

On the Elasticity of Gender Hegemony

Why Hybrid Masculinities Fail to Undermine Gender and Sexual Inequality

TRISTAN BRIDGES AND C. J. PASCOE

Gender is susceptible to extraordinary change; gender inequality is, by comparison, much more durable. Indeed, shifting gendered styles have been at the center of discussion among masculinities scholars and contemporary social commentators, many claiming that the days of emotional repression, homophobia, and sexism are nearing their end. Consider, for example, some recent trends in masculine expression: the “metrosexual,” the “hipster,” and the “bro.”

The earliest of these, the *metrosexual*, emerged in 1994 (Simpson 1999 [1994]; Barber 2016). This well-coiffed twenty- or thirtysomething, white, educated, professional man likely lived in a city and stylistically laid claim to symbolic territory typically associated with women and gay men (de Casanova, Wetzel, and Speice 2016). This “new heterosexual masculinity, one rooted in consumption and vanity” (Barber 2016) purchased grooming products, wore designer clothing, and spent a great deal of time and money on hygiene and appearance (e.g., Whitehead 2007; Coad 2008; Shugart 2008).

Appearing on the heels of the metrosexual (though echoing earlier gendered expressions [Mailer 1957]), the *hipster* is a white, usually college educated, 20–30-year-old, city-dwelling man, distinguished by tastes such as musical interests, hairstyles, grooming habits, clothing, literary and artistic curiosities, as well as culinary and libation preferences. More countercultural, androgynous, intellectual, creative, and independent than the metrosexual, the hipster draws on a gendered form of nostalgia for masculinities of old—embracing styles of facial hair, dress, or particular cultural artifacts from specific historical periods (at least as

those periods are collectively imagined). The rise of the artisanal hipster aesthetic is part of a more general elevation of all manner of “geek masculinities” to new heights of gendered status (Bell 2013).

Other recent expressions of masculinity, such as the *bro*, seem to be less indicative of change. “Bro” is most often used to describe young, white men, connoting a playful, immature, hypermasculine, frat boy, party culture (e.g., Ward 2008, 2015). As a prefix or suffix, “bro” masculinizes all sorts of identities, objects, relationships, and behaviors: “laxbros” (lacrosse players), “brogrammers” (computer programmers), “dudebros” (generic, hypermasculine twentysomethings), “brogurt” (yogurt for men), “brotein” (protein as a dietary supplement), “broga” (yoga for men), and, perhaps most conspicuously, the “bromance.” From movies (*I Love You, Man*, 2009) to social media hashtags (#mancrushmonday), “bromance” describes intense emotional bonds and perhaps even intimate touch between young, straight-identified men (e.g., DeAngelis 2014), forms of homosociality that seem to share little in common with similar relations in relatively recent history (e.g., Bird 1996; Grazian 2007).¹

While by no means an exhaustive list, taken together we suggest that these three emergent configurations of gender illustrate that masculinity is changing. What does it mean for heterosexual men to care deeply about their appearance in ways that are typically associated with women or gay men? What does it mean when men proudly announce intimate relationships with other straight men? Do they herald larger changes in the structure and organization of gender relations and inequality? Can they be seen as evidence of a general demise of homophobia or sexism? The answer to all of these questions is both “Yes” and “No.” Indeed, the larger question—and one that is more challenging to answer—is what do contemporary transformations in masculinity among historically privileged groups of men *mean*?

The sense that masculinity is changing is nothing new (e.g., Rotundo 1993; Segal 1990; Kimmel 2012). Over a half century ago, Helen Hacker (1957) asked why and how masculinity was transforming, what kinds of new dilemmas and burdens awaited men navigating emerging gendered expectations, and whether changes in masculinity might foreshadow transformations in inequality. Historical evidence suggests that gendered anxieties and discourses that follow shifts in gender relations are recycled. Indeed, while the examples of the metrosexual, the hipster, and

the bro are contemporary ones, they indicate that gender is a historical *process*, and that some configurations of practice are more likely during some historical periods than others as patterned responses to transformations in gender relations.

