) from whence the reified mythologization of violence comes.

2.6. *Practically (Re)viewed (Re)marks*

Authors in men’s studies in religion appear to write about violence in a way that implies a way of making Christian and Jewish men somehow ambiguously “better”. Violence is both reified into action and assumed to be both part of contemporary men and excisable from them. These men are understood to desire some sort of upward mobility with regard to their gendered identities. Stephen Boyd’s often-referenced title within the field, *The Men We Long to Be: Beyond Domination to a New Christian Understanding of Manhood* is a clear example of the perception of a malfunctioning current model—dominating masculinity—alongside the possibility of upward mobility—the ability to imagine the type of men they long to be.

The field appears to be founded upon this idea of self-improvement as being correlative to cultural progress—like Lynn White in the famous article “The Historical Roots of our Current Ecological Crisis”, these authors recognize a problem within their social order and envision a solution that seemingly only they can provide. Lynn White understands that primarily Christian men and Christian ideologies have caused an international ecological crisis and that the solution to it lies within Christianity (White 1967). Likewise, Boyd recognizes dominating tendencies within dominant Christian conceptions of masculinity, and uses Christian theologies to envision a non-dominating, ‘authentic’ type of masculinity within the same tradition (Boyd 1995).

The ways in which authors discuss violence in men’s studies in religion bears a close resemblance to a more general method of identity-interrogation that occurs within these authors’ contexts: that of Heinz Hartmann’s ego psychology. A central idea in ego psychology is that every person has an ego, and that the development of the ego will allow the person to better respond to his or her environment. Jane Gallop notes that “[e]go psychology [...] seeks to return psychoanalysis to a pre-Freudian state, one in which the conscious ‘autonomous’ ego is the centre of the human psyche” (Gallop 1985, 98). The ego psychologist’s attempt to develop an “‘autonomous’ ego” correlates to the author’s attempt in men’s studies in religion to develop a sort of autonomous masculinity—a masculinity that is somehow able to be bracketed off from the rest of the subject.

In the next chapter I will take a close examination of Lacanian theory. A part of Lacan’s theory is quite relevant here: his “return to Freud”. As I will show, Lacan focuses not on developing the ego or imagining the ego to even be a thing that can

be improved, but on recognizing the implications that unconscious systems have for conscious thought. The project undertaken by many authors in men's studies in religion, conceiving of themselves apparently alongside an ego psychology ideology, imagine that by improving themselves they can better cope with and improve their environment. It might be more beneficial instead for discussions of violence to focus on the unconscious structures in place that allow one to express the ideas that one does.

Chapter 3 – Violence (Re)Signified: A Lacanian Theoretical Framework

The subject in other words recognizes itself at the moment it loses itself in / as the other.

(Grosz 1990, 41)

Our conception of the concept implies that the concept is always established in an approach that is not unrelated to that which is imposed on us, as a form, by infinitesimal calculus.

(Lacan [1973] 1977b, 19)

3.1. *Metaphor and Myth*⁵

In the last chapter I portrayed the field called men's studies in religion in a way that shows how 1960s feminist ideologies regarding masculine religious traditions are adapted by current discourses about masculinit(y)/(ies) in religion. This chronological progression might seem common-sense. Men's studies in religion, noted by the authors who construct it, forms itself against and in response to the feminist theorists emerging in the 1960s and 1970s. Juxtaposing authors who interrogate what masculinity means in religious contexts against previous authors who question whether religious contexts can exist external to masculine identities is essential to understanding why those who respond to and construct men's studies in religion conceive of masculinity and violence in the ways that they do.

Jacques Lacan's quotation at the beginning of this chapter shows, however, why this chronology, or perhaps this genealogy, is omitted in ideas regarding violence in the field. By stating that "[o]ur conception of the concept implies that the

⁵ Although Lacan writes in French, in this chapter I will rely on English translations of his work. I will also use English translations of French theorists who comment on him, where those commentaries exist. I base this decision on Jane Gallop's argument that reading is not made more authoritative when performed in a particular language (Gallop 1985), and in Alain Badiou's understanding that "philosophy privileges no language, not even the one it is written in (Badiou 2005, 38). Reading texts in their original language would allow for a *different* interpretation of them, but not necessarily a more authoritative one.

concept is always established in an approach that is not unrelated to that which is imposed on us" (Lacan [1973] 1977b, 19), Lacan relates one's ability to conceive of an idea with the process by which one is able to conceive of it. In the context of discussions about violence in men's studies in religion, this idea necessitates a link between how authors in the field understand violence and the feminist ideologies upon which the field is constructed. This idea of institutional knowledge is dependent upon several Lacanian concepts and is much more complex than can be explained in a few paragraphs, so I will explore it further in chapter 4.

One might ask what a psychoanalytical reading adds to discussions about violence in different forms of gendered analysis. On a clinical level, after all, psychoanalysis is very much an intimate relationship between the analyst and analysand that takes place frequently over several years before any sound results are achievable. As I will show in the following chapters, it is neither my intention to analyse any authors in the field, nor to analyse a single author's work in reference to the field. What I intend to do is historicize particular concepts within the Lacanian theoretical model and show how they compose a useful reading of the current state of men's studies in religion.

Jeremy Carrette recognizes an important challenge to studying religion, or at least groups who make claims to religious adherence, from a psychological perspective. Carrette writes that:

Any critical reading of the psychological knowledge of religion has therefore to examine the issue of the individual and sociological, not just in the domain of specific concerns, but also at the point at which this issue emerges in a wider variety of fields.(Carrette 2007, 72)

For Carrette, “psychological knowledge of religion” cannot be analysed *sui generis* because it is always contextual in relation to other fields of knowledge. Of equal importance to multi-disciplinary research in religious studies is engagement with a variety of concerns outside the declared research problem. One of my goals in this thesis is to contextualize in a hopefully coherent way a variety of challenges that authors in men’s studies in religion create for themselves.

In chapter 1 I noted that Lacanian psychoanalysis has not been integrated to a large extent into discourses about religion. As I will show in the following chapter, however, constructing a conversation and adding to a pre-existing one are not mutually exclusive—indeed, they might necessitate each other. In this chapter I seek to explore Lacan’s psychoanalytical model with regard to his work on the subject and signification. Lacan is involved with a wide variety of scholarship, both theoretical and applicable. For the purposes of this thesis I will focus on the theoretical contributions he makes to theory in the field of psychology and religion.

I will begin by showing how Lacan’s notions of the mirror phase and the processes of signification provide one with a viable toolset with which to study concepts of identification and signification. I will then examine work done by substantial Lacanian theorists to review productive conversations about Lacanian theories. These conversations shift a Lacanian reading regarding signification and the ways in which language forms concepts about identity in ways that allow for a viable intersection between Lacanian psychoanalysis and men’s studies in religion. I will lastly interrogate ways in which Lacanian theorists discuss violence and how a Lacanian work about language composes a useful way to interpret concepts of violence.

Underlying this chapter, and my entire reading of Lacan, is the understanding that Lacan's model, being constructed in and focusing on language, should be understood as language and by literary means. Lacan's focus on the primacy of the infant-mother relationship and the intrusion onto that relationship by the rule-instilling father does not show an argument for the primacy of biological relationships. It rather shows how a narrative structure comprises metaphorical relationships between differentiable elements of environmental perception. It is here that I will disagree with Howard Schwartz's argument in *God's Phallus* that a phallus is necessarily a penis (Schwartz 1994). While the idea of the phallus, possibly translatable as authority in this context, is conceptually dependent on Lacan's reading of the penis, one does not equal the other. One's father does not necessarily force a symbolic order onto one's perception of the world, but the *idea* of a father as opposed to a mother in the conceptual binary "established in an approach that is not unrelated to that which is imposed on us", provides one with a useful metaphor with which to interpret particular and contextualized elements of experience. These metaphors simply work to create a narrative method to interpret a narrative structure, much as the way authors use the narrative concept of God to interpret the narrative cultures that simultaneously form the concept of God and are formed by it.

3.2. *The Man in the Mirror: Lacan on the Subject and Signification*

An appropriate place in Lacan's work from which to begin is that which is referred to in this thesis' title: the mirror stage. In "The Mirror Stage as Formative of

the 'I' Function", Lacan argues that a subject's first sense of self is discovered upon interacting with a mirror or other reflective surface in which the reflected object behaves as the subject does but does not equate to it. A person is not born with a sense of self, but gains one by recognizing a particular way that symbols order themselves. Lacan writes that

[i]t suffices to understand the mirror stage in this context as *an identification*, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes [assume] an image—an image that is seemingly predestined to have an effect at this phase, as witnessed by the use in analytic theory of antiquity's term, "*imago*". (Lacan [1966] 2006b, 76)⁶

By looking at a mirror the subject takes on, or assumes, an *identification* with the object that the mirror reflects. The reflected image is at both times paradoxically "Other" to the subject and instrumental to the subject's recognition of his or her own subjectivity.

The subject projects this image onto the first "Other" to which he or she relates that does not behave as the reflective mirror does: the mother. The mother represents a sense of splitting in the subject. By assuming an image of selfhood, the subject presumes that the other with whom he or she has interacted so far in life, the mother, must also have a self. The recognition of other is thus dependent on the recognition of the possibility of self and *vice versa*; one assumes the self in the recognition of the other, and presumes the other in recognition of the self. The imaginary identifications assumed and presumed would not function if both processes did not occur simultaneously. This recognition of selfhood and other begins the life-long process of presuming images onto projections of the Other who

⁶ Italics of *identification* and *assume* are Lacan's untranslated French terms, which are conveniently identical to their English translations

referentially relate to the first Other—a process that Lacan locates in something called the “Imaginary”.

Lacan illustrates the imaginary and the process by which the subject signifies itself as such by referring to a case wherein the imaginary fails: that of Daniel Paul Schreber. Schreber had previously been understood by Sigmund Freud in the book *The Schreber Case* to suffer from paranoid dementia. In “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis”, Lacan redirects Freud’s reading of Schreber’s psychopathology into a malfunction in the Imaginary. Schreber, a judge, began in mid-life to identify himself as a woman. He allegedly writes that he would like to experience a sexual act as a woman, and dresses as himself in what he considers women’s clothing for extended periods of time. Lacan writes that

It is in the *name of the father* that we must recognize the basis of the symbolic function which, since the dawn of historical time, has identified his person with the figure of the law. This conception allows us to clearly distinguish, in the analysis of a case, the unconscious effects of this function from the narcissistic relations, or even real relations, that the subject has with the image and actions of the person who embodies this function[...]. (Lacan [1966] 2006d, 230)

Schreber, and indeed any subject, projects imagined assumptions about selfhood and presumed assumptions about otherness onto the world—the very conception of the world is an imaginary presumption. The subject mediates and conveys assumed and presumed identifications through what Lacan calls “the symbolic function”. To function symbolically the subject requires a framework wherein particular words mean particular things. The subject must presume that another subject—who is also presumed—maintains the same or a similar symbolic function, otherwise communication as such would be impossible.

What Lacan intends when he cites the “*name of the father*”, or “*le nom du pere*” in the original French, is the way in which the subject sanctions the way he or she communicates with another subject. The “figure of the law” is not necessarily a person whose profession is enforcing a state’s legal system – although that role is included in the *le nom du pere* – but rather is the process by which the subject structures symbols based on rules – or laws – that seem to be authoritative. In the Lacanian triad between mother, father and child, it is the father who provides rules and order onto signification. Whenever the subject communicates with another presumed subject, he or she speaks in symbols, about topics, and by methods that *le nom du pere* sanctions. Lacan’s analysis of Schreber includes an interpretation that the judge dresses in women’s clothing and desires to engage in sexual acts as a woman due to a dysfunctional relationship with *le nom du pere*; the rules and laws that socially sanction the ways in which a ‘normal’ subject symbolizes desire are not evident in Schreber—his psychosis is a dysfunctional relationship between the Symbolic and *le nom du pere*.

Lacan further elaborates upon the role that the Symbolic and the Imaginary has on the subject in another seminar, “The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious”. In this seminar, Lacan shows how signification functions with reference to the identification assumed in the Imaginary. He writes that

psychoanalysis alone allows us to differentiate in memory the function of remembering. The latter, rooted in the signifier, resolves the Platonic aporias of reminiscence through the ascendancy of history in man. (Lacan [1966] 2006f, 431)

Lacan argues that memory and the act of remembering are different functions that have different causes and results. The memory that the subject remembers is

affected by the signifiers that the subject uses to refer to the memory. The signifiers constantly shift with respect to new experiences, so an act of remembering is never identically to a prior act. The act of remembering a memory “resolves the Platonic *aporias*” – or doubts or confusions – “of reminiscence” by applying new sets of signifiers onto the assumed memory. The subject resolves the doubts and confusions about the memory by linking the signifiers to his or her own history. By signifying a memory so that it correlates to other assumedly historical memories, the subject assumes a sense of stability or regularity; the memory makes sense because it is remembered in a chain of other memories that make sense because they too refer to previous, historically referential memories.

