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Title:

Approaches to Studying Masculinity: A Nonlinear Perspective of Theoretical Paradigms

Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to argue that there is a need to locate theoretical paradigms on masculinity within a nonlinear perspective, and this has implications for the conceptualization of the research agenda. Over the last 40 years, discussions and research on masculinity have been arranged in time-related stages where each stage is marked by a change in theoretical underpinnings. These conceptual shifts uphold a distinction between “old” and “new” paradigms where in consequence the former or the latter (depending on personal beliefs) becomes devalued to some degree. This paper suggests that in the context of masculinity studies one cannot impede or deny the usefulness and value of the previous theoretical paradigms. Similarly, new paradigms should not be seen as less significant. The approach based on “nonlinearity of theoretical paradigms” acknowledges the coexistence of paradigms, which are seen as equally relevant to contemporary contexts. Moreover, this discussion on nonlinearity implies that research on masculinity, in its search for comprehensiveness, could apply a concept of theoretical paradigm as a *modus operandi* for each undertaken study.

Introduction

This paper focuses on theoretical paradigm shifts or, in other words, the conceptual changes in masculinity studies and their impact on research practice within the last 45 years. The changing context of research on masculinity has been well articulated, but the interpretation is often positioned in a linear manner. Linearity indicates that research has moved through a number of time-related stages where a particular period of time tends to be linked with a certain theoretical perspective (Edwards, 2006; Hearn et al., 2012). The assumption that research on masculinity is arranged by stages has important theoretical and methodological implications for studying gender. First, I will illustrate what are commonly defined as three major theoretical shifts within masculinity studies to highlight their implications for studying gender.

Since the 1970s, the research in this field has been preoccupied with *masculinity and how it is positioned in relation to feminism*. The publication of Kate Millett’s *Sexual*

Politics (1977) opened the academic discussion on power relations from the female perspective and became a powerful critique of patriarchal culture. Sexual politics is seen as a practice that helps to establish men's dominance over women in private and public spheres. Unequal gender relations are sustained by the fact that mostly men govern social, economic, and political institutions. In this context, equality for women is seen as a gradual process that has to incorporate social and legal reforms grounded in democratic foundations. There are distinctive ways in which academics have responded to feminism; nowadays, with a growing volume of literature on men and masculinity, it is important to recognize the differences in each authors' political and theoretical assumptions, which have an impact on the nature of the research agenda (Messner, 1997). Feminist theories seek to explore and understand how different social, cultural and institutional practices affect women's lives. Their focus is on gender inequalities and the construction and reproduction of gender and sexual differences. Profeminist academics on masculinity (e.g. Kimmel, 1990; Mac and Ghail, 1996; Whitehead, 2002; Connell, 2005) are concerned with this unequal nature of social structures, the reproduction of women's marginality and subordination through politics and media. For them, theories of feminism call for the revision of manhood in ways that contribute to the development of a deeper understanding of masculinity. Research sharing the feminist agenda problematizes gender inequalities so that they become a significant terrain of analysis.

From the mid-1980s to the early 2000s, the Connellian conceptualization of masculinity, in line with the feminist agenda, offered complex theoretical insights into masculinity in itself. Connell's theory of *hegemonic masculinity* (1987) brought recognition of inequalities among men and acknowledgement that patriarchy brings profits to all men, with some (depending, for example, on social class, ethnicity, sexuality, age, education, or race) benefiting more than others. Moreover, Connell observed (1995) that gender ought to be discussed in plural forms such as masculinities where the pluralising of the expression highlights individual views on what it means to be a man. With the recognition of *multiple masculinities*, research on gender has become concerned with the diversity of men's personal feelings, perspectives, and different representations of manhood. That is not to say that Connell's approach is not framed by issues of power relations between genders or ignores gendered experiences of women. However, contemporary research on men

and masculinities which has been developed within the Connellian framework is established mostly from a mindset that is preoccupied with the category of ‘men’, questions surrounding masculinity, and men’s relationships.

Finally, from 2009 onward, Eric Anderson’s (2009) inclusive masculinity theory has been in use to capture changes in intimacy and emotionality among men. The Andersonian perspective moves away from the hierarchical order of social relations where men attempt to distance themselves from femininity or position themselves within the orthodox ideologies of manhood. The focus is instead mostly directed toward multiple masculinities, which can coexist without dominating one another or aiming to establish hegemonic relationships. With a greater awareness of the human rights agenda and greater access to information, more inclusive styles of masculinity become legitimized. At the same time, Anderson’s theory is often criticized for neglecting gendered power relations. It assumes a static framework of inclusivity within which men’s experiences are investigated.

