

**Contextualizing Gender**  
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**Lecture - 42**  
**“Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept” II**

Good morning, dear participants and welcome to this module. In the previous module we had begun our discussions on the essay “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept” by Connell and Messerschmidt.


Hegemonic masculinities is a much debated and theorized concept. Today we shall look at the various reformulations suggested by Connell and Messerschmidt. It will lead to a more diverse understanding of this concept.

The authors have alerted us to the need for rejecting the unidimensional approach or approaches to men’s and masculinities studies and discuss how the 21st century has opened new avenues to understand the subject of man closely and more personally without any prejudice.

Connell and Messerschmidt in their arguments do not shy away from acknowledging the theoretical indifference faced by both masculinities and hegemony as two conceptual paradigms. Therefore, they offer reasons and probable causes to revisit the concept of hegemonic masculinities and reform it.

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- R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt present reviews and reformations while contextualizing the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” as it has influenced gender studies across many academic fields.
- We need to reject the homogenized categorization of men and masculinities as we have established the presence of “a thousand and one variations of masculinity”. (Meuser and Behnke, 1998).
- While considering the plurality of masculinities, R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt ask and discuss the following questions:
  - What should be rejected?
  - What should be retained?
  - What should be reformulated?



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Connell and Messerschmidt have presented reviews and reformations while contextualizing the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” as it has influenced gender studies across many academic fields. There is a need to reject the homogenized categorization of men and masculinities as we have established the presence of “a thousand and one variations of masculinity”.

While considering the plurality of masculinities Connell and Messerschmidt ask and discuss certain questions. They ask, what should be rejected, secondly; what should be retained and finally, what should be reformulated as they provide a systematic plan for this reformation and according to them there are four principal areas of change. As a diverse dynamic and evolving field of inquiry which has gained a firm foothold in humanities in the last two decades.

We require a more complex understanding of the masculine subject especially in the 21st century, a technosocial, media mediated, biotechnologically advanced, postmodern, pandemic prone world that we inhabit today.

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- Connell and Messerschmidt suggest reformulation of the concept in four areas:
  - Gender Hierarchy
  - The Geography of Masculinities
  - Social Embodiment
  - The Dynamics of Masculinities
- Why do we need to revisit the concept of “hegemonic masculinity”?
- According to the authors, there is a need to reform the concept due to the changing dynamics of gender hierarchy, an interplay between power and agency on a global and local level to attain gender democracy.



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Connell and Messerschmidt suggest reformulation of the concept in four areas. Gender hierarchy, the geography of masculinities, social embodiment and the dynamics of masculinities. So, why do we need to revisit the concept of “hegemonic masculinity”?


According to the authors, there is a need to reform the concept due to the changing dynamics of gender hierarchy, an interplay between power and agency on a global and local level to attain gender democracy.

Alternate masculinity can pose a challenge to the traditional heteronormative masculinity therefore, there is a need to reform the masculine subject in the light of the other than the canonized masculine subjectivities.

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### Introducing Review and Reformulations.

- Connell and Messerschmidt draw a reformed picture of the concept of hegemonic masculinity. In need of contemporary reformulation, a dominant pattern of masculinity ought to accommodate alternate masculinities.
- What Should Be Retained?
- The basic idea of hegemonic masculinity is defined by the authors as “the combination of the plurality of masculinities and the hierarchy of masculinities”. (874)
- Certain masculinities are more socially central, or more associated with authority and social power, than non-hegemonic masculinities.




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Let us review the analysis of Connell and Messerschmidt in the context of what should be retained. The basic idea of hegemonic masculinity is defined by the authors as “the combination of plurality of masculinities and the hierarchy of masculinities”. Certain masculinities are more socially central or more associated with authority and social power than non hegemonic masculinities. As we continue to assert the popularized mainstream masculine behaviour and except toxic masculinity in the name of culture and tradition, it is important to understand that the ideals of dominance, control and power work through ideological conditioning and through repression and violence as well.