This process, which Judith Butler uses in her concept of “citationality” which I described in chapter 1, authorizes each signifier and stabilizes the Imaginary subject. The subject assumes an identity by means of the seemingly stable image of itself in the mirror. The assumed identity is understood to be stable because the signifiers the subject uses to form it, and to which the subject seeks to conform, assumedly reflect that first mirrored Other. Notions of stable, whole subjects are central to the Imaginary; fantasies that the subject creates are “phantasies” insofar as the fantasies construct phantasms: they assume a whole subject and presume whole Others about whom the subject fantasizes. Both the assumedly whole subject and the presumably whole Other do not exist in and of themselves, however; they are based the presumably stable signifiers used to understand them. The fact that these authorizing signifiers are constantly in flux causes Butler to call the Imaginary order that they form “morphological” (Butler 1993).

It will be noticed throughout this thesis that I substitute “(re)signify” and “(com)pose” for “re-signify” and “compose”. I employ these parentheses strategically in reference to Lacan’s idea of historicity in the signifier. In every case where the subject recognizes and embeds significance in an object, the act is both signification and re-signification. The act is a signification because it appeals to “the ascendancy of history in man”. The act is also a re-signification because, while appealing to the signifier’s historicity, both the signifier and the history to which it appeals are morphological—which makes every signification in effect supersede a previous signification. In chapter 4, in which I (com)pose a relationship between Foucault and Lacan with reference to institutionalized knowledge, I both “pose” a relationship that already exists and “compose” one, since the relationship I (com)pose does not necessarily exist prior to my imagining it.

Lacan’s focus on the signifier in unconscious processes is sharply different from Freud’s focus on the Oedipal complex. However, Lacan notes that the central and motivating figure in his model is the same figure in Freud’s: the mother. In “The Freudian Thing”, Lacan writes about desire, and specifically the “Thing” that the subject desires. For Lacan, desire – like everything that is signified – is expressed in language. The thing that is desired, or *l’objet petit a*, rooted in the signifying chain of recognizing the Other that begins in the mirror stage, is the first Other who the subject recognizes: the mother. More precisely, the thing that is desired is the relationship that the subject has with the mother prior to the Mirror stage: an ideal, symbiotic, non-differentiated relationship bereft of signification.

Every desire, for Lacan, is a displacement of the desire that the subject has to regain the lost ideal relationship with the mother. It must be displaced because to

desire the mother is to desire the socially inexpressible Oedipal Thing. Because it is inexpressible the desire for the mother manifests itself as desire for other expressible but surrogate desires. The achievement of each of these surrogate desires results in what Lacan calls *jouissance*, or a momentary joy that results in an inexpressible recognition that the achieved desire is not *l'objet petit a*. The drive to satisfy that desire motivates the subject to perpetually transfer the desire onto other surrogate Others. Experience is thus motivated by a drive to satisfy this desire for the Freudian Thing which is itself rooted in the morphological Imaginary and the signifying chain.

3.3. *The Men and Women Who Look Back: Lacanians on Signification*

Lacan's theories regarding signification and the signifier's primacy in mediating experience have been advanced in several interesting directions. Jeremy Carrette argues that "[i]t is, perhaps, not until Jacques Lacan [...] that we can find a more psychoanalytical resolution to the individual-sociological binary where he sees the core of the individual in the other and reveals how we are formed through the other" (Carrette 2007, 87). In this section I will show how authors have advanced Lacan's "resolution of the individual-sociological binary" in interesting and productive ways.

Some authors have successfully applied the *nom du pere* to Marxist cultural critiques (Badiou [1982] 2009, Žižek 1994, 2008). Others have used Lacan's work on the primacy of the signifier to offer new philosophies about language (Gallop 1985, Vahanian 1989, Bracher and Ragland-Sullivan 1991). Many feminist authors

use Lacan's focus on social constructivism to show the morphological nature not just of the Imaginary, but also of gender identities (Butler 1993, Grosz 1990, Ian 1993,). Still others interrogate particular questions in theological contexts under Lacanian readings about the subject and the role that a father-figure plays in signification (Crownfield, Wyschogrod and Raschke 1989, Kristeva 2002, Pound 2007).

Legitimate concerns regarding Lacanian theory also exist. Some argue that Lacan's focus on the desire for the relationship had with the unattainable mother does not allow for a productive psychology about desire (Kovel 1981). Others argue that Lacan's use of the phallus to 'stand' for the desired other allows for problematic gender-biased psychologies (Butler 1993, Schwarts 1994). Others still examine Lacan's recognition of difference to show "ocularocentrism" because in his subjective processes "the sense of sight is the only one of the senses that directs the child to a totalized self-image" (Grosz 1990, 38-39). However, enough substantial work is currently being done to develop his theories to warrant further investigation of areas in which Lacanian readings might be productive.⁷

In *Reading Lacan*, Jane Gallop argues with reference to Lacan's mirror stage that "the mirror stage itself is both anticipation and retroaction (Gallop 1985, 78). She explains that the root of Lacan's idea about subjectivization is that it simultaneously refers to and emerges in the past, present and future. The stage is anticipatory because the identification that is assumed is only understood to be assumed because it will occur in the future; assuming an identification anticipates

⁷ My purpose in this section is to exposit contemporary (re)workings of Lacan's theories. To that end I will focus thoroughly on a few authors and tangentially on others. The authors on whom I will focus represent those who are most often cited in the literature and most substantial in their influence on other theorists.

future assumption of the same identification. The stage is simultaneously retroactive because the assumed identification is only recognizable from the present. The subject recognizes an identification and retroactively applies it from an assumption in the mirror stage.

Gallop reworks Lacan's focus on "the ascendancy of history" in signification by locating history within anticipation and retroaction. She writes that "[m]y history,' subjective history, history of a subject, is a succession of the future perfects, pasts of a future, moments twice removed from 'present reality' by the combined action of an anticipation and a retroaction" (82). The assumption of identification in the mirror stage succeeds due to the idea that historical events are authoritative with regard to identity claims. Gallop's argument is thus significant because she claims that the historical authority by which the subject assumes identifications is just as contextual to anticipation and retroaction as are the identifications that it authorizes.

Gallop emphasizes in her reading of Lacan the divisiveness inherent to signification. As a paradox that allows for and is only recognizable through subjectivity, the mirror stage's anticipatory retroaction engenders an interpretation of psychoanalysis where autonomous subjects, the idea of a 'whole person' and the development of the self are unattainable. She resumes Lacan's critique of ego psychology that I mentioned in chapter 2 by focusing on that field's reification of psychological concepts. She argues that "[e]go psychology [...] seeks to return psychoanalysis to a pre-Freudian state, one in which the conscious 'autonomous' ego is the center of the 'human psyche'" (98). If one understands that a person has an ego, and that something can be done to the ego to develop it that will benefit the person, then the ego becomes as real as the person whom its development benefits.

This understanding of the ego does not allow for the paradoxes that a Lacanian reading assumes. If, however, the ego is understood as a metaphor with a metaphorical matrix that relates to how a person experiences the world, then understanding it need not amount to developing it in order to allow for productive analyses such as Gallop's.

Slavoj Žižek argues similarly to Gallop but emphasizes the retroactive element of signification more than the anticipative. In *The Metastases of Enjoyment*, Žižek argues that signifying claims, and especially claims to sexual identity, occur retroactively. He defines retroactive assumptions about sexuality as "*coitus a tergo*", or "sexuality from behind". By this Žižek means that sexual signification is constructed after the signifier to which the concept applies is recognized. If subject signification occurs retroactively, as Gallop argues, then the referential signifier, or the signifier that lends citational authority to the present signification, must have occurred at some point in the past. Žižek's argument about *coitus a tergo* implies that a signifier is only recognizable as such after being cited as a referential signifier.

Žižek illustrates his argument by comparing signification to a Möbius strip. The process by which a signifier refers to a signified – or to another signifier, in Jacques Derrida's understanding of the concept – necessarily appears linear due how we imagine it—and the process is notably an imaginary process, or a process that imagines some sort of autonomy in its parts. However, the process – much like the process of identifying the subject in reference to the Other – is cyclical. It is not the case that one event *causes* another to happen, but rather that it is useful in one context or another to *imagine* cause as a means of incorporating an event into one's symbolized understanding of experience.

Žižek elaborates the ways in which the symbolic operates with regard to signification in his book *Violence*. As noted in chapter 1, I use Žižek's differentiation between mythical and divine violence in my analyses of how the term is used in men's studies in religion. For Žižek, if a concept is mythical then it factors into the subject's symbolic order—the subject has invested some fashion of significance in the concept and has developed a meaning system around it. “Mythical” violence is thus narrative; it participates in a structured signifying matrix wherein the violent act contributes to, and is motivated by, the subject's symbolic order. An action is not always necessarily motivated by a person's symbolic order. Natural disasters, for instance, can be defined as violent after the fact through *coitus a tergo*, but are not are not motivated by a symbolic order. Police brutality, however, is a violent concept deeply embedded within several social, political and strategic contexts that are all motivated by symbolized relations between the subject and the other. Police brutality is motivated by the symbolic order. A natural disaster, motivated outside the subject's symbolic order, is motivated by the real.

Žižek agrees with Lacan about the supremacy of language in signification and focuses on defining practical instances of the indefinable Real. Alain Badiou, a Lacanian who focuses more perhaps on the philosophical elements of Lacan's work, moves away from the practicalities with which Žižek approaches psychoanalysis. Badiou argues that Lacan is accurate in suggesting that nothing is knowable outside of language. He disagrees, however, that focusing on language amounts to a productive philosophy about Being. He writes that “[i]f philosophy is essentially a meditation on language, it will not succeed in removing the obstacle that the specialization and fragmentation of the world opposes to universality” (Badiou 2005,

35). Badiou does not focus on language in Lacan; he rather understands Lacan as unveiling a unique philosophy of splitting in signification. He reworks Lacanian theories to posit a philosophy about Being that is unapproachable when it is restricted by language.

In one of his major works, *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou uses materialist Marxism to elucidate the subject's materiality, and thus its particularity. In chapter 1 I explored the strategic differences between uses of particular Being, or $A=A(A_p)$, and pure Being, or $A=A(A)$. Badiou maintains that signification occurs in a materialized way to a material subject. Since Badiou's understanding of particularized Being is material, each signifying process is also material. This alteration from Lacan's immaterial and metaphorical notion of signification is an important one because it concretely links Lacan's primacy of the signifier to Marx's notion of material experience.

Badiou serves as an adequate Lacanian with which to close this section because he speaks to the work of Lacan, Gallop and Žižek with equal clarity. He notes that "[w]hen in any active reality the reflection upon its own history comes to the surface, it is because this reality has run its course" (Badiou [1982] 2009, 19). With this statement Badiou recognizes several central concepts from which this chapter can move forward. The notion of "active reality" refers to the identification that the subject assumes in Lacan's mirror stage. The subject's ability to reflect "upon its own history" requires Gallop's reading regarding retroactive anticipation. In order for the "active reality" to "run its course" it must be understandable in one's symbolic order. This transfer into a symbolic narrative structure is the process by which, for Žižek, the divine becomes mythological.

Badiou writes that “for Lacan, and for contemporary philosophy, thought is separated from the real. It has no direct access to, or acquaintance with this real. Let’s say that between thought and the real there is a hole, an abyss, a void” (Badiou 2005, 65). This void between thought and the real is Lacan’s “anti-conceptual” gap between cause and effect, or between event and utterance, that I explored in chapter 1. Perhaps then, as with cause and effect, the reality that is understood to have run its course is only available to be understood as such when the causal rubric of malfunction is applied to it.

3.4. Signification and Violence

Lacanian and post-Lacanian theories provide ample avenues along which one can interrogate complicated narrative structures. Authors who deal with the concept of violence employ narrative structures that are deeply rooted in retroaction and anticipation. These structures help form and are formed by symbolized frameworks. When authors write about violence, they write about it through these frameworks.

As redundant as doing so may seem, it is important to note that concepts regarding violence occur through signification. Locating violence in signification is important for my thesis. If violence is signified, then ideas, actions and figures that authors deem violent are deemed so contextually in relation to other significations. When authors call something violent, they call it so in reference to other mythologized, or symbolized, ideas about violence. The author applies or assumes – retroactively and anticipatorily – violent identifications. These identifications rely on particular significations in order to function. However, because the assumption or

application of the identification is restricted by the subjective history from which it gains perceived authority, the author cannot understand violence outside of how it is symbolized. Violence that resists symbolization is real violence, or as Žižek terms it, “divine violence”.

