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Abstract

Hegemonic masculinity was introduced as a concept which, due to its understanding of gender as dynamic and relational and of power as consent, could explain both the persistence of male power *and* the potential for social change. Yet, when hegemonic masculinity is applied in empirical cases, it is most often used to demonstrate the way in which hegemonic masculinity shifts and adopts new practices in order to enable some men to retain power over others. This is especially so in feminist IR, particularly studies of military masculinities, where shifts towards "softer" military masculinities such as the "tough and tender" soldier-scholar demonstrate to many feminists merely the "flexibility of the machinery of rule" (Khalili 2011). In this article, I challenge the pessimism of these accounts of military masculinity. My particular contribution is to build on an emergent and underdeveloped strand of Connell's work on hegemonic masculinity: how change might be theorised. I argue that hegemonic masculinity remains a useful concept, but that the process through which "hegemony may fail" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) requires rethinking. I make this argument by exploring and working through empirical material on military masculinities, drawing on both my own research and critical analysis of the literature.

Keywords

hegemonic masculinity, gender relations, social change, militaries,

Introduction

Hegemonic masculinity was introduced as a concept which, due to its understanding of gender as dynamic and relational and of power as consent, could explain both the persistence of male power *and* the potential for social change. Raewyn Connell, one of the originators and key proponents of the concept, maintains that in its formulation it allows for more equitable relations between dominant and subordinate groups (Connell 2005, 1818; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 853). Yet, when hegemonic masculinity is applied in empirical cases, it is most often used to demonstrate the way in which hegemonic masculinity shifts and adopts new practices in order to enable some men to retain power over others (Ehrenreich 1984; Demetriou 2001; Hooper 2001; Messner 2007; Messerschmidt 2010). This is especially so in feminist IR, particularly studies of military masculinities, where shifts towards "softer" military masculinities such as the "tough and tender" soldier-scholar demonstrate to many feminists merely the "flexibility of the machinery of rule" (Khalili 2011, 1491; Niva 1998; Orford 1999; Razack 2004; Whitworth 2004). In this article, I challenge the pessimism of these accounts of military masculinity. My particular contribution is to build on an emergent and underdeveloped strand of Connell's work on hegemonic masculinity: how change might be theorised.

The term hegemonic masculinity is well established in gender and sexuality studies. Since its introduction in the 1980s (Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1985; Connell 1987), many theorists have built on the insight that masculinities exist in relations of hierarchy, dominated by a loosely coherent and evolving hegemonic form which dominates not through force, but through

consent (Donaldson 1993; Connell 1995; Connell 2002a; Hearn 2004; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). It "occupies a uniquely privileged positioning within the field" (Beasley 2012, 753), and is used in a wide variety of contexts (Messerschmidt 2012) to explain the persistence of male dominance in a context of multiple and dynamic masculinities.

I argue that hegemonic masculinity remains a useful concept, but that the process through which "hegemony may fail" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 853) requires rethinking. I make this argument by exploring and working through empirical material on military masculinities, drawing on both my own research and critical analysis of the literature. Militaries are important sites for the investigation of hegemonic masculinities. Constructions of masculinity and femininity in the military context arguably shape the entire gender order. The idea that men take life while women give it underpins the ideology of gender difference, especially in cultures where military myth and the military as an institution play a significant role in national pride (Muir 1993; Morgan 1994; Segal 1997). "No other arena" as Connell puts it "has been more important for the definition of hegemonic masculinity in European and American culture" (Connell 1995, 213). If the concept of hegemonic masculinity is to be of use in theorising the potential of social change as well as understanding the persistence of the gender order, it needs to work here.