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- The hierarchy of masculinities is a pattern of hegemony, not a pattern of simple domination based on force.
- Cultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalization, and the marginalization or delegitimizing of alternatives are widely documented features of socially dominant masculinities.
- Hegemony works in part through the production of exemplars of masculinity (e.g., professional sports stars).
- Hegemony works through ideology and repression.
- These assertions, according to the authors have held up in the light of research and criticism.



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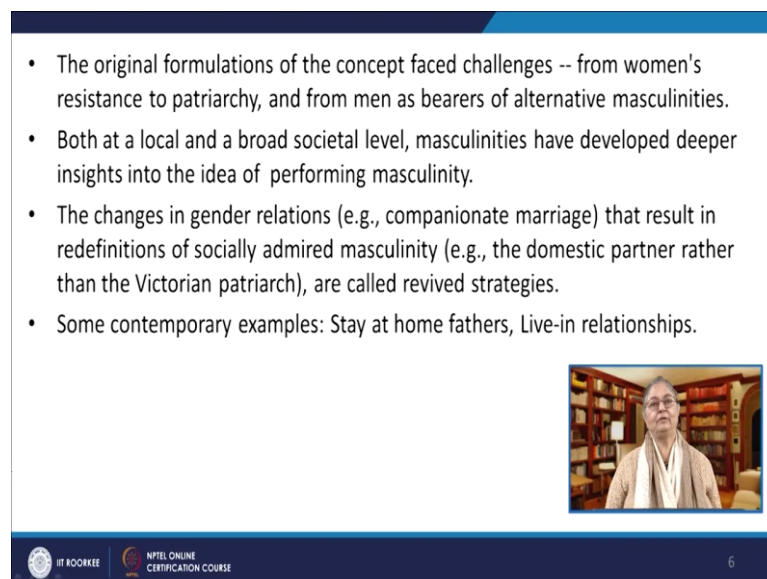
The hierarchy of masculinities is a pattern of hegemony not a pattern of simple domination based on force. Cultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalization and the marginalization or delegitimization of alternatives are widely documented features of socially dominant masculinities.

Hegemony works in part through the production of examples of masculinity. For example, we can look at how the professional sports stars emerge on the scene. Hegemony works through ideology and repression also and these assertions according to the authors have held up in the light of research and criticism.

According to the authors masculinities also function at a local, social and global level. The reformulated masculinity has given a space to the new age sensitive man who does not conform to the norms of flamboyant masculinity.

This transformation has enlarged our understanding of gender ‘as one is not born a man, but becomes one’.

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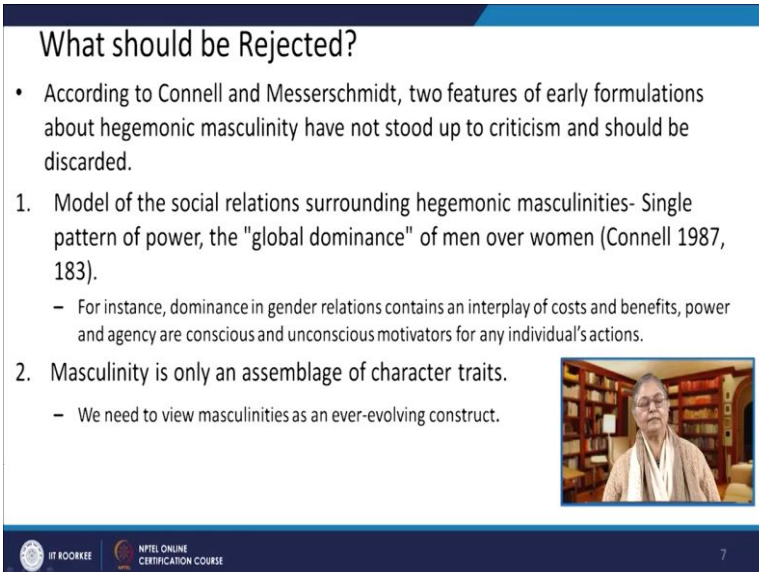
- The original formulations of the concept faced challenges -- from women's resistance to patriarchy, and from men as bearers of alternative masculinities.
- Both at a local and a broad societal level, masculinities have developed deeper insights into the idea of performing masculinity.
- The changes in gender relations (e.g., companionate marriage) that result in redefinitions of socially admired masculinity (e.g., the domestic partner rather than the Victorian patriarch), are called revived strategies.
- Some contemporary examples: Stay at home fathers, Live-in relationships.