Authors who write about masculinity and religion employ not “divine violence” but “mythical violence”. Some examples from Björn Krondorfer’s *Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism: A Critical Reader* show how mythical violence is signified in men’s studies in religion. James B. Nelson writes generally that, following a shift from “feminist and lesbian / gay movements”, men are beginning to feel a hunger “for the release from the violence men have inflicted upon the planet” (Nelson 2009, 38). He interprets this violence as “a substitute for our [men’s] tears” (40). Jay Emerson Johnson argues on an equally general scale that “given the continued and horrifying spectre of violence and oppression worldwide, the project of envisioning a more just and hopeful future demands transcendental thinking and dreaming” (Johnson 2009, 132). Scott Haldeman writes that “I accept responsibility to consider the implications of my norms and values for others in a social system that coerces many through physical and social violence” (Haldeman 2009, 384). Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher notes, perhaps most useful for my purposes in this chapter, that “[a] deconstructive and critical theory of men’s studies should answer the charge of cultural imperialism. In my view, however, critique of sexist practices is *transcultural*. Fighting against violent, mutilating, abusive misogyny ought to be a ‘universal’ or *normative* principle” (Baker-Fletcher 2009, 441).

These quotations are representative not only of the authors who write them, but of general sentiments in the field. Krondorfer writes in the collection's introduction that *Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism* [...] represents the spectrum, depth and quality of the work accomplished so far" in the field. (Krondorfer 2009, xvii). If the book is to be representative of the field, then so are the ideas therein. It is important then to see that the authors to whom I refer above apply similar identifications onto the concept of "normative" masculinities with which they work. Nelson writes about violence inflicted by men from which they desire release. Johnson argues that it is primarily men who impose the "spectre of violence and oppression worldwide". Haldeman, writing about gay men's issues in religious studies, feels coerced by "physical and social violence". Lastly, Baker-Fletcher wishes to impose a culture that fights "against violent, mutilating, abusive misogyny". Each of these authors envisions a possibility for social change away from these violent masculinities. More importantly, however, each engages not with the idea that particular violent events are taking place socially, but rather that social violence manifests in particular events. The signification's application is not toward particular individuals ($A=A[A_p]$), but to an imagined group wherein each member is implicit in each act ($A=A[A]$). Authors in the field apply significations related to violence not to the men who enact the violence, but to the category of masculinity about which they strive to be critical.

Perhaps most significantly, these authors who apply violent significations to normative masculinities do so by conceiving of identifications that are somehow other compared to those that they perform. The authors, being "critical" in Krondorfer's *Critical Reader*, set themselves apart from the violent masculinities that

they study. This idea regarding a violent other, however, is necessarily constructed by the imaginary subject. As such the writers are active, consciously or otherwise, in making those actions, ideologies and patriarchies that they study violent. In a Lacanian analysis the non-violent subject and the violent other simultaneously form and are formed by each other.

Elizabeth Grosz' quotation which I used to introduce this chapter is very useful here. She writes that "[t]he subject in other words recognizes itself at the moment it loses itself in / as the other" (Grosz 1990, 41). Authors in men's studies in religion recognize themselves as subjects who are opposed to what they recognize as violence in particular ways of performing masculinities. By recognizing themselves in opposition to the men they study they lose themselves "in / as" violence. This paradoxical recognition is what is unique about a Lacanian theoretical framework reading regarding the field, and what enables the strongest critique of authors who claim knowledge about men, masculinities and violence. By attempting to find remedies for dysfunctional masculinities, authors in men's studies in religion in a way create the problem they try to solve. The larger and more significant question, however, relates to how and why this situation emerges.

3.5. Theoretical (Re)Marks

In this chapter I have attempted to detail Lacanian and post-Lacanian theories regarding signification and the subject, and then applied those theories to how authors in men's studies in religion approach concepts of violence. Lacan interestingly denies autonomy and maintains that subjectivity and signification involve the other as much as the self. Other authors argue similarly to Lacan,

focusing in interesting and productive ways on the relationships among the self, the other, and the ways in which significance forms between the two. Subjectivity and signification are important for men's studies and religion primarily because in the field subjects problematically apply significations that include violence toward the other.

The progression from Lacanian signification to post-Lacanian theories to how each are applied in men's studies in religion are all essential to my thesis. In the next chapter I will show how theories about violence in men's studies in religion are informed and coerced by institutional knowledge. Authors in the field acknowledge the influence that institutions have on them, but they do not engage with the magnitude of these coercions. By exploring this relationship I will be able to put forward the implications that Lacanian analysis has for the future of the field.

Chapter 4: Foucault, Lacan, and a Field's Institution

[P]ower is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.

(Foucault [1976] 1990, 93)

The political force of religious discourse, in its power to silence and its power to demand an utterance, is the key theoretical operation on which Foucault's 'religious question' can be examined.

(Carrette 2000, 42)

4.1. Introduction

While writing this thesis I have consistently encountered a fundamental challenge: what constitutes the field of men's studies in religion, and how do authors who subscribe to that title find correlations among themselves? Authors write about a field. Editors select authors from those who write about a particular field to be included in anthologies about that field. These anthologies are intended to be representative of particular conversations within the field. This process is made exceedingly difficult when the subject that motivates the field is ill-defined.

Within men's studies in religion there exists a documented ambiguity regarding the term "masculinity" or "masculinities". This ambiguity correlates with the field's youth and is challenging for its future. The challenge, it must be noted, is not unique to this field—"religion" in "religious studies" is also being investigated by several authors for its analytical usefulness. The general field of religious studies however has a much longer history than men's studies in religion, and has experienced well-documented modes of institutionalized knowledge.⁸ Men's studies

⁸ For example, see McCutcheon 2001.

in religion has not yet undergone similar field-wide criticism, and so the extents of institutionalization on it are not yet fully understood.

It is important to note from Chapter 2 that authors in men's studies in religion do not claim to participate in a unified discourse. As Culbertson and Krondorfer note: "[m]ethodologically men's studies in religion is an open field" (Culbertson and Krondorfer 2005, 5861). The field has multiple objects of study, multiple goals and multiple methods of approaching its objects and attaining its goals. It is equally important to note from Chapter 3 that the act of labeling one's work as contributing to a unified discourse simultaneously and paradoxically positions the work within a conversation and also composes the conversation into which the work is positioned. "(Com)position" can be used then as a Lacanian portmanteau to acknowledge the paradoxical relationships among authors in men's studies in religion, the men they claim to study, the field in which they claim to study, and the processes of exclusion that construct this imaginary sublimation.⁹ Since they work in a new field, they are constantly composing the institutionalized system of knowledge – which is also imagined – in which they position themselves. Underpinning this chapter is the assumption that men's studies in religion as a field – and as an institution, if it can be called as such – is much more split and divisive than authors within it suggest.

In a Lacanian analysis of men's studies in religion the anthropomorphized other against which the anthropomorphized field defines itself has as much influence

⁹ If every investigation is a demonstration of lack, and if every demonstration of lack is a sublimation of the unconscious attempt to reinstate the imaginary, symbiotic relationship with the mother displaced onto a socially appropriate medium, then the quest undertaken by men to identify a masculinity and then integrate themselves with it is a sublimated and melancholic quest to find and merge with the lost maternal object.

on how the field constructs its identity as the field itself does. Jacques Derrida investigates this exclusionary identity in *Of Grammatology* when he argues that “the outside is the inside” or that every conception of A integrates into its definition the possibility of $\neg A$. The motivations, methods and ideological mandates in which authors and editors include and exclude ideas into their conceptions of men’s studies in religion are mediated by “a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (Foucault [1976] 1990, 93). Discussions of violence, incorporated into discussions of masculinity in men’s studies in religion, are mediated similarly. If this situation is power, then power situates violence.

Power operates in men’s studies in religion. Power operates in the ways in which authors and editors in the field construct what the field’s multiple objects of study are, and what arguments regarding those objects of study can be defined as relating to the field. My goal in this chapter is to investigate how Foucault’s explorations about power can be used to mediate men’s studies in religion and Lacanian signification in regard to violence. Foucault hopefully elucidates why a re-historicization of violence in men’s studies in religion is a necessary manoeuvre at this point in the field. Essential to this argument is an investigation of whether or not it is useful to describe men’s studies in religion as an “institution” in the Foucauldian meaning of the phrase, and ideas of knowledge as “institutionalized knowledge”.

4.2. *Foucault with Lacan*

Before analyzing institutional knowledge, it is necessary to show why is it useful to (com)pose a relationship between Lacan and Foucault regarding men’s studies in religion. Both authors emerge from an academic French culture, and use

similar language to approach questions of subjectivity. Both authors recognize the influence that discursivity has on knowledge. Foucault's ideas of mechanisms of coercion function very similarly to Lacan's *nom du pere*. Foucault, like Lacan, "reveals the inadequacy of language to hold and express desire" (Carrette 2000, 78). Indeed, elements of each author's theoretical framework are exceedingly similar.

The conversation between each author is more interesting, though, with regard to their differences. While Foucault does not specifically necessitate malice within his processes of coercion, he interprets it as a tool used consciously by someone within a framework of power. Lacan, however, understands coercion more as an anti-conceptual element of signification. The *nom du pere* forms the symbolic order against which all knowledge is signifiable, while mechanisms of coercion apply to particular politicized and strategic situations. I will focus on a single mechanism of coercion – that which operates throughout men's studies in religion – to show how this particular signifying chain functions in a Foucauldian framework.

My reading of Foucault is influenced by Jeremy Carrette, especially his work *Foucault and Religion*. Carrette synthesizes a number of Foucault's books and articles in which the topics of religion, spirituality and religious institutions before 1976 when he (Foucault) began to directly work on Christianity. One of Carrette's aims, he claims, is "to read the religious strands of [Foucault's] texts alongside each other in order to establish the underlying religious questions hidden in his work" (2-3). In recognition of the difficulty of discovering what is meant by "religious strands", Carrette qualifies Foucault's position: "Foucault generally uses the term 'religion' as a kind of overall phenomenological term to refer to any institutionalized faith

tradition, though this predominantly means institutionalized Christianity” (Carrette 2000, 4). For Foucault “religion” seems less of a “religious” concept than an organizational affiliation.

Like Lacan, Carrette and (assumedly) thereby Foucault are interested in the process by which the subject is constructed. Carrette writes:

[t]he central point of Foucault’s work on confession is to demonstrate how religious discourse simultaneously forms a ‘subject’ (control, identity and discipline); it subjugates, subjectifies and forms a subject of knowledge. Religion, according to Foucault, creates ‘subjects’ through a strategic alliance of power, discourse and truth. Religion is caught in the inescapable politic of the ‘subject’. (Carrette 2000, 40)

In Carrette’s Foucault, religious discourses create the possibility of a particular ‘subject’ by subjugating, subjectifying and forming the ways in which one understands subjectivity. This creative ability is relegated by a “strategic alliance of power, discourse and truth”. Both Carrette and Foucault agree, then, that the subject is created discursively: “Discourse and power are seen in this process as twinned ‘procedures’ in ‘the extortion of truth’” (39). To argue this, Carrette draws on the ability of religious discourses, due to their culturally assumed authority, to oppress discourse by demanding utterance and silence, or “the said and the unsaid” (39).

This culturally assumed ability that works to create the subject bears a close resemblance to Lacan’s *nom du pere*. However, a Lacanian reading of the church’s abilities would focus on the church’s participation in a particular social structuration that is rooted far deeper than one institution. The important agreement between Foucault and Lacan, however, is that institutions are seen by the individual to assume some sort of agency in the process of subjectivization precisely because of

the authoritarian investment that the subject places on institutional constative claims. This is not to suggest that the Catholic church only controls its members through discourse, but rather that symbolic orders that are rooted in and that consciously or unconsciously refer to it construct subject frameworks that are at least partially influenced by its particular “exhortation of truth”.

Charles C. Scott explores the internalization of social sanctioning in his article “The Pathology of the Father’s Rule: Lacan and The Symbolic Order”. In Scott’s reading, expressible knowledge is mediated by social sanctioning. *Le nom du pere* functions by sublimating libidinal desires for the mother onto socially appropriate objects. The libidinal desire, being repressed by this sublimation, is never expressed. In this way *le nom du pere* is also quite similar to the “said and unsaid”, since the Father’s Rule demands one particular kind of utterance and proactively silences other kinds by forcing the sublimation of *jouissance*. This mediation is similar to Foucault’s “said and unsaid” but significantly different because, while institutions for Foucault sanction speech by consciously allowing or barring certain ideas from being spread, the Father’s Rule limits knowledge on the level of what can and cannot be symbolized.