As with previous historical periods during which masculinities were being redefined, the extent of contemporary transformations and their impact and meaning is the source of a great deal of theory, research, and debate (e.g., Connell 1985, 1987, 1995, 2002; Messner 1993; Anderson 2009; Bridges and Pascoe 2014). What we are interested in here is not the fact that change is happening, but how to interpret the *meanings* of these changes. It is tempting to read the metrosexual, the hipster, and the bro as part of a narrative of extraordinary and progressive change—men seem less inhibited by strict expectations of manliness. Indeed, some scholars suggest that the transformations associated with young, white, educated, and class-privileged men are signs of “the declining significance of homophobia” (McCormack 2012). Others argue that contemporary masculinities are no longer organized hierarchically; rather, they are “inclusive” (Anderson 2009) and represent a fundamental challenge to systems of power and inequality. We suggest that symbolic changes in the gender order need to be understood in terms of what they accomplish, but also what they obscure.

To understand these emerging identities as both accomplishing and obscuring gender inequality, we bring Raewyn Connell’s theorization of “symbolic relations” into dialogue with our conceptualization of “hybrid masculinities”—the selective incorporation of identity elements typically associated with various marginalized and subordinated masculinities or femininities into privileged men’s gendered performances and identities (e.g., Demetriou 2001; Messner 2007; Messerschmidt 2010; Arxer 2011; Bridges 2014; Bridges and Pascoe 2014, 2015). By drawing on the substructures of Connell’s theory of gender relations, we articulate how flexibility in some substructures can work in ways that conceal the resilience of others.

Gender Relations

Drawing on Juliet Mitchells’s (1966) insight that gender inequality was established by a complex yet “specific structure” made up of distinct

components, Connell makes sense of gender relations as composed of four constituent parts: power relations, production relations, emotional relations, and symbolic relations (Connell 1987, 2002). These four dimensions of gender relations are interconnected and mutually constitutive. As with other understandings of gender as a social structure (e.g., Lorber 1993; Risman 2004), the identification of these four substructures emerged out of previous feminist theorizing.

As “substructures” (Connell 2004), Connell understood these dimensions of gender relations as working together, though not always to the same ends or with the same means. As such Connell’s theory makes possible an understanding of gender inequality as capable of being challenged and reproduced simultaneously. As Connell notes, however:

The argument does not assume that they are the only discoverable structures, that they exhaust the field. Nor does it claim that they are necessary structures. . . . The argument rests on a gentler, more pragmatic but perhaps more demonstrable claim that with a framework like this we can come to a serviceable understanding of current history. (1987, 97)

Intentionally leaving a theory open like this speaks to this framework’s ability to adapt to new contexts and contingencies. Connell’s theory of gender relations does more than simply account for change; it actively anticipates change.

Not only do gender relations change, but these changes actually *constitute* gender relations. Gender relations are historically unstable and prone toward crisis, something Connell calls “crisis tendencies.” Crisis tendencies are uneven, often affecting gender relations incompletely. While the gender order continually tends toward crisis, Connell suggests that this propensity may have intensified in recent history, producing “a major loss of legitimacy for patriarchy,” such that “different groups of men are now negotiating this loss in very different ways” (1995, 202).

Conceptualizing crisis tendencies as an integral feature of gender relations allows us to make sense of historical change by considering the diverse potential embedded within any historical transformation in gender relations. Crisis tendencies speak to the flexibility of systems of power and inequality. Though the history of gender inequality is sometimes presented as a slow but steady march toward equality, Connell’s

theory makes possible an understanding of progress while contextualizing this potential with a conceptualization of inequality as flexible and adaptive.

Hybrid Masculinities

As relations of power, production, emotions, and symbols change, these changes reverberate throughout the gender order. Building on the dimension of symbolic relations in particular, the concept of hybrid masculinities attests to the flexibility of gender inequality. Hybrid masculinities illustrate a great deal of change among symbolic and emotional relations—transformations that obscure the fact that power relations have been less challenged than it initially seems.

