A Best Example of a Literature

Review

This literature review reflects the ways in which I am developing ideas and making links between the themes of banter, gender, identity, performance, space, and sport.  The aim is to introduce banter into the sociological context, tracing how this new field of study links to existing theories and perspectives, with a specific focus on emphasising the way that banter, as an area of study, is valuable in its own right, whilst simultaneously enriching existing fields.  The review will begin with a section dedicated to exploring men and masculinity, followed by discussion of banter and gendered identities, themes of performance, and finally, situating banter in space.

### Men and Masculinity

This section will outline the gender theories that will act as the foundation for my project. Hegemonic theorizing will be introduced as the theory which will act as a catalyst for thinking and debates in subsequent chapters. Once this theory has been summarized within the context of my research, this section will progress to engage with theories which have emerged to expand and progress this thinking, once again providing a basis for my own argument within the analysis chapters. Discussion will then move towards specific engagement with literature on sporting masculinities and the rugby lad.

#### Hegemonic masculinity theorizing and its critiques

Theorising on hegemonic masculinity dominates much of the literature on men and masculinity. This is also a prominent theory in research on men and sport. It is for these reasons that such theorizing will inform debates within the analysis. My research will aim to explore the ways in which hegemonic masculinity as a configuration of gender practice is experienced by men in reality (Connell, 1995). It is therefore important to provide a discussion of the ways in which this theory has developed and been adopted within research, as well as acknowledging the criticisms and alternatives which have emerged.

Hegemonic masculinity scholarship and theorizing is a relatively recent advancement within studies of gender and masculinity, with many advocating that the concept proves as ‘slippery’ to understand as that of masculinity itself (Howson, 2006; Connell, 2005; Donaldson, 1993). The idea builds upon the work and Marxian perspectives of Gramsci on hegemony, which he discusses in relation to class (Gramsci, 2005, Connell, 2005). Within this work Gramsci (2005) conceptualizes hegemony as being significant to understanding the maintenance of power in society, as well as the formation of dominant social groups and structures.  Raewyn Connell supports this, arguing that hegemony is ‘the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life’ (2005: 77). Notably, in much of the literature which discusses Gramscian perspectives of hegemony, such as that by Connell, emphasis is placed upon persuasion of dominant cultural ideas through the media and other social institutions, such as the sporting sites at the centre of my research, resulting in ideologies becoming normalized (Donaldson, 1993; Demetriou, 2001; Connell, 2005).  My own research will continue to build on this early theorising, in doing so extending this theorising into new directions.

The term hegemonic masculinity itself arrived some time later, the starting point for which in Sociology was credited to the emergent behavioural and identity changes seen amongst boys after the Second World War (Howson, 2006). Described by Connell (2005: 831) to be a ‘synthesis’ of many other ideas, particularly stemming from frustrations with the ‘male sex role’ model prominent in the literature on gender in the 1970’s, Connell sought to develop this idea further. Male sex role theorisations asserted that specific traits, attitudes and behaviours acted to validate an individual’s sex as male (Pleck, 1987). Such work was problematic for a number of reasons, notably the positivist connotations; however the prominence of the work within academia meant that ‘normative’ ideas of identity according to sex became mainstream. Connell’s work provided a critique of these narratives, offering an alternative to previous theorising, placing emphasis upon issues which had been overlooked, such as power (Moller, 2007; Connell 2005, 1987).  The progressive nature of Connell’s work, and its significance as a conceptual tool to further explore masculinity and the gender order were acknowledged as key strengths, even by those most critical of hegemonic masculinity conceptualisations (Moller, 2007; Hearn, 2004; Demetriou, 2001). It is due to the significance of such work and the emphasis upon interrogating power relations that this theory will be prominent within this project, utilising this to unpick understandings of masculinity.

Regardless of the existing critiques, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has now become widely utilized and is commonly drawn upon in research on masculinities (Howson, 2006; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). This extensive usage has meant that the term itself has become somewhat diluted in recent years, with definitions altering according to discipline and author. Having said this, consensus remains that the term is conceptualised in relation to Connell’s initial theorizing, referring to ‘the pattern of practice that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue’ (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 832). Early theorizing was based on ideas of power, dominance, and difference, noting that male power had been achieved through ‘culture, institutions and persuasion’ (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 832; Connell, 2005). More recently the notion of hegemony has, as stated by Hearn (2004: 53) ‘provided a way to think about the overarching ideologies at the level of everyday, taken for granted ideas and practice performed “with consent” and “without coercion”.’ Further to this, hegemonic masculinity continues to be utilized as a theoretical tool to explore the construction and maintenance of the gender order, with Howson arguing that hegemonic masculinity took ‘control of the gender order’ (2006: 3). The links between hegemonic masculinity and gender more broadly have been widely discussed, with writers suggesting that hegemonic masculinity theorising provided a new way of approaching gender relations (Johansson and Ottemo, 2015). The continued prominence and application of this theory to analyse men’s experiences, once again makes it appropriate for this dissertation.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), in their writing on rethinking the concept of hegemonic masculinity, assert that masculinities are subject to change and that hegemonic masculinity theory is sufficiently robust in order to be able to remodel itself and continue to be relevant. However, in more recent writing there have been critiques of hegemonic masculinity, with alternative ways of theorizing men within the wider context of gender proposed. McKay et al. (2000: 7) acknowledge that experiences of men within sports settings are not ‘uniform’. They suggested the potential for resistance to forms of hegemonic masculinity and that this warrants further exploration. Ian Wellard (2009, 2002) provides further insight into this notion of resistance and uniformity in his work on ‘exclusive’ masculinity. Drawing on ethnographic observations in a variety of sporting contexts Wellard (2009, 2002) argues that there are both exclusive and expected forms of masculinity. Whilst he is to some extent aligning with hegemonic theorizing, his work is distinctly different in the way that he acknowledges other forms of masculinity and begins to explore notions of resistance and agency (Wellard, 2009, 2002). Wellard (2009) suggests that men have to work in order to ‘fit in’ with dominant forms of masculinity in sporting spaces.  In doing so there is the implication that this is a conscious decision and that those men therefore have the potential to deviate or make different choices with regards to how they situate themselves within the gender order. The idea of ‘choice’ will be a significant theme explored within my dissertation, therefore, this work from Wellard (2009,2002) will form an important foundation for theoretical discussions and analysis throughout the project.

Considering all of the points from this section together it is interesting to reflect on where we are with regards to the value and relevance of the hegemonic model in understanding men’s practices. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 830) argue that hegemonic masculinity must be ‘reformulated’ in contemporary terms, in doing so themselves acknowledging that previous theorizations may no longer be relevant in modern contexts. Though they are arguing for reformulation of the concept, the argument and examples presented within this section show that a reformulation of the concept is potentially problematic.  It is clear from the critiques noted here that such theorizations could hinder productive theorizing of masculinities and that there is potential for new theories to emerge. This will be a central aim of this dissertation. Having said this, it is important to be cautious when making such assertions, as there are those thinkers who assert that there is no ‘beyond hegemony’ and that through dismantling existing hierarchies and exclusions within society that there is an inevitability regarding the construction of new ones (Laclau and Mouffee, 2005).

**More reasons why this version is the ‘best’ include:**

* The points and arguments are appropriately and consistently supported by the literature.
* The literature utilized is varied (author and age of work).
* Quotations are integrated into the argument carefully and help to further the point/ argument (avoid just putting these in randomly!).
* The paragraphs are carefully connected, they flow logically which helps to build a clear argument.
* The writing is clear and there are few grammatical or spelling errors.

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