The intersections between Foucault and Lacan’s theoretical frameworks seem to warrant a close reading between the two. I will focus now on that which is most pertinent in Foucault’s work to the current topic: his work on institutionalized knowledge. It is in the processes of the institutionalization of knowledge – or modes of knowing that are socially sanctioned – where men’s studies in religion, Lacan and Foucault are primarily connected.

4.3. Foucault and Masculinity

It is worthwhile to note that Foucault is important to a study of masculinity. Although this notion might seem obvious due to the influence *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* has had on theories of gender construction, his theories are applicable for possibly negative reasons. Carrette notes that “the centrality of the misogynistic works of Sade to Foucault’s ‘spiritual corporality’ and Foucault’s lack of concern for the plight of women in such work brings this question of gender into even greater focus” (Carrette 2000, 64). Foucault’s work would not necessarily be included as contributing to men’s studies in religion, but his “gender-blind” (Carrette 2000, 70) analysis of sexuality, formed partially by the work of the Marquis de Sade, creates a normalized sexuality that is arguably masculine.

If Foucault’s work is “gender-blind” because he does not specify female sexuality, then the blindness refers to the tendency in authors investigated by authors such as Luce Irigaray to envision their own gender as the default gender. Foucault could be argued to deal not so much with “the history of sexuality” but with “the history of male sexuality” which is very closely linked with “the history of masculinity”. His work on the medicalization and pathologization of certain sexual practices – masturbation, homosexuality, etc. – are precursors to men’s studies in religion just as much as are the feminist ideologies that critique him. Carrette notes that “[t]he themes of Foucault’s religious question are inescapably wrapped up in a male perspective” (74). While Foucault’s work does not necessarily contribute to men’s studies in religion as a field, it certainly does contribute to a particular cultural mindset wherein critical questions about sexuality can emerge.

4.4. Foucauldian institutional frameworks

In his argument that religious institutions are coercive, Carrette focuses on Foucault's "examination of the silences" (25). The indoctrination of silence, inextricable from that of utterance, is the mechanism through which an institution seeks to control available constative claims. Carrette writes:

The church is for Foucault part of a network of institutions (an *apparatus/dispositif*) which seeks to control speech and silence. They form a political strategy in the creation of religious 'truth'. Religious powers govern the individual self and nation-states through the operations of the said and unsaid; and it is precisely this mechanism of coercion which enables Foucault to develop his ideas of 'political spirituality.' (32)

For Carrette's Foucault, an attempt to control what may be uttered and what must be kept from utterance is an attempt to control 'truth'. "Coercion" here is not necessarily antagonistic or sinister—it is a necessary technology from which the subject presumes 'truth' onto the 'said'.

"Religious powers", however, are not the only institutions that "govern the individual self and nation-states". Some authors argue that Foucault authorizes his entire critique about institutional power by referencing Christian narrative structures. In her article "'Truth as Force': Michel Foucault on Religion, State Power, and the Law", Nancy J. Holland locates Foucault's conception of political power within the Christian binary between shepherd and flock. In Holland's reading of Foucault, democratic countries adopt a pastoral relationship between government and population. This relationship parallels the Christian narrative about Jesus being a shepherd and Christians being his flock (Holland 85). She writes that "[t]he insidiously destructive power of the modern Western world is thus traced back to the

unique configuration of the self, knowledge, and power that came from uniting the early Christian practices with political power as it had been traditionally understood” (Holland 86).

If Carrette is accurate in his notion that speech and silence “form a political strategy in the creation of religious ‘truth’” and if Holland is accurate in suggesting that ‘truth’ when projected and assumed by a “unique configuration of the self” is based in “uniting early Christian practices with political power”, then any configuration in which ‘truth’ is professed must cite a Christian heritage. It is not only the case that “the church is for Foucault part of a network of institutions [...] which seeks to control speech and silence”, but rather that any institution is. While in this reading all institutional knowledge cites “religious powers” in order to “govern the individual self and nation-states”, the constative claim itself does not need to be assumed to be “religious” or as emerging from a “religious power” in order to assume any sense of authority.

4.5. Men’s Studies in Religion as an Institution

Ivan Strenski has noted that “Religious Studies deploys the hegemonic power of language and conceptualization over others by naming what they do ‘religion’. Further, those institutions identified as ‘religious,’ [...] must also be seen as parts of strategies of power and domination” (Strenski 1998, 347). If an institution is any structure that functions in coalition with other institutions to “control speech and silence”, then any constative claim that is legitimated through a citation of other institutions engages with institutional knowledge. As I showed in chapter 2, authors in men’s studies in religion participate in religious studies because they apply the

term “religion” to their objects of study. They often cite similar sources – and always similar themes – when attempting to contribute to what they understand the field to be. Culbertson and Krondorfer note that many authors in the sub-field of “gay and queer studies in religion” cite Boswell’s *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Culbertson and Krondorfer 2005). They also argue that the field as a whole is constructed in response to “[f]eminists of the 1960s and 1970s” (5862). These feminists presumably argue cohesively about “the devastating effects of patriarchy and hetero-sexism in Western culture” (5862). Authors in the field thus seem to construct their arguments by referencing “a network of institutions”.

If authors in men’s studies in religion cite pre-existing networks of institutions to legitimate their arguments then they participate in institutionalizing the constative claims that they produce. More significantly, authors such as Culbertson and Krondorfer who argue that some authors can be grouped together into “men’s studies in religion” work to introduce that phrase as a part of a “network of institutions”. If a body of ‘knowledge’ can be grouped together as a field, or as a discursive institution, then other institutions can cite it in strategies to control constative claims. Authors who cite others’ work as contributing to men’s studies in religion, or who present particular utterances as being valid contributions to a pre-existing body of knowledge, influence their audiences to also accept the work as such. This mechanism of coercion amounts to an attempt to control what counts as – or what can be said about – masculinity and religion. This attempt results in what can be called institutionalized knowledge regarding masculinity and religion.

If authors construct men's studies in religion as an institution by attempting to control what counts as belonging to its field of study, then in a Foucauldian reading they must also attempt to control what does not count as contributing to the field. In Foucauldian language these authors attempt to control the "unsaid". The mechanisms of coercion that influence the subject to accept particular constative claims' validity also functions to deny the validity of other claims. As in religious coercion, this action is not necessarily malicious, but rather is a necessary attempt to solidify the field into a semblance of a whole.

4.6. Institutionalized knowledge v. Howard Schwartz

Mechanisms of coercion functioning in men's studies in religion can be elucidated with the example of Howard Schwartz. Schwartz (then Eilberg-Schwartz) argues in *God's Phallus and Other Problems with Men and Monotheism* that Jewish men have a feminized position in relation to God and that the entailing homoerotic dilemma engenders an aversion to the depiction of a naked supreme being. This aversion complicates the male relationship with God and problematizes the concept of masculinity in a patriarchal system. In his conclusion Schwartz argues that feminizing the Jewish character of God instead of the men who participate in the tradition might engender better adaptive and less patriarchal gender schemas in Jewish culture.

Since being published in 1994, *God's Phallus* has acquired a total of four reviews in peer-reviewed journals, as per a database search by title. The reviews follow two paths: they either summarize and do not engage critically with the text

(Fuchs 1997) or dismiss it outright (Anon. 1994). An interestingly anonymous review from *Christian Century* concludes:

Much of what gets revealed in a book this timely, relevant and in its own way shocking is likely to pass as it came: rapidly. But Eilberg-Schwartz is a serious scholar; what he turns up and contemplates will not go without leaving traces. At the very least, no one will be bored. (Anon 1994, 761).

The anonymous reviewer – perhaps significantly anonymous; the other reviews in the volume are each accompanied by the author’s name – imagines little in the way of a future for the book or for Schwartz’s ideas. As much as the author categorizes Schwartz as a “serious scholar”, however, the 180-word review offers little evidence of this.

The author questions the very validity of Schwartz’s motivation for his analysis: “Almost everything fashionable on the lit-crit scene is called upon here: ‘gender criticism,’ feminism, biblical studies, psychoanalysis, cultural anthropology and more” (761). A reading of this quotation could inform the reader that *God’s Phallus* is an attempt not at serious scholarship, but at including one’s self into a number of ‘trendy’ fields. If this reading is the reading intended by the anonymous author, then it seems then that Schwartz’s apparent attempt to include his book into “[a]lmost everything fashionable on the lit-crit scene” is what will pass rapidly.

Schwartz’s more recent work has fared similarly academically. A powerful example comes from *Administration and Society*, where the editor included in the same addition an article by Schwartz, two responding reviews of it, and a concluding response to the reviewers by Schwartz. In the original article, “Masculinity and the Meaning of Work: A Response to Manichean Feminism”, Schwartz identifies a trend in some feminist discourses of splitting gendered dialectics in a way that very much

resembles Freud's imago or Melanie Klein's "good breast / bad breast" hypothesis: "Manichean feminism is a form of feminism that sees gender differentiation as an opposition of the forces of goodness, identified with the female, against the forces of badness, identified with the male. It is based on the premise that reality can be denied, and represents the repudiation of males who engage it." (Schwartz 1995, 249). Schwartz's purpose, very much like mine, is simply to "show the nature of this connection" in gender studies between gender and some feminists' tendencies "to idealize or demonize" (250).

In response to this argument, Marta B. Calás and Linda Smircich write:

The editor of *Administration and Society* invited us to provide a 'response' to Howard Schwartz's 1995 [this issue] article. We chose not to present a response in the traditional sense (...). Instead, because it is our view that *masculinity*, the concept on which his article centers, needs to be analyzed rather than defended, our response is in the form of a brief bibliography (...). [T]his inquiry needs to be both well informed (by the appropriate literature) and epistemologically sound—that is, clearly located in a paradigmatic stance that disavows sex/gender essentialism and that questions any recourse to "human nature" in support of its arguments. (Calás, Marta B and Linda Smircich 1995, 295-296).

The purpose of the response is clear: it is the authors' opinions – as well as the journal editors', as I will argue, for printing the "response" as is – that the argument posited in Schwartz's article is neither epistemologically sound nor representative of the discourse into which he seeks to include it. The journal's purpose for including Calás and Smircich's response also seems clear: writing a response that undermines and dismisses the original article represents not an academic critique of it but a pre-emptive exclusion of it from a larger body of literature. The institutional exclusion proceeds as follows: 1) by publishing you we (*Administration and Society*) accept your validity; 2) other authors do not accept your validity; 3) we publish those

authors, and thus accept their lack of acceptance of your validity; 4) these other authors participate in constructing and maintaining our institution; 5) since the authors who construct and maintain our institution do not accept your validity, you are not valid in this institution.

Calás and Smircich argue that Schwartz is uninformed of the subject about which he writes – and as such is unable to apply “the appropriate literature” to it. The phrase “the appropriate literature” further extends the institutional exclusion. By publishing Calás and Smircich’s response, *Administration and Society* states – in its anthropomorphization, as is necessary for this argument – that 1) we accept these (Calás and Smircich) authors; 2) these authors participate in constructing and maintaining us; 3) in publishing their “appropriate literature” it becomes appropriate for us; 4) it is not we who make the literature appropriate, but they who both suggest it and construct and maintain us; 5) they suggest that it is appropriate; 6) this literature will participate in reconstructing then maintaining us.

The implications of recognizing the threat of non-acceptance by the institution do not go unnoticed by other authors who participate in it. Cynthia McSwain, writes “Men, Mom, Meaning, and Marginalization: Some Feelings and a Couple of Thoughts for Howard Schwartz” also in response to Schwartz’s “Masculinity and the Meaning of Work”. Before responding to the article, McSwain writes:

First of all, I have always thought of Howard Schwartz in a friendly way. I do not know him well, but I have talked with him at several conferences and have felt quite supportive of him, especially when he risked sharing his rather widely unpopular views. I like him; he seems open and willing to struggle with difficult issues personally and intellectually. Given this, I want to be open and willing to struggle in return. (McSwain 1995, 283)

McSwain recognizes the “unpopularity” of Schwartz’s arguments and is willing to critically engage with them, but still distances herself and her arguments from him and his. She is willing to critically engage with him, but only, it seems, so long as he is willing to critically engage with her. She is only “open and willing to struggle” with his ideas “[g]iven” that he “seems” to do *likewise*. He can only *seem* to be “open and willing to struggle” because she cannot be sure; “I do not know him well”. She engages with him with the understanding that she may only do so out of ignorance of his openness, and so if he is not in fact open the fault will not be due to her critical toolset, but to his ability to *seem* to be one thing and yet *be* another (remembering Badiou’s engagement with particularized being from chapter one). By distancing herself from him she is able to critically engage with him without being grouped with his “widely unpopular views” and risk being excluded from the institutionalized discourse.

