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Masculinities and Men's Studies

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Women's studies

- Beginning around the 1960's, modern feminist writers began to make strong critiques of mainstream social science theory and research methods.
- New ideas about female development and functioning gave rise to a new field, Women's Studies.



Gender studies

- Theorists and researchers: to take seriously the notion that a person's gender has important effects on his or her behaviour.
- Material effects of gender on women and men's bodies.
- Women's Studies and Gender Studies: to created a stronger awareness of people as gendered beings.



Gender studies

- In his essay entitled “Are you a Man or a Mouse?” Homi Bhabha writes: “My own masculinity is strangely separating from me, turning into my shadow, the place of my filiation and my fading. My attempt to conceptualize its conditionality becomes a compulsion to question it; my analytic sense that masculinity normalizes and naturalizes difference turns into a kind of neurotic ‘acting out’ of its power and powerlessness” (Bhabha 1995, 58).



Men's studies

- In the early 1970's, Men's Studies emerged.
- Similar questions as in Women's Studies: what consequences does the experience of being male have on men?
- Why did masculinity become a cultural and intellectual problem worth studying?



Feminism and men's studies

- Feminism and women's studies questioned the notion of "human being" and "universal human experience."
Man≠human.
- Gender as a problematic construct, rather as a natural, taken-for-granted reality.
- Universal experience as a male experience rejected and questioned.
- Men-under-construction.



Men's studies

- To show that masculinities are socially produced, fluid and contingent.
- According to Bryce Traister, “masculinity has for so long stood as the transcendental anchor and guarantor of cultural authority and ‘truth,’ demonstrating its materiality, its ‘constructedness,’ requires an especially energetic rhetorical and critical insistence” (Traister 2000).

Carrigan, T., Connell, R., Lee J. 1985. “Towards a New Sociology of Masculinity,” *Theory and Society*.

Anxieties about men's studies and masculinities

- There has existed a considerable feminist anxiety about studying men and masculinities. The idea persisted that a focus on men and masculinities would distract attention from women and women's inequalities.
- Tania Modleski most eloquently voiced this anxiety in her book *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a 'Postfeminist' Age* (New York: Routledge, 1991).



Anxieties about studying masculinities

- However, researchers in the field of men's studies argue that focus on women and their issues "delete" men and normative masculinity and marginalize them. Both masculinities and femininities as socially produced and performed should be studied.



Men's studies

- Since 1970s studies on different aspects of menhood (from men in the labor market to men in the family and violent men, etc.).
- But only by the end of the 20th century, the number of these studies increases dramatically.
- A growing body of literature theorizing men and masculinities focuses on a variety of topics including men's violence, fatherhood, pornography, men's crimes, female masculinity, male femininity etc.

Men's studies

- Men's studies span traditional disciplinary divides; it cannot avoid being interdisciplinary. Sociology, psychology, economics, political science and the rest are all relevant to an understating of men and masculinity.



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Men's studies

- Some studies done by feminists or feministically inclined researchers.
- Other studies inspired by different “masculinity movements” including pro-male movement called *mythopoetic movement*.
- This movement emphasized male pain and attempted to rethink traditional male roles.



Masculinities and mythopoetic movement

- Its ideologist Robert Bly and his book *Iron John* (1990): Men lost their power and feel powerless. In order to regain their masculinity, men need to separate themselves from women (at least temporarily, for certain periods of time).
- The dominant topic: men are unable to separate fully from their mothers to become 'real men', having had little close contact with their fathers, or other male mentors.



Masculinities and mythopoetic movement

- Robert Bly invokes mythopoetic concepts to restore a lost, traditional masculinity.
- Emotional self-exploration, male bonding and recovering damaged relationships with fathers.
- You can discover your authentic masculinity becoming a “hard warrior” rather than a “soft wimp.”



Masculinities and mythopoetic movement

- Robert Bly appeals to men who would like to reclaim and reaffirm the imagined origins of masculinity.
- Rather than reaffirm masculinity, however, the new men's movement illustrates its contradictions. The paradoxical appeal of mythopoetic 'manly' rituals – in which men express feelings and emotions, dance and sing, love art and nature – is that they allow men to redefine their own 'feminine' qualities as 'deep masculine'.



Masculinities and mythopoetic movement

- Pro-male movement encouraged the creation of discussion groups, therapeutic strategies for men, courses on men and masculinities, conferences etc. “Therapeutic” groups and therapeutic effect on men.
- Unfortunately, it was oriented towards a small fraction of privileged men, mostly middle aged middle class white men.
- A major limitation of this movement was its failure to engage with questions of structural inequalities and injustices.



The men's rights lobby

- One of the main “founding” texts of this lobby is *Warren Farrell, The Myth of Male Power: Why are Men the Disposable Sex?* (1994).
- Farrell: men are now the gender victims as a result of feminism having gone too far, with men having increased responsibilities but few rights around issues of marriage, divorce, child custody and access to children.



The men's rights lobby

- Modern legislation is seen to be overprotective of women's interests, resulting in discrimination against men at a time when they are under increasing threat within a rapidly changing society.
- Some researchers argue that these pro-male movements were a reaction to feminism, an attempt to accuse women and feminists for creating problems that men encounter in society.



Why study men and masculinities?

- Why do we need to look at masculinity issues?
- What are masculinity issues?



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Why study men and masculinities?

- “Crisis of masculinity” – difficulties of being a man and male confessional writing in magazines, TV and Internet.
- Hard times for men (figures of the absent father and underachieving male student).
- Media explanations: men’s inability to internalize appropriate models of masculinity causes the increase in these failed masculinities.



Why study men and masculinities?

- Men are powerfully affected by the experiences of growing up male, having people respond to them as males, expecting and having others expect certain behaviors based on "male gender roles", and having feelings about their masculinity.
- Men's Studies moves masculinity from the periphery of inquiry into the center. The subject of study is not, as in most traditional scholarship, about men as historical, political, and cultural actors, but rather about men as men.



Why study men and masculinities?

- While many men have power and often get to do what they want, there are also a great number of men who feel quite powerless and have been damaged by harsh masculine socialization.
- Many men do have trouble dealing with strong women. Men are raised to believe that they should be strong and dominant. Men's Studies can enlighten us to various aspects of relationships between the sexes.



Why study men and masculinities?

- The purpose of studying men from a gender aware perspective is not to further oppress women, but to address quality of life issues for men and women.



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Masculinity issues

- Most males are encouraged from an early age to suppress certain emotions such as vulnerability, love, hope, gratitude, hatred or pity.
- Emotional constriction may lead to a variety of psychological, physical, and social problems.
- Most acts of violence are committed by men.
- Males comprise the vast majority of incarcerated and homeless people.
- Definitions of masculinity are changing?



Pro-feminist men's studies

- Masculinity and femininity are not fixed, static “roles” that individuals have but rather dynamic relational processes.
- There is no singular “masculine role”. There are a multiplicity of masculinities.
- Different conceptions of masculinity/manliness. Masculinities as “configurations of practice” according to R. Connell.



Pro-feminist men's studies

- Masculinity is “a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture” (Connell 1995 and 2005).



Pro-feminist men's studies

- Jeff Hearn, *The Gender of Oppression* 1987 – men and women as sexual classes. Masculinity in the workings of women's oppression.
- Pierre Bourdieu (1990) examines relationships between men and women as relationships between the **dominant and dominated classes**.
- *La domination masculine* (1990); questions of patriarchal power and the social construction of gender.



Pro-feminist men's studies

- Pierre Bourdieu: the sexual division of human beings into two fundamental categories is a thoroughly arbitrary cultural construction.
- For him, sexism aims to ascribe historically produced social differences to a biological nature.
- Our perceptions of the biology of reproduction are the effects of the arbitrary social construction of gender divisions which they are supposed to legitimate and explain.



Pro-feminist men's studies

- While the invocation of biology allows the social construction of sexual difference to appear motivated or natural, its real function is to mask the true, socially produced power relations between the sexes.