Conceptualized in a linear manner, research on masculinity brings to the foreground the multiplicity of perspectives. However, one might suggest that time-related thinking, paired with researchers’ tendency to work mainly within a contemporary theoretical framework, might create an illusion of separation between “old” and “new” paradigms. At the same time, depending on personal beliefs, some academics might be reluctant to accept the latest conceptual frameworks.

Researchers continue to evaluate knowledge in the context of historical, social, cultural, and economic changes, posing new kinds of questions that can only be answered by producing new theories. Consequently, theoretical paradigms, which are used to understand the concepts of masculinity and gender issues, are in constant transition. However, this transition does not necessarily indicate that previously used theoretical paradigms have lost their value. Similarly, the succeeding paradigm should not be perceived as less significant, as it aims to capture the complexity of a new context. That is not to say that any theoretical idea can be classified as a theoretical paradigm. There are diverse contexts and diverse areas of academic inquiry within masculinity studies, but paradigms represent the main framework of understanding the existing status quo (for more discussion, see sections *Theoretical Paradigms in Conducting Research on Masculinity* and *Explaining the Nature of Theoretical Paradigms*).

Linear thinking about research on masculinity creates (to some degree) confusion among researchers. Applying time-related linearity rests on the idea that one has to either neglect or reject certain paradigms. In this paper, a central argument is that a clearer understanding of research on masculinity should recognize the nonlinearity of theoretical paradigms, which coexist, all being applicable to contemporary contexts. Knowledge is not absolute and the understanding of the world is constantly changing (Kuhn, [1962] 1996). Similarly, the changing conditions of social, cultural, and economic reality reshape gender relations and in consequence the nature of research on masculinity. However, the continued relevance of theoretical paradigms might be explained through the fact that (a) “old” gender and class inequalities still have a significant impact on life chances and opportunities; (b) new patterns of socioeconomic inequalities emerge, creating new forms of division; and (c) a greater understanding of the human rights agenda contributes to the democratization of social expectations, but as discussed later it does not imply that relations of hierarchy have disappeared. Thus, the nonlinear approach does not lead to the rejection of the validity of earlier or present theoretical paradigms. It acknowledges paradigms as continuously relevant to contemporary contexts.

A further issue relates to the employment of the term “theoretical paradigm” in planning and conducting research on masculinity. The term is commonly used in the vast majority of social sciences subjects. However, it seems that in the field of masculinity studies researchers do not necessarily differentiate between “theoretical paradigm” and “theory”. This paper argues that the conceptualization of gender issues within the research on masculinity can be framed by three major theoretical paradigms, namely, “patriarchal relations paradigm”, “hegemonic masculinity paradigm”, and “inclusive masculinity paradigm”. In short, “theoretical paradigm = conceptualization of gender issues” and “theory = conceptualization of theoretical paradigm”. In a practical sense, introducing a theoretical paradigm as a starting point of inquiry has crucial implications for the undertaken investigation.

This paper aims to re-examine paradigmatic and methodological assumptions involved in the study of men and masculinities; and by doing so, contribute to debates on researching gender. Research on masculinity might take many forms and offer multiple frameworks of analysis but if it is to be seen as a comprehensive exploration,

then it has to consider the complexity of the linearity and nonlinearity of theoretical paradigms.

Theoretical Paradigms in Conducting Research on Masculinity

The nonlinear perspective should not be geared towards the notion of “competing theoretical paradigms”; as such, it would replicate to some degree the views of the linear approach. Rather, each paradigm can provide its distinctive character contributing to the different aspects of ideological, political, and social agendas. As can be seen in Table 1, three theoretical paradigms draw on different conceptual perspectives that contribute to focusing on diverse frames of interpretation. Whereas, in masculinity studies, there are multiple areas of academic inquiry, a choice of theoretical paradigm might position the researcher within a particular framework of thought.

