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Hegemony, hegemonic masculinity, and beyond

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Introduction

This chapter explores two “crucially important” concepts and their relationship in critical studies of men and masculinities (CSMM): hegemony and hegemonic masculinity. Following Gramsci, hegemony always refers to a historical situation, in which power is won and held; it is not a matter of the pushing and pulling of ready-formed groupings but is partly a matter of the formation of social groupings – in this context, gender groupings (cf. Carrigan et al., 1985; Hearn, 2004). The most well cited definition of hegemonic masculinity is:

... 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, p. 77)

In this chapter, we do not give a step-by-step review of different approaches to the two key concepts (see Aboim et al., 2016; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Hearn, 2004; Howson, 2006); rather, we develop a specific line of theorizing that locates the two concepts and seeks to go beyond their predominant current use in studying men and masculinity.

The reasons for these two concepts and their relationship being considered as crucially important draw from the centrality of critique to understanding men and masculinities (see also the chapter by Hearn and Howson in this volume), but for now an important point of departure for our analysis within a broader gendered context is the consideration of popular consciousness. This emphasis on popular consciousness underpins one, if not the most important, feature of both hegemony and hegemonic masculinity, that is, they are both considered as social constructions, and therefore neither exists because there is something essential that enables their constitution. Further, neither is ever stable and coherent, and, as such, neither can claim to be universal and/or continuing. This might *prima facie* seem counter-intuitive, given that when we reflect historically on the nature of gender it might well seem that men and masculinity have *always* enjoyed unique privileges. It surely indicates the existence of “something” essential, stable, even universal,
about masculinity that enables men to act within a continuous system of gendered privilege/importance/authority that cannot and so “should” not be questioned.

This view of men and masculinity we will refer to as the foundationalist position. In popular consciousness and the configurations of practice that constitute the everyday life of people that in turn mark gender across the Occident today, it is the foundationalist position that holds predominance. Thus, what becomes crucial for a critical understanding of the foundationalist approach to men and masculinity, and thereby gender more broadly, is the relationship between hegemony and hegemonic masculinity, particularly how the latter informs this popular consciousness. This raises questions about why men and masculinity have come to predominance and, even more importantly, how this predominance is sustained and maintained. Further, there needs to be recognition that this popular consciousness works at the collective, social, national and then global levels that, in turn, effectively expose the social world as a gendered system.

Critical studies of men and masculinities (CSMM), as a sub-field of study, “presents critical, explicitly gendered accounts, descriptions and explanations of men and masculinities in their social contexts that bring men and masculinities into sharper relief, as objects of theory and critique” (Hearn & Howson, this volume). Pushing this understanding further, it is possible to understand CSMM as a discursive space in which is contained a set of tools capable of critically exposing, examining and evaluating the social conditions that produce and sustain men and masculinity. Many of these theoretical (discursive) tools, it could be argued, were examined and developed, albeit in the nascent context of CSMM, in “Theorizing Men and Men’s Theorizing” (Hearn, 1998) and have now, arguably, become part of the methodology of CSMM. However, within CSMM it is accepted that they first took form from the socio-political theoretical fundamentals that feminism provided, predominantly in the latter half of the twentieth century. As Hearn (1998, p. 783) goes on to point out:

Although feminist theory and practice has addressed the problem of men throughout its development, the major emphasis has been on the analysis of women’s experiences of the consequences of men’s domination rather than the focused theorization of men. Feminist writing is not, as it is sometimes characterized, “just about women”; this is simply not the case. Feminists have always been simultaneously involved in making women visible, developing critiques of men, and making men not just visible but problematic.

So, for simplicity, and drawing from the above, the key points we focus on, which also gave rise to CSMM, concern issues around the (in)visibility of men and/or critical explorations of masculinities within gendered life, and the taken-for-grantedness of gendered/men’s actions on the basis of an essentialized, and thereby privileged, masculinity. Put simply, we see CSMM as a space within which to investigate men through a critical evaluation of the masculinities that become exposed, the actions produced, and the consequences for gender relations.

Both invisibility and taken-for-grantedness have deep theoretical roots that have extended out from feminist theory more generally, into feminist-inspired masculinities theory more specifically and, in the latter case, what Hearn (2017) refers to as the most developed and cited approach in the CSMM, perhaps because of the multiple influences on and interpretations of it that include: patriarchy theory; Gramscian Marxism; gay politics; critiques of categoricalism; practice theory; psychoanalysis; structuration theory; theorizing on the body;
and even pluralism (cf. Aboim, 2010). Interestingly, though, when masculinities theory is considered, there is often an immediate leap to what may be referred to as its “central pillar” (Hearn, 2017, p. 25), that is, hegemonic masculinity: a concept that resonates with many of the influences referred to above and whose definition, paraphrasing Connell (1995), exposes the embodied configurations of practice that produce and sustain legitimacy within the gendered system that, in turn, ensures the privileged position of masculinity and, thereby, men, while ensuring the de-privileging of femininity and, thereby, women. It is perhaps not hard to see why hegemonic masculinity is considered as the central pillar of the critical studies of men and masculinities, not least because it offers the beginning of an articulation about the problematic relationship between our understanding of masculinity and the practice of men with how femininity is understood as underpinning the expected practices of women. Most importantly, this articulation is developed, sustained and in some cases altered through “culture” that, in turn, produces and populates popular consciousness.

So, while the centrality of hegemonic masculinity that has developed over the past four decades emphasizes the importance of culture (notwithstanding a substantial critique; see Beasley, 2008; Flood, 2002; Hearn, 2004; Howson, 2006; Petersen, 1998) that is not disputed here. To understand it better, and in particular why and how it is enabled and sustained within culture by popular consciousness producing informal or “normative” as well as formal or “legal/legitimate” privileges, it is important to take our examination back to its grounding theory, that is, hegemony (see Howson, 2006). In so doing, hegemony opens up the context in which invisibility and taken-for-grantedness are enabled and sustained but also allows investigation into how we might then move CSMM into the theoretical beyond. So, examining and applying key features of the theory of hegemony exposes the theoretical ground upon which can be built a more nuanced insight into the hegemonic nature of popular consciousness and practices in the gendered system(s) (what will otherwise be called here “hegemony”). This is because it exposes both the ideological and material basis upon which privilege is able to obfuscate or, worse, make invisible men and masculinity while simultaneously showing how men and their actions, through our taken-for-grantedness, are legitimized. It should not be surprising then that invisibility and taken-for-grantedness are positioned, both implicitly and explicitly, within Connell’s definition of hegemonic masculinity. However, hegemonic masculinity through this approach becomes more than simply a problem for the gender system. By pushing the hegemony/hegemonic masculinity synergy beyond its current articulation, it is possible to offer an important opportunity to move CSMM forward, by enabling the introduction of the concept of “empty signifier”.

**Hegemony and the hegemonic**

In masculinities theory, it is safe to say that the use of hegemony was, and still is, predominantly an attempt to give a theoretical basis to that which is clearly set out in the definition of hegemonic masculinity, namely, the dominance of men and the subordination of women.

What emerged from this matrix in the mid-1980s was an analogue, in gender terms, of power structure research in political sociology – focusing the spotlight on a dominant group. Hegemonic masculinity was understood as the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue.

*(Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832)*
In the context of masculinities theory, this description of hegemonic masculinity does two important things. First, it implicitly operationalizes the concept of hegemony through its reference to political sociology that in turn implies a focus on the relationship between civil society and political society or resistance and power. But here, given the emphasis on masculinity, the emphasis is more on power and less on resistance. Second and most importantly, it offers an explicit interpretation of hegemonic masculinity that links it to domination. Specifically, it states that hegemonic masculinity represents “things done”, in a way that subordinates the non-material processes of expectation, meaning and identification, suggesting that these “things done” “allow” for a system of domination by men over women to exist. So how should we understand these two aspects of hegemonic masculinity in the context of the theory of hegemony? Later on the same page, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 832) offer an important clue: “[h]egemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendency achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion” (cf. Hearn, 2012). Here the creation and then application of hegemony refers to processes of ascendency achieved by control of the institutions of persuasion but where violence (informal and formal) can always be operationalized (if required). The idea of hegemonic masculinity as the domination by masculinity/men over femininity/women can now be tempered, challenged even, because what is really being enabled is persuasion-based ascendency (for more detailed discussion, see Howson, 2006). This situation puts some theoretical strain on the nexus of hegemony and hegemonic masculinity because it alters, or has the potential to alter, what is meant by domination and, as a consequence, subordination. It could be argued that ascendency is an inevitable and natural process of building hegemony within a complex organic society. Further, that persuasion-based ascendency is very different to simple domination. So, then, how should hegemony be understood in this context within the CSMM?