This article thus contributes to debates about 'undoing gender' (Butler 2004; Deutsch 2007; Risman 2009), but more in Deutsch's and Risman's sense of dismantling gendered inequities, less so in Butler's sense of refusing any inner unity to gender identities or subjects (Butler 2004;

1990). Butler's focus on the discursive production of 'subject positions,' is useful in its insistence that identities are not unitary, stable or pre-given. Yet Connell and Messerschmidt are surely right to maintain that whilst discourse creates subject positions, gender relations are also constructed through non-discursive practices, including wage labour, violence, sexuality, domestic labour, and child care, as well as through unreflective routinized actions (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 842). In other words, subjects can have agency, even if they are also constructed by discourses and practices; or as Connell puts it "bodies are both objects of social practice and agents in social practice" (Connell 2002a, 47). Similarly, although power can be diffuse and productive, as poststructuralists claim, Connell's insistence that subjects do sometimes *possess* power and *exercise* it is compelling. There is sometimes more intentionality behind the gender order than mere assemblages of practices, even if there is not a patriarchy central holding the power. Although I adopt a social constructivist perspective, then, I borrow insights from poststructuralism, capitalising on the "syncretic possibilities" in approaches which attempt to draw on both theoretical trajectories (Beasley 2012, 749). In particular, I draw on poststructuralist understandings of the way in which identities are constructed through relations with others in my argument that the key to social change lies in the relational aspect of gender. For the unravelling of hegemonic masculinity, men must be encouraged not so much to *change their ways* as to *change the way in which they negotiate their identities in relation to others*. Rather than forge their identities through relations of opposition or domination, men and subjects in general need to construct their identities through recognition of similarity, respect, interdependence, empathy and equality with others. The importance of ideas of interdependence and empathy in undoing hierarchical gender relations is not a new insight, but

detailed theorisation of how this process of change could occur is missing from Connell and others' accounts. There has been since the 1980s a focus on gender as practice, but as Deutsch perceptively notes, the language inherent in the phrase "doing gender" has "undermined the goal of dismantling gender inequity by, perhaps inadvertently, perpetuating the idea that the gender system of oppression is hopelessly impervious to real change and by ignoring the links between social interaction and structural change" (Deutsch 2007, 107). It is the aim of this article to develop these links and to develop Connell's theorising of the dynamics of gender relations and the possibility of social change.

I begin by discussing hegemonic masculinity in scholarship on militaries, arguing it has been a useful concept for explaining the dominance of men and masculinist foreign policies in a context of multiple, shifting and contradictory masculinities. I move onto demonstrating that scholarship which has focused on the shift in military masculinities to "tough and tender" soldier-scholars (as western militaries have shifted to focus on peace enforcement or stabilisation interventions overseas) has tended to argue that here hegemonic masculinity is adapting to incorporate whatever practices and styles are necessary for the retention of power. Although the "tough and tender" masculinities appear to be more progressive, they are constructed through the demonization of those in whose lands soldiers intervene, and thus construct new gendered hierarchies of race and class. Similarly, although western militaries appear to be more welcoming to LGBT personnel, new hierarchies based on sexuality are being formed. Noting that Connell never has this pessimism, in the third section, I examine her theorising of the potential to dismantle hegemonic masculinity. Finding her formulation

contradictory, I argue for a reconceptualization of the process through which social change could occur. I illustrate this with examples in section four, and conclude in section five with some suggestions for strategies to encourage such change.

Hegemonic Masculinity in Militaries Scholarship

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has proven to be useful to the many scholars of gender and the military (see for example Enloe 1983; Tickner 2001; Goldstein 2001; Cohn and Enloe 2003; Hutchings 2007; Cockburn 2010). In the case of armies in particular, it has helped us theorise the way in which there are multiple and contradictory masculinities – officers and squaddies, combat soldiers and administrative clerks, experienced war-weary generals and gung-ho new recruits, and so on – and yet, this multiplicity and contradiction does not seem to trouble the power of militaries and militarism in public life or the "potent myth of combat:"

> The notion of combat plays a central role in the construction of notions of manhood and justifications for the superiority of maleness in the social order. In reality, of course, to be a soldier of the state means to be subservient, obedient and almost totally dependent. But that mundane reality is hidden behind a potent myth: to be a soldier means possibly to experience 'combat', and only in combat lies the ultimate test of a man's masculinity. (Enloe 1983: 12)

Since Enloe's work, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been used extensively in order to capture the way in which certain ideas about being a soldier and a man dominate in army cultures, with important implications for the gender order as a whole. These ideas differ slightly in different times and places, but are generally ideas connected to combat: strength, physical fitness, aggression, action, competitiveness, and the ability to dehumanize the enemy and defeat them in combat, along with some not so directly connected to combat: heterosexual (and actively so) and hard-drinking, for example. The argument is not that all soldiers fit this model, or even that the majority do – rather, that this model acts as a cultural ideal, in more or less overt ways, and all negotiate their masculinity in relation to it (Enloe 1983; Enloe 1993; Morgan 1994; Hockey 2003; Higate 2003; Woodward and Winter 2007).