Table 1

<i>Theoretical paradigms within research on masculinity</i>	<i>Masculinity In Relation To Second-Wave Feminism</i>	<i>Connellian Conceptualization Of Masculinity</i>	<i>Andersonian Inclusivity of Masculine Behaviours</i>
<i>Conceptual perspective</i>	Strong focus on the reproduction of inequalities between men and women in social, cultural, political, and economic structures	Strong focus on the reproduction of inequalities among men in social, cultural, political, and economic structures Recognizing the multiplicity of masculinities	Strong focus on masculinities that coexist without dominating one another Recognizing changes in intimacy/emotionality among men
<i>Purpose</i>	Addressing gender power relations Researching gender inequalities between men and women in education and employment Promoting the politics of equality	Addressing hierarchical order among men Researching inequalities among men based, for example, on class, race, sexual orientation, and social culture Promoting the politics of equality	Addressing changes in perspectives on divers forms of masculinity Researching cultural transformations related to social justice/gender equality Recognizing the democratization of social expectations and quality of social relations

	Raising issues of oppression, empowerment, and equality	Raising issues of oppression, empowerment, and equality	Raising issues of oppression, empowerment, and equality
Possible areas of academic enquiry	Identity, employment, schooling, violence, motherhood, media messages, and sexual exploitation	Identity, employment, schooling, violence, fatherhood, media messages, aging, sport, sexuality and health	Identity, employment, schooling, cultural transitions, media messages, aging, sport and sexuality
Limitations	<p>A narrow perception on masculinity based on an assumption that all men are equal</p> <p>Focus upon feminist politics enables the characterizing of men in the light of oppression and reinforces the image of men as victims of social and cultural changes.</p> <p>Polarization of gender relationships</p>	<p>While recognizing differences among men the primary theoretical underpinning is seen as a fixed male structure</p>	<p>Unproblematic representation of social and cultural diversity (e.g. class relations or the stratification of educational experiences).</p> <p>Neglects gender power relations.</p>
Theory	e.g. Marxist's (1932) theory of social oppression	e.g. Gramsci's (1971) framework of hegemony	e.g. Nussbaum's (2011) Capabilities and Human Rights approach

These theoretical paradigms can be used to decide on general research aims (and in consequence determine the research questions, methods, and framework of analysis). Of course, there is no single template for planning research on masculinity, but identifying a theoretical paradigm provides a means for clarifying the purpose of the research. Having a coherent conceptual framework enables one to plan and explain the philosophy behind the undertaken research. This in turn raises questions related to ontological and epistemological considerations. For example, the aim of the research might be to capture a complex interplay between “changes in the labor market” and their impact on “constructions of local masculinity”. In this context, choosing a theoretical paradigm might provide a meaningful structure for the studied phenomena.

The “masculinity in relation to second-wave feminism” paradigm could possibly focus on the “gendering” of work. It could include differences in the type and status of male and female jobs, gender disparities in terms of the financial rewards and the impact of these different conditions of employment on social position and identity. Nevertheless, in some contexts, the fundamental perception of men’s work as economically valuable and women’s work as being ‘caregivers’, has been questioned to some degree by the changing political and economic landscape. Consequently, within this paradigm the research on gender might also explore patterns of resistance. For example, within the last 50 years in the United Kingdom, the shift from heavy manufacturing to service-sector employment has reconstructed a traditional notion of “being a man” (McDowell, 2009). The problematic element is that much of the service industry requires attributes that are conventionally seen as nonmasculine, especially among working-class men (e.g. service with a smile, empathy, or patience). Maintaining the balance between the “masculine self” and the nature of service employment might trigger patterns of resistance where men might become forced to distance themselves from femininity/feminine behaviours. This paradigm could capture perspectives on construction and reproduction of gender differences.

On the contrary, within the Connellian conceptualization of masculinity the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” could be used to illustrate class inequalities and investigate employment opportunities available for working-class and middle-class men. As heavy industry switched to automation and high-tech manufacture, the UK Government to compete in the global economy has started valuing the intellectual workforce (thus favouring the middle class who is more likely to remain in education longer and successively prosper into business-like employment). Men from less affluent backgrounds are more likely to find themselves in low-skill and precarious employment (Lindsay, 2003). In the context of this paradigm, the focus is on capturing the hierarchical order among men and highlighting the role of environmental factors (structure) in shaping one’s future life chances. Certain constructions of masculinity become culturally exalted depending on the socioeconomic climate of a particular time and place.

Finally, the Andersonian “inclusive masculinity” paradigm could aim to explore to what degree and in what manner individual experiences of (young) men are shaped by the contemporary labor market. Taking into account the perspective that hegemonic

masculinity is no longer universally valued in the West (as it has a negative impact not only on women or gay men but also on heterosexual men themselves) allows one to explