Masculinity research, Hegemonic Masculinity and global society

Raewyn Connell
University of Sydney

The field of masculinity studies: from critique to ethnography to global awareness

There is a familiar narrative of the development of our field of research. The early stages of the field are found in cultural debates about gender and masculinity, in psychoanalytic thought (especially Alfred Adler's theory of the 'masculine protest'), in the anthropology of kinship, and in sociological and psychological writing about 'sex roles'.

These discussions took a new shape in the 1970s, with the impulse of Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation towards a social critique of masculinity. Studies of masculinity crystallized in the 1980s as a research field, with new empirical work, analyses of multiple masculinities, and attention to hegemony and hierarchy. A notable example of the new genre was the book published in Germany in 1985 by two feminist researchers, Sigrid Metz-Göckel and Ursula Müller, *Der Mann: Die BRIGITTE-Studie*, a comprehensive survey of gender relations with a focus on the situation of men.

In the 1990s the empirical research began to take on ideas from post-structuralism about the discursive construction of masculinities. By then the ideas had reached fields such as health, social work and education and began to inform practice there. The growth of masculinity research was accompanied by a theoretical debate about the nature of masculinities, the relation between masculinities and modernity (Meuser 1998), and concepts such as 'hegemonic masculinity' (Howson 2006).

I call this the 'ethnographic moment' in masculinity research. Ethnography of the classic style, based on participant observation and interviewing in a small community, was one of its research methods, as shown for instance in Zhang's (2010) recent study of masculinities in a Chinese village. But there were other methods too. Other studies were done by clinical interviewing, by large-scale surveys, by historians burrowing among documents, and by media analysts observing mass culture. What all these studies shared was a focus on documenting specific patterns of masculinity revealed in culture and social relations in a particular time and place.

The rich ethnographic documentation proved that there is no single masculinity, but rather multiple masculinities, both locally and on a world scale. It also showed that masculinities can and do change. This was important in overcoming the tendency in the mass media and popular culture to treat 'men' as a homogenous group and

'masculinity' as a fixed, ahistorical entity. It was particularly important for the development of *applied* forms of knowledge, based on the new masculinity research.

Work on boys' education was one important example, given urgency by a media panic about boys' 'failure' in schooling and the resurgence of unscientific beliefs about boys' different ways of learning. Work on violence prevention was another. Programs for violence prevention, both at the level of domestic violence and at the level of civil conflict and war, drew for guidance on the new masculinity research. A discourse about men's health developed, in which masculinity research provided a counter-weight to the simple categoricalism predominant in biomedical sciences when they spoke about gender. Psychological counselling practice directed towards men and boys also spread widely.

Perhaps the most striking development in the new research field was its rapid transformation into a world-wide field of knowledge. It is a notable fact that the most sustained research and documentation program on men and masculinities anywhere in the world was launched in the mid 1990s, not in the global metropole, but in Chile. This program drew in researchers from across Latin America, and it is continuing today (Valdés and Olavarría 1998, Olavarría 2009). We now have not just individual studies, but published collections of descriptive research and applied studies of masculinity for practically every continent or culture-area, including African masculinities (Shefer et al. 2007), Islamic masculinities (Ouzgane 2006), changing masculinities in India (Chopra 2007), and more.

If we look in the *Web of Science* database, we currently find 4133 items with 'masculinity' or 'masculinities' as a title word, a severe test. It is not a gigantic field but it is a significant interdisciplinary enterprise with a rich knowledge base already. Some 2309 of these titles appeared in the decade 2000-2009, so the field is still growing.

With the internationalization of the field, the documentation of the diversity of masculinities moved to a new order of magnitude. The need for a concept of social change to contextualize them has become more apparent. In some of the literature, this is supplied by a narrative of progress. A 'traditional' masculinity (often understood as patriarchal and perhaps violent) is contrasted with a 'modern' masculinity (often understood as more expressive, egalitarian and peaceable). Mass media are often happy with this schema. Something like it underlies the journalistic concept of the 'metrosexual'.

The narrative of progress, moving from tradition to modernity, is a familiar trope across the human sciences. It was foundational to the European social sciences when they took shape in the nineteenth century, and it continues in different forms today. The most familiar contemporary version is the 'globalization' story, in which we are all being swept up into a homogeneous global modernity spreading outwards from its North Atlantic core. Or - according to taste - global postmodernity, global risk society, or global network society, all following the same track.