Hybrid masculinities refer to the selective incorporation of elements of identity typically associated with various marginalized and subordinated masculinities and—at times—femininities into privileged men's gender performances and identities (e.g., Demetriou 2001; Messner 2007; Messerschmidt 2010; Arxer 2011; Bridges 2014; Bridges and Pascoe 2014).² These transformations include men's assimilation, among others, of “bits and pieces” (Demetriou 2001, 350) of identity projects coded as “gay” (e.g., Hennessy 1995; Demetriou 2001; Heasley 2005; Bridges 2014; Bridges and Pascoe 2015), “Black” (e.g., Ward 2008; Hughey 2012), or “feminine” (e.g., Arxer 2011; Wilkins 2009; Schippers 2000; Messerschmidt 2010).

Research on hybrid masculinities points to a patterned set of consequences associated with the processes of incorporating elements of the identities of various Others. Hybrid masculinities work in ways that reproduce contemporary systems of gender, race, class, and sexual inequality, but, importantly, obscure this process as it is happening. The emergence of hybrid masculinities indicates that normative constraints associated with masculinity are shifting, and shows that these shifts have largely taken place in ways that have sustained existing ideologies and systems of power and inequality (e.g., Messner 1993, 2007; Demetriou 2001; Messerschmidt 2010; Bridges 2014; Bridges and Pascoe 2014, 2015).

The interpretation of changes in gender relations provided by our conceptualization of “hybrid masculinity” directly critiques a growing body of literature that suggests that new configurations of identity and

practice are best understood as *resistance* to gender and sexual inequality. This “inclusivity” framework (Anderson 2009; McCormack 2012) suggests that these changes in gender relations represent important, lasting, and serious changes in various dimensions of gender inequality. Yet historical work on masculinity documents that it is a category of identity characterized by internal and dialectical contradictions (e.g., Kimmel 2012; Aboim 2010) and that hegemonic configurations have demonstrated extraordinary elastic properties over time, incorporating new modes of behavior and practice in periods of crisis (e.g., Messner 1993, 2007; Connell 1995; Demetriou 2001; Bridges 2014; Bridges and Pascoe 2014, 2015; de Boise 2015), and taking on unique forms in different regions and local contexts (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). This chapter provides an alternate analysis of contemporary shifts in masculinities not as uniform challenges to gender and sexual inequality, but as complicated processes that have the collective effect of obscuring inequality.

The concept of hybrid masculinities grew out of analytic limitations associated with Connell’s theorization of hegemonic masculinity (Demetriou 2001). In analyzing straight-identified men’s assimilation of elements of “gay male culture,” Demetriou suggested that the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which had at its core a symbolic distance from “subordinated masculinity” (a configuration Connell [1987, 1992, 1995] argued was best represented by gay men), could not account for why straight men might adopt the styles of subordinated men. This is, for Demetriou, inconsistent with a Gramscian conceptualization of “hegemony”:

Whereas for Gramsci the process is essentially a dialectical one that involves reciprocity and mutual interaction between the class that is leading and the groups that are led, Connell understands the process in a more elitist way where subordinate and marginalized masculinities have no effect on the construction of the hegemonic model. (Demetriou 2001, 345)

As such, Demetriou suggests that hegemonic masculinity is better understood as a “hegemonic masculine bloc” capable of appropriating “what appears pragmatically useful and constructive for the project of domination at a particular historical moment” (2001, 345). While it may

seem that the adoption of elements associated with gay men by straight men is a significant movement away from hierarchical gendered relations, Demetriou suggests something much more dynamic—that the incorporation of “bits and pieces [of gay male culture] . . . [produce] new, hybrid configurations of gender practice that enable them to reproduce their dominance over women [and other men] in historically novel ways” (2001, 350–51). The appropriation of elements of subordinated and marginalized “Others” into configurations of hegemonic masculinities works to recuperate existing systems of power and inequality.

Demetriou’s understanding, however, presupposes concrete social groups in definite relations of alliance and subordination. Our identity-based approach situates these practices as much more fluid and dynamic. As such, our theorizing of hybrid masculinities builds on—rather than opposes—Connell’s framework. It is not the case, for instance, that young, straight, white men are the only ones “playing” with masculinity. Nor is it necessarily true that young men are *intentionally* playing with masculinity in ways that either maintain or conceal gender inequality. Our conceptualization of “hybrid masculinities” captures the dynamic processes through which some groups receive a qualitatively different set of patterned consequences for their participation and have a qualitatively different set of considerations at stake in participating in the first place.