The original formulations of the concept faced challenges from women’s resistance to patriarchy as well as from men as bearers of alternate masculinities. Both at a local and a broad societal level masculinities have developed deeper insights into the idea of performing masculinity. The changes in gender relations that result in redefinitions of socially admired masculinity are called revived strategies.

We can take the example of companionate marriage or the domestic partner rather than the Victorian patriarch in this context, some other contemporary examples may be taken in the form of stay-at-home fathers or live in relationships. Connell and Messerschmidt observe that the conventional definitions of hegemonic masculinity singularly exhibit domination of men over women in both public and private spheres.

Historically masculinity and the masculine subject did not acknowledge inclusion and acceptance of the 'Other'- other than the flamboyant, chauvinistic, narcissistic white men.

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**What should be Rejected?**

- According to Connell and Messerschmidt, two features of early formulations about hegemonic masculinity have not stood up to criticism and should be discarded.

1. Model of the social relations surrounding hegemonic masculinities- Single pattern of power, the "global dominance" of men over women (Connell 1987, 183).
  - For instance, dominance in gender relations contains an interplay of costs and benefits, power and agency are conscious and unconscious motivators for any individual's actions.
2. Masculinity is only an assemblage of character traits.
  - We need to view masculinities as an ever-evolving construct.



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Connell and Messerschmidt also feel that there are two features of early formulations about hegemonic masculinity which have not stood up to criticism and therefore, should be discarded. Firstly, it is the model of the social relations surrounding hegemonic masculinities 'a single pattern of power the global dominance of men over women'.

For instance, dominance in gender relations contains an interplay of costs and benefits where power and agency are conscious and unconscious motivators for any individuals' actions. Secondly, masculinity is only an assemblage of character traits and we need to view masculinities as an ever-evolving construct.

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What Should Be Reformulated ?

- The authors argue that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is in need of reformulation in four main areas:
  1. The Nature of Gender Hierarchy
  2. The Geography of Masculine Configurations
  3. The Process of Social Embodiment
  4. The Dynamics of Masculinities



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The next question which they discuss is what should be reformulated. And the authors argue that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is in need of reformulation in four main areas. Firstly, the nature of gender hierarchy. Secondly, the geography of masculine configurations, thirdly the process of social embodiment and fourthly the dynamics of masculinities. The first discourse that requires reformation in the field of men's and masculinity studies is the established pattern of gender hierarchy.


According to Connell and Messerschmidt, gender relations and gender hierarchies are present everywhere. Since masculinities is a plural conceptualization it is essential to note that the masculine subject is an amalgam of progressive gay friendly and gender equal sexist misogynist and homophobic traits.

In relation to hegemonic or dominant forms of masculinity, the ever-reemerging multiplicities of masculinities across fluid local and transnational context also disrupt the very binarism of gender.

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### 1. Gender Hierarchy

- The recent research in discursive psychology indicates how structured relations among masculinities exist in all local settings.
- The dialectical pragmatism captures the reciprocal influence of masculinities on each other.
- Hegemonic masculine patterns may change by incorporating elements from the “others”- the sexualized others, as well as the marginalised others.
- Analyses of relations among masculinities are clearly recognizing the agency of subordinated and marginalized groups- often conditioned by their specific location. (“Connell’s Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique”).




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The recent research in discursive psychology indicates how structured relations among masculinities exist in all local settings. The dialectical pragmatism captures the reciprocal influence of masculinities on each other. Hegemonic masculine patterns may change by incorporating elements from the “others”- the sexualized “others” as well as the marginalized “others”.

Analyses of relations among ‘masculinities’ are clearly recognizing the agency of subordinated and marginalized groups often conditioned by their specific location.

