

Rethinking Masculinities: Challenging Hegemonic Norms and Embracing Diversity

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Abstract: This paper critically examines the conventional understanding of masculinity, emphasizing the need to transcend hegemonic norms and embrace diverse expressions of gender identity. The introduction highlights the pervasive issue of gender egalitarianism being overshadowed by a focus on women's rights, perpetuating stagnation in perceptions of masculinity. The paper proceeds to challenge the notion of an unchanging and authentic practice of masculinity, known as "the male role," exploring the impact of hegemonic masculinity on subordinated forms. Chapters delve into the complexities of the sexed body, questioning innate versus nurtured perspectives on masculinity, and highlighting the role of societal influence and social practice. The study also explores the dynamics of masculinity concerning ethnology, social class, and race, advocating for an inclusive approach that transcends biological determinism. Furthermore, the paper discusses the evolution of new thinking around masculinity, dissecting the implications of hegemonic masculinity on men's mental health and family dynamics. The concluding chapter emphasizes the dynamic nature of masculinity, urging a departure from rigid stereotypes and encouraging a more inclusive understanding shaped by self-identification and personal decision-making. Overall, the paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on gender by challenging traditional paradigms and promoting a nuanced and adaptable conceptualization of masculinity in contemporary society.

Keywords: Masculinities; Gender Identity; Manliness; Gender Equality; Embracing Diversity.

1. Chapter One: The Masculinity Paradox: Unveiling the Problem

With the male group as the standard and the female group as the lacking, the pursuit of gender egalitarianism is likely to be seen as synonymous with advocating for women's rights. Connell Raewyn asserts that any report titled "Gender and development" primarily focuses on women and their growth (143). With considerable endeavours and recognition have been undertaken to enhance the social status of women, the understanding and perceptions towards masculinity remain stagnated over the years. Mass culture commonly presupposes the existence of an unchanging and authentic practice of masculinity that embedded in every male individual, which is also addressed as "the male role" (Connell R.W., 2007). The hegemonic masculinity, as noted by Connell R.W., not only subordinates femininity, but also by suppresses and marginalises alternative forms of masculinity (18). For those who are unable to fit the prescribed criteria are labelled as the "despised others" (4). This paper seeks to broaden the understanding of masculinity by exploring diverse portrayals, with the goal of promoting gender equality.

The paper starts with an emphasis on the pressing need for assistance in achieving gender equity within the male population. Chapter two argues the inconsistencies between the notion of masculinities and biological inheritances. The formation of masculinity is dynamic and susceptible to historical transformation. Therefore, the notion of hegemonic masculinity refers to a culturally and socially accepted norm under certain conditions. Chapter three examines how ethnology, social class, and race influence the discourse of masculinity. Recognising that the norms governing male behaviour in Western culture may not be well-received in Eastern culture, it is important for us to adjust to the practical social circumstances and exhibit tolerance towards various expressions of masculinity. Therefore, the term of masculinity

transcends the biological bodies and geographical boundaries. Through an examination of the evolving nature of masculinities and the display of its various forms, the paper challenges the notion that masculinity is solely determined by biological factors. To align with contemporary progress, the paper highlights the necessity of embracing the notion of the new man.

2. Chapter Two: The Sexed Body: Exploring Nature and Nurture in Masculinity

There are two contrasting theories being discussed in the current academic sphere regarding the construction of masculinity. The nativist perspective asserts that masculinity and femininity are innate and unchanging, originating from biological factors (Money and Tucker, 12). In contrast, nurturists contend that individuals' views and personal behaviours are formed after birth. This chapter explores Butler's enquiry into the problems of fixed nature of sexuality and examines the role of biological norms and gender expectations in shaping masculinity.

Butler argues that performativity is a way in which ontological effects are established through discourse (54). Therefore, the definitions of boy, girl, man, and woman are the physical manifestations that are employed to classify individuals. Masculinity and machismo are the inherent attributes that come along with the confirmation of one's male gender. Money and Tucker note a clinical observation on nurses' tendency to talk softly and exhibit more sensitive behaviour towards female infants compared to male infants. Before the baby boy develops an understanding of masculinity, he has already begun learning how to be more resilient than his female peers (87). Therefore, the societal expectations reinforce the understanding towards gender restraints, and individuals whose behaviours conform to the

gender schema are more likely to receive support from the public. In addition to Beauvoir's argument of acquired identity through social and cultural processes (122), Butler takes a step further of Beauvoir by questioning the pre-established sex positions. Her scepticism regarding the distinction between "becoming a woman" and "being a woman" questions the assumption that having a female body, or more broadly, belonging to a specific sex, is necessary to fulfil the corresponding gender role. Therefore, Butler posits that a woman is shaped by cultural coercion, whereas her innate biological sex is not encompassed within this cultural coercion.