Our theorization of “hybrid masculinity” connects a consistent finding across a collection of research that has shown that hybrid masculinities are broadly associated with at least three distinct consequences that exacerbate, reflect, and conceal existing inequalities in patterned ways (e.g., Bridges and Pascoe 2014). First, hybrid masculine practices often work in ways that create discursive space between privileged groups of men and hegemonic masculinity, enabling some to frame themselves as outside of existing systems of privilege and inequality—something we label *discursive distancing*. Second, contemporary hybrid masculinities are often premised on the notion that the masculinities available to young, white, straight men are less meaningful than the identities of various Others, whose identities were at least partially produced by collective struggles for rights and recognition. We call this process *strategic borrowing*. Third, hybrid masculinities work to fortify symbolic and social boundaries between (racial, gender, sexual, class-based) groups—

further entrenching, and often concealing, inequality in historically novel ways. We refer to this consequence as *fortifying boundaries*.

Collectively, these patterned consequences exemplify the processes by which meanings and practices of hegemonic masculinity change over time in ways that have sustained the structure of institutionalized gender regimes to advantage men collectively over women and some men over others (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Similar to Connell's (1987, 1995) conceptualization of the four substructures of gender relations as interrelated and overlapping, we see each of the consequences we identify here as heuristic devices that enable us to examine the meanings of contemporary shifts in gender identities, relations, and inequality. Below, we provide more detail from research that highlights the three processes as interrelated, yet distinct.

Discursive Distancing

Research on men's profeminist, political, and grooming activities illustrates how hybrid masculinities can work in ways that discursively distance men from hegemonic masculinity as they also (often more subtly) align themselves with it. "Bromances," for instance, are instructive—they are, on the surface, a relationship that would seem to reduce the distance between hegemonic masculinity and intimacy between men in a way that questions the centrality of homophobia to contemporary masculinities. Yet the very language to describe these relationships—"bro"—works to symbolically enshrine heterosexuality by establishing distance from same-sex eroticism even while seemingly engaging in same-sex intimacy. In this way, "bro" works as both a symbol and discourse associated with a dominant configuration of white, heterosexual masculinity (Ward 2015). An analysis of men's antisexist work and beauty practices documents a similar process of change in symbolic relations that does little to disrupt the systems of power that structure gender and sexual relations more broadly.

Men's participation in antiviolence movements such as Walk a Mile in Her Shoes marches (Bridges 2010) or My Strength Is Not for Hurting campaigns (Masters 2010) illustrates discursive distancing. Walk a Mile marches require that men wear high-heeled shoes and walk one mile protesting violence against women and pledging support to end

it. These men are standing in solidarity with women, actively opposing men's violence, and wearing women's clothing—all practices that seem to distance them from hegemonic masculinity. As Bridges (2010) observed, however, march participants can reproduce gender and sexual inequality even as they actively resist it. Participants regularly joked about wearing women's clothing, their (in)ability to walk in heels, and same-sex sexual desire—all of which worked to align them with hegemonic masculinity even as their participation in antiviolence activism distances them from it.

The My Strength Is Not for Hurting campaign—one of few antirape campaigns explicitly directed at men—also works to distance men from hegemonic masculinity through framing rapists as pathological men while depicting the nonrapist as hegemonically masculine. The nonrapist is a “real,” “strong” man who is fundamentally different from (the presumably weak and unmanly) rapist. The campaign draws on ideologies about men's inherent “strength” and protectionism (“. . . is not for hurting”) in a way that symbolically reinscribes unequal gender relations. Campaigns like this separate “good” from “bad” men and fail to account for the ways that presenting strength and power as natural resources for men perpetuates gender and sexual inequality even as they are called into question (Murphy 2009; Pascoe and Hollander 2016). Both Walk a Mile marches and the My Strength Is Not for Hurting campaign create some distance between these (good) men who oppose gendered violence and (bad) hegemonically masculine men who presumably support it. Yet, in challenging men's violence against women, both campaigns simultaneously reaffirm hegemonic masculine forms.