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- Example: Protest masculinity is “a pattern of masculinity constructed in local working-class settings, sometimes among ethnically marginalized men, which embodies the claim to power typical of regional hegemonic masculinities in Western countries, but which lacks the economic resources and institutional authority that underpins the regional and global patterns”. (Poynting, Noble, and Tabar 2003) (847)
- Critics like Gregory Wayne Walker also distinguish between “Anomic protest masculinity” (which is unguided and destructive) and “Disciplined protest masculinity” (which is the product of intensive social control and functions to increase solidarity among working-class men).



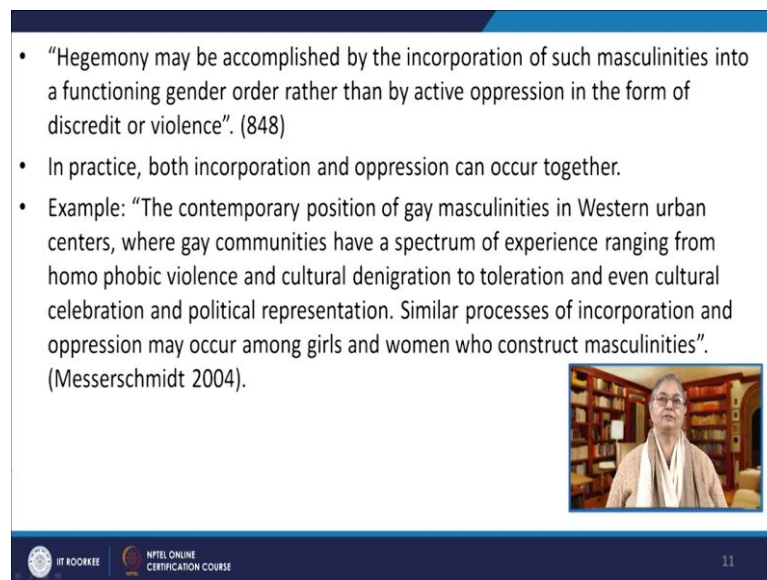
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We can take the example of protest masculinity which is “a pattern of masculinity constructed in local working-class settings sometimes among ethnically marginalized men which embodies the claim to power typical of regional hegemonic masculinities in western countries, but which lacks the economic resources and institutional authority that underpins the regional and global patterns”.

Critics like Gregory Walker have also distinguished between ‘anomic protest masculinity’ and ‘disciplined protest masculinity’. ‘Anomic’ protest masculinity is unguided and destructive whereas, ‘disciplined’ protest masculinity is a product of intensive social control and functions to increase solidarity among working class men. Connell and Messerschmidt also suggest that the survivability of non hegemonic patterns of masculinity is represented by well crafted responses to race and ethnic marginalization, physical disability, class inequality or stigmatized sexuality.

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- “Hegemony may be accomplished by the incorporation of such masculinities into a functioning gender order rather than by active oppression in the form of discredit or violence”. (848)
- In practice, both incorporation and oppression can occur together.
- Example: “The contemporary position of gay masculinities in Western urban centers, where gay communities have a spectrum of experience ranging from homo phobic violence and cultural denigration to toleration and even cultural celebration and political representation. Similar processes of incorporation and oppression may occur among girls and women who construct masculinities”. (Messerschmidt 2004).




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Hegemony may be accomplished by the incorporation of such masculinities into a functioning gender order rather than by active oppression in the form of discredit or violence. In practice both incorporation and oppression can occur together. Messerschmidt has also given certain examples: “the contemporary position of gay masculinities in Western urban centers where gay communities have a spectrum of experience ranging from homophobic violence and cultural denigration to tolerance and even cultural celebration and political representation. Similar processes of incorporation

and oppression may occur among girls and women who construct masculinities”. According to Connell and Messerschmidt the ideas of femininity and masculinity are relational and interdependent concepts in our contemporary world. We cannot label any discursive act as completely feminine or completely masculine.