The workings of hegemonic masculinity are complex: at times it acts as a glue: a shared respect and admiration for the idealized model provides the common ground to mask the differences of class, rank and age; at the same time, however, hegemonic masculinity is the result of the power struggles and rivalries between different groups of men and their efforts to prove their masculinity (Enloe 1993, 98). Moreover, these power struggles are expressed in gendered – often misogynist and homophobic – terms: the threat of being feminised is used to downgrade and police groups of men – which we see in army training with the archetypal use of "woman," "girl," "queer," and "faggot" to put down those who are failing to complete the various physical challenges associated with manliness (Segal 1997; McManners 1993; Woodward 1998; Higate

2003; Hockey 2003).[1] Importantly, these strategies of feminization– although directed at men – have an impact on women by reinforcing "feminized" qualities with inferiority.

It is clear from the terms used to feminise others that sexuality has also been at issue in the power struggles. Heterosexuality has been central to Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity as a practice which has enabled men's dominance over women and subordinate men to continue. The policing of the boundaries between heterosexual and homosexual has been a central dynamic in the construction of hegemonic masculinity: "gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity… " (Connell 1995, 78). This has perhaps particularly been so in many western military contexts, where some allege the insecurities brought about by a homosocial culture have at times engendered an acute homophobia (Judd 2014).

The dominance of this combat-oriented masculinity, which is associated with toughness, force and heterosexual prowess, has had material effects. When this way of being a man is valorised, so too are the practices of militarisation and war – military solutions to problems which are arguably better solved in other ways. The association of masculinity with toughness, aggression, and war, and femininity with weakness, passivity and peace privileges "tough" responses to conflict and feminises non-violent alternatives, reinforcing the systems of war and militarism (Tickner 1992; Hooper 2001; Enloe 2007; Cockburn 2010).The dominance of this particular model of military masculinity has also been linked to violence against women by soldiers

[1] These insults may be meted out by instructors, or, as times have changed and equal opportunity policies taken hold, by employed in more subtle ways, as part of peer pressure.

including the use of rape as a weapon of war (Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2009; Meger 2010), domestic violence (Lutz 2004), and the sexual exploitation of women on peacekeeping operations (Whitworth 2004; Higate 2007). Finally, it maintains the very idea that gender is a dichotomous structure, with that which is masculine valorised over that which is feminine, not just in military contexts but beyond.

Western militaries have of course changed much over recent decades. They have shifted focus from traditional warfare to more complex operations, often with a peacebuilding or stabilisation agenda (Moskos, Williams, and Segal 2000; Elliot and Cheeseman 2004). They have downsized, modernised and increased in their professionalism, with implications for masculinities (King 2013). Furthermore, militaries do not exist in isolation from wider society, and military masculinities have thus been influenced by changes in masculinities in civilian culture (Woodward and Winter 2007). In feminist studies of these shifts in military masculinities, however, what is emphasised is the superficiality of any change in hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity – both cultural ideal and patterns of practice of real men – is acknowledged to have changed, but new hierarchies have been formed. In other words, there is a softening of hegemonic masculinity, through the adoption of new practices and styles of soldiering, but with little in the way of shifts of power from privileged men and masculinist foreign policies. The following section demonstrates the pessimism of the literature through an examination of several examples where feminist IR scholars have charted changes in military masculinities over recent decades.