Other boundary blurring projects accomplish similar ends. Kristen Barber's (2008, 2016) study of white, middle-class, heterosexual men's interactions with workers in professional men's hair salons illustrates a related dynamic in which some men engage in beauty work formerly coded “feminine.” Barber shows how men rely on a rhetoric of expectations associated with professional-class masculinities to justify their participation in the beauty industry while simultaneously naturalizing distinctions between themselves and working-class men, framing the latter as misogynistic and responsible for reproducing gender inequality. Barber highlights the ways these men avoid feminization while simultaneously strengthening their status as class-privileged men. The cost of

the salon services excludes working-class men; but more than this, the salons' clients position themselves as more gender and sexually progressive than the nonwhite and working-class men not represented in these places. Thus, the straight, white, educated, and elite men in Barber's study frame costly salon haircuts as a sign of progressive masculinity—a potent symbol they frame as illustrating their status as “new” men (see Messner and Messerschmidt's chapter in this volume).

While bromances, men's prowomen activism, and beauty work may appear to be new, the process of *discursive distancing* is not. As Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Mike Messner argued:

Too often critical discussions of masculinity tend to project atavistic hypermasculine, aggressive, misogynistic masculinity onto relatively powerless men. By comparison, the masculine gender displays of educated, privileged New Men are too often uncritically applauded, rather than skeptically and critically examined. (1994, 215)

Ignoring the intersectional dynamics that inequitably distribute access to specific hybrid masculine forms risks presenting contemporary changes as indicative of transformations in systems of inequality that still exist—albeit in new forms. As Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner (1994) suggest, men of color, working-class men, and immigrant men, among others, are often implicitly cast as the possessors of regressive masculinities. In fact, when groups of marginalized and subordinated Others craft hybrid gender identities, they often do so with very different consequences and concerns than those of white, middle-class, young, urban men. *Discursive distancing* provides a sensitizing concept to analyze these intersections in finer detail. Part of analyzing transformations in symbolic gender relations must involve a critical assessment of the work accomplished for the groups who get labeled as transformed.

Strategic Borrowing

Configurations of hybrid masculinity associated with privileged groups of men are often premised on the notion that the masculinities they perceive as available to them are meaningless when compared with various “Others.” Indeed, cultural appropriation is a defining characteristic

of processes of hybridization—domination through “negotiation” rather than “negation” (e.g., Sinfield 1996; Burke 2009). Research on hybrid masculinities has shown that men who occupy privileged social categories “strategically borrow” symbols associated with various Others in ways that work to reframe themselves as symbolically part of socially subordinated groups.

While challenging inequality may be part of the motivation driving hybrid masculine configurations, research suggests that these practices may also have to do with exploring pleasures that powerful men have been denied by gendered expectations. Relatively privileged men who mobilize hybrid configurations of masculinity gain access to some of the symbolic and emotional pleasures associated with transgression. In this way, hybrid masculinities can also be seen as a form of symbolic tourism—enjoying the pleasures associated with transgressing normative gender and sexual boundaries, but avoiding much of the injustice and pain.

Once made visible by feminist challenge and critique, privileged configurations of masculinity are capable of dramatically reworking the meaning associated with that visibility to recuperate privilege in new ways. Through this process, white men are presented as victims (Messner 1993) and inequality becomes less easily identified. Like Mary Waters’s (1990) research documenting white people’s relative ignorance of the ethnic flexibility they are afforded, the hybrid identities available to young, straight, white men may be very different from those available to marginalized and subordinated groups. As Patricia Hill Collins writes, “Authentic Black people must be contained—their authentic culture can enter white controlled spaces, but they cannot” (Collins 2004, 177). The strategic borrowing of symbols and styles associated with various marginalized and subordinated “Others” has a patterned set of consequences, research documents. One manifestation of this are hipster masculinities, which borrow bits and pieces from working-class, white masculinity as a way of symbolically laying claim to masculine authenticity.

