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Mike Donaldson
University of Wollongong, miked@uow.edu.au

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What Is Hegemonic Masculinity?

Mike Donaldson
Sociology, University of Wollongong, Australia

Structures of oppression, forces for change

A developing debate within the growing theoretical literature on men and masculinity concerns the relationship of gender systems to the social formation. Crucially at issue is the question of the autonomy of the gender order. Some, in particular Waters, are of the opinion that change in masculine gender systems historically has been caused exogenously and that, without those external factors, the systems would stably reproduce.(1) For Hochschild, the "motor" of this social change is the economy, particularly and currently, the decline in the purchasing power of the male wage, the decline in the number and proportion of "male" skilled and unskilled jobs, and the rise in "female" jobs in the growing services sector.(2) I have argued that gender relations themselves are bisected by class relations and vice-versa, and that the salient moment for analysis is the relation between the two.(3)

On the other side of the argument, others have been trying to establish "the laws of motion" of gender systems. Connell, for instance, has insisted on the independence of their structures, patterns of movement. and determinations, most notably in his devastating critiques of sex-role theory. "Change is always something that happens to sex roles, that impinges on them. It comes from outside, as in discussions of how technological and economic changes demand a shift to a 'modern' male role for men. Or it comes from inside the person, from the 'real self' that protests against the artificial restrictions of constraining roles. Sex role theory has no way of grasping change as a dialectic arising within gender relations themselves." It has no way of grasping social dynamics that can only be seriously considered when the historicity of the structure of gender relations, the gender order of the society, is the point of departure.(4)

This concern with broad, historical movement is linked to the question of male sexual politics. Clearly, if men wish to challenge patriarchy and win, the central question must be, who and where are the "army of redressers?" (5) But "the political project of rooting out the sexism in masculinity has proved intensely difficult" because "the difficulty of constructing a movement of men to dismantle hegemonic masculinity is that its logic is not the articulation of collective interest but the attempt to dismantle that interest.(6) It is this concept of "hegemonic masculinity" on which the argument for autonomy of the gender structures turns, for it is this that links their broader historical sweep to lived experience. Put simply, if the gender system has an independence of structure, movement, and determinations, then we should be able to identify counter-hegemonic forces within it; if these are not identifiable, then

we must question the autonomy of the gender system and the existence of hegemonic masculinity as central and specific to it.

On the other hand, if gender systems are not autonomous, then the question "why, in specific social formations, do certain ways of being male predominate, and particular sorts of men rule?" remains to be answered and the resistances to that order still remain to be identified.

The political implications of the issue are clear. If there is an independent structure of masculinity, then it should produce counter-hegemonic movements of men, and all good blokes should get involved in them. If the structure is not independent, or the movements not counter-hegemonic, or the counter-hegemony not moving, then political practice will not be centred on masculinity ... and what do we men do then, about the masculine images in and through which we have shaped a world so cruel to most of its inhabitants?

Hegemony and masculinity

Twenty years ago, Patricia Sexton suggested that "male norms stress values such as courage, inner direction, certain forms of aggression, autonomy. mastery, technological skill, group solidarity, adventure and considerable amounts of toughness in mind and body." (7) It is only relatively recently that social scientists have sought to link that insight with the concept of hegemony, a notion as slippery and difficult as the idea of masculinity itself.

Hegemony, a pivotal concept in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks and his most significant contribution to Marxist thinking, is about the winning and holding of power and the formation (and destruction) of social groups in that process. In this sense, it is importantly about the ways in which the ruling class establishes and maintains its domination. The ability to impose a definition of the situation, to set the terms in which events are understood and issues discussed, to formulate ideals and define morality is an essential part of this process. Hegemony involves persuasion of the greater part of the population, particularly through the media, and the organization of social institutions in ways that appear "natural," "ordinary:' "normal." The state, through punishment for non-conformity, is crucially involved in this negotiation and enforcement.(8)