Hegemonic Masculinity and the "Flexibility of the Machinery of Rule"

Steve Niva identifies a new hegemonic masculinity in the US military at the time of the 1991 US invasion of Iraq in which an "openly articulated sense of manly vulnerability and human compassion" appeared to have replaced "bravado or stern invincibility" (Niva 1998, 118). The First Gulf War enabled the US army and nation to reclaim their masculinity in response to its emasculation in the wake of Vietnam, he argues, but this masculinity was significantly different. Military spokespersons' constant references to worrying about the safety of "our troops" and media coverage which avoided jingoist militarism are interpreted by Niva as evidence of a feminization of military masculinity, through the construction of a "tough and aggressive, yet tender-hearted masculinity" (Niva 1998: 118). The way in which, for example, General Colin Powell "openly wept at his high school reunion", and General Norman Schwarzkopf "spoke of his love for the opera and his family and even donned traditional Saudi robes on occasion in a display of multicultural sensitivity" suggests that American soldiers could be "tough but tender" (Niva 1998: 118). The construction was based on race as well as gender, with the liberal and compassionate white masculinity of the US soldiers contrasted with Saddam Hussein, who became an "Oriental Hitler," and a positioning of Arab men in general as backward in their macho and hypermasculine ways (Niva 1998: 119). Rather than fundamental change, then, this shift was nothing more than "a redefinition of masculinity in man's favour through an expansion of the concept of legitimate masculinity and thus an extension of masculinity's power over women and deviant men who do not measure up to this new paradigm" (Niva 1998: 121). The result is another "hybrid masculinity," combining aggressiveness *and*

sensitivity, in order to ensure the position of elite men is harder to challenge. Niva's conclusion details the negative consequences:

> This new masculinity can counter critics who claim it seeks to denigrate women or sharply define itself against the feminine. It can hold itself out as superior to and more easily justify its actions, however ill intentioned, against those men and masculinities in different social and cultural contexts that are still associated with traditional patriarchal social orders. And it can do all this without having to radically question the persistent fact that men, particularly elite western men, still dominate the major institutions, decision making bodies of international authority and power that, however enlightened their agendas and concerns, still shape the agenda of world politics (Niva 1998: 122).[2]

Feminists have identified similar tough but tender masculinities in the discourse surrounding 1990s peacekeeping, peacebuilding and humanitarian operations (Orford 1999; Razack 2004; Whitworth 2004). Both Sherene Razack and Sandra Whitworth argue compellingly that Canadian peacekeepers in Somalia in 1993 constructed their masculinity in relation to the Somalis they were supposed to be protecting. The positioning of Somalis as barbaric and primitive, ungrateful and immoral, enabled a Canadian peacekeeper masculinity that was civilized, advanced and heroic, reinforcing ideas of Canada as an ethical middle power, an expert at peacekeeping (Razack 2004, 24–7; Whitworth 2004, 85–118). Even after the murder of a sixteen year old Somali boy at the hands of two Canadian peacekeepers, it was noticeable

[2] As Niva points out, it is less than ironic that this new tenderhearted and supremely civilized masculinity presided over one of the most lopsided slaughters in modern warfare (Niva 1998: 121).

how quickly the narrative returned to one in which a "gentle, peacekeeping nation was betrayed by a few unscrupulous men" (Razack 2004, 4). Jean Bethke Elshtain's archetypes of the Just Warrior and the Beautiful Soul serve as a useful shorthand for the elaborate gender ideology underpinning militarism and war: regardless of what men and women actually do in war, men are assumed to go off to fight to protect their womenfolk, whilst women remain at home, waiting and weeping (Elshtain 1982; Elshtain 1987). When "peacekeeper masculinity" is hegemonic, however, rather than undermining the ideology, the gendered dichotomy merely shifts. It shifts from the Just Warrior/Beautiful Soul to the Just Peacekeeper (heroic, advanced, civilized, protector) and a number of feminised and racialised Others: primarily the backward, weak, passive victims of war and the uncivilized, barbaric hordes, beset by ancient hatreds. Razack argues that what the Somalia Affair teaches us is that "the dehumanization of others is more easily accomplished and condoned when we understand those others to be different and when we understand ourselves to be standing outside of the world's crises as impartial and compassionate observers" (Razack 2004, 14). It thus reinforces racism and provides a "smokescreen for a new politics of containment in peripheralized regions." (Pieterse 1998, 236). Here, "peripheralized" conveys "the legacy of authoritarianism, the supremacy of security in politics, surplus armaments, and a tradition of politics of polarization – in many cases overlaid upon the authoritarian legacy of colonialism" (ibid) which are obscured by the "powerful and seductive story of the West bringing human rights and democracy to non-Western countries" (Razack 2004, 47). Similarly, in the narratives justifying intervention in Bosnia, Ann Orford argues that the intervening forces are imagined as "white knights", heroic agents of progress, democratic values, peace and security, while the locals are "oppressors,