This story is being undermined by the argument that there are multiple modernities, not just a North Atlantic one. It is even more strongly undermined by the view, put by Mauricio Domingues, Aníbal Quijano and other Latin American thinkers, that there is indeed one modernity, but it is global, and the European story is just one element in a much larger whole (Domingues 2008). In such a perspective it is imperialism, not capitalism or the industrial revolution, that is the frame, and to understand power and hegemony we must reckon with the 'coloniality of power', to use Quijano's phrase.

When we look at the issue on a global scale, it is clear that masculinities can be problematised in different ways. In the mid-20th century, the great Mexican poet and cultural theorist Octavio Paz, in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, problematised the cultural construction of 'machismo' through the unresolved tensions of indigenous and Spanish culture, and the uncompleted Mexican revolution of the twentieth century. About the same time, Frantz Fanon, a psychiatrist who was not yet the famous theorist of third-world revolution, in *Black Skin White Masks* (1952) problematised the construction of black masculinity under the pressures of French colonial rule.

Black Skin, White Masks is a brilliant, bitter and troubling analysis of racism both in metropolitan France and in the French colonial empire. In the course of the book, Fanon analyzes the psychodynamics both of white and black consciousness. Almost incidentally, the book is also an analysis of white and black masculinities, and their relationship within colonialism and racist culture. Women are present in the book, but only in terms of their sexual relationships with black and white men, or as objects of sexual fantasy. Fanon is clear that colonialism is a system of violence and economic exploitation; the psychological consequences are not a matter of discourse but arise from material relations. Within that structure, black masculinity is marked by divided emotions, and a massive alienation from original experience. This alienation is produced as black men struggle to find a position, and find recognition, in a culture that defines them as biologically inferior, indeed a kind of animal, and makes them objects of anxiety or fear.

A decade later, in a sharp and witty anatomy of modern culture and society in Iran, *Westoxication*, Al-e Ahmad presented another critique of the alienated, deracinated masculinity of the neo-colonial world. Later again - but still before the first journal of masculinity studies existed in the global North - Ashis Nandy (1983) made a stunning historical-psychological analysis of the making of masculinities under the British Raj in India, both among the colonized and the colonizers, in *The Intimate Enemy*.

There are, of course, more sources than these. But I mention these, all works of originality and even brilliance, to show how a southern theory perspective (Connell 2007) might help us re-think the structure of 'men and masculinity' as a field of knowledge. We have many bases or starting-points for new perspectives. We have the possibility of a polycentric domain of knowledge on a world scale.

'Studying up' and thinking about power

In the familiar narrative of the field, masculinity studies arose from the feminist breakthrough that created women's studies and gender studies. Feminism has, to a certain extent, functioned as a guarantor of critical studies of men and masculinities. Some practitioners, acknowledging the patriarchal character of academic life in general, emphasise that their analysis is 'pro-feminist'. In applied fields such as anti-violence work, dealing with rape and domestic violence, scrupulous men's groups take care to work in concert with women's groups and acknowledge the needs and fears of victimized women.

Feminism is radically plural, especially when we see it on a world scale (Bulbeck 1998). It does not provide an uncomplicated guarantee of anything; but it has possibilities of growth and diversity. Research on men and masculinities is not a separate field dependent on feminism. It is, rather, part of the feminist revolution in knowledge that has been opening up in the last generation. Indeed it can be seen as a strategic part of feminist research, the moment of 'studying up', the power structure research that we need to understand the gender order.

Therefore, a key part of the enterprise is researching institutions in which masculinities are embedded and which have weight in the social order as a whole. This includes the state, the security services, the corporations, and the capital markets. Two projects by Australian sociologists, Mike Donaldson and Scott Poynting's (2007) *Ruling Class Men*, and Michael Gilding's (2002) *Secrets of the Super Rich*, point in this direction. Indeed, I think one of the key needs in the field of masculinity studies right now is more economists! - to give us a clearer picture of the business world as an arena of masculinities, and the economic stake in gender relations.

In the second half of the twentieth century, after a series of crises and convulsions, capitalism was re-established under US hegemony as a global system of economic relations. Transnational firms, at first called 'multinational corporations', became the key institutions in production and marketing. In the 1960s, initially because of multinational corporations' needs for finance for international transactions, a new body of stateless capital became visible. By the 1980s there was growing integration of the capital and currency markets of major economic powers, and multinational corporations had adopted strategies of international sourcing of components, which amounted to a global decentralization of industrial production. Low-wage economies and development zones in Mexico, China, south Asia, and elsewhere were suddenly important in the strategies of major corporations, and de-industrialization appeared in the old centres of heavy industry in Europe and north America, such as the Ruhr and the north of England.