Pro-feminist men's studies

- Sexual oppression is above all an effect of symbolic violence; the traditional relationship between the sexes is structured by a habitus which makes male power appear legitimate even to women.
- Insofar as symbolic violence works, it produces women who share the very same habitus that serves to oppress them.



Pro-feminist men's studies

- The social effects of gender divisions that the dominant groups -- men -- do not escape the burdens of their own domination.
- To change dominant gender relations means to change gender habitus (rather difficult task).



Pro-feminist men's studies

- R. Connell, *Gender and Power*, 1987 – identifies inequalities between males and females in relation to levels of income, levels of literacy, women's participation rates in government and their experience of domestic violence.
- Very influential Connell's *Masculinities* (1995 and 2005) – masculinities are not only differentiated; they stand one another in relations of power. The use of Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony.
- Hegemony is a persuasion of the population through social institutions and media that the social world is 'natural', 'normal' (to legitimate the interests of the powerful).



Pro-feminist men's studies

- One of the major strength of pro-feminist analyses is that they connect masculinity to wider social and economic forces.
- This link between the class relations of society and patriarchy illustrates a perspective on masculinity that remains close to feminist aims of reducing oppression.



Pro-feminist men's studies

- To make masculinities visible in their many representations and effects.
- Masculinity and globalization: "... global market relations, migration and ethnic/cultural conflict – are increasingly important for understanding gender issues in general." (Connell 2005).



Pro-feminist men's studies

- Power dimensions of gender relations and masculinity are considered most important (theorization of the relationship between different forms of masculinity and femininity and power dynamics among them).



Different masculinities

- Masculinity is a social, cultural, and historical construct, dependent on and related to other factors such as class, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and disability.
- The hierarchical relations between the different types of masculinity.
- There is a “gender politics within masculinity” (Connell 1995, 37).



Hegemonic masculinity

- Concept of “hegemonic masculinity” helps to determine how particular groups of men— dominant versions of masculinity— occupy and sustain positions of power, which “Legitimate and reproduce social relationships that generate dominance” over other forms of masculinities as well as over women (Connell 2005).



Hegemonic masculinity

- It is a type of masculinity embodied by popular heroes, role models and fictional characters.
- Hegemonic masculinity is naturalized in the form of the hero and presented through forms that revolve around heroes: sagas, ballads, westerns, thrillers” etc. in books, films, television, and in sporting events.



Hegemonic masculinity

- Michael Kimmel: “Hegemonic masculinity contains within it the image of the ‘man’ in power, a man with power and a man of power. We equate manhood with being strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control. The very definitions of manhood we have developed in our culture maintain the power that some men have over other men and that men have over women.” (Kimmel, 1997)



Hegemonic masculinity

- Hegemonic masculinity is not intended as a description of real men.
- Hegemonic masculinity is not a personality type or an actual male character. Rather, it is an ideal or set of prescriptive social norms, symbolically represented, but a crucial part of the texture of many routine mundane social and disciplinary activities.



Hegemonic masculinity

- Hegemonic masculinity in Western society is recognized in most literature as hinging on heterosexuality, economic autonomy, being able to provide for one's family, being rational, being successful, keeping one's emotions in check, and above all not doing anything considered feminine.
- Hegemonic male norms stress values such as courage, aggression, autonomy, mastery, technological skill, adventure, toughness in mind and body.



Mad Men (2007-2015)

- Don Draper:
- *"Maybe I'm not as comfortable being powerless as you are."* (Season 1)
- *"People tell you who they are, but we ignore it because we want them to be who we want them to be."* (Season 4).
- *"You're born alone and you die alone and this world just drops a bunch of rules on top of you to make you forget those facts. But I never forget. I'm living like there's no tomorrow, because there isn't one."* (Season 1).



Hegemonic masculinity

- 4 rules are used to define hegemonic masculinity:
 1. No sissy stuff (no feminine behavior).
 2. Be a big weel (power, status, success and wealth).
 3. Be the sturdy oak (strength, confidence, independence).
 4. Give'em hell (aggression, courage and even violence).