criminals or primitive barbarians," (leaders or elites), "engaged in child-like squabbles, motivated by unsatisfied ambitions, and cannot govern themselves" (ethnic groups) or "starving, powerless, suffering, abused, helpless victims" (women and children) (Orford 1999, 698–9). She concludes: "The constant linking of violence to local passions and chaotic nationalism masks the more far-reaching forms of violence that are now conducted through massive restructuring and social upheaval in the name of free trade or economic liberalism" (Orford 1999, 710).

Some scholars extend this argument to recent interventions associated with the War on Terror, arguing that a new form of western militarized masculinity has emerged from the discourses justifying and legitimising these wars – "the sensitive masculinity of the humanitarian soldier-scholar (white, literate, articulate, and doctorate festooned)" (Khalili 2011). Although new in form, it clearly has its roots in the peacekeeping masculinities described above. Khalili's humanitarian soldier-scholar is "vocal, articulate and highly educated" and enthusiastic about the potential of operations such as Iraq and Afghanistan to defeat insurgents and help create peace and security. He advances a notion of warfighting which ostensibly takes into account political nuances, aims to win over civilian populations, and deploys an openly liberal discourse of salvation and humanitarianism. Not only is the soldier-scholar the ultimate in civic virtues, he is also the embodiment of international wisdom, war-fighting prowess, and a kind of knowingness about the world (Khalili 2011, 1487). Humanitarian soldier-scholars "are not interested in chest thumping gestures, deploy the language of hearts and minds much more readily and see their wont as being the wielders of softer or smarter power" (ibid). As such, this

model of masculinity appears to be more progressive. With its proclaimed focus on winning hearts and minds, protecting local people, providing security and stability, and so on, it appears to represent an advance on more gung-ho traditional military masculinities. Khalili's main argument, however, is that its dominance merely disguises the fact that the interventions have inflicted direct violence and exacerbated the structural violence that characterises the lives of ordinary Iraqi and Afghan civilians (also see Shepherd 2008).

It is clear that there has also been a considerable degree of change in terms of gender relations *within* western militaries in the last decades. This is not just with respect to the inclusion of women, where all NATO militaries, with the current exception of the UK, have opened up combat positions to female personnel. It is also evident in terms of attitudes to sexuality. The US policy of Don't Ask Don't Tell was repealed in 2011. Recent findings that the repeal had no overall negative impact on cohesion, recruitment, retention, assaults, harassment, or morale (Belkin et al. 2013) indicates that the US military is now a more tolerant place for LGBT personnel. The UK's Code of Social Conduct conceptualises sexual orientation as a private matter for the individual, ending the compulsory discharge of known homosexuals, and indicating the UK military too is becoming more accepting of diversity (Judd 2014; Bindel 2012). One could conclude that heterosexuality is no longer so obviously the quintessential practice of hegemonic masculinity, and homosexuality the subordinated, as was once the case. Here too, however, commentators suggest that progress is not straightforward. LGBT personnel are clearly still more tolerated than celebrated. Sarah Bulmer's conclusion of the UK case posits the idea that LGBT inclusion in the military could be understood as "homonormative", whereby

only certain “acceptable queers”, ones who are discreet and keep their sexuality private, are accepted (Bulmer 2013). She goes on to complicate this conclusion in various ways, which I will pick up on later, but in this reading, we arguably have another case of old hierarchies being replaced by new ones: respectable, discreet queers and problematic, offensive, ‘out’ queers.