Strategic borrowing is also at work in the incorporation of gay culture by straight-identified men. The emergence of the identity of the metrosexual seems perhaps the best example of this. Indeed, de Casanova, Wetzel, and Speice’s (2015) interviews with metrosexual-identified men

indicate that white-collar men embraced this configuration of gender strategically (for career advancement) “rather than [out of] a collective rethinking of masculine norms or a challenge to hegemonic masculinity” (2015, 78). As culturally dominant models of masculinity assimilate symbols associated with subordinated “Others” and alter the look and feel of contemporary performances of gender, however, these practices do little to challenge men’s structural position of power and authority (Demetriou 2001). Rather, as Demetriou writes,

[w]e are used to seeing masculine power as a closed, coherent, and unified totality that embraces no otherness, no contradiction. This is an illusion that must be done away with because it is precisely through its hybrid and apparently contradictory content that hegemonic masculinity reproduces itself. (2001, 355)

Similarly, by theorizing the symbolic elements of sexuality, Bridges (2014) analyzes the causes and consequences of heterosexual men subjectively identifying aspects of themselves as “gay” in ways that preserve their heterosexuality and simultaneously reinforce existing boundaries between gay and straight individuals and cultures.

Steven Arxer’s (2011) study of interactions between heterosexual men at a college bar documents an analogous practice. The behavior of the men in Arxer’s study is surprisingly different from the competitive, emotionally detached, sexually objectifying practices that characterize straight men’s interactions in Bird’s (1996) or Grazian’s (2007) research. Instead, these men draw on the emotionality presumably displayed by gay men (illustrating flexibility within Connell’s “emotional relations”) to increase their chances of sexually “scoring” with women (providing no real challenge to “power relations”). Thus, while a different collective performance of masculinity than the “the girl hunt” that Grazian (2007) examined or Bird’s (1996) analysis of the “men’s club,” the consequences of performing emotional sensitivity are strikingly similar in terms of sustaining existing systems of power and inequality. Similar consequences occur with racial strategic borrowing among white men (e.g., Hughey 2012; Bridges and Pascoe 2014).

When we frame young, straight, class-privileged, educated, white men’s “new” performances of masculinity solely as indicators of a de-

cline in gender and sexual inequality (e.g., Anderson 2009; McCormack 2012), already marginalized groups of men often end up situated as playing a greater role in perpetuating inequality (Messner 1993; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner 1994; Bridges and Pascoe 2014). By framing an extraordinarily privileged group of men as both the embodiment and harbinger of feminist change, social scientists participate in further marginalizing poor men, working-class men, religious men, undereducated men, rural men, and men of color (among others). Even as young, straight, white men borrow from young, gay, black, working-class, rural, or urban men to symbolically boost their masculine capital, research shows that these practices often work to reaffirm these subordinate and marginalized groups as deviant, shoring up existing relations of power and dominance.

Fortifying Boundaries

By co-opting elements of style and performance from less powerful masculinities, young, straight, white men's hybridizations often obscure the symbolic and social boundaries between groups upon which such practices rely. Through a process we call *fortifying boundaries*, hybrid masculinities further entrench and conceal systems of inequality in historically new ways, often along lines of race, gender, sexuality, and class.

For instance, when men engage in sexual practices that challenge the relationship between normative masculinity and homophobia, they may reify inequality. Jane Ward's (2008, 2015) research on white straight-identifying men who have sex with other straight-identifying men illustrates this process. Ward documents the ways that, in their search for sexual partners, these men objectify women, reject effeminacy among men, and hypereroticize men of color. They talk about hooking up with other men while watching "pussy porn," say they do not want to have sex with men who are feminine "sissy la las," and use stigmatizing language to describe their ideal men-of-color sex partners. Ward calls this particular configuration of practices "dude sex," implicitly suggesting that sex between men *might* challenge contemporary gender relations, but sex between "dudes" does not. Similar to the "bromance," "dude sex" relies on symbolic relations to simultaneously challenge and reinforce systems of power and inequality. Though violating the "one-act rule"

(Schilt and Westbrook 2009) of men's homosexuality by participating in same-sex sex, these men simultaneously reinforce gendered and raced inequality. In fact, according to Ward's research, engaging in same-sex sex is *proof* of their masculinity precisely because of their race and class position—a process Ward (2015) calls “hetero-exceptionalism.” Their identity projects are situated as having a better political and cultural “fit” with heterosexuality, relying on symbols and stereotypes of gendered and racialized performances of masculinity to authenticate their *heterosexual* masculine identities.