Business journalists in the 1980s began writing about 'globalization' as a way of summarizing these changes. The idea was given force by the rise of neoliberal ideology and politics, from the late 1970s, which drove the growth of international trade and to a degree standardized the policy regimes of different countries. In the

1990s the idea became popular among sociologists and cultural theorists as well as economists. A literature about the new form of society supposedly being produced by globalization became influential (see my critical review of this literature, Connell 2007).

The issue was also picked up by feminist scholars, and a literature began to appear about globalization and gender (Chow 2003). The main concern of this research was documenting the impact of globalization processes on the lives and political struggles of women. By the late 1990s these concerns had also entered the field of masculinity research, and a discussion of 'masculinities and globalization' was beginning (Connell 1998). This gave a way of talking about change in the lives of men. Examples were the Latin American discussions of the impact of neoliberal restructuring on traditional models of patriarchal fatherhood, and the discussions in the Arab world of cultural turbulence about masculinity resulting from Western cultural and economic domination and local resistances (Ghoussoub and Sinclair-Webb 2000).

A focus on the transformation of lives in global restructuring is proving fruitful in masculinity research in relation to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Some of the best ethnographic research on masculinities, sexuality and violence has developed in response to the AIDS crisis. Local action is vital, not only around prevention but also around treatment and care. So studies of inequality in local gender orders, and local gender orders' role in creating vulnerability among women, continue to be important (for example Thege 2009).

Yet HIV/AIDS is a world issue. And as Silberschmidt (2004) observes on the basis of research in east Africa, the danger to women comes not so much from the 'traditional' forms of men's gender privilege as from post-colonial *changes* in gender relations. Risk of infection is created by attempts to reassert men's power in changed circumstances. Yet this is not a completely hopeless terrain. Sexuality can be negotiated, and some new and more egalitarian relations emerge as well as relations of domination and exploitation. As the recent research with youth in South Africa shows (Morrell et al. 2009), change and resistance to power in gender practices is also influenced by wider cultural and economic change. The significance of men's sexuality in the epidemic, then, cannot be understood without understanding gender relations in both local and transnational arenas.

This perspective has increasingly influenced gender policy. Until fairly recently, gender policy documents usually concerned the lives of women and said little about men, except as perpetrators of violence or beneficiaries of inequality. This has now been changing. For instance in 2003, three United Nations agencies sponsored a broad discussion on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality. This drew heavily on the 'ethnographic moment' research about masculinities around the world. This initiative resulted in a policy document 'The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality', adopted at the 2004 meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (Connell 2005; Lang et al. 2008).

At the same time, research has been building up about masculinity in the dominant institutions of the global economy, among the corporate elite. The pioneering study in this vein is Hooper's (2000) analysis of the images of businessmen found in the pages of the neoliberal business newspaper *The Economist*. A fascinating mixture of cooperative, teamwork imagery, plus new-frontier, technocratic imagery, with remnants of colonialist attitudes, emerged.
Donaldson and Poynting's more materialist *Ruling Class Men* (2007) used not only journalistic accounts but also biographies, autobiographies, and other sources to reconstruct the patterns of life of men born to great wealth and privilege. It is a frightening picture, in the light of their power, since human sensitivity and emotional involvement are carefully eliminated from their upbringing.

Together with colleagues in Chile, Japan and South Africa, I have been making a study of managerial masculinities in the context of the global economy, for instance in the finance sector (Connell 2010a, 2010b; Olavarría 2009). Interviews with managers in businesses oriented to, or impacted by, world trade and capital flows, give a view of both the old and the new processes shaping elite masculinities. These cases show that the methods of the 'ethnographic moment' in masculinity research are by no means obsolete, in studying the emerging world of transnational institutions and processes. But these methods certainly have to be re-thought. In the interviews for this study we gave considerable attention to international links, both in the life histories and in current labor processes. Complex issues of comparability and translation arise

Recognizing the global dimension in gendered power gave new relevance to research on masculinity as a factor in the creation of global society. The earliest explicit study of 'male culture' in settler colonialism was the work of the New Zealand historian Phillips, whose first paper on this question was published in 1980 - tellingly, in a collection entitled *Women in New Zealand Society*. More and better historical research followed, notably the classic work of Morrell (2001) on the institutions of settler colonialism in South Africa.