The key point to note here is that all these cases reinforce the claims of many feminist and postcolonial scholars that race, class, nation and sexuality need to be considered in any analysis of gender relations. “Softer” or hybrid masculinities appear to always entail new race or class or sexuality oppressions. Discussing masculinity in isolation from other practices can thus “obscure rather than illuminate both structural inequalities and progressive changes” (Hooper 2001, 73). Attentiveness to intersectionality, not just masculinities and femininities, is vital to ensure that change in gender relations is progressive and that any challenge to hegemonic masculinity is meaningful. As Michael Messner concludes, although drawing from a different context (the hybrid masculinity of California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger):

> The success of this new man leadership style is at once a visible sign of the ways that liberal feminist critiques of hypermasculinity have been incorporated and embodied into many professional-class men’s interactional styles and displays. What results is a rounding of the hard edges off of hypermasculinity and a visible softening of powerful men’s public styles and displays. But this should not be seen necessarily as a major victory for feminism. Rather, if I am correct that this more sensitive, new man style tends to facilitate and legitimize privileged men’s wielding of power over others, this is

> probably better seen as an example of feminism's being co-opted into new forms of domination—in this case, class and race domination (Messner 2007, 477).

Conceptualising change: Positive Hegemonic Masculinity, A Contradiction in Terms?

The view that unravelling masculinities is a utopian aspiration because new hegemonic masculinities are always being refigured – often across multiple axes of identity – is dominant in empirical studies of masculinity, particularly in feminist IR, as outlined above. The formulation of the concept of hegemonic masculinity perhaps lends itself to such applications. As hegemonic masculinity is defined as something which is fluid and contingent, as the "configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell 1995, 77; also see Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832), it makes it difficult to conceive of a shift in hegemonic masculinity which would amount to a challenge to the dominance of (some more than other) men. As Hooper puts it "Hegemonic masculinity gets transformed, through constant challenges and struggles, to resemble whatever traits happen to be most strategically useful for the getting and keeping of power" (Hooper 2001, 61). The risk is that we come to our analysis of gender relations with a framework within which progressive change cannot be conceptualised.

Certainly, the many feminist International Relations scholars that have charted changes in military masculinities over recent decades have used hegemonic masculinity to explain the

persistence of masculinism and militarism, rather than more progressive social change. Of course, on one level, this is because masculinism and militarism have indeed persisted, but it is my contention that it is also because of a tendency to overdeterminism and pessimism in much feminist IR writing on military masculinities. It is as if any shift in gender relations is inevitably hegemony at work; and there is little point in asking whether such shifts might be signs of progressive change, and, more importantly, how they could be furthered. Connell's work never has this pessimism. From initial theorising about hegemonic masculinity to her more recent work, she argues that hegemonic masculinity is capable of radical reform – of being "*dismantled,"* so that there are no remaining hierarchical relations between masculinity and femininity. Two questions immediately arise. Is Connell attentive enough to intersectionality, i.e. does she address the way in which challenges to hegemonic masculinity often in practice involve new hierarchical relations across other and multiple axes of identity? Secondly, how is this dismantling to come about? The most explicit articulation of this commitment to the possibility of dismantling hegemonic masculinity appears in Connell and Messerschmidt's 2005 revisiting of the concept, where they argue that gender relations are always areas of tension, of contestation, and that, crucially, "hegemony may fail:"

> Put another way, 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 as hegemonic among men[…] a version of hegemony open to equality of women. In this sense, it is possible to define a hegemonic

> masculinity that is thoroughly "positive" […]. Recent history has shown the difficulty of doing this in practice. A positive hegemony remains, nevertheless, a key strategy for contemporary efforts at reform. (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 853)

They are quite clear, then, that the concept of hegemonic masculinity should not imply that masculinity's dominance over femininity or men's dominance over women is inevitable. Gender relations can be democratized, made more equal. As for the how, the suggestion is that it is possible to have a "positive hegemonic masculinity" – positive in the sense that it is "open to equality with women" and hegemonic in the sense that it remains "hegemonic amongst men". What is being proposed is a two step process: a "transitional stage" in which a version of masculinity is established which is open to equality with women as hegemonic amongst men, then, secondly, eradicating relations of hierarchy, presumably through allowing the hegemonic masculinity to construct those relations of equality.