Some of men's practices that initially appear to be feminist also perpetuate gender inequality even as they obscure it. Recent changes in the ideologies and practices of fathering may seem progressive—such as increasing levels of emotionality and time spent with children. But, upon closer investigation, they also often entrench gender inequality. The new fathering movement of the twentieth century, for instance, was not necessarily about challenging gender inequality in families, but about a particular *style* of men's parenting (Messner 1993), that, as Stein (2005) argues, redraws boundaries around men's heterosexuality and masculine authority. In her study of the Promise Keepers movement, Heath (2003) examines the ways that men embody “new fathering” by playing larger roles in their children's lives and increasing their emotional availability while also enforcing gender inequality by espousing a “biblical” notion of “the family” in which women submit to their husbands (see also Donovan 1998).

Groups of evangelical Christian men exemplify the processes by which hybrid masculinities can be understood to fortify boundaries between groups even as they appear to challenge those boundaries (e.g., Diefendorf 2015; Wilkins 2009; Gerber 2015). For instance, Diefendorf's (2015) analysis of young evangelical Christian men's claims to sexual abstinence before marriage appear to be a fundamental departure from hegemonic configurations of masculinity, which emphasize sexual experience. She shows, however, that such claims are better understood as enabling these men to continue to collect on forms of gendered entitlement that have arguably been more successfully challenged outside of these groups. Thus, Diefendorf shows that rather than resisting hegemonic masculinity, this strategy is a hybrid configuration of masculinity that fortifies boundaries and systems of inequality between these men

and “Other” men and between men and women in ways that work to these men’s collective (and continued) advantage.

While diverse boundary-blurring work is accomplished in many contemporary configurations of masculinity, much of this blurring is best understood as superficial. Within Connell’s framework, research on hybrid masculinities illustrates an extraordinary flexibility in symbolic and emotional relations. But this flexibility often works in ways that conceal the continued resilience of power relations. This makes the gender order appear to have transformed a great deal, when less has actually changed than these practices appear (and are sometimes used as evidence) to demonstrate.

Conclusion

Connell (1995) theorized something she calls “gender vertigo” as accompanying periods of change—the sense of unease as gendered personality structures and relations transform.³ It is associated with public challenges to cultural conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity and the experiences associated with charting new gender projects under shifting systems of opportunity and constraint—liberating for some, disorienting for others, and potentially infuriating for those who refuse to acknowledge change. As Connell writes,

The pattern of difference/dominance is so deeply embedded in culture, institutions and body-reflexive practices that it functions as a limit to the rights-based politics of reform. Beyond a certain point, the critique of dominance is rejected as an attack on difference—a project that risks gender vertigo and violence. (Connell 1995, 232)

Because crisis tendencies are a fundamental feature of the structure of gender relations, gender vertigo is a historically recycled set of anxieties that accompany transformation. Hybrid masculinities are gender projects that offer *some* men new tools to navigate the gender vertigo accompanying periods of crisis in gender relations. The hipster, the metrosexual, and the bromance, as well as other gendered configurations in this chapter, are gender strategies that accompany transformations. Our theorization of hybrid masculinities, however, situates them as

more than this as well: hybrid masculinities are strategies with patterned consequences for groups of men who hold concentrated constellations of power and authority.

Recent changes—produced both by structural change and feminist critique and reform—have shed light on masculinity and gender privilege in historically unprecedented ways. Privilege works best when it is invisible, when it goes unrecognized by those who benefit the most. When the experiences of privilege are fundamentally altered, so too are the “legitimizing stories” that justify systems of gendered power and inequality. The concept of hybrid masculinities offers a framework within which we can better assess how privilege adapts to structural and socio-political change by highlighting these emergent strategies of action and legitimizing stories and strategies.