Heterosexuality and homophobia are the bedrock of hegemonic masculinity and any understanding of its nature and meaning is predicated on the feminist insight that in general the relationship of men to women is oppressive. Indeed, the term "hegemonic masculinity" was invented and is used primarily to maintain this central focus in the critique of masculinity. A fundamental element of hegemonic masculinity. then. is that women exist as potential sexual objects for men while men are negated as sexual objects for men. Women provide heterosexual men with sexual validation, and men compete with each other for this. This does not necessarily involve men being particularly nasty to individual

women. Women may feel as oppressed by non-hegemonic masculinities, may even find some expressions of the hegemonic pattern more familiar and manageable.(9)

More than fifty books have appeared in the English language in the last decade or so on men and masculinity. What is hegemonic masculinity as it is presented in this growing literature? Hegemonic masculinity, particularly as it appears in the works of Carrigan, Connell, and Lee. Chapman, Cockburn, Connell, Lichterman, Messner, and Rutherford, involves a specific strategy for the subordination of women. In their view, hegemonic masculinity concerns the dread of and the flight from women. A culturally idealized form, it is both a personal and a collective project, and is the common sense about breadwinning and manhood. It is exclusive, anxiety-provoking, internally and hierarchically differentiated, brutal, and violent. It is pseudo-natural, tough, contradictory, crisis-prone, rich, and socially sustained. While centrally connected with the institutions of male dominance, not all men practice it. though most benefit from it. Although cross-class. it often excludes working-class and black men. It is a lived experience, and an economic and cultural force, and dependent on social arrangements. It is constructed through difficult negotiation over a life-time. Fragile it may be, but it constructs the most dangerous things we live with. Resilient, it incorporates its own critiques, but it is, nonetheless, "unravelling." (10)

What can men do with it? According to the authors cited above, and others, hegemonic masculinity can be analyzed, distanced from, appropriated, negated, challenged, reproduced, separated from, renounced, given up, chosen, constructed with difficulty, confirmed, imposed, departed from, and modernized. (But not, apparently, enjoyed.) What can it do to men? It can fascinate, undermine, appropriate some men's bodies, organize, impose, pass itself off as natural, deform, harm, and deny. (But not, seemingly, enrich and satisfy.)

Which groups are most active in the making of masculinist sexual ideology? It is true that the New Right and fascism are vigorously constructing aggressive, dominant, and violent models of masculinity. But generally, the most influential agents are considered to be: priests, journalists, advertisers, politicians, psychiatrists, designers, playwrights, film makers, actors, novelists, musicians, activists, academics, coaches, and sportsmen. They are the "weavers of the fabric of hegemony" as Gramsci put it, its "organizing intellectuals." These people regulate and manage gender regimes: articulate experiences, fantasies, and perspectives; reflect on and interpret gender relations.(11)

The cultural ideals these regulators and managers create and perpetuate. we are told, need not correspond at all closely to the actual personalities of the majority of men (not even to their own!). The ideals may reside in fantasy figures or models remote from the lives of the unheroic majority, but while they are very public, they do not exist only as publicity. The public face of hegemonic masculinity, the argument goes. is not necessarily even what powerful men are, but is what sustains their power, and is what large numbers

of men are motivated to support because it benefits them. What most men support is not necessarily what they are. "Hegemonic masculinity is naturalised in the form of the hero and presented through forms that revolve around heroes: sagas, ballads, westerns, thrillers," in books, films, television, and in -sporting events.(12)

What in the early literature had been written of as "the male sex role" is best seen as hegemonic masculinity, the "culturally idealised form of masculine character" which, however, may not be "the usual form of masculinity at all." To say that a particular form of masculinity is hegemonic means "that its exaltation stabilizes a structure of dominance and oppression in the gender order as a whole. To be culturally exalted, the pattern of masculinity must have exemplars who are celebrated as heroes." (13)

But when we examine these bearers of hegemonic masculinity, they seem scarcely up to the task, with more than just feet of clay. A football star is a model of hegemonic masculinity.(14) But is a model? When the handsome Australian Rules football player, Warwick "the tightest shorts in sports" Capper, combined football with modelling, does this confirm or decrease his exemplary status? When Wally ("the King") Lewis explained that the price he will pay for another five years playing in the professional Rugby League is the surgical replacement of both his knees, this is undoubtedly the stuff of good, old, tried and true, tough and stoic, masculinity. But how powerful is a man who mutilates his body, almost as a matter of course, merely because of a job? When Lewis announced that he was quitting the very prestigious "State of Origin" football series because his year-old daughter had been diagnosed as hearing-impaired, is this hegemonic?