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- Hegemonic masculinity originally formulated in tandem with a concept of “hegemonic femininity/”emphasized femininity” to mark the asymmetrical position of masculinities and femininities in a patriarchal gender order.
- “Gender is always relational, and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from some model (whether real or imaginary) of femininity”. (848)
- Example: As life-history research clearly demonstrates, women are central in many of the processes constructing masculinities-- as mothers; as schoolmates; as girlfriends, sexual partners, and wives; as workers in the gender division of labor etc.



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Hegemonic masculinity was originally formulated in tandem with a concept of “hegemonic femininity or emphasized femininity” to mark the asymmetrical position of masculinities and femininities in a patriarchal gender order. “Gender is always relational and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from certain model of femininity either real or imaginary”.

For example, the life history research which clearly demonstrates that women are central in many of the processes constructing masculinities as mothers, as schoolmates, as girlfriends, sexual partners and wives or workers in the gender division of labor etcetera.

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- The concept of “emphasized femininity” found compliance with patriarchy, and relevance in contemporary mass culture.
- Therefore, there is a need to incorporate a more holistic understanding of gender hierarchy, “recognizing the agency of subordinated groups as much as the power of dominant groups and the mutual conditioning of gender dynamics and other social dynamics”. (845)
- A historical interplay of femininities and masculinities.
- According to Connell and Messerschmidt, such measures will reduce the isolation of men's studies and will emphasize the relevance of gender dynamics to the problems- ranging from effects of globalization to issues of violence.



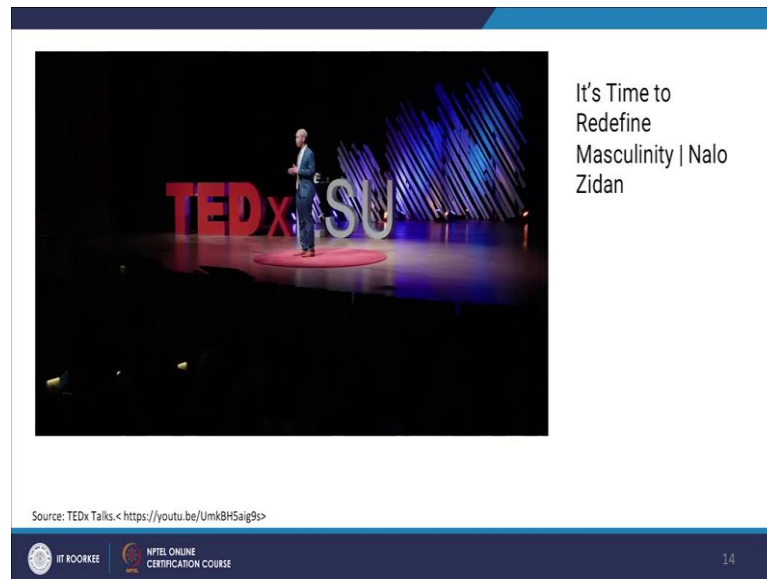
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The concept of “emphasized femininity” found compliance with patriarchy and relevance in contemporary mass culture. Therefore, there is a need to incorporate a more holistic understanding of gender hierarchy. We should recognize the agency of subordinated groups as much as the power of dominant groups and the mutual conditioning of gender dynamics and other social dynamics there has always been a historical interplay of femininities and masculinities.

According to Connell and Messerschmidt such measures will reduce the isolation of men’s studies and will also emphasize the relevance of gender dynamics to the problems ranging from effects of globalization to issues of violence. These opinions and findings are further reinforced in a talk by Nalo Zidan a queer black artist whom we shall look at now.

Zidan elaborates on the idea of ‘masculine femininity’ non normative womanhood violence against the victims of unfit masculine and feminine individuals and what it means to be human.

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It's Time to Redefine Masculinity | Nalo Zidan

Source: TEDx Talks < <https://youtu.be/Umk8H5aig9s> >

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“Sexual assault against masculine identify women is a silent afterthought. Seemingly because it does not fit the structure of what we think we know a victim to be we acknowledge that feminine women are victims of sexual violence, but we pathologize queer masculine women’s identities deeming them unfit to be a victim because of their masculinity. The way masculinity has been adopted by the unattainable expectations of men has greatly impacted the ways we understand victimhood and the voices we silence as we uphold them.