Research on hybrid masculinity suggests that we should be careful when assessing whether these transformations are best understood as challenges to systems of power and inequality or simply shifts in the ways those systems are perpetuated (e.g., Bridges 2014; Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Budgeon 2014). Legal scholar Reva Siegel (1996) refers to processes of social reproduction involving the appearance of social transformation that share some of the patterns we have identified here as “preservation-through-transformation.” Similarly, we suggest that it is critically important to separate an analysis of the motivations and the consequences of hybrid masculinities—recognizing patterned consequences even when individuals may be unaware of their participation or even their interests in reproducing existing structures of power and inequality.⁴ While the motivations behind hybrid configurations of masculinity may be to challenge inequality or explore pleasures men have been denied by stoic configurations of masculinity, research suggests three separate dimensions of hybrid masculinities that have the collective consequence of obscuring power and inequality. Indeed, rather than challenging inequality, they are better understood as what Kandiyoti (1988) referred to as “patriarchal bargains.”

Hybrid masculinity helps us recognize that meaningful changes in or successful challenges to systems of gendered power and inequality are more complex than they may at first appear. Considerations of what real (not simply stylistic) change will look like is an open question and must be answered with a framework capable of making sense of the elasticity of gender and sexual inequality.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Discursive distancing—hybrid masculine practices that create symbolic space between privileged groups of men and hegemonic masculinity, enabling some men to frame themselves as outside of existing systems of privilege and inequality.

Fortifying boundaries—hybrid masculine practices that entrench and conceal systems of inequality in historically new ways, often along lines of race, gender, sexuality, and class.

Gender and sexual inequality—the organization of social relations through which heteronormative and patriarchal ideals become part of the structure of society, embedded in social institutions, interactions, identities, and culture.

Gender hegemony—the process by which gender inequality is justified through social structures, interactions, and institutions—a process that is continually transforming as it adapts to new historical circumstances, challenges, and social contexts.

Hegemonic masculinities—configurations of masculinity that symbolically organize inequalities among men and legitimate inequality between men and women.

Hybrid masculinity—the selective incorporation of identity elements typically associated with various marginalized and subordinated masculinities or femininities into privileged men's gendered enactments and identities.

Strategic borrowing—hybrid masculine practices of cultural appropriation by which privileged groups claim ownership of cultural symbols associated with subordinated and marginalized social groups.

NOTES

- 1 This type of intimacy—both emotional and physical—is not historically unique. A great deal of scholarship documents intimate relationships between men throughout U.S. history. See, for instance, E. Anthony Rotundo's (1993) and John Ibson's (2002) work on emotional and physical intimacy between men in the 19th and early 20th centuries as well as Jane Ward's (2015) work, which documents same-sex intimacy as consistently part of heterosexual masculinity. What we are seeing today are contemporary expressions of a long-standing pattern of relationships among men rather than something historically unprecedented.

- 2 Subordinated and marginalized groups also incorporate elements associated with dominant groups as well. Consider Messerschmidt's (1997) analysis of Malcolm X and his participation in a form of zoot-suit "hipster" masculinity among African American men in the 1930s and '40s in the United States as well as Nandy's (1983) analysis of British colonialism in India. While they illustrate a process of hybridization of masculinity as well, African Americans and Indians are here motivated by very different concerns and operating under dramatically different constraints than the hybrid masculinities we analyze in this chapter. We are suggesting that this form of hybridization (involving dominant groups appropriating cultural elements of various Others) often works in ways that do not resist systems of inequality.
- 3 While "gender vertigo" is now primarily associated with Barbara Risman's (2004) work on challenges to gender relations within the family, she borrows the concept from Connell's theory.
- 4 Discussions of "men's interests" are necessarily complex (e.g., Messner 2004). Connell discusses men's "interests" in ways that do not necessarily demand conscious reflection or malicious intentions. As she writes, "Interests are formed in any structure of inequality, which necessarily defines groups that will gain and lose differently by sustaining or by changing the structure" (1995, 82). Our examination of hybrid masculinities considers them as working "in men's interest" in a similar manner.

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