Hegemonic masculinity

- Hegemonic masculinity as an aspirational goal rather than lived reality for ordinary men. Indeed a key characteristic seems to be its impossibility or “phantasmic” nature.
- The ideals may reside in fantasy figures or models remote from their lives of unheroic majority (Donaldson 1993).



Hegemonic masculinity/transnational business masculinity

- “Transnational business masculinity” (R. Connell) most conspicuously reflects this hegemonic pattern of masculinity.
- Economic and political elite: egocentrism, very relative loyalties to either the state or corporation and diminished sense of responsibility for others.



Hegemonic into toxic

- The term toxic masculinity defines “those aspects of hegemonic masculinity that are socially destructive, such as misogyny, homophobia, greed, and violent domination...” (Terry Kupers 2001).



Hegemonic into toxic

- *“Masculine culture is both a reason that Trump does what he does and a reason that people accept and trust it. His classical brand of masculinity becomes toxic and feeds tribalism and violence and entitlement among his followers — those who prefer fighting to talking, walls to bridges, grimaces to smiles.”*

(James Hamblin, “Trump Is a Climax of American Masculinity”, *The Atlantic*).



Hegemonic into toxic

- *The fact that Trump's impetuosity and thoughtlessness are rewarded rather than punished only further evidence the boys-will-be-boys system. His weakness is not in "speaking without thinking," as apologists have offered, but in being unable not to speak when challenged. Trump is both a product of a masculine culture and a beneficiary of its musky tenets (James Hamblin, "Trump Is a Climax of American Masculinity", *The Atlantic*).*



Hegemonic into toxic

- “A number of commentators have highlighted Trump’s “toxic masculinity” and suggested that in its hyper-macho posturing, bullying and lack of empathy for others, it masks an underlying fear and anxiety of not measuring up, of being inadequate, of losing control. Others have noted the “precarious masculinity” of Trump’s white working-class male supporters, and suggest that many men see in Trump and his talk of male dominance and success someone who can restore their lost power and status (“Maine Voices: A call to resist ‘toxic masculinity’”).



Protest masculinity (or precarious masculinity)

- Protest masculinity as a marginalized masculinity “which picks up themes of hegemonic masculinity in the society at large but reworks them in a context of poverty” (Connell 2005).
- As some kind of mirror image of hegemonic masculinity but in socially deprived contexts.



Protest masculinity (or precarious masculinity)

- „ The term "protest masculinity" refers to what researchers describe as instances of extreme forms of sex-typed behavior on the part of some males. Key to the concept of protest masculinity are high levels of physical aggression. The protest masculinity profile is also proposed as including destructiveness, low tolerance for delay of gratification, crime, drinking, and similar dispositions.“ (Braude 1990).



Protest masculinity (or precarious masculinity)

- In compensation for stigmatized work and low economic position, men will emphasize their masculinity (aggressive masculinity, violent masculinity) as a cultural resource.
- Connell (1995): marginalized masculinity – men who indulge in a „spectacular display“ of ‚masculine protest‘; men who have a restricted access to the power that a traditional working class men’s job (manual) can give them. They usually cannot construct masculinity through work, education, ownership of property etc.



Crime and protest masculinity

- Crime as a resource for doing masculinity.
- Protest masculinity is often a product of narcissism built from deep feelings of powerlessness and insecurity. Connell compares it to a “tense, freaky façade, making a claim to power where there are no real resources for power” (Connell 1995, 111).



Crime and protest masculinity

- Studies on masculinity emphasize that criminal behavior can be used as a resource when other resources are not available for accomplishing masculinity.
- If men do not have a steady, reliable job, a stable family life or other traditional indicators of successful masculinity, criminal behavior becomes an acceptable way to affirm and reproduce their masculinity.



Toxic masculinities

Boy look at you, looking at me
I know you don't understand
You could be a bad motherfucker
But that don't make you a man
Now you're just another one of my problems.
Lana Del Rey, "High by the Beach"



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Future of masculinities?

- On a global scale, the export/import of toxic masculinity (domination, the devaluation of women, aggression, and violence).
- Global markets, dispossession, ethnic/cultural conflicts, and migration as a backdrop of toxic masculinity.



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