This formulation is problematic. If we recall the means by which hegemonic masculinity achieves its hegemonic status, that is, through the feminization of other groups of men, it is hard to see how a masculinity open to equality with women could ever be hegemonic. As argued above, one of the strengths of hegemonic masculinity as a concept derives from the way in which it captures the relationship between the dynamics which exist between men and women and those existing within groups of men. It explains why feminization is such an effective strategy in terms of positioning and policing subordinate groups of men (Connell 1987; Connell 1995; Hooper 2001, 71). It also requires, however, that there cannot be a hegemonic

masculinity amongst men which is simultaneously open to relations of equality with women – to become hegemonic, it will necessarily have feminized others, and this feminization process unavoidably disparages women.

Rather, I argue that, if there are to be two stages, the transitory stage of would be more likely to be one where the hegemonic masculinity shifts to adopt traits, practices and values which are conventionally associated with femininity. Rather than the disposition towards equality and democracy coming first – which is the difficult challenge – the more achievable and therefore more likely first step is the incorporation of the "feminine". This of course, is the phenomenon identified in much of the literature, as outlined above, where it was found to be problematic – constituting a new hybrid hegemonic masculinity which relied on the subordination of others whilst pretending to progressive change. Yet, I argue that it is a mistake to confuse these particular examples with a problem with the concept itself. Although in many cases hegemonic masculinity shifts to retain power, it can be more fundamentally challenged – dismantled, in Connell's terms. The softening of hegemonic masculinities, identified across many contexts, is not always inevitably a superficial change, masking the retention of power and the creation of new hierarchies. The difference can be illustrated with reference to changing military masculinities in the British Army.

British Military Masculinities constructed through relations of equality

Elsewhere, I have argued that as a result of an increased focus on peace support or stabilisation operations, we can identify an alternative British military masculinity to the combat model; a masculinity that is associated as much with conflict resolution as conflict, with the skills and practices of communication, negotiation, humanitarianism, sensitivity, compassion and empathy (Duncanson 2009; Duncanson 2013).[3] The attempts to construct an alternative masculinity – a peacebuilder masculinity – have potentially important lessons for theorising how the more radical transformatory challenge to hegemonic masculinity can be achieved. Here we see practices traditionally associated with femininity, such as communication, sensitivity and compassion, included in the model of masculinity. As a step, it is necessary but far from sufficient given the analysis of the softening of masculinities detailed above. To be part of a process of radical change, peacebuilder masculinity must be constructed in a way that does not create new hierarchical identities across any axes of identity.

Poststructuralists from Delueze and Foucault to William Connolly (1991) and Lene Hansen (2006) have argued that identities may always be relational, but they do not have to be oppositional and hierarchical (also see Beasley 2012, 758–761). As well as looking to see what *kinds of practices* are being constructed as manly in military discourses, then, we need to pay as much attention to *how* these constructions are constructed and enacted. Are they carried out in terms of "radical Othering" (Hansen 2006), in ways which create hierarchies between self and Other? Or are they carried out in ways that break down such hierarchies and build relations of equality, empathy and mutual respect? If the former, then what we have is the phenomenon

[3] It is important to note that at the institutional level, this masculinity is far from challenging the hegemony of the combat model

of hegemonic masculinity shifting but not being dismantled. If the latter, however, then softer masculinities are evidence of a more fundamental challenge to gender relations.

We do see evidence of the latter in British Army discourse around Peace Support Operations, peacekeeping soldiers constructing relations of empathy, mutual respect, and equality with those in areas of conflict. There are examples of British soldiers in Bosnia taking women's groups seriously as political actors, subverting the positioning of women as passive victims in warzones, and of British soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan building relations of empathy and mutual respect with local people and the soldiers of the local security forces (see Duncanson 2009; 2013). In such cases, hierarchical gender dichotomies are not merely replaced with others, but the structure of hierarchical gender relations begins to be dismantled. It has to be restated that these instances are rare, and far overshadowed be evidence of soldiers constructing masculinities through "radical Othering," Nonetheless, it is important to consider the disruptions to the rule because of the insight they give us into the possibility and mechanics of change which would actually dismantle hegemonic masculinity.

There is evidence from other contexts of gender relations increasingly being forged through relations of equality and respect, such as rock music subcultures (Schippers 2007); some American University fraternities that are shifting away from the laddish 'frat boy culture' (Anderson 2008, 616–7); and families who are making concerted efforts to divide housework and childcare equally, redefining family roles in the process (Risman 1999). In these cases, it is not just that hegemonic masculinities shift to incorporate practices associated with femininity,

it is that crucially the masculinities are being constructed through relations of equality and respect, thus dismantling hegemony.