In Australian surfing champion, iron man Steve Donoghue, Connell has found "an exemplar of masculinity" who lives "an exemplary version of hegemonic masculinity." But, says Donoghue, "I have loved the idea of not having to work ....Five hours a day is still a lot but it is something that I enjoy that people are not telling me what to do." This is *not* the right stuff. Nor are hegemonic men supposed to admit to strangers that their life is "like being in jail." Connell reveals further contradictions when he explains that "Steve, the exemplar of masculine toughness, finds his own exemplary status prevents him from doing exactly what his peer group defines as thoroughly masculine behaviour: going wild, showing off, drunk driving, getting into fights, defending his own prestige." This is not power. And when we look to see why many young men take up sport we find they are driven by "the hunger for affiliation" in the words of Hammond and Jablow; we see the felt need for "connectedness" and closeness. How hegemonic is this? (15)

Homosexuality and counter-hegemony

Let us, however, pursue the argument by turning now to examine those purported counter-hegemonic forces that are supposedly generated by the gender system itself. There are three main reasons why male homosexuality is regarded as counter-hegemonic. Firstly, hostility to homo-

sexuality is seen as fundamental to male heterosexuality; secondly, homosexuality is associated with effeminacy; and thirdly, the form of homosexual pleasure is itself considered subversive.(16)

Antagonism to gay men is a standard feature of hegemonic masculinity in Australia. Such hostility is inherent in the construction of heterosexual masculinity itself. Conformity to the demands of hegemonic masculinity, pushes heterosexual men to homophobia and rewards them for it, in the form of social support and reduced anxiety about their own manliness. In other words, male heterosexual identity is sustained and affirmed by hatred for, and fear of, gay men.(17)

Although homosexuality was compatible with hegemonic masculinity in other times and places, this was not true in post-invasion Australia. The most obvious characteristic of Australian male homosexuals, according to Johnston and Johnston, has been a "double deviance." It has been and is a constant struggle to attain the goals set by hegemonic masculinity, and some men challenge this rigidity by acknowledging their own "effeminacy." This rejection and affirmation assisted in changing homosexuality from being an aberrant (and widespread) sexual practice, into an identity when the homosexual and lesbian subcultures reversed the hegemonic gender roles, mirror-like, for each sex. Concomitantly or consequently, homosexual men were socially defined as effeminate and any kind of powerlessness, or a refusal to compete, "readily becomes involved in the imagery of homosexuality" (18)

While being subverted in this fashion, hegemonic masculinity is also threatened by the assertion of a homosexual identity confident that homosexuals are able to give each other sexual pleasure. According to Connell, the inherent egalitarianism in gay relationships that exists because of this transitive structure (my lover's lover can also be my lover), challenges the hierarchical and oppressive nature of male heterosexuality.(19)

However, over time, the connection between homosexuality and effeminacy has broken. The "flight from masculinity" evident in male homosexuality, noted thirty years ago by Helen Hacker, may be true no longer, as forms of homosexual behaviour seem to require an exaggeration of some aspects of hegemonic masculinity, notably the cult of toughness and physical aggression. If hegemonic masculinity necessarily involves aggression and physical dominance, as has been suggested, then the affirmation of gay sexuality need not imply support for women's liberation at all, as the chequered experience of women in the gay movement attests.(20)

More than a decade ago, Australian lesbians had noted, "We make the mistake of assuming that lesbianism, in itself, is a radical position. This had led us, in the past, to support a whole range of events, ventures, political perspectives, etc. just because it is lesbians who hold those beliefs or are doing things. It is as ludicrous as believing that every

working class person is a communist." (21) Even though there are many reasons to think that there are important differences in the expression and construction of women's homosexuality and men's homosexuality, perhaps there is something to be learned from this.

Finally, it is not "gayness" that is attractive to homosexual men, but "maleness." A man is lusted after not because he is homosexual but because he's a man. How counter-hegemonic can this be?