A particularly instructive place to begin examining persuasion as a feature of hegemony is Joe Buttigieg’s critique of the London School of Economics Centre for Civil Society’s approach to hegemony. Buttigieg, a leading Gramscian scholar and expert on Gramsci’s development of the relationship between hegemony and civil society, argues that:

[h]egemony, as theorized by Gramsci, is not imposed; quite the opposite, the governing class achieves hegemony (i.e., becomes hegemonic) through leadership and persuasion, so that instead of imposing itself on the subordinate or subaltern classes, it acquires their consensus. This leadership is not exercised solely or even primarily from the seat of government, but also and much more importantly within the sphere of civil society where consensus is generated.

(Buttigieg, 2005, pp. 37–38, our emphases)

This is a crucial intervention in understanding hegemony and for applying it to hegemonic masculinity and, more broadly, to masculinities theory. In effect, the application of hegemony means that the things done, that in turn allow men to become hegemonic, align better with the theory of hegemony when they are not representative of impositions or things demanded. Hegemony is not domination forced upon subaltern groups. Rather, hegemony is achieved because there is consensus, significantly expressed in masculinities theory as complicity. However, this only produces a qualified, contingent, shifting and fundamentally unstable consensus. Thus, in the description given by Connell and Messerschmidt, two important ideas can be drawn out, albeit implicitly. First is the importance of aspiration as the basis of achievement. There is much value to be gained by unpacking or deconstructing this relationship, because in so doing it explicitly exposes the conditions for and processes of
persuasion and, thus, complicity. Further, the achievement of hegemony is, for Buttigieg, enabled because the things done are given meaning and organized through leadership, which for Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) is implicit in the reference to “ascendency”. So, to claim that a particular society or transnational society’s hegemonic constitution includes hegemonic masculinity as a form of domination imposed on men and women, where domination in its taken-for-grantedness removes or ignores the important subtleties of leadership/ascendancy and persuasion that have been built into the theory of hegemony, will make it difficult to make sense of masculinity in all its forms and expressions. In taking up this approach, it is also instructive to include processes that lead to the development of meaning, as well as practice through leadership. Leadership, in turn, is the starting point from which persuasion is made possible and, thus, complicity and consensus are achieved. This heightens the importance of the structural nature of hegemony in which both material and non-material facets – notably, meaning, identity as well as, practice or things done – operate in synthesis. Leadership as ascendancy then, holds discursive value and gives meaning to the aspirations of men (and women), and then their actions for achievement, that expose the crucial importance of persuasion and complicity in the creation and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity and hegemony:

What distinguishes hegemony from domination is precisely the symbiotic relationship between the government (which is frequently identified with the State in mainstream political theory) and civil society, a relationship, then, that cannot be analyzed in any meaningful way if one starts with a conception of civil society as something separate from and opposed to the State. No one explained this more clearly than Gramsci in his Prison Notebooks.

(Buttigieg, 2005, pp. 37–38)

Power structures within the gender system, as Connell and Messerschmidt point out, were in fact identified in the early research, and in so doing, the focus was placed on the conversion of power to domination and the identification of men, or more specifically men who express particular forms of masculinity, as capable of this conversion and thus positioned as the “dominant” group. In many ways, since then, the application of hegemony to hegemonic masculinity has continued this focus. However, this has been, in perhaps too many instances within CSMM, to the exclusion of the importance of the broader civil society or what Gramsci referred to as the “subaltern” and, more importantly, the synergetic nature of both groups. In both Weber and Gramsci we see that domination expresses a set of processes whereby rules are followed – not always by imposing coercion but, rather, by producing agreement within the popular consciousness of the rules. Thus, by challenging the domination emphasis and in line with the approach to hegemony set out by Buttigieg’s interpretation of Gramsci’s texts, the reason there is value in deconstructing the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and domination is that it enables clarity around the importance of the symbiotic relationship. In other words, it highlights the importance of the other forms of masculinity such as “complicit”, “subordinate” and “marginalized”, as well as femininity and, in particular, “emphasized femininity”, for the continuation of the hegemonic process. This more than anything problematizes the foundationalist position meaning/identity/practice, because it exposes the radically contingent nature of hegemonic masculinity and the contingent relations of multiple masculinities. So here, the term “symbiotic relationship” takes on particular importance because it indicates that, for each identity within the plurality of masculinities and femininities (see Howson, 2006), the constitution of their meaning/identity
must rely on the influence of the “other” and not autonomously (or essentialistically) produced meaning/identity. The product of this networked reliance is the gender system. So again, why it is important to push hegemonic masculinity beyond the domination analogue is that by doing so it is possible to put aside the essentialism and foundationalism that enables the taken-for-grantedness of privilege and makes men visible within symbiotic networks. More importantly still, it exposes the very real enabling role of ascendency and leadership, persuasion, aspiration towards achievement, complicity, the operation of violence and coercion in the making of gendered meanings and identifications that inform and produce the configurations of practice within the hegemony.