Money and Tucker consolidate the importance of societal impetus and social practice from anatomical perspective (102). They draw comparisons between gender identification and the acquisition of speech to highlight the significance of societal influence and social behaviour. They contend that sexual organs, or as they puts it, "prenatal sex hormone," are analogous to the activities of linguistic organs (143). The mouth and vocal cords grant us the capacity to communicate verbally in response to social cues. This principle is also applicable to gender identification. Hence, instead of recognising genetic body that generates a definite gender, body is the manifestation of continual negotiation and practice with society. This finding has been repeated proven by doctors. Ainsworth argues asserts that doctors have been aware for a long time that certain individuals had characteristics that do not align with their sex chromosomes (S6). These individuals may have gonads (ovaries or testes) or sexual anatomy that differ from what is expected based on their gene expression.

By excluding genetics as the primary factor in the development of masculinity, Money and Tucker redirect their focus on the role chromosomes played in shaping masculinity. According to them, the function of chromosomes concludes once they transmit the sex-determining message to the body and then disappear from the process of shaping one's future sexual role (44). Therefore, born with sex-oriented genitalia has a minimal impact on the development of masculinity or femininity. In addition, scientists later discover that a gene called *Dmrt* has the ability to transform an adult testicular cell into an ovarian cell, adding further complexity to the gender disputes. Therefore, a more extensive spectrum of interpretations, as opposed to the conventional dichotomy, is necessary when examining gender identity.

The perception of being needed arises from cultural expectations and plays a crucial part in differentiating gender identity. Freud affirms that sexuality is not entirely governed by innate factors, but rather a protracted and tumultuous process. Hence, societal stimulations and individual experiences are essential in the formation of masculinity. Clinical cases further support the notion that gender is a product of cultural construction, which encompasses ethology, social identity, occupation, and other related aspects. Therefore, gender performances are not the direct result assigned by sex differences. Therefore, the validity of genetics as a determinant of masculinity and femininity in predicting human behaviour may be questionable. In the future, according to Ainsworth's suggestion, the most effective approach to determine someone's gender may simply involve asking them directly (291). Thus, the presence of varied sexual characteristics prompts my subsequent section to explore the potential for diverse forms of masculinity and the significance of self-identity.

3. Chapter Three: New Horizons: Evolving Notions of Masculinity

There was a surge of literature discussing "the male role" in the 1970s, which strongly condemned societal expectations as the root cause of repressive conduct exhibited by men. Hegemonic masculinity, featured with the prominence of prominent masculine traits such as independence, risk-taking, aggression, heterosexuality, and rationality. (Anderson, 863), is a "handbook" which prohibits individualised behaviours. The notions of hegemonic and subordinated masculinities are useful for comprehending both men's vulnerability to risk and their challenges in dealing with disability and injury. Hegemonic masculinity has various repercussions, such as widespread concerns regarding men and boys, efforts in education and antiviolence initiatives, as well as implications for health and counselling. According to a study published in the Archives of Internal Medicine, 56% of veterans from the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan were diagnosed with two or more separate mental health disorders. By 2012, the number of American soldiers committing suicide exceeded the number of soldiers dying in battle (Dreazen 3). The soldiers are reluctant to seek professional help due to the weight of acknowledging their own fragility and the associated shame of losing their manhood. The burden of hegemonic masculinity is so immense that the majority of men are unable to personally attain the ultimate objective. However, they endorse and are governed by it, use it to evaluate the behaviour of other individuals.