What this historical research showed was that imperialism did not just impinge as an external force on the gender orders of colonized societies. Imperialism was *inherently a gendered process*, as Mies (1986) argued in a powerful text. Specific masculinities, specific gender relations, were inscribed in colonialism and imperial expansion themselves. The construction of world-wide empires could not be regarded as something that happened before gender effects were produced. Gender was embedded, was formative, in imperialism, and thus in the initial construction of global arenas.

Both historical research, and questions arising from the application of contemporary ethnographic research, thus converge on the idea that the arenas of power in transnational space, for instance the institutions of transnational business, politics and communication, *are gendered from the start*. The gender regimes of these institutions are open to study, and the gender order of the transnational space as a whole can be mapped.

On hegemonic masculinity

I now turn to the implications of these lines of thought for the familiar concept of 'hegemonic masculinity'. This concept has been both widely used and widely criticized. It is clear that the problems addressed by this concept remain of importance. The reformulation of the concept (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) has been cited over 600 times in research literature in the six years since its publication.

In that paper we endorsed some of the suggestions made in the critical literature, especially those that lead beyond the use of the concept as a psychological typology. Complex social patterns of centrality and marginalization, in which particular practices might migrate from one configuration of masculinity to another, are involved. We argued on the one hand for connecting the concept of hegemonic masculinity with an analysis of social embodiment; on the other, for recognizing spatial patterns in hegemony. The masculinity that is hegemonic at a local level might be significantly different from (though usually overlapping with) the hegemonic masculinity at a regional or global level (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

It is important that the relationship of hegemonic masculinity to violence should not be misunderstood. 'Hegemonic masculinity' does *not* equate to violent masculinity. Indeed, where violence is central to the assertion of gendered power, we can be fairly certain that hegemony is not present, because hegemony refers to cultural centrality and authority, to the broad *acceptance* of power by those over whom it is exercised.

Yet hegemony is not irrelevant to the understanding of violence. Violence may be a sanction that backs up authority, that reinforces consent by making consent prudent. Gramsci spoke of 'common sense' as a vehicle of hegemony. Conversely, a pattern of masculinity may be hegemonic that does not *mandate* personal violence, but is systematically open to violence – celebrating mediated violence, employing practitioners of violence, creating impunity, and supporting the institutional conditions of violence.

In my view, this is the situation in Australia today, and perhaps also in central Europe. The hegemonic masculinities are those of the corporate world, and contemporary corporate masculinity depends culturally on its relation with mediated professional sports, especially football; on the existence of a growing 'security' sector of practitioners of violence; on a legal system in which the proof of rape, domestic violence or sexual harassment remains extremely difficult; and on a callousness towards poverty and social distress that is now institutionalized in the political world as neoliberalism.

Attention to the questions about gender in transnational spaces discussed above raises further questions about the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Laurie (2005), in a study of the masculinities involved in the 'water wars' in Bolivia, makes the

important observation that masculinity research in the global North has presumed a consolidated social epistemology based on a coherent gender order. But this assumption cannot be made in parts of the global South, where cultural discontinuity and disruption is the condition of life. In such conditions a dominant masculinity may not be 'hegemonic', because no hegemony is possible.

I would now argue, not so much for a redefinition of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, as for a change of emphasis in using it. It seems to me, increasingly, that the strategic questions about change in gender relations involve not only personal relations, identities and intimate life, but also large-scale institutions and the structural conditions of social life. The politics of gender include the politics of corporations, states, and transnational structures of communication, trade and military power.

To recognize that, makes the task of achieving gender equality seem harder; and indeed it is hard. But it also prevents gender politics - including the tasks of change in masculinity - from being regarded as a narrow specialist field. It reconnects our tasks with the wider issues of change in the world.

References

Al-e Ahmad, Jalal. 1982 [1962]. *Gharbzadegi (Weststruckness)*. Translated by John Green and Ahmad Alizadeh. Lexington KY, Mazda Publishers.

Bulbeck, Chilla. 1998. *Re-orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chopra, Radhika, ed. 2007. *Reframing Masculinities: Narrating the Supportive Practices of Men*. New Delhi: Orient Longman Private.

Chow, Esther Ngan-ling. 2003. Gender matters: studying globalization and social change in the 21st century. *International Sociology* 18 (3): 443-460.

Connell, Raewyn. 1998. Masculinities and globalization. *Men and Masculinities*, vol. 1 no. 1, 3-23.

