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# Challenging hegemonic masculinity: a critico-historical investigation of domination, gender and social justice

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**Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critico-  
Historical Investigation of Domination, Gender and  
Social Justice**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the  
degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

from

**UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG**

by

**RICHARD HOWSON B.SOC.SC (HONS)**

**SOCIOLOGY PROGRAM**

**2002**

## **CERTIFICATION**

I, Richard Howson, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Sociology Program, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Richard Howson

20<sup>th</sup> December 2002

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## Abstract

This thesis is a critico-historical investigation of domination, gender and social justice. Its point of departure is to challenge the axiom in the literature on men and masculinity that hegemonic masculinity is a dominative socio-cultural phenomenon. Further, that as a consequence its relationship with social justice in gender politics is one of mutual exclusivity.

As part of this critico-historical challenge to hegemonic masculinity, the analytic trajectory this thesis takes begins with the work of Antonio Gramsci and specifically, his theory of hegemony where particular focus is given to explicating the full complexity of that theory. Within and through this complexity, the interpretation of hegemony offered in R. W. Connell's theory of practice is examined to reveal a particular dominative form of hegemony that underpins the conceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity offered in his later masculinities theory. However, this thesis shows through an elaboration of Connell's 'masculinities theory' and its extension into a study of the operability of hegemonic masculinity in the key gender regime of family law, that the "alliance politics" and "de-gendering strategy" envisaged by Connell as a replacement for hegemony is a flawed strategy. Further, it will be argued that to offer 'new' strategic possibilities for social justice in gender requires not the negation of hegemony but its re-instatement into the politics of gender. In this context, the radical plural democracy that emerges from the post-Marxism of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe represents a 'new' strategic project, which emerges from the Gramscian theory of hegemony but leads to a paradigmatic shift in the conceptualisation of protest and the aspiration for change.

The theorists studied in the thesis all ground their work in the concept of hegemony even though, its interpretation and application differ, often significantly. Nevertheless, by applying a critico-historical perspective it is possible to show the central thematic that links each theoretical paradigm in a way that offers future research a set of radical ideas that enable the opening up of possibilities for progression to social justice in gender.

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