The disparity between single and hegemonic masculinity, which treats men as a homogeneous group, creates tensions in men's everyday lives and is also at odds with the diversity of ethnicity, social class, and culture. In such circumstances, men are compelled to pursue what is referred to as "masculine insurance" (Anderson 871). Men opt to present themselves as the standard and obscure their genuine identity. Men themselves are alarmed by this relentless cycle, prompting them to launch various movements aimed at challenging the existing status quo, thereby garnering societal attention. Regarding ascribed social roles, Connell R.W. argues that parenthood plays a significant role in hegemonic masculinity due to the feminised qualities of sensitivity and nurturing that child-caring entails (210). It is a common belief that fathers are inherently unable to care for infants, and that it is the responsibility of women to give birth to and raise babies. The mass media serves as a fervent advocate, generating numerous posters and movies that promote the value and prestige of motherhood. Men, often depicted as the foundation and primary earner of the household, frequently devote a significant amount of time to their employment. This not only hinders the development of close family bonds, but also perpetuates a harmful pattern of absent fathers and overburdened mothers.

By acknowledging the existence of various forms of masculinity and valuing each person's unique individuality, the paper advocates for the advent of the new man is an inevitable course of action. In fact, the manifestation of different forms of masculinity is contingent upon generational and economic contexts. Confronted with intense competition, a growing number of homemakers opt to enter the workforce, and some males assume the task of caring for their children. Donaldson points out that Australia witness a five-time increase in the number of males who are largely responsible for parenting from 1981 to 1990 (645). Advertisements

featuring males caring for infants have been airing on Japanese television, while a reality show in China has gained significant popularity by showcasing fathers' involvement in childcare. Individually, David Cameron, the former prime minister of the United Kingdom, postponed the cabinet meeting in order to escort his youngest daughter to the nursery. He explicitly stated that it is indeed feasible to simultaneously fulfil the roles of a respectable spouse, a commendable parent, and an exceptional head of government. Moreover, the outcome can be indeed advantageous in children's upbringing. Donaldson states that children with involved fathers exhibit greater emotional security and lower levels of anxiety compared to children with less involved ones. Therefore, more father-child interactions reduce the likelihood of future gender stereotyping and promote greater tolerance towards change in children.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity is fundamentally unattainable. The talents and interests of individuals, whether they involve being a caring father proficient in knitting or a talented athlete, should be treated with respect. Therefore, it is essential to see masculinity in real individuals rather than discussing it as a fictional character representation, especially in modern context. Furthermore, it is gratifying to acknowledge individuals who take pride in deviating from prevailing masculine norms and derive contentment from participating in activities that are conventionally linked to femininity. Regardless of whether individuals conform to hegemonic masculinity or exhibit different forms of masculinities, the process of self-identification and self-announcement is integral to their construction of personal identities. Therefore, masculinity primarily exists as a subjective concept, shaped by personal identification and impacted by one's upbringing, where adherence to conventional ideals depends on personal decision-making. Contrary to the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which enforces certain actions in males, masculinity in real-life social situations demonstrates the wide range of cultural practices and the complexities of gender development in men.

4. Conclusion

The phenomenon of dynamic masculinity comprises not just shifts in how the media represents masculinity, but also requires active engagement from disciplines such as pedagogy and psychiatry. The study asserts that gender is universally recognised as a social construct, and hence it is malleable and responsive to cultural environments. Using the changes brought about by parenthood as an illustration, men are adapting to the expectations of being contemporary individuals in accordance with the swift expansion of the economy. Moreover, as individuals grow more assured of their own identities, a growing proportion of males are participating in collaborative parenting. Although advancements have been made in other domains, such as business and politics, there continues to be a need for persons who exemplify conventional masculine characteristics. The growing sense of familial connection does not diminish the professional achievements of males. Therefore, hegemonic masculinities emerge under certain conditions and are subject to historical transformation. Rather than deriving masculinity

exclusively from biological maleness, masculinity is attained by participating in activities that are traditionally associated with masculinity. Consequently, individuals of any biological sex have the capacity to cultivate masculinity through the adoption of male actions. The capacity to be "androgynous", identified by Bem, is observed in both males and females (155). The construction of modern masculinity requires the elimination the notion that genetics solely determines gender on the basis of gender equality. Contrary to popular belief, scientific research and economic progress indicate that both femininity and masculinity may be found in both male and female individuals. Gonads and hormones do not determine one's masculine or feminine identity directly. Instead, it is the persistent societal obstacles that have a substantial impact on the development of one's gender identity. Possessing a robust self-identity and being aware of one's gender can be beneficial in effectively communicating persons' self-perceptions, aspirations, and behaviours.

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