Connell, Raewyn. 2005. Change among the gatekeepers: men, masculinities, and gender equality in the global arena. *Signs*, vol. 30 no. 3, 1801-1825.

Connell, Raewyn. 2007. *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Connell, Raewyn. 2010a. Im Innern des gläsernen Turms: Die Konstruktion von Männlichkeiten im Finanzkapital. *Feministische Studien*, vol. 28 no. 1, 8-24.

Connell, Raewyn. 2010b. Lives of the businessmen. Reflections on life-history method and contemporary hegemonic masculinity. *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, vol. 35 no. 2, 54-71.

Connell, Raewyn and James W. Messerschmidt. 2005. Hegemonic masculinity: rethinking the concept. *Gender and Society*, vol. 19 no. 6, 829-859.

Domingues, José Maurício. 2008. *Latin America and Contemporary Modernity: A Sociological Interpretation*. New York, Routledge.

Donaldson, Mike and Scott Poynting. 2007. *Ruling Class Men: Money, Sex, Power*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Fanon, Frantz. 1967 [1952]. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press.

Gilding, Michael. 2002. *Secrets of the Super Rich*. Sydney: HarperCollins.

Ghoussoub, Mai and Emma Sinclair-Webb, ed. 2000. *Imagined Masculinities*. London: Saqi Books.

Hooper, Charlotte, 2000: Masculinities in transition: the case of globalization. Pp. 59-73 in: Marianne H. Marchand and Anne Sisson Runyan, ed., *Gender and Global Restructuring*. London: Routledge.

Howson, Richard. 2006. *Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity*. London and New York: Routledge.

Lang, James, Alan Greig and Raewyn Connell, in collaboration with the Division for the Advancement of Women. 2008. *The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality.* 'Women 2000 and Beyond' series. New York, United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women/ Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Electronic version at: http.www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/w2000.html.

Laurie, N. 2005. Establishing development orthodoxy: negotiating masculinities in the water sector. *Development and Change*, 36, 527-549.

Metz-Göckel, Sigrid and Ursula Müller. 1985. *Der Mann. Die BRIGITTE-Studie*. Hamburg: Beltz.

Meuser, Michael. 1998. *Geschlecht und Männlichkeit: Soziologische Theorie und kulturelle Deutungsmuster*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Mies, Maria. 1986. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*. London: Zed Books.

Morrell, Robert. 2001. F*rom Boys to Gentlemen: Settler Masculinity in Colonial Natal 1880-1920*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Morrell, R., Epstein, D., Unterhalter, E., Bhana, D. & Moletsane, R. 2009. *Towards Gender Equality: South African schools during the HIV and AIDS epidemic.* Scottsvillle: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Nandy, Ashis. 1983. *The Intimate Enemy. Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Olavarría, José, ed. 2009. *Masculinidades y globalización: Trabajo y vida privada, familias y sexualidades*. Santiago: Red de Masculinidiad/es Chile, Universidad Academia de Humanismo Cristiano and CEDEM.

Ouzgane, Lahoucine, ed. 2006. *Islamic Masculinities*. London: Zed Books.

Paz, Octavio. 1990 [1950]. *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. Enlarged edition. London: Penguin.

Phillips, Jock. 1980. Mummy's Boys: Pakeha Men and Male Culture in New Zealand. Pp. 217-243 in Phillida Bunkle und Beryl Hughes, ed., *Women in New Zealand Society*. New Zealand: Allen & Unwin.

Shefer, T., K. Ratele, A. Strebel, N. Shabalala and R. Buikema, ed. 2007. *From Boys to Men: Social Constructions of Men in Contemporary Society*. Lansdowne (South Africa): UCT Press.

Silberschmidt, Margrethe. 2004. Men, male sexuality and HIV/AIDS. Reflections from studies in rural and urban East Africa. *Transformation* 54: 42-58.

Thege, Britta. 2009. Rural black women's agency within intimate partnerships amid the South African HIV epidemic. *African Journal of AIDS Research* 8 (4): 455-464.

Valdés, Teresa and José Olavarría, ed. 1998. *Masculinidades y Equidad de Género en América Latina*. Santiago: FLACSO/UNFPA.

Zhang Xingkui. 2010. *Studies of Men and Masculinities in Contemporary China*. PhD thesis, Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney.

Read more about Raewyn Connell
www.raewynconnell.net

Translation of the paper:
Claudia Senn
claudia.senn@aon.at