Many of us are still struggling to accept the fact that masculinity does not protect any of us from sexual violence no matter where you are on the prism. I have been very honest about my experiences with masculinity and I have shared a few different examples I see as perpetuating the invisibility of queer masculine identify women at this point you may be thinking how can we better support non normative womanhoods.

First and foremost, we have to hold ourselves and the people around us accountable acknowledging what we now know about masculinity. Masculinity in women is real and queer masculine women would prefer to be received as whole individual experiences without our every move being conflated with manhood.

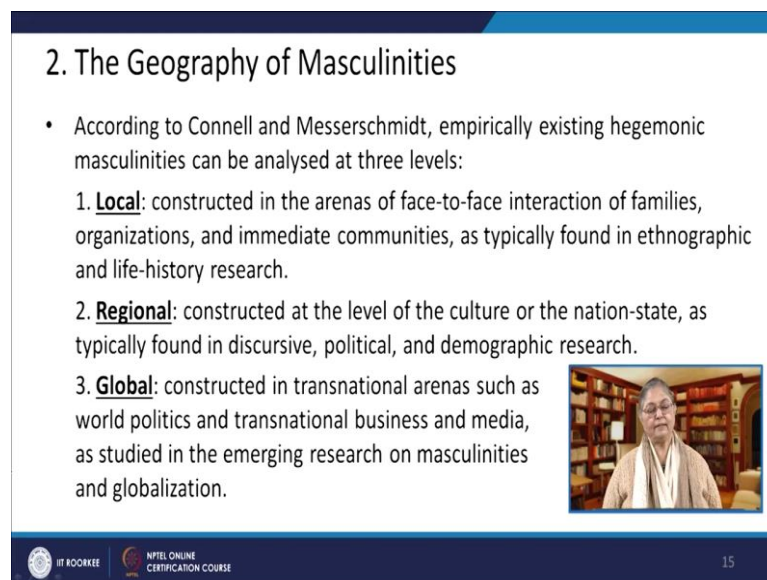
These historically narrow definitions of masculinity have been a pervasive part of our culture and it is easy to take its common sense when you have not been exposed to ideas challenging them or people whose reality call for the revisiting of his definition.

But once we begin to see the deeper nuances we cannot un see them. We can explore masculinities via non normative womanhoods and understand that masculinity is something bigger than the dictionary and the representations that we have been fed. It is time to reimagine masculinity.

So, when you leave this room to tell that one friend about this talk you can be confident in mentioning my masculinity not because this talk has taught you who I am or what masculinity is, but because now you have the tools to ask more questions, thank you”.


Now, that we have defined the altered DNA of the masculine subject let us move to the next area of reformation suggested by Connell and Messerschmidt, that is the geographies of masculinities. The phrase ‘geographies of masculinities’ is centered around the geospatial construction of the masculine subject. According to Connell and Messerschmidt ‘hegemonic masculinities’ is constructed on a local regional and global level.

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2. The Geography of Masculinities

- According to Connell and Messerschmidt, empirically existing hegemonic masculinities can be analysed at three levels:
  1. **Local:** constructed in the arenas of face-to-face interaction of families, organizations, and immediate communities, as typically found in ethnographic and life-history research.
  2. **Regional:** constructed at the level of the culture or the nation-state, as typically found in discursive, political, and demographic research.
  3. **Global:** constructed in transnational arenas such as world politics and transnational business and media, as studied in the emerging research on masculinities and globalization.