The editors of *Administration and Society* in effect form “a political strategy in the creation of ... ‘truth’” (Carette 2000, 32) for knowledge in their discourse by constructing the conversation among Schwartz, Calás, Smircich and McSwain as they do. Schwartz’s “widely unpopular ideas” are relegated to the “unsaid” while the “said” are reproduced by a list of “appropriate texts”. Those authors who critically engage with the unsaid do so only from actively constructed boundaries so as to remain within the institutional framework. Due in part to a history of critically engaging the unsaid without McSwain’s distancing rhetoric, Schwartz is excluded from academic discourses on gender and religion. If the elements of knowledge reinforced by this conversation are dependent on mechanisms of coercion, then the productive next step will be to explore – partially through Schwartz’s case – what

mechanisms of coercion are in place in men's studies in religion. What are these mechanisms, and how do they inform what can and cannot be known about violence?

4.7. *Instances of "Violence" in MSR*

Anon., Calás, Fuchs, McSwain and Smirich strategically exclude Schwartz's ideas from institutionalized constative claims regarding masculinity in men's studies in religion. This process is not unique to controversial topics such as implicit homosexuality in Judaism and Christianity, or to "Manichean feminism", but rather is complicit in all constative claims that appeal to an institutional conception about men's studies in religion. As I showed in chapter 2, many authors in the field focus on how violence is inherent to masculinities. Robert Bly, one of the field's early writers, argues that "[t]he dark side of men is clear. Their mad exploitation of earth resources, devaluation and humiliation of women, and obsession with tribal warfare are undeniable" (Bly 1990, x). Contemporary authors assume truth to Bly's position. Culbertson and Krondorfer note that "[p]articularly they [authors who contribute to men's studies in religion] counter the crippling effects of homophobia and abusive behaviour toward women as well as culturally or sexually marginalized men" (Culbertson and Krondorfer 2005, 5863).

In chapter 2 it was sufficient for my argument to note that particular ideas about masculinities circulate in men's studies in religion. In the present discussion, however, the ways in which authors in the field propagate particular notions about masculinity are not mere occurrences; they are rather instances in which mechanisms of coercion are at work. For Bly to suggest that "[t]he dark side of men

is clear”, the side must be understood to at one point have been opaque. Bly writes as though the statement “[t]he dark side of men is clear” is understood to be a true statement. In a Lacanian reading, Bly presumes a retroactive and anticipatory identification about masculinity. He presumes a) that the dark side is clear based on a subjective history – the “mad exploitation of earth resources, devaluation and humiliation of women...” – and b) that the dark side of men is an ongoing challenge. He retroactively applies the dark side which is now clear to the historical exploitive actions that are only clear under his current understanding of them. Before his epiphany about the dark side of men, the actions were still dark but simply not recognized as such.

Any ‘truth’ to Bly’s statement is mitigated by institutional mechanisms of coercion. Institutions, as Carrette argues, seek to control speech and silence in strategic efforts to produce particular ‘truth’ statements. To do this they cite other institutions, a process which constructs an authoritarian framework against which constative claims’ validity are measured. Bly, and by extension the field of men’s studies in religion that assumes truth to Bly’s statement, understands violence in a way that is mitigated by other institutions.

Similar to Bly’s assumption about “the dark side of men”, the notion that a violent “side” is inherent to masculinities is common in men’s studies in religion. In chapter 2 I showed this in the works of Culbertson and Krondorfer 2005, Hamman 2007, Livingston 2007, Longwood 2006, Poling 2009, and Putney 2001. My argument is that each of these authors interprets masculinities as being violent or prone to violence through through an institutionalized lens. The fact that the authors position themselves within men’s studies in religion, and the fact that other authors

in the field cite them as being valid sources, suggests a relationship to institutionalized 'truth' that is different than the one Schwartz experiences.

The ways in which violence is addressed in the field are complex, strategic and political. The retroactive anticipation with which the authors address violence engenders an ahistorical interpretation of an historical situation—in the rhetoric commonly used in the field, it is not only the case that “the dark side of men is clear”, but that this darkness can be read into the hazy, pre-historical past in which men presumably still explicated, devalued and humiliated those around them. The current project must at this point then turn to (re)historicizing the way in which authors in men’s studies in religion approach violence.

4.8. Mothers and the Mirror Stage: (Re)historicizing Violence

As I showed in chapter 2, most authors who study masculinity within men’s studies in religion cite a narrative heritage that is very closely linked to feminist discourses from the 1960s and 1970s. For many authors in the field, these feminist arguments allegedly form cohesive revelations about how hegemonic masculinities are performed in Western cultures. Authors structure their arguments in response to and in general agreement with this feminist critique. This strategic placement constructs institutional understandings about both the feminist critique with which the authors agree and the field to which they hope to contribute.

Psychoanalytically it is necessary for the adoption of the feminist critique about hegemonic masculinities to be read as a universal truth. Assuming a violent identification requires the subject to apply the identification both retroactively onto historical events and anticipatorily onto future possibilities. Feminist discourses

enable authors who study masculinity and religion to construct a particular symbolic order that takes into account political contexts of 1960s and 1970s gendered Western cultures. These discourses thus compose an element of the *nom du pere* for men's studies in religion—when understood to authorize the said and unsaid they authorize what ways of knowing about violence are symbolizable. The authors in men's studies in religion sanction themselves by presuming that the institutionalized ways in which they understand religion carries some kind of 'truth'. The strategic control of utterances enables only particular ways of understanding violence; ideas that go against the dominant ideology risk institutional omission, as is evident in Schwartz's case.

A critical examination that brings forth questions about the ways in which violence is discussed in the field cannot adopt as 'truth' an ahistorical approach to violence. Instead of remarking, as most authors in the field do, that feminist theories have shown, for example, "the dark side of men", it is important to historicize the references that authorize the dominant ideology held by authors in men's studies in religion. Why do authors in the field assume truth to those feminist ideas? In the next chapter I will interrogate why it is significant for feminist re-definitions regarding masculinity such as Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Mary Daly's to work with concepts deemed "religious" and "transcendent".

4.9. *Institutional (Re)marks*

In this chapter I have attempted to show that men's studies in religion can be understood as an institution, or as a field that assumes and produces institutional constative claims. Mechanisms of coercion work to control what ideas about

masculinity and violence can be accepted into the field. When concepts such as violence are mediated by institutional controls, only particular ways of understanding violence emerge—and of particular relevance to this thesis, male violence.

Authors in the field reify concepts about male violence by citing them as factual problems that must be addressed. The proliferation of quantitative data that support the position that male violence is a problem further reinforces the reification. The willingness to assume factuality about male violence is strongly linked to feminist coercion in the field's widespread discourses. The feminist ideas that motivate authors in the field, assumed to be true, work with other frameworks to socially sanction what can and cannot be known about masculinity and violence.

The process by which authors in men's studies in religion produce socially sanctioned ideas about masculinity and violence is deeply rooted in Lacanian signifying processes. Coercion is, if nothing else, an engagement with the *nom du pere* on an institutional level. As such, the ways in which authors imagine male violence equates to the ways in which they apply particular signifiers to concepts about violence. To signify male violence in a feminist context is to produce a concept in a particular, politicized economy. However, as with all Lacanian signification, signifying male violence is a (re)signification. It is simultaneously the signification of a particular idea, and also the re-signification of an event that, prior to the emergence of the feminist context, would not necessarily have been signified identically.

In the next chapter I will (re)position Carrette's Foucauldian reading about knowledge and institutions to specifically address how violence is approached in the confines of a field in religious studies. Understanding how violence is (re)signified

requires the assumption that discourses labeled as “religious studies” can be called institutions. If this chapter was successful, men’s studies in religion can accurately be said to produce and refer to institutionalized constative claims regarding violence, male violence, and violent masculinity.

Chapter 5: Traumatic Transcendence and a New Perspective on Violence

[T]here is no other to reason, there is no beyond, there is no transcendence.
(Desmond 2003, 206)

[T]here has to be a transcendental signified for the difference between signifier and signified to be somewhere absolute and irreducible.
(Derrida [1967] 1974, 20)

5.1. Introduction

William Desmond and Jacques Derrida's above discussions about transcendence are deeply rooted within contextual significations. Discussions about violence in men's studies in religion are no different. If the particularities of each conversation are not understood, or at least approached, two congruent statements, such as Derrida's and Desmond's, might seem contradictory and their correlation paradoxical.

In the context of the first quotation above, William Desmond argues that Hegel's view of religion is a "radical rationalization" because it denies the possibility of transcendence. Frederiek Depoortere expands upon Desmond's idea to suggest that "Hegel ends up with a thinking that disallows any real transcendence, any transcendence that is truly other" (Depoortere 2007, 501). In a Lacanian understanding, the "reason" of which Desmond speaks is placed within the symbolic, or within the linguistic rule-based realm of the *nom du pere*. In Lacanian theory a transcendence that is "truly other" is as impossible as it is for Depoortere's Hegel. The concept of the other is inextricable from the concept of the self. "Transcendence" is thus very much engaged with particularized being, which I

discussed in Chapter 1, and social sanctioning, which I discussed in chapter 3. Discussions about transcendence, like discussions about being, are based in signifying chains. Thus the perception of transcendence is dependent on the (unrecognized) particular signification of the concept in scission – Badiou's $A=A(A_p)$ – and is thus dependent on discursivity and institutionalized knowledge.

In the second quotation that introduces this chapter, Derrida refers not to the existence of the transcendental signified, but rather to the impossibility of the signified in what Judith Butler would call a citational relationship. Derrida maintains that “everything is a sign of a sign” (Derrida [1967] 1974, 43) and that “[t]he age of the sign is essentially theological” (14). The only place in which a signified can exist is within a theological framework. In this framework a non-contestable constative claim exists from whence come all signifiers. The signified's theological necessity seems quite convenient for the current discussion, since the men writing about themselves in relation to religion, the French feminists who critique masculinity, and the idea of Lacanian psychoanalysis all arguably participate in theological discourses. In these discourses constative claims gain referential authority by appealing to a transcendental – though for Lacan *inexpressible* – signified. Authors engage with and strategically construct theological discourses about violence.

In the previous chapter I used a Foucauldian understanding of institutionalized knowledge to (re)historicize discourses about violence throughout men's studies in religion. By structuring the chapter around institutionalization I was able to show the concept's strategic placements. By (com)posing a relationship among Lacan, Foucault, men's studies in religion, French feminist theory and violence, I (re)historicized issues regarding the historical framing of discussions about

violence for authors who try to add to men's studies in religion. Only after (re)historicizing the ways in which violence is imagined – and in doing so negating the possibility of prediscursive “male violence” – am I able to motion towards a new perspective for talking about masculinity and violence. Under a Lacanian framework in which the existence of anything that is “truly other” than the subject is impossible, my own negation of transcendence closely parallels Desmond and Depoortere's analyses regarding Hegel's work.

This chapter is my thesis' culmination. In it I will draw together the data, themes and arguments discussed at length in chapters 1-4 to argue that authors within men's studies in religion operate within a particular institutional framework. In this framework violence is equated to masculine identity claims. This field currently contributes to a future of gender-based dialectics wherein masculinit(y)/(ies) will be more and more (re)signified or (com)posed as ahistorically and prediscursively pathological. Based on the data I have gathered from authors in men's studies in religion, Lacanian signifying models, and Foucauldian institutional knowledge, my thesis points to a traumatic event that is not referenced but is latently active in conceptions of masculinity. The trauma is caused by a (re)signification of the term “transcendence”. In this chapter I will argue 1) why trauma explains the current status of men's studies in religion, 2) why the (re)signification regarding “transcendence” is essential to this trauma, and 3) what repercussions the traumatic (re)signification regarding “transcendence” has for discussions of violence in men's studies in religion, and in a broader spectrum for future generations of men.

5.2. *Trauma and Signification*

In an 1895 investigation of hysterical psychopathology, Sigmund Freud writes about a patient named Emma. Emma suffers from an interesting condition that allows for an even more interesting analysis. During her analytical treatment Freud makes the following observation:

Emma is subject at the present time to a compulsion of not being able to go to shops *alone*. As a reason for this [she produced] a memory from the time when she was twelve years old (shortly after puberty). She went into a shop to buy something, saw the two shop-assistants (one of whom she can remember) laughing together, and ran away in some kind of *affect of fright*. In connection with this, she was led to recall that the two men were laughing at her clothes and that one of them had pleased her sexually...