It is fair to say that within CSMM a significant amount of research energy has been expended applying, explaining and critiquing hegemonic masculinity; notwithstanding this, the outcome is the representation of hegemonic masculinity as a static concept (see Messerschmidt, 2012). It could be argued that this has been and is because of the continued presence of domination in its articulation. While this emphasis and approach provide the tools for being able to express a clear and present dichotomy within the gender system, it is far less effective in enabling understanding of the conditions that enable hegemonic masculinity within the current gender system. In short, to understand these conditions better, there is much research value in shifting attention to complicity within the gender system.

But equally important as the move beyond the domination analogue towards leadership and complicity are two further additions. First, while consensus is the basis of the making of a hegemonic group such as, men, it is not the only force in operation. Hegemony will always involve, predominantly indirectly but directly when required, the use of coercion. In other words, the exercise of power, simply put as the ability to impose one’s interests upon the other against their resistance (see Weber, 1978), is required but is not the primary force. Gramsci (1971, p. 263) put it this way, “one might say that State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion.” This opens up the second addition, that is, that hegemony is never created and sustained in those spaces within society where power or pure power operates as domination. For Gramsci, this is no more than the crude operation of politics. Instead, hegemony is very much a force that is enabled through power’s engagement with civil society, that is, the subaltern and therefore the creation of consensus. But it is always an engagement that is underwritten or protected by processes of coercion and, where necessary, violence, and it is here that political society, in Gramsci’s terms or ascendant groups for Connell and Messerschmidt, play their part. So, for a group to become and operate hegemonically, it must be able to operate effectively within the nexus: the political/power and the social/subaltern. This means articulating and dispersing a legitimacy that enables the engagement and the building of consensus and complicity rather than simply imposing power as domination that ensures a crude form of subordination. The question of legitimacy, though present in the early definitions of hegemonic masculinity, has often not been highlighted in most subsequent usages and applications.

Thus the application of these few, but key, concepts within the theory of hegemony enables us to see that a hegemonic group exercises pure power not as domination but, rather, as a form of legitimate leadership as authority, and here we can define the latter as: authority = power + legitimacy. Moreover, applying hegemony to gender systems, in the way outlined here, means problematizing not only of the pushing and pulling of ready-formed groupings, and different kinds of masculinity, but also the taken-for-grantedness of the very categories of men and women, as in concern with the hegemony of men (Hearn, 2004). It also opens up national, societal or cultural hegemony to transnational and transsocietal problematics (cf. Connell, 2007; Hearn, 2015).
Hegemonic masculinity and beyond

In masculinities theory, hegemony grounds understandings of men and masculinity. But we argue here that there is value in a reconsideration of the concept that goes into the theoretical beyond, notwithstanding an acceptance of the points made by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005). An important caveat, though, in moving into the theoretical and practical beyond, is that while ascendency and leadership have been argued here to be important, we should not accept these as necessarily positive aspects of hegemonic masculinity—rather, that hegemonic leadership is simply a configuration of practices and meanings that enable the building of compliance based on a consensus of the rules. In the context of hegemonic masculinity this produces the taken-for-grantedness and invisibility that have become part of the nature of men and masculinities. This configuration of practices and meanings is what might be referred to, following Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and Laclau (1990), as the centre of the (material) discursive space. However, if we can understand hegemonic masculinity as the centre of a gendered discursive space, then we must also recognize that its meanings and practices have been hegemonically given through its radically contingent symbiotic relations with “the other” within the gender system, and so it is fraught with antagonisms and contestation. It is a centre that because of these conditions can only be understood in the context of that which the centre must hegemonically exclude, such as subordinate and marginalized masculinities and femininity. These excluded identifications become its radical contingent outside. They are radical because, while outside of the centre, they exert upon it a constitutive force. This is because in a discursive space no identity puts in place practices without meaning attached, and no meaning exists in and of itself with complete stability and fixity. Yet, as Messerschmidt (2012, p. 72) concludes, albeit with respect to the “character type” of hegemonic masculinity, this is predominantly how hegemonic masculinity is being applied in CSMM, that is:

Within the core articles examined, there remains a fundamental collective intellectual tendency by numerous editors, reviewers, and authors “to read ‘hegemonic masculinity’ as a static character type, …” [emphasis in original]

To move beyond the static ossification that pervades the application of hegemonic masculinity in CSMM, there is value, as Messerschmidt points out and following Connell, in considering moving away from the individuation of hegemonic character to exploring how all meaning and all practices are enabled, even constituted, through the relationality between identities and particularly with their radical outside. This removes whatever essentialist and individualist privileges and positions are perceived to be given by hegemonic masculinity to men, and replaces them with a more questioning approach to privilege based on the dynamics inherent to socially construction.