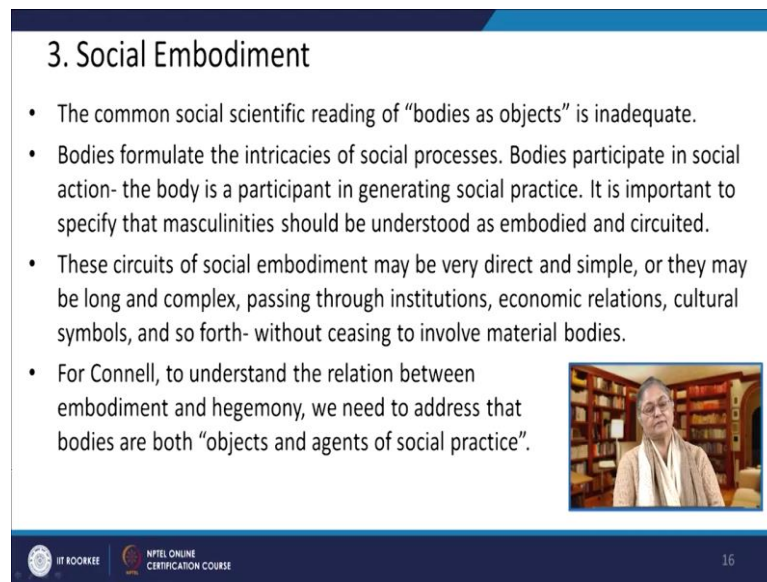
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Locally it is constructed in the arenas of face-to-face interaction of families, organizations and immediate communities as typically found in ethnographic and life history research. At a regional level it is constructed at the level of the culture or the nation state as typically found in discursive, political and demographic research.

At a global level it is constructed in transnational arenas such as world politics and transnational business and media. As studied in the emerging research on masculinities and globalization. Connell and Messerschmidt suggest that the interaction between hegemony and social embodiment is based on body politics.


Bodies express, articulate, perform and present an individual's identity in a socio-cultural setting. It is more than a cultural signifier and embodiment is a third area of change.

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**3. Social Embodiment**

- The common social scientific reading of “bodies as objects” is inadequate.
- Bodies formulate the intricacies of social processes. Bodies participate in social action- the body is a participant in generating social practice. It is important to specify that masculinities should be understood as embodied and circuted.
- These circuits of social embodiment may be very direct and simple, or they may be long and complex, passing through institutions, economic relations, cultural symbols, and so forth- without ceasing to involve material bodies.
- For Connell, to understand the relation between embodiment and hegemony, we need to address that bodies are both “objects and agents of social practice”.



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They suggest that the common social scientific reading of “bodies as objects” is inadequate. Bodies formulate the intricacies of social processes. Bodies participate in social action, the body is a participant in generating social practice. It is important to specify that masculinities should be understood as embodied and circuted.

These circuits of social embodiment may be very direct and simple or they may be long and complex passing through institutions, economic relations, cultural symbols etcetera without ceasing to involve material bodies. For Connell to understand the relation between embodiment and hegemony we need to address that bodies are both objects and agents of social practice.


According to Connell and Messerschmidt we need to unlearn the dangerous lessons that we have learnt about masculinity. The last area of reformation suggested by the authors is the ‘dynamics of masculinities’ which presents the term ‘masculinities’ as a cultural

apparatus which is in constant motion and progression. This progression can also be witnessed in a man's life as a process of becoming and unbecoming a man.

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#### 4. The Dynamics of Masculinities

- All practices that construct masculinities are categorized as “unitary masculinity”: it represents compromise formations between contradictory desires or emotions, or the results of uncertain calculations about the costs and benefits of different gender strategies.
  - Example: Life history studies. The authors suggest that a careful analysis of life histories may detect contradictory commitments and institutional transitions that reflect different hegemonic masculinities and also holds seeds of change.
- It may showcase the reasons for internal conflict and external outburst in the form of violence, trauma, diseases, repression etc.
- Hegemonic masculinities are likely to involve specific patterns of internal division and emotional conflict, precisely because of their association with gendered power.



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All practices that construct masculinities are categorized as “unitary masculinities”. It represents compromise formations between contradictory desires, emotions or the results of uncertain calculations about the cost and benefit of different gender strategies. The example is given by citing the life history studies. A careful analysis of life histories may detect contradictory commitments and institutional transitions that reflect different hegemonic masculinities and also holds seeds of change.