Changing men, gender segmentation and paid and unpaid work

Connell notes, "Two possible ways of working for the ending of patriarchy which move beyond guilt, fixing your head and heart, and blaming men, are to challenge gender segmentation in paid work and to work in men's counter-sexist groups. Particularly, though, counter-sexist politics need to move beyond the small consciousness raising group to operate in the workplace, unions and the state." (22)

It is hard to imagine men challenging gender segmentation in paid work by voluntarily dropping a third of their wage packet. But it does happen, although perhaps the increasing trickle of men into women's jobs may have more to do with the prodding of a certain invisible finger. Lichterman has suggested that more political elements of the "men's movement" contain human service workers, students, part-timers. and "odd-jobbers." Those in paid work, work in over-whelmingly female occupations -counselling, nursing, and elementary teaching are mentioned. In this sense, their position in the labour market has made them "predisposed to criticise hegemonic masculinity, the common sense about breadwinning and manhood." It can also be seen as a defence against the loss of these things, as men attempt to colonize women's occupations in a job market that is increasingly competitive, particularly for men's jobs.?(23)

If we broaden the focus on the desegmentation of paid work to include unpaid work, more interesting things occur. While Connell has suggested that hegemonic masculinity is confirmed in fatherhood, the practice of parenting by men actually seems to undermine it. Most men have an exceptionally impoverished idea about what fatherhood involves, and indeed, active parenting doesn't even enter into the idea of manhood at all. Notions of fathering that are acceptable to men concern the exercise of impartial discipline, from an emotional distance and removed from favouritism and partiality. In hegemonic masculinity, fathers do not have the capacity or the skill or the need to care for children, especially for babies and infants, while the relationship between female parents and young children is seen as crucial. Nurturant and care-giving behaviour is simply not manly. Children, in turn, tend to have more abstract and impersonal relations with their fathers. The problem is severely compounded for divorced fathers, most of whom have extremely little emotional contact with their children.(24) As Messner has explained, "while the man is 'out there' establishing his .name' in public, the woman is usually home caring for the day-to-day and moment-to-moment needs of her family ....Tragically, only in mid-

life, when the children have already 'left the nest' ...do some men discover the importance of connection and intimacy." (25)

Nonetheless, of the little time that men spend in unpaid work, proportionally more of it goes now into child care. Russell has begun to explore the possibility that greater participation by men in parenting has led to substantial shifts in their ideas of masculinity. The reverse is probably true too. Hochschild found in her study that men who shared care with their partners rejected their own "detached, absent and overbearing" fathers. The number of men primarily responsible for parenting has grown dramatically in Australia, increasing five-fold between 1981 and 1990. The number of families with dependent children in which the man was not in paid work but the woman was, rose from 16,200 in 1981 to 88,100 in 1990. Women, however, still outnumber men in this position ten to one.(26)

Not only a man's instrumental relations with others are challenged by close parenting, but so are his instrumental relations with himself. Men's sense of themselves is threatened by intimacy. Discovering the affection, autonomy, and agency of babies and children, disconcerted by an unusual inability to cope, men are compelled to re-evaluate their attitude to themselves. In Russell's study, the fathers who provided primary child care "constantly marvelled at and welcomed the changes that had taken place in their relationships with their children."(27) Even Neville Wran, the former premier of the Australian state of New South Wales whose most renowned political activity was "putting the blowtorch to the belly" of political opponents. said of fatherhood, which occurred in his sixties, "It's making me a more patient, tolerant, understanding human being. I'm a real marshmallow." (28)

The men who come to full-time fathering do not, however, regard themselves as unmanly, even though their experiences have resulted in major shifts in their ideas about children, child care, and women. In fact, one quarter of them considered these changes a major gain from their parenting work. This was despite the fact that these men's male friends and workmates were highly critical of their abandonment of the breadwinner role, describing them, for instance, as being "bludgers," "a bit funny," "a bit of a woman," and "under the thumb." (29) This stigmatism may be receding as the possibility of securing the children's future, once part of the father's responsibility in his relations with the "public sphere," is becoming less and less possible as unemployment bites deeper. (30) Child-minders and day-care workers have confirmed that the children of active fathers were "more secure" and "less anxious" than the children of non-active fathers. Psychological studies have revealed them to be better developed socially and intellectually. Furthermore, the results of active fatherhood seem to last. There is considerable evidence to suggest that greater interaction with fathers is better for children, with the sons and daughters of active fathers displaying lower levels of sex-role stereotyping. (31)