On two occasions when she was a child of eight she had gone into a shop to buy sweets and the shopkeeper had grabbed at her genitals through her clothes.... (Freud [1895] 1966, 353-354)

Freud interprets Emma's memories as pointing to a traumatic event – being molested at age eight – that renders her unable in later years – for unknown reasons at the time – to withstand being laughed at by a man whom she finds attractive. Her condition develops into clinical agoraphobia when she becomes unable to enter certain social environments. Important in Freud's analysis is that the first scene is not necessarily interpreted by the subject as being sexual, but that she applies that marker only after being introduced to sexuality's discursive reality. Freud refers to this process as the "associative link" (354).

In the molestation scene Emma is naïve in regard to anything she might deem sexual; and thus only signifies it as traumatic within the analytic process in reference to the later scene. It is biologically sexual but not perceived as such. This

set of events has been interpreted as being “presexually sexual” (Grosz 1990), or as sexual but experienced before the subject learns sexual signification.

Lacan uses Freud’s analysis of Emma to strategically reconfigure Freud in a non-biological way. Lacan argues that trauma is active in signification. He writes that “the opacity of the trauma [...] is then specifically held responsible for the limits of remembering. [...]. [This is] as a highly significant moment in the transfer of powers from the subject to the Other [...], the locus of speech and, potentially, the locus of truth” (Lacan [1973]1977e, 129). Elsewhere he clearly links trauma to the “primal scene” from whence the subject emerges (Lacan [1973] 1977d, 69 and the real that “stretches from the trauma to the phantasy” (Lacan [1973] 1977c, 60). The trauma then is that event which motivates the movement from non-signified symbiosis to splitting, language and significance.

In relation to Emma’s case, Marcus Pound deviates from the Freudian perspective to a Lacanian one. He suggests that

“the origin of this particular phobic reaction was not the anxiety of sexual desire, but our original dependence on language and the Other. In the encounter with the desire of the Other, the subject (Emma) was also forced to encounter the real of her own existence, the unassailable traumatic kernel of her being that resists integration into language”. (Pound, 47)

The reason why Emma runs away during the second occasion is not necessarily due to a recognition of presexual sexuality, but to signifying trauma. Emma is unable to integrate the scene when she was younger, before she had the language to understand it and the older shopkeeper’s desire which ‘caused’ it, with the scene when she was older. The “affect of fright” is thus caused by an encounter with the unsignifiable, terrifying real.

Emma's case directs one to question then what other events can be analysed constructively under the rubrics of pre-sexual sexuality and trauma. When violence and masculinities compose the topic of inquiry, authors who analyse violent acts mirror arguments about pre-sexual sexuality. This method contrives the possibility of pre-violent violence. What implications do signification and trauma have for discourses about violence? Do authors approach, or perhaps are they barred from approaching, particular ideas due to an "affect of fright"? Why does violence terrify authors in men's studies in religion, and why does this make them attach themselves to it?

As I stated earlier, Lacan writes that "there is only cause in something that doesn't work" (Lacan [1973] 1977, 22). To ask "what causes violence" however is to ask a broad, ambiguous question that will likely beget a broad, ambiguous response. It might seem more refined then to focus on one 'type' of violence, and to ask, as many have (Longwood 2006), "what causes *male* violence?" I am not interested in the question's answer, if one exists. I am interested rather in, and in this thesis I have been motivated by, the process through which violence has become embedded into narratives regarding masculinities. To refer to the parallel explored in Emma's case, I am interested in the process through which mythologized conceptions of masculinity are seen to be pre-violently violent, and as I will examine later, how conceptions of violence intersect conceptions of freedom.

As I explored in Chapter 4, this signification wherein violence equates to masculinity has not always commanded the prominence it currently does; as in Emma's case, it has been (re)signified. How is men's studies in religion, a field that has been founded on this (re)signification, foundationally affected by violent

masculinities? My purposes in this first section are twofold: 1) to elaborate how current cultural discourses contribute to a relatively new understanding of an ahistorically violent heterosexual masculine identity that is attached to all persons who identify as heterosexually male; and 2) to posit that the extent to which masculinities have been (re)configured has only been possible by (re)positioning the concept of God as the ultimately violent divine patriarch. As paralleled in Freud's analysis of Emma's case, this process of the naturalization of male violence can be constructively investigated using Lacan's theories regarding trauma and (re)signification.

5.2.1. Violent Subversions

For Lacanian theory, trauma plays an important role in the retroactive and anticipatory process through which one's symbolic order develops. Since Lacanian psychoanalysis is based in Freudian theory, the foundational trauma understandably deals with an infant's relationship with his or her mother in the Mirror Stage. In this relationship, the infant and mother exist initially in symbiosis—each requires the other for different kinds of nourishment. The traumatic event for the infant is his or her separation from the mother, which is experienced through the symbolic recognition through language of subjectivity – i.e. recognizing one's self as separate from one's mother. Recognizing difference, rooted in the mirror stage and explored in chapter 3, in effect destroys the previous symbiotic relationship.

The traumatic event itself, occurring as the subject comes into language, is necessarily inexpressible. With no referential language network with which to express it, the event is repressed. The systems that rise out of it however construct

a permanent impression on the ways in which the subject will apply signifying identifications later in life.

Signification is necessarily structured like language, and is structured by internalized sets of rules as is language. One foundational rule involves matrices of internalized authoritarian social sanctioning. The significance that the subject invests in a signifier relies on how the subject perceives that he or she is allowed to understand it. The sanctioning body that allows for the signification co-exists with other matrices of ever-changing authoritarian regimes.

These sanctioning processes and authoritarian negotiations result in truth statements that the subject perceives to be incontrovertible: "I am Canadian"; "the earth revolves around the sun"; "male violence is an international problem that must be addressed by legal and governmental bodies". As discussed in chapter 1, these processes are closely related to political and economic viability. As discussed in chapter 4, political and economical viability are mediated by mechanisms of coercion. The traumatic event occurs prior to and motivates the sanctioning process. The sanctioning process allows for the creation of the symbolic order. The traumatic event is thus constitutive of the symbolic order and not referred to by it.

5.2.2. Feminist Theology and Masculine (Re[com])position

Signifying processes, structured like language, are reconfigured like language over time. During this constant reconfiguration, the signification retains the previous ways in which it was imagined, but the present conception necessarily supersedes its antecedents in terms of perceived importance. In her 1993 book *Sexes and Genealogies*, Luce Irigaray contributes to the reconfiguration of the Christian God as

a reference point fully available only through male signification. In writing about the possibility of the male as being a “whole being”, she writes that:

If he has no existence in his gender, he lacks his relation to the infinite [...]. To avoid this finiteness, man has sought out a unique *male* God. God has been created out of man’s gender. [...] No human subjectivity, no human society has ever been established without the help of the divine. (Irigaray [1987] 1993, 43)

The “he” to whom Irigaray refers is an anthropomorphized abstract masculinity. Masculinities in the Christianized European and North American countries to which she refers, regardless of interpretation, allegedly enjoy an essential character that has been inscribed into Western structures of signification of which femininities are principally bereft: an infinite reference point. Jacques Derrida writes in *Of Grammatology* that “there has to be a transcendental signified for the difference between signifier and signified to be somewhere absolute and irreducible” (Derrida [1967] 1974, 20). If no transcendental signified exists, then every signifier is the signifier of another signifier. The theological concept of God is thus the only conceivable signified. Whereas every other ideation can only be known discursively through past signifiers, God’s godhood is theologically self-evident. In a Lacanian non-theological way of understanding God, however, the idea that God’s godhead self-evidence is a phantasy: a presumed other who is imagined to be a whole image.

Julia Kristeva argues in a similar path to Irigaray when, in “Credence-Credit and Credo”, she reads the Apostle’s Creed psychoanalytically to show an assumption of singularity between signifier and signified. She interprets the phrase “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty”, as a decisive statement about imagined singularity. This statement “helps bring about primary stabilization of the subject through its enduring character” (Kristeva 2002b, 102). Like Irigaray’s notion that the

concept of God engenders masculine autonomy, Kristeva here argues that the infiniteness of God is a reference point for the possible infiniteness, or durability, of the subject.

Many feminist authors have extended Irigaray's concept of God's male-privileged signification and Kristeva's idea of God as the male primary stabilization. These authors suggest that violence committed by males, the disruptive properties of patriarchy and the concept of God are inextricably linked (Daly 1985, Goldenberg 1979). These ideologies have been normalized into "Women's Studies" curriculums in Canadian universities.¹⁰ Following the logic regarding institutionalization of knowledge I used in chapter 4, the inclusion of feminist arguments in the structure of accredited universities correlates with the assumption of these arguments to some extent in what is considered valid institutional knowledge in academic institutions. Alternatively, no accredited university in Ontario offers a "Men's Studies" program.¹¹ This opposition reflects the process through which authors in men's studies in religion are informed about what can be discussed in relation to gender and sexuality. Feminist arguments construct the *nom du pere* that sanctions signification within men's studies in religion and thus sanction what is and is not socially expressible within the field.

If one accepts that the only referential matrix that includes a signified is one that is theologically rooted in the transcendental signified, and that by rooting its signification in the transcendent the subject stabilizes itself through the signified's

¹⁰ Sixteen of the seventeen non-technical universities in Ontario accredited by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/list/univers.html>) offer dedicated programs in Women's or Gender Studies. Fourteen of these sixteen programs are directly referred to as "Women's Studies in the program title.

¹¹ However, Nipissing University offers a "Gender Equality and Social Justice" program, and Queen's University offers a "Gender Studies" program.

“enduring character”, then Irigaray and Kristeva’s projects (re)stabilize the subject by (re[com])posing the enduring character of the transcendent. This (re[com])position amounts not only to (re)defining the transcendental signified – God – but also the identificational statement that the signified stabilizes—masculinity.

5.2.3. Men’s Studies in Religion and Male Violence

Men arguably comprise the anti-subject of Women’s Studies and the subject of Men’s Studies. As shown in chapter 2, the latter is arguably dependent upon the former. In what ways, then, do the male authors from these institutions who are apparently doubly affected by this (re)signification respond?

Men’s studies in religion has formed in direct response to arguments founded in and akin to Irigaray’s and Kristeva’s. As discussed in chapter 2, within this field the vast majority of authors identify themselves as “profeminist”, or as agreeing in part or in whole with feminist positions in relation to religion. Authors such as Robert Bly (Bly 1990) and Eugene Monick (Monick 1987, 1991) argue that current conceptions of masculinity are maladaptive because the signifiers they use have lost valuable and productive references from folkloric and mythic traditions. These misguided symbolic orders create environments in which aggression, competition and potency become referential to violence. A significant strain of argumentation within men’s studies in religion has refocused the discourse on the existence of male violence to “dealing” with male violence. Some authors question how much churches should “recognize a responsibility not only to the victims but to the perpetrators of domestic violence” (Livingston 2007), whereas others seek to find successful pastoral care programs for pathological sexual obsessions in men

(Kennedy 2008). Mark 11: 15-18, which is commonly known as the “Temple Tantrum” scene, shows Jesus expelling a group of entrepreneurs from a temple. New interpretations read the scene as justified male aggression against a culture of barbaric male violence and perversion of cultural values (O’Brian 2008).

This theme which amounts to investigating apparently rampant male violence is not found far into the histories of religious and theological studies. In his article “The Cross and Male Violence” James Poling notes that “throughout most of the Church’s history, [...] male violence against women has not been thematized as a theological and ethical problem. [...] This is a particular obligation of the present generation” (Poling 2009). The “present generation” to which Poling’s 2009 article refers is a mere three decades from the French feminist introduction of the idea that masculinity is categorically pathologically violent, and that this violence stems from a divinely violent reference point. Within a generation, then, the symbolic order against which men define their masculine identities has shifted drastically. Very quickly, cultural focus and economic viability have shifted from a non-idea to the establishment of it and finally to the naturalization of it. Poling thus argues that current attitudes toward male violence are particular to a contemporary understanding of both masculinity and violence.

To rephrase these recent reconfigurations psychoanalytically, what seems to be occurring is a traumatic (re)signification that is structurally similar to that seen in Emma’s case. Authors in men’s studies in religion – and elsewhere – are experiencing a new discursive reality that is reinforced and that produces a new history. Actions are being attributed to gender that in earlier decades might have been attributed to other social categories, or might not have been attributed at all.

While a man physically abusing a woman, a child or another man can be understood to be mythically violent (Zizek 2008), the (re)signification to which Poling alludes embeds the cause of the violence and the rubric of malfunction within the man's gender. To extrapolate upon Poling's argument, boys will inevitably experience the traumatic signification of acts they have committed as being not only violent, but violent due to their gender.