Crucially though, as suggested above, the relationality involved in social construction also creates antagonism, and it is this that converts a social relationship into a political relationship, thereby marking relationships between the centre and the radical other. For example, tensions between gay and straight, black and white, as well as, for example, inter-religious differences are very often converted into political antagonism. However, for hegemonic masculinity to be created in such a way that it can produce a level of compliance based on a hegemonized consensus, it is necessary that a masculinity type be able to empty itself of meanings and practices and be able to constitute and re-constitute itself to accommodate new meanings and practices that align with, but can also influence, the popular
consciousness. This is while simultaneously legitimizing the application of coercion, where required, to exclude and/or marginalize others. Once included, the broader task of hegemony is to then create the perception of stability and fixedness and the desire within the mass (of men) to aspire towards that which is now given legitimacy and privilege.

In *Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity* (Howson, 2006), it was shown how, in the Australian cultural context, hegemonic masculinity defined but also stabilized itself upon the “hegemonic principles” of heterosexuality, breadwinning and aggression (a process that extends and has been highlighted in other international and transnational cultural contexts). The continued privilege received by men that allows certain character traits of hegemonic masculinity to remain taken-for-granted, and thus invisible, have their social ontological roots in the enabling of these principles. This ontological, and indeed epistemological, approach emphasizes the socio-political objective that seeks to uncover and analyse the conditions that enable hegemonic masculinity, as opposed to the ontic where the focus of analysis is simply exposing and describing specific sorts of masculinities in an attempt to classify and compare. In addition, because a specific form of masculinity/femininity can only be understood in relation to all the others, the meaning and practices attributed to any one form is not essentially given but is always in relation to meaning and practice that exist radically.

In the context of the discussion so far, there is value in revisiting our understanding of hegemonic masculinity and specifically, by bringing to it a “sociology of postmarxism” (see Howson, 2017). In this context, three issues need to be highlighted. First, it is problematic to continue applying hegemonic masculinity as domination, given that the basis of hegemony itself is marked by leadership and persuasion in the creation of complicity. Second, it is equally problematic to accept hegemonic masculinity as a stable masculinity type, because this simply moves the emphasis away from social dynamic reality to an emphasis on the individual and processes of individuation. Finally, in emphasizing the centring of hegemonic masculinity within the gender system, but also its non-essentialist nature, the radical contingent nature of its constitution is exposed, and with it antagonism. What these three issues indicate is that the very nature of the hegemony of men is far more complex than the model of patriarchal domination as universal. The hegemony of men and the hegemonic masculinity produced must negotiate a way to make non-essentialism and particularity appear as essential and universal, with the latter being the expression of the legitimate privilege enjoyed by “all” complicit men, as implied within the definition of hegemonic masculinity. To overcome these problems of particularity, which in postmarxism is referred to as organized within the logic of difference, requires movement to a logic of equivalence. Central to this movement and highlighted in the application of hegemonic masculinity within CSMM, it has been argued elsewhere (e.g. Howson, 2017) that hegemonic masculinity be considered as an “empty signifier” (see Laclau, 1996, p. 36; Howson, 2017) because, *inter alia,* this assists in addressing these key issues of complicity and in the movement from difference to equivalence through the application of concepts, such as complicity and aspiration central to the development and maintenance of the hegemony of men.