Men who share the second shift had a happier family life and more harmonious marriages. In a longitudinal study, Defrain found that parents reported that they were happier and their relationships improved as a result of shared parenting. In an American study, househusbands felt positive about their increased contribution to the family-household, paid work became less central to their definition of themselves, and they noted an improvement in their relationships with their female partners.(32) One of the substantial bases for metamorphosis for Connell's six changing heterosexual men in the environmental movement was the learning of domestic labour, which involves "giving to people, looking after people." In the same sense that feminism "claimed emotional life as a source of dignity and self respect," active fathers are challenging hegemonic masculinity. For hegemonic masculinity, real work is elsewhere, and relationships don't require energy, but provide it.(33) There is also the question of time. The time spent establishing the intimacy that a man may crave is also time away from establishing and maintaining the "competitive edge," or the "public face." There are no prizes for being a good father, not even when being one is defined narrowly in terms of breadwinning. (34)

Social struggles over time are intimate with class and gender. It is not only that the rich and powerful are paid handsomely for the time they sell, have more disposable time, more free time, more control over how they use their time, but the gender dimensions of time use within classes are equally compelling. No one performs less unpaid work, and receives greater remuneration for time spent in paid work, than a male of the ruling class.

The changes that are occurring remain uncertain, and there is, of course, a sting in the tail. Madison Avenue has found that "emotional lability and soft receptivity to what's new and exciting" are more appropriate to a consumer-orientated society than "hardness and emotional distance." Past television commercials tended to portray men as Marlboro macho or as idiots, but contemporary viewers see men cooking, feeding babies, and shopping. Insiders in the advertising industry say that the quick and easy cooking sections of magazines and newspapers are as much to attract male readers as overworked women. U.S. *Sports Illustrated* now carries advertisements for coffee, cereal, deodorants, and soup. According to Judith Langer, whose market-research firm services A.T. & T., Gillette. and Pepsico among others, it is now "acceptably masculine to care about one's house. (35)

The "new man" that comes at us through the media seems to reinforce the social order without challenging it. And he brings with him, too, a new con for women. In their increasing assumption of breadwinning, femocratic and skilled worker occupations, the line goes, women render themselves incomplete. They must -'give up" their femininity in their appropriation of male jobs and power, but men who embrace the feminine become "more complete." (36)

And if that isn't tricky enough, the "new men" that seem to be emerging are simply unattractive. Indeed, they're boring. Connell's six changing heterosexual men in the environmental movement were attracted to women who were "strong, independent, active. (37) Isn't everybody attracted by these qualities? Gay men find "new men" irritating and new men are not too sure how keen they should be on each other, and no feminist worth her salt would be seen dead with one.

The ruling class: Really real men?

If the significance of the concept of hegemonic masculinity is that it directs us to look for the contradictions within an autonomous gender system that will cause its transformation, then we must conclude it has failed. The challenges to hegemonic masculinity identified by its theorists and outlined above seem either to be complicit with, or broader than, the gender system that has apparently generated them. I can appreciate why Connell is practically interested in and theoretically intrigued by arguing against the notion of the externality of gender change. "*Both experience and theory* show the impossibility of liberating a dominant group and the difficulty of constructing a movement based not on the shared interest of a group but on the attempt to dismantle that interest." (38) (My emphasis). The key is the phrase "constructing a movement." It is only a system which has its own dynamics that can produce the social forces necessary to change radically that system.

But Connell himself has written that gender is part of the relations of production and has always been so. And similarly, that "social science cannot understand the state, the political economy of advanced capitalism. the nature of class, the process of modernisation or the nature of imperialism, the process of socialisation, the structure of consciousness or the politics of knowledge, without a full-blooded analysis of gender." (39) There is nothing outside gender. To be involved in social relations is to be inextricably "inside" gender. If everything, in this sense, is within gender, why should we be worried about the exteriority of the forces for social change? Politics, economics, technology are gendered. "We have seen the invisible hand;' someone wittier than I remarked, "It is white, hairy and manicured."