In sum, I agree with Connell that positive change is possible, that "hegemony might fail" but disagree over the way in which it can happen. As I have argued, the idea of a masculinity hegemonic among men retaining its hegemony but being open to relations of equality with women is contradictory. The idea that a softer, more feminised form of hybrid masculinity (in the sense that it has incorporated traits and practices associated with women and femininity) can become hegemonic, however, is theoretically possible and empirically observable in many situations. This phenomenon has the potential to be dangerous – masking new oppressions by seeming to be progressive – or more positive. It is positive if, and only if, it is constructed through relations of empathy and respect.

Conclusion: Pushing at Contradictions and encouraging relational thinking

How do we push for the often more elusive element of a challenge to hegemonic masculinity, the means by which it is constructed; the relational element rather than the practices? I highlight two potential strategies here. Firstly, as hegemonic masculinities which have adopted 'softer' traits in order to retain power will contain contradictions, this creates opportunities for feminists to push at those contradictions, make them explicit, in the hope of forcing consideration of the underlying problems (Connell 1990; Hooper 2001). In the case of British soldiers, for example, there is a limit to the extent that they can claim to be a "force for good"

(Ministry of Defence 2003), to be caring and compassionate, to be focused on peacebuilding and resolving conflict, and simultaneously continue to think that they are superior to those in the countries in which they are intervening and to construct their identities through their demonization. Sarah Bulmer reaches a similar conclusion about the productiveness of contradictions in her work on LGBT personnel in the British military (Bulmer 2013). “Allowing servicemen and women to march at Pride, in uniform, does undermine the policy that sexuality is ‘private matter’ ... It is paradoxical to have a public display of private sexuality; it disrupts the boundaries between public and private upon which the gender order of the military is based. Exposing this failure is, in itself, an important feminist tactic because it refuses to be complicit in patriarchy's reproduction” (Bulmer 2013, 149). Bulmer argues that by highlighting the inconsistencies in common military prejudices against LGBT personnel, feminists can illustrate the radically contingent nature of patriarchy and thus undermine its foundations (Bulmer 2013, 150).

The second is to focus less on getting men to “change their ways” and more on changing their relationships, or, more specifically, shifting from constructing their identities in terms of radical Othering to forging identities through relations of equality, respect and empathy. This means challenging constructions of masculinity which are based on subordinating women or Other men and encouraging more fluid identities, based on recognising similarities and interdependence. It involves “contesting the hegemony of masculinities which emphasise violence, confrontation and domination, and replacing them with patterns of masculinity more open to negotiation, cooperation and equality” (Connell 2002b). This is challenging in a military

context, where much of the training has traditionally involved learning to dehumanize the enemy, but not impossible. As western militaries increasingly focus their training on stabilisation or peacebuilding operations, including issues such as partnering indigenous forces, cultural awareness and responding to sexual violence, it becomes possible that identities could be forged through recognition of similarity, interdependence, empathy, respect and equality – both in the sense of discursively adopting subject positions and in real interactions with those in whose lands soldiers intervene.

To conclude, to dismantle hegemonic masculinity, hierarchical relations must be replaced with relations of equality, mutual respect or empathy. Dismantling can happen in stages, as Connell argues, but the transitory stage cannot be the one she suggests, where a version of masculinity open to equality with women becomes hegemonic amongst men. Given the means by which hegemonic masculinity is formed, through the subordination – often feminisation – of others, that suggestion is incoherent. Instead the transitory stage has to be one where traditionally disparaged, feminised traits are newly valued and incorporated into "softer" or hybrid masculinities. The forging of more equal relations is the ultimate, more challenging stage. The hybrid stage may make it more likely that relations of equality, mutual respect, empathy and so on are formed, however, so rather than dismiss the New Man syndrome in all its contexts, assuming it is always camouflages the continuation of patriarchy, militarism and neoliberalism, we can look to expose its contradictions, and to push for those relations of equality.

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