It may showcase the reasons for internal conflict and external outburst in the form of violence, trauma, disease, repression, suppression etcetera.

Hegemonic masculinities are likely to involve a specific pattern of internal division and emotional conflict precisely because of their association with gendered power.

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- Relationships with fathers are one likely focus of tension, given the gender division of labor in child care, and the "long hours culture" in professions and management. Ambivalence toward projects of change on the part of women are likely to be another, leading to oscillating acceptance and rejection of gender equality by the same men.
  - Any strategy for the maintenance of power is likely to involve a dehumanizing of other groups and a corresponding withering of empathy and emotional relatedness within the self
- hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily translate into a satisfying experience of life. We should actively attempt to modernize gender relations. A positive hegemony remains, nevertheless, a key strategy for contemporary efforts at reform.



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Relationships with fathers are one likely focus of tension, given the gender division of labor in childcare and the long hours culture in professions in management. Ambivalence towards projects of change on the part of women are likely to be another, leading to an oscillating acceptance and rejection of gender equality by the same men.

Any strategy for the maintenance of power is likely to involve a dehumanizing of other groups and a corresponding withering of empathy and emotional relatedness within the self. Hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily translate into a satisfying experience of life. We should actively attempt to modernize gender relations.


A positive hegemony remains nevertheless a key strategy for contemporary effort at reform. To conclude we can say that Connell and Messerschmidt have presented an open dialogue in the form of a demasculinize narrative which projects men and masculinities studies in a relational light.

While acknowledging the failures of the traditional meanings and contradictions of the concept hegemonic masculinity and witnessing the transitional state of men and masculinities studies. Connell and Messerschmidt have proposed reformations and reformulations in the subjective situatedness of the masculine subject.



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- The concept of hegemonic masculinity does not rely on a theory of social reproduction.
- The conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity should explicitly acknowledge the possibility of democratizing gender relations, of abolishing power differentials, not just of reproducing hierarchy.
- A transitional move in this direction requires an attempt to establish a version of masculinity open to equality with women.
- To enhance the understanding of gender dynamics, we should reject “those” usages that imply a fixed character type, or an assemblage of toxic traits. (853)



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The concept of hegemonic masculinity does not rely on a theory of social reproduction. The conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity should explicitly acknowledge the possibility of democratizing gender relations of abolishing power differentials and not just of reproducing hierarchy.

A transitional move in this direction requires an attempt to establish a version of masculinity which is open to equality with women. To enhance the understanding of gender dynamics we should reject those usages that imply a fixed character type or an assemblage of toxic traits.

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- To conclude, Connell and Messerschmidt provide “a renovated analysis of hegemonic masculinities” and the way forward.
- “In the developing countries, the processes of globalization have opened regional and local gender orders to new pressures for transformation and have also opened the way to new coalitions among groups of powerful men.
- “In the global arenas of transnational corporations, media, and security systems, new patterns of hegemony are being forged.
- “The making and contestation of hegemony in historically changing gender orders is a process of enormous importance for which we continue to need conceptual tools.” (854)



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So, Connell and Messerschmidt have provided “a renovated analysis of hegemonic masculinities” and also the way forward. “In the developing countries the processes of globalization have opened regional and local gender orders to new pressures for transformation and have also opened the way to new coalitions among groups of powerful men”.



“In the global arenas of transnational corporations, media and security systems, new patterns of hegemony are being forged. The making and contestation of hegemony in historically changing gender orders is a process of enormous importance for which we continue to need conceptual tools”. Drawing on critical masculinities, Connell and Messerschmidt provide multiple contestations, constraints and challenges in men’s and masculinities studies. Their aim is to construct new avenues and theoretical frameworks for the new upcoming scholars and activists in the field.

In the upcoming modules we will study the work of some new theorists in the area of men’s and masculinities studies. In the next module we will discuss Chris Beasley’s take on feminism and men in masculinities scholarship. ‘Possible connections, interactions and disjuncture’ to deconstruct the barriers between feminism and masculinity scholarship today.

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Thank you.