Following this assumption, in the Lacanian understanding of the term, the boys who assume that masculinity and violence are linked will (re)signify their own symbolic orders accordingly to reinterpret past actions as exhibiting male violence. The newly assumed identification will be one wherein the boy's masculine identity will be retroactively violent, and will anticipate a continued trend of violence. Is it the case that men were naive to male violence before being discursively introduced to its possibility, as Emma was to the sexual nature of her assault at age eight? Or is it the case that these events only gained the causal marker of "male violence" after the 1970s, and that the gendering of violent acts is as socially constructed as sexuality? The associative link between demonized actions and normalized or expected identity affiliations is problematic, to say the least.

5.3. *Bridging Trauma and Transcendence*

Between *why* and *what* exists a conceptual gap that recapitulates the gap between the speaking subject and the language spoken by the subject. An examination of trauma appears to elucidate the *why* to the thesis' *what*, but does not explain the gap between what happens and why it happens, or between the effect and the cause. The naturalization of violence in men's studies in religion is caused

by, or at least correlates with, a traumatic (re[com])position regarding masculinity and violence. This (re[com])position engenders the production of a particular type of knowledge when one speaks about the two topics. Foucault's mechanisms of coercion apply to kinds of discursive knowledge that can be produced about these topics. The mechanisms are only as effective as the strategic ways in which they are embedded within institutions such as men's studies in religion. Because the processes are non-linguistic, they necessarily function within Lacan's "anti-conceptual" and inexpressible gap. The gap in this chapter lies in the coercive mechanisms of *how*: how are the mechanisms that limit the production of knowledge in men's studies in religion as effective as they are?

In the next section I will modify a reading of transcendence proposed by Luce Irigaray. Irigaray argues that freedom is only accessible in a transcendental model. My reading about Irigaray exposes fundamental flaws in her argument, mainly in response to her notion that conceptions of freedom are dependent upon transcendental signifieds. The flaws in her argument present a clear way of thinking about the anti-conceptual *how* that exists in the naturalization of violence in men's studies in religion. If authors in this field operate within an institutionalized framework wherein masculinities are violent *because* of a trauma related to the transcendental signified, they do so by locating their motivation within a desire for "freedom": freedom from patriarchal ideas of the transcendent, freedom from normative myths about masculinity based on those ideas. The desire for freedom, located within the signified's normative pathologies, causes these authors to simultaneously despise their subjects (themselves) for their lack of freedom and reproduce this lack by reproducing the systems in which the lack is produced. The

desire for “freedom” becomes an abstract lack or *manque* that sublimates their desires for their mothers onto an institutionalized framework and reproduces the *nom du pere* that prevents them from realizing that desire.

5.4. The Problem with Transcendence

Conceptions of freedom, contingent as they are on various political, social and historical matrices, and constructed as they are in various institutional frameworks, are continually produced and reproduced. These constructions are programmatically exclusionary. As has been stated by many scholars across various disciplines and reinforced by Judith Butler in her article “Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Time”, a person or group can only be free within a particular context if he, she or they are included within the ideological limitations of freedom within that context. Following this, to quote Butler, “If freedom is one of those ideals we hope for, perhaps it will be important to start by remembering how easily freedom can become deployed in the name of a state self-legitimation whose coercive force gives the lie to its claim to safeguard humanity.” (Butler 2008, 21) If individual and group freedoms are contingent upon the inclusion and exclusion of individuals in the categories of “person”, “human”, and possibly “subject”, then including or excluding certain individuals from these categories is of vital importance to the possibility of conceiving those individuals as being deserving of safeguarding by the state. In Canadian legal history, for example, The “Persons Case” of 1929 forced the Canadian Supreme Court to recognize women as deserving of the title “qualified persons” and thus guaranteed constitutional protections. Constitutionally recognizing women as persons has been essential to including women as “persons

under the law” and thereby as persons deserving of safeguards by the state. In the 1930s and 1940s, Nazi exclusion of persons of Jewish descent from the category of “human” played a vital role in treating a group in a way that would have been inconceivable if every member of that group was understood to be “human”. Analyzing critically the ways in which mechanisms of coercion operate in these instances is a necessary project for any discussion of freedom.

In *Sharing the World*, Irigaray constructs an idea of freedom that is only viable through the recognition of an irreducible and transcendent other. This definition of the other as irreducible –and, by default, neutral– necessitates a seemingly anti-deconstructionalist model of relationality in which the subject’s conception of the other is indeed extricable from the subject’s conception of its self. A comparison of Irigaray’s model with Martin Buber’s classic “I-Thou” interrelational concept, wherein the other is also understood to be irreducible, allows for an exploration of the theoretical ramifications within an historically French feminist framework of reproducing an ideal that epitomizes the relationship between God and Man. The analysis will culminate by 1) questioning the core of Irigaray’s goal of whether or not it is possible to locate a universal equality or conception of freedom within an androcentric framework, and 2) proposing that the requirement for men within men’s studies in religion to appeal to this androcentric framework even in their renunciation of it motivates the traumatic (re)signification of masculinity as pathological. If equality and freedom are impossible within a transcendental schema, what are the ramifications for identity conceptions that rely on those pathologized transcendental signifieds?

5.4.1. Irigaray and the Problematic Definition of “Transcendence”

Irigaray intends something specific when she uses “the transcendent other”, “the transcendence of the other”, “the other as transcendent” or any other similar permutation. The other for Irigaray is a spiritual other. She writes:

The other, it is true, is beyond our horizon. To address him, or her, means to agree to question this horizon – thus to risk the loss of our shelter [...]. Thus we sometimes transform a material sharing into a spiritual value. The other becomes an opportunity for making personal spiritual progress or benefits, that we imagine to be shareable – but with a God or in God, rather than with the other here and now present at our side. (Irigaray 2008, 25)

Irigaray’s other is the other whose existence Desmond and Depoortere deny. If, as she notes elsewhere, transcendences are synonymous with ideals (xii), and if addressing the other and therefore recognizing the transcendence of the other is “an opportunity for making personal spiritual progress [...] with a God or in God”, then the recognition of the other as transcendent seems to recognize the other as the ideal, and then also –and interestingly – as the Christian concept of God. To rephrase this situation psychoanalytically and perhaps more productively, Irigaray’s imagination of transcendence is the desire to be recognized by an other who is imagined to be ambiguously ‘better’ than she is and thus “ideal” and able to help her make some kind of “progress”. Irigaray’s other is Lacan’s “subject who is supposed to know”. Sublimating desire onto Irigaray’s “transcendent” places it in the object that is the furthest removed from the corporeal mother as is possible. The displacement of the subject, the ego, and/or the “I” in the recognition of a transcendent other thus locates the desire firmly within the Symbolic; it is a desire

constructed in and reinforced by a completely mythological framework, if one uses Žižek's definition of "myth" from chapter 3.

In this sense it seems that for Irigaray the ideal relationship, then, is not with the other "present at our side" but with the seemingly subject-displacing conception of God.¹² Irigaray later clarifies herself – or perhaps obfuscates the matter further, for this analysis – by stating that "If the attraction that brings me towards the other is a quest for transcendence, as a desire for a beyond that I cannot appropriate in my world, [...] what calls us together belongs to a transcendental dimension. [...]. The other has to remain transcendent with respect to my own temporality" (80). The transcendent is that which is beyond human conceivable boundaries. If the other is also "an opportunity for making personal spiritual progress or benefits" then the boundaries that the other transcends must in every instance be at least partially spiritual. The definitions of the other and the boundaries he or she transcends are both then spiritual, referring consciously or unconsciously to a forgotten or unnamed Christian origin.

If Irigaray's "transcendent other" is theologically based – and I believe that it is, consciously or otherwise – then it is at least not *only* theologically based. In *Key Writings* Irigaray presents her career project as being to "render possible a philosophy, and more generally a culture, of two subjects" (Irigaray 2004, vii). Related to Jacques Derrida's theory that something is never only one, but always at least two (Derrida [1967] 1974), her project then refers to agency and the possibility of recognizing subjectivity outside the self, if the self itself is understood to possess

¹² I will not at this point enter a discussion of the problematic conception of the Christian God as an irrefutably transcendent entity. For a critique of the naturalization of "God", see (McCutcheon 2001)

some sort of agency. The apparent intention of utilizing “transcendent” then is to position the other as “*you*, always other and non-appropriable by *I*” (Irigaray 2004, 24. Irigaray’s italics). A paradox here emerges. The conception by the self of the other as irreducible to and thus extricable from the self is possible only through the discursively understood conception of the other as irreducible and extricable. However, the conception is based on an understanding necessarily held by the self. Since, under a Derridian analysis, the self’s conception of the other is inextricable from the self’s conception of the self, Irigaray’s conception of the other as transcendent is discursively constructed upon her own ability and willingness to construct it as such. The project is then not so much ideal as utopian, because while it is allegedly ideal it is never fully attainable. Transcendence outside the self is paradoxically impossible.

The paradox of conceivable extricability is not the only challenge implicit in Irigaray’s location of the other; it also directs toward a more recent linguistic critique that terminology associated with the problematic word “religion” carries with it “a culturally specific social construction with a particular genealogy of its own” (King 1999, 40).¹³ In *Orientalism and Religion*, Richard King analyses the ways in which “religious” terminology has been used within colonial agendas in Asia; but his analytical method can be transferred to the current discussion. In King’s work, a term that was originally used by and for a specific group can never fully be dissociated from that term’s original usage. Terminological genealogy has important practical ramifications when that group applies the terms onto another group. The

¹³ See also (McCutcheon 2001), (Fitzgerald 2000)

term has different yet equal importance when applied by a group onto itself only after the term has been (re)introduced by its originating users.

For instance, King explores the ramifications of colonial deployment of “mystical” onto what was seen as “religion” in India during Europe’s colonial campaigns. The political ends European states achieved were due in part to the conceptualization of India as “mystical” instead of “rational”. King writes that “India seemed to have remained unchanged for thousands of years, representing a crucial example of static archaism with which the dynamic modernity of the West could be successfully contrasted” (King 1999, 118). King analyses, then, the ways in which locating the other through “religious” terminology partially excluded the other from the category of personhood; the Indian other needed to be brought out of the realm of the mystical and into the realm of the rational before he or she could be considered a person equal to the colonizing self.¹⁴

Important for the present discussion then is that Irigaray locates her conception of the other through the terminology of a spiritualized model of transcendence that has as the origin of its modern usage a reference to the Christian concept of God. If one places “transcendent” into the same terminological genealogy as “spiritual” as Irigaray does, then it must by the history of its usage refer

¹⁴ Even more recently, Robert Yelle discusses at the round-table for Critical Theory and Discourses on Religion Group and the North American Study of Religion at the 2009 American Academy of Religion annual meeting that “transcendence, if not an empty signifier, refers to Protestant Christianity” (Yelle 2009). Yelle refers specifically to how the phrase “transcendent value” is being used in discourses about modernity. Within ‘modern’ states, values should apparently transcend ethnocentrism. In noting the necessary Protestant entailment of the term, however, the universality of transcendent values collapses. Yelle reaches a conclusion that “transcendence” must be abandoned if a non-Christocentric theory of modernity is to be approached.

back to European conceptions of “religion” as Protestant Christianity. Irigaray does not of course explicitly state that her idea of the transcendent other is the Christian God that necessitates the trauma for men’s studies in religion, but the two usages of the phrase cannot be completely disassociated, much as her conception of the other cannot be fully disassociated from her conception of herself. As such, the colonial, and as I will argue, misogynistic uses of religious terminology cast important and uncritically approached consequences on Irigaray’s location of the other. An older but very similar interrelational approach to the other clarifies the inherent misogyny of the location of the other within transcendent and thus “religious” terminology: Martin Buber’s “I/Thou” model of interrelationality.

5.4.2. Martin Buber and the Transcendental Patriarchy

Buber’s model recognizes three spheres of interrelationality: “life with nature”, “life with men”, and “life with spiritual beings” (Buber [1923] 1970, 56-57). Within these spheres there are two word-pairs that delineate different types of relationships: “I-It” and “I-You” (53). This model then is organized into subject and object. In the relationship with elements of nature, “I-It” permeates. It is impossible to recognize subjectivity in nature or in an inanimate object; an object is always an “it”, or a “thing”. To supersede “It” in relation to an object in this model would be to recognize a “You”. This anthropomorphizes the object into a subject of equal subjectivity as the self. In the anthropomorphized object, or more directly in another person, there exists a conceivable possibility to recognize not just a being, but a being possessing subjectivity equal to the subjectivity the self, or “I”, possesses. “When I confront a human being as my You and speak the basic word I-You to him,

then he is no thing among things nor does he consist of things" (59). Within relationships with the other, Buber recognizes the possibility and tendency to reduce the You of the other to It. When the uniqueness of being in the other is not seen, the other is a tool for the use of the self. Only one relationship for Buber cannot reduce the other to an It, or as a being only of use by the self. "Only in one relationship, the all-embracing one, is even latency actuality. Only one You never ceases, in accordance with its nature to be You for us. To be sure, whoever knows God also knows God's remoteness and the agony of drought upon a frightened heart, but not the loss of presence" (147).