Is there, then, some place we can locate exemplars of hegemonic masculinity that are less fractured, more coherent, and thus easier to read? Where its central and defining features can be seen in sharper relief? If the public face of hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily even what powerful men are, then what are they necessarily? Why is it "no mean feat to produce the kind of people who can actually operate a capitalist system?" (40)

Even though the concept "hegemony" is rooted in concern with class domination, systematic knowledge of ruling class masculinity is slight as yet, but it is certainly intriguing. One aspect of ruling class hegemonic masculinity is the belief that women don't count in big matters, and that they can be dealt with by jocular patronage in little matters. Another is in defining what "big" and "little" are. Sexual politics are simply

not a problem to men of the ruling class. Senior executives couldn't function as bosses without the patriarchal household. The exercise of this form of power requires quite special conditions - conventional femininity and domestic subordination. Two-thirds of male top executives were married to housewives. The qualities of intelligence and the capacity for hard work which these women bring to marriage are matched, as friends of Anita Keating, the wife of the Prime Minister of Australia, remarked, by "intense devotion ...her husband and her children are her life." Colleen Fahey, the wife of the premier of New South Wales, had completed an 18-month part-time horticulture course at her local technical college, and she wanted to continue her studies full-time. "But my husband wouldn't let met," she said. "He said that he didn't think it was right for a mother to have a job when she had a 13-year-old child ...I think if I'd put my foot down and said I'd really wanted a career, he'd have said, 'You're a rotten mother leaving those kids." (41)

The case for this sort of behaviour is simply not as compelling for working-class men, the mothers and the wives of most of whom undertake paid work as a matter of course. Success itself can amplify this need for total devotion, while lessening the chances of its fulfilment outside of the domestic realm. For the successful are likely to have difficulty establishing intimate and lasting friendships with other males because of low self-disclosure, homophobia, and cut-throat competition. The corporate world expects men to divulge little of their personal lives and to restrain personal feelings, especially affectionate ones, towards their colleagues while cultivating a certain bland affability. Within the corporate structure, "success is achieved through individual competition rather than dyadic or group bonding." The distinction between home and work is crucial and carefully maintained. For men in the corporation, friends have their place - outside work. (42)

While William Shawcross, the biographer of media mogul Rupert Murdoch, found him "courageous" and "charming," others close to Murdoch described him as "arrogant," "cocky," "insensitive, verging on dangerous," "utterly ruthless," and an "efficient Visigoth." Murdoch himself described his life as "consisting of a series of interlocking wars." Shawcross also found that Murdoch possessed "an instinctive feel for money and power and how to use them both;' had a "relentless, unceasing drive and energy," worked "harder and more determinedly" than anybody else, was "sure that what he was doing was correct", "believed that he had become invincible", and was driven by the desire "to win at all costs." (43) And how must it feel to know that you can have whatever you want, and that throughout your life you will be looked after in every way, even to the point of never having to dress and undress yourself? Thus the view that hegemonic masculinity is hegemonic insofar as it succeeds in relation to women is true, but partial. Competitiveness, a combination of the calculative and the combative, is institutionalised in business and is central to hegemonic masculinity. The enterprise of winning is life-consuming, and this form of competitiveness is "an

inward turned competitiveness, focussed on the self," creating, in fact, an instrumentality of the personal. (44)

Hegemonic masculinity is "a question of how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth, and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate their dominance." (45) Through hegemonic masculinity most men benefit from the control of women. For a very few men, it delivers control of other men. To put it another way, the crucial difference between hegemonic masculinity and other masculinities is not the control of women, but the control of men and the representation of this as "universal social advancement," to paraphrase Gramsci. Patriarchal capitalism delivers the sense, before a man of whatever masculinity even climbs out of bed in the morning, that he is "better" than half of humankind. But what is the nature of the masculinity confirming not only that, but also delivering power over most men as well? And what are its attractions? A sociology of ruling-class men is long overdue.

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