

R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*. "Men of Reason." (2005)

bell hooks, *We Real Cool*. "Gangsta Culture: A Piece of the Action" (2004)

## Connell's Gender Theorizing

"Gender is a way in which social practice is ordered ... Gender exists precisely to the extent that biology does *not* determine the social. [...] Taking a dynamic view of the organization of practice, we arrive at an understanding of masculinity and femininity as *gender projects*. These are processes of configuring practice through time, which transform their starting-points in gender structures." (71-72)

Connell studies the "individual life course," case studies of individual men, to study masculinity; however, he acknowledges that "we find the gender configuring of practice however we slice the social world, whatever unit of analysis we choose." (72)

Three-fold model of **structure of gender**, distinguishing:

- a. Relations of power
- b. Relations of production
- c. Relations of cathexis (emotional attachment) (73-74)

## Relations Among Masculinities

- *Hegemony*: the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life
  - *Hegemonic masculinity*: the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy (77)
  - "It is the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence, that is the mark of hegemony (though violence often underpins or supports authority)" (77)
- *Subordination*
- *Complicity*: "Masculinities constructed in ways that realize the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy" (79); not necessarily slacking, often involves extensive compromise with oppressed groups
- *Marginalization*: the relations between the masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes or ethnic groups" (80)

## The Studies

Connell studied Australian males in areas of social contention, three marginalized and subordinated, and one complicit or hegemonic.

- Unemployed men (N.B.: these were all white men)
  - Develop what Connell calls '*protest masculinity*', a gender identity based around violence and self-adornment
  - A result of chronic unemployment or job instability and rejection of and by the school system, an embrace of alternative lifestyle
  - Many grew up in households where mother was main source of income; however, income equality is not a source of contention for these men.
  - Do not perceive women as more emotionally sensitive or less capable than men

- Men involved in the environmental movement
  - Most embrace feminism and try to recreate themselves as 'new men'
  - Passive sexuality, emphasis on increasing emotional openness and cooperativeness
  - Guilt is a major feature of experience of manhood
- Men involved with the gay community
  - Experience moment of transition or separation from heterosexual life; most had conventional childhoods
  - Very marginalized; many desire long-term relationships but most struggle to find them
  - Many reject 'effeminacy' in gay expression
  - Experience of sexuality as identification with object of desire, knowledge of other is partial motivator for preference
- Men building their masculinity on the basis of what Connell calls "technical reason".
  - Masculinity as intelligence or technical skill, male as breadwinner or provider
  - Not all men interviewed met standards of hegemonic masculinity
  - Sometimes their complicity with hegemonic masculinity was also the means for its undermining, e.g., equal opportunity for employment
  - Aggravated or even undermined by hierarchical employment

## **bell hooks on Black Male Gangsta Culture**

hooks also sees black men's emphasis on criminal identity and culture as facilitated by a capitalist system that primes them to be unable to meet the 'male breadwinner/provider' model of masculinity. A lack of stable jobs, or a lack of preparation for them (due to rejection by the school system), coupled with a cultural valuation of money over integrity (according to hooks), and a cultural disvaluation of working for white men, leaves black men seeking an alternative model of fulfilling masculinity.

According to hooks, this model is based primarily on money-earning any way possible. This often leads to crime or an admiration of criminality as a form of freedom and masculinity.

### **Questions**

1. How does bell hooks' account of black male masculinity compare to Connell's account of unemployed Australian masculinity? How does it differ? What elements are missing?
2. How does the construction of black male masculinity differ from the construction of hegemonic masculinity?
3. How does the construction of hegemonic masculinity differ from the construction of the man of reason?
4. How does black male masculinity differ from the masculinity of the man of reason?
5. bell hooks and Connell are both very opinionated writers. They both suggest at various points that men should seek political and social ways out of their predicaments, placing the blame at various levels of analysis. However, hooks' language is much more psychological and individualistic, perhaps a feature of her situation, writing as a black woman addressing black men. What are some alternative conceptions of masculinity they could or do suggest?

hooks, bell. "Gangsta Culture: A Piece of the Action." In *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*. Routledge, 2003. © Routledge. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <http://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

Connell, R. W. "Men of Reason." In *Masculinities*. 2nd ed. University of California Press, 2005. © University of California Press. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <http://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

MIT OpenCourseWare  
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

WGS.301J / 17.007J / 24.237J / 17.006 Feminist Thought  
Fall 2014

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.