We can begin to understand what an empty signifier is by considering what appears as completely obvious. It is a signifier without a signified; representation without meaning; identity or type without content. As Laclau states, this definition also expresses a problem insofar as how there can be a disconnection between signifier and signified. The answer is because the system has inherent to it a “structural impossibility” that further is expressed as a subversion of the system (Laclau, 1996, p. 37). By structural impossibility is meant that the structure of the system, for our purposes the gender system, can never complete itself, and, as such, its own stability is impossible. This is where hegemony and its key mechanism
hegemonic masculinity as an empty signer play a most important role, because here it must create the perception of completeness and stability. However, as an empty signer it cannot represent the purity of masculinity, because what it must constantly do is enact exclusions (the very idea of masculinities as plurality indicates that the purity of masculinity is impossible). Nor can it expose the pure difference between men and women, between masculinities and between femininities, because the structural impossibility of the system produces antagonisms (which means that, for example, the difference between gay and straight is not given by a clearly defined limit) that, in turn, express the subversion of pure difference. Rather, hegemonic masculinity as the empty signifier of a structurally impossible gender system has the task of bringing together a range of differential meanings and practices and binding them into a particular discursive formation. Just as in the process of ascending to leadership, the task is to bring together elements of gender to work together to persuade the popular consciousness of the legitimacy of its hegemonic principles as well as the exclusion and marginalization of anything that might jeopardize or not represent the these principles. So, the real privilege and authority of hegemonic masculinity as being expressed in things done is only part of the whole; by moving beyond this point, we can now understand it to be expressed not by what it does or is or is perceived to contain in terms of meanings and practices but, instead, through its instability, fluidity and, ultimately, its emptiness; in this way it can address the problems of structural impossibility and produce compliance and consensus within the whole gender system.

Concluding discussion

The emptiness of any signer, such as hegemonic masculinity, means that it exists because a system cannot get to a point where it can complete itself and provide stability but, rather, is always open and dynamic, where the meanings and practices that constitute the discursive content must be able to be altered to protect the hegemony. Likewise for hegemony, or a hegemonic facet, the “objective” of hegemonic masculinity is to create the perception of the purity of masculine meaning and practice and, as a consequence, its authority. At this point, it is important to remind ourselves that hegemony, which is the building of authority through the exercise of power and the creation of legitimacy on the basis of the obfuscation or blocking of radical content, is not achieved on the basis of the modernist imperative for truth and progress or even more problematic domination. Rather, it is achieved predominantly on the basis of a hegemonized consensus that enables aspiration and compliance. In other words, hegemonic masculinity as the empty signifier of the gender system must indeed become the centre and the authority capable of ensuring that the majority of people continue to aspire towards certain forms of masculinity and femininity and thus must embody certain meanings and practices. However, the representation of the gender system through an empty signifier such as hegemonic masculinity does not mean that masculinity has not been achieved; rather, it is constitutively unachievable. It is perhaps why there has been much discussion about what actually constitutes hegemonic masculinity. Do we need to express it in global, transnational or national terms? Are there many hegemonic masculinities? The answer is to address these questions not ontically but, rather, ontologically, that is, by examining the conditions of the gender system such as its hegemonic principles, desire and aspiration, leadership and processes of persuasion, that in turn require consideration of hegemonic mechanisms such as the media, the family, the workplace, religion and sport. This then makes the purity and truth of masculinities secondary to the ontological or hegemonic task of persuasion and aspiration. But, most importantly, it is about exposing the processes of
obfuscation of the constitutive nature of antagonism and its radically excluded content from hegemonic masculinity. In this way, it acts as the re-presentation of what is an effectively impossible masculine purity in and across gender relations.

Notes

1 We use the terms “discursive” and/or “discursive space” drawing on the postmarxist approach to discourse. A discursive space is constituted by processes of meaning construction and delivery (discursive) that connect to, influence, and cannot be separated from the material configurations of practice (extra-discursive) that consequently emerge (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).
2 It is not always acknowledged that the earliest use of hegemonic masculinity was in the 1979 paper entitled “Men’s bodies” (Connell, 1979/1983).
3 Domination can be understood to be enforced by rules, and in this context Weber (1978, p. 53) defines domination as “the probability that a command [rule] with a specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons.” This suggests that here we have exposed the nexus between power and cooperation or the basis of complicity/consensus. Rules cannot operate and be obeyed without cooperation (Howson, 2017).
4 Throughout the body of Connell’s work there is a consistent recognition and in many cases development of civil society, institutions, persuasion and cultural aspects of hegemony. Yet, in the descriptions of hegemonic masculinity in both Masculinities and the “Rethinking Hegemonic Masculinity” article, it is domination that seems to dominate explanations of gender relations.
5 Drawing on Laclau’s later work, in particular the development of the idea of “radical contingency” (see Laclau, 1990; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), its application to masculinities theory is possible (Howson, 2017).
6 Gramsci (1971) makes a number of important revisions to how civil society had been understood. First, Gramsci separates political society, the economy and civil society, but primarily for analytical purposes. Secondly, because civil society does not include the economy, it can be described as constituted by the Church (or similar), associations, trade unions and cultural institutions. Third, civil society is key to the creation of the State (as hegemony), and so is always connected to political society.

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