The concept of God for Buber necessitates a being whose subjectivity can never be dismissed, nor appropriated by the self. If one's interrelational goal is to conceive of the other as a subject, then the reference point must be that relationship in which the subjectivity of the other cannot conceivably be questioned. The relationship with God then is the ideal relationship, and the relationship wherein the self conceives subjectivity in another person is one wherein the self conceives of the other as being an aspect of God's subjectivity. One must see God in the other, as it were.

Obviously theological, this model posits that 1) if the other is God then the other's subjectivity can never be denied, 2) if the other is another person, then it is possible to conceive of him or her as possessing a subjectivity equal to one's own, but it is also possible to conceive of him or her as an object to be acted upon for one's own purposes, and 3) if the other is an element of nature, it can have no sense of subjectivity and can only be related to as an object to be used for one's own purposes. The transcendent other, referring explicitly to "the spiritual" and

historically if not consciously to a Christian past, is definitionally this other whose subjectivity can never be denied. If conceiving the other as a subject requires an ideological conception of God in him or her, however, then certain gendered inequalities emerge, explored, curiously perhaps, by Irigaray decades before she wrote *Sharing the World*.

5.4.3. Divine Women

In “Divine Women”, published in French in 1987 and translated into English in 1993, Irigaray analyses the strategic benefits afforded to men through the conception of a God that is gendered as male. She writes that “to avoid finiteness, man has sought out a unique *male* God. God has been created out of man’s gender. [...]. Divinity is what we need to become free, autonomous, sovereign. No human subjectivity, no human society has ever been established without the help of the divine” (Irigaray [1987] 1993, 42. Irigaray’s italics). The problem for Irigaray here is not in the conception of God, but in the *gendering* of it. She argues that so long as women lack their own gendered God from which they could refer to an infinite subjectivity – or in Derrida’s terminology, a *transcendental signified* – a fundamental difference between men and women with regard to available subjectivity will continue. She writes that “having a God and becoming one’s gender go hand in hand. God is the other that we absolutely cannot be without” (Irigaray [1987] 1993, 44). Women can never be complete subjects, agents, and thus persons if this infinite referent of female subjectivity is not available.

If one accepts that women do not fully qualify as subjects when the primary referent of subjectivity is a monotheistic male-gendered God, then what are the

implications on a conception of interrelationality wherein the ideal relationship is between the self and that male-gendered God? In Buber's case the answer seems obvious: since he refers directly to that God, men will occupy a privileged position in terms of possible subjectivity. If recognizing the "I" is inextricable from the recognition of the "You" and *vice versa*, then a lack of a complete "You" negates the possibility of a complete "I". Within Irigaray's terminology in *Sharing the World*, this incomplete "I" is categorically unable to recognize a complete "transcendence of the other" since the transcendent other contextually refers back to a male-privileging tradition that negates the linkage with a discourse of female transcendence.

There is an implicit counter-thesis to Irigaray's work in "Divine Women" that is integral to my thesis. To extrapolate from Irigaray's argument, "transcendence" refers to a male subjectivity, so men are afforded a privilege in defining themselves when they position themselves against a transcendent subjectivity. However, if that transcendence refers to a dysfunctional theology wherein God is inherently violent, then the afforded position is reversed—women, having no divinely violent reference point, are not inherently violent in this regard. This (com)position turns the situation which she identifies as ideal into a dystopia: that which is assumed to be ideal is actually what is most terrible. The men who identify themselves under this system would then also operate within a dystopian framework wherein the signified that assumingly affords them sole access to subjectivity and freedom is actually that which categorically hinders them from attaining any sort of subjectivity, and following that, any sort of freedom.

Irigaray writes that "not taking into account the existence [...] of the other, in fact amounts to depriving oneself of some freedom both by reducing the original

impetus and by only partially founding that which determines the transcendental impetus. This makes human freedom as such impossible" (Irigaray, 2008, xxi). If Irigaray foundationally limits the possible subjectivity attainable by a woman by locating ideal subjectivity within a male-male context, and locates freedom as only being attainable within this context, then can women ever attain a complete freedom? If the counter-thesis is instead true, and if men, through denying the existence of the transcendence of their signified because of its traumatic (re)definition, limit their own access to the other, can men be free either?

If we return to Butler's notion of freedom and state self-legitimation, we can see that the method through which Irigaray locates freedom partially removes women from the ideological boundaries of both state safeguards and freedom by limiting the extent to which a woman is a subject. If personal and group freedoms reflect fundamental human rights, and if conceiving of the other as being included within the category of "those deserving of fundamental human rights" is contingent on conceiving the other fully as a subject, then limiting the extent to which a woman is a subject excludes her from the category of "those deserving fundamental human rights". It is not the case that a woman is free or not free then; by excluding her from the category to which freedom refers, she is denied the conceptual *option* of being free or not free. The trauma for authors in men's studies in religion is that they accept the counter-thesis to Irigaray's argument implicitly in their acceptance of the argument itself, demonizing themselves in their recognition of the impossibility of recognizing divinity in women.

5.4.4. Demonic Men?

Irigaray's core project is to imagine a way to "share the world" that is founded upon the relationship between the self and the other. If sharing the world with a conception of the other requires a conception of the self, then sharing the world with a complete, ideal, other requires the conception of a complete, ideal, self. When the conceptions of the ideal and "transcendence" correspond to a system in which certain individuals occupy privileged positions that repudiate others, the repudiated individuals are denied access to those conceptions. When the self is denied the categorization of completion through a reference to a particular gendered ideal, the other is denied the same categories. This critique echoes past critiques about Western society pertaining to the exclusion of women from social roles as in the Persons Case. When governed by categories perhaps created by and for men, women are thus relegated to subordinate and incomplete subjectivities. In such a system men are afforded the sole opportunity to "share the world" with each other.

However, if the conception of the self has been traumatically (re)signified to refer not to a complete, ideal other but to a violent, pathologized other, and the subject who assumes that identification also assumes that violent pathologization onto him- or herself, then the subject will not be free to "share the world" with the other until he or she "repairs" the part of the self, and thus the part of the signified, that limits the achievement of freedom. This struggle for freedom, or this desire to remediate a *manque*, motivates authors in men's studies in religion to conceive of a malfunctioning masculinity, thus constantly producing and (re)producing an

institutionalized gender-based dialectic wherein they and the topics of their analyses can only be conceived under an ahistorical rubric of malfunction.

5.5. Practical Ramifications and Conclusions

What then are the practical ramifications of this cultural reinterpretation of masculinities as inherently pathological and violent? In a study of kindergarten pupils, Stephanie Cayot Serriere of Pennsylvania State University finds that young boys regularly enact symbolic and physical violence on both boys and girls (Serriere 2008, 23). At the 2009 Ontario Education Research Symposium, the Centre for Literacy at Nipissing University presented data that in England, 11% more female than male students complete high school (Booth 2009, 6). This gender-based educational gap, the study notes, is widening, and is coming closer to past performance and social background as determinants of academic performance. (Booth 2009, 6). A 2007 Government of Canada report finds that “[no] other socio-demographic variables except gender differentiate between high school graduates and participants of a non-university PSE [post-secondary education]” (Thiessen 2007, ii), that “females are substantially more likely to be on better educational pathways than are their male counterparts” (iii), and that 25% more males than females do not complete high school (32). Data are provided from many sources in Canada, the United States and England that boys participate in a culture of valorized underachievement.

In the thesis’ introduction I used Alain Badiou’s notion of politics as concentrated economy to show how arguments about female inequality are economically viable because they are politically motivated. The authors’ who

produce these ideas are socially sanctioned because of the economical viability that their particular strategic position within their political contexts affords them. In a way, then, my introductory and conclusive data refers to my primary focus only tangentially. The educational reports above are motivated by a political strategy, and assume validity based on the acceptance of them by the institutions from whence they come.

What kinds of conclusions can be drawn from the data with relation to theory, (re)signification and trauma? The data, obviously removed from the focus of this thesis, are significant to the current discussion. It is my contention that the reproduction of gender-based violence in very young children and the widening influence that gender identity has for educational achievement correlates to a cultural naturalization of masculine identity and masculine references as being inherently and incontrovertibly violent.

At some point, male children are increasingly experiencing a traumatic event that is later signified as relating to a pathological or at least malfunctioning element of themselves. These significations of violence are historically contextualized into a system of signifying reference points for masculinity and seem to have negative repercussions for social interaction. The future of gender-based dialectics – and apparently for future generations of men – is dependent on the ways in which normative statements such as the naturalization of male violence are critically disassembled. This critical approach will hopefully come about in constructive ways. These constructive futures will require closer, multidisciplinary investigations of the links between violence, male violence and signification that exceed what I have been able to accomplish here.

5.6. Final (Re)marks: Revealing (or [Re]veiling) the (Re)Definition of Masculinity

In this thesis I hope to have shown that a productive conversation is possible between Lacanian psychoanalytical theories and men's studies in religion. While authors in these two discourses do not actively engage with each other, Lacanian theories concerning signification compose a useful toolset with which to interrogate how, and more importantly why, male violence occupies the cultural capital that it does. By exposing the institutional frameworks that drive men's studies in religion along its present trajectory, I hope to have given a unique reading of this historical situation.

If this thesis has been successful it will hopefully appear quite simple. It should appear simple because I have worked throughout under a truism: references are referential. The Lacanian concepts that I have used to show that the ways in which authors write about violence are merely tools that have enabled me to apply that truism to the axiom predominant in men's studies in religion that "men are violent". If it has been a failure, however, it will have further obfuscated discourses about violence with regard to men's studies in religion—in effect (re)veiling, or adding an unnecessary hindrance to, productive communication.

The method by which I have argued my thesis will also, if successful, have appeared almost too simple. In chapter 1 I attempted to lay out the theoretical, practical and historical points of departure that have motivated my studies for the last two years. In chapter two I attempted to do the same for the authors who compose my data-set. By reviewing the literature regarding men's studies in religion

in conjunction with some feminist theorists who instigated men to question their own identities, I simply attempted to show that data actually exist which legitimize my argument. In chapter 3 I attempted to contextualize particular terms from a theoretical model so that I could phrase the data in a meaningful way. In chapter 4 I attempted to legitimize the application of the theories to the data by showing that the data forms an institutional structure. Lastly, in chapter 5 I attempted to show that the data occurs as such because it is produced in a particular, political and economical context. If I have shown these things then this thesis has succeeded.

Men's studies in religion is a new field in which authors pose interesting arguments from unique contexts. These authors' work is gaining cultural viability, as is evident in Booth, Serriere and Theissen's educational analyses. Booth, Serriere and Theissen's arguments parallel arguments presented in the field: the ways in which men perform masculinit(y)/(ies) is maladaptive and appears to correlate with lower achievement in particular areas.

I have attempted to argue in this thesis that the ways in which authors in men's studies in religion approach their objects of study requires them to work within a rubric of malfunction. There must be something "wrong" with masculinity in order for it to require studying. These authors work within this particular rubric due to the pre-existing feminist arguments that motivate them. The arguments that authors who ascribe to men's studies in religion make with regard to violence are influenced both – but not exclusively – by the rubric of malfunction in which they operate, and by the feminist ideologies that motivate them. These two factors, the rubric of malfunction and the feminist ideology, have contributed to the (re)defining of masculinit(y)/(ies) as being somehow inherently violent.

A Lacanian reading of this situation, in which the (re)definition is intrinsically linked to subjective signifying processes and trauma, has allowed me to productively reveal the current state of institutional knowledge related to men's studies in religion. The (re)definition is both a new definition and a re-definition. It is a redefinition because a previously-existing chain of signifiers exists from which discussions of violence come. It is also a definition because the re-definition's traumatic history has made it inexpressible. The new definition that masculinity is inherently violent is thus both retroactive, because it is applied throughout history regardless of context, and anticipatory, because it projects a particular future for gender-based dialectics.

Further research will show if psychoanalytic readings about men's studies in religion are productive. In this thesis I have applied only a small fraction of Lacan's theories to my topic. Further research should integrate a more comprehensive Lacanian analysis of the field. Inasmuch as signification is essential to any analysis, useful results will probably also come from reading Lacan's *manque*, or lack, onto the field. Since *manque* is very important to Lacan, and is cited throughout his work, applying it to men's studies in religion will allow for a thorough analysis. Likewise, it will be important to continue a critical engagement with the concept of violence in the field. Further work ought to expand the non-Lacanian approaches to violence in ways that continue to interrogate normative claims about masculinity and the systems in which actions done by men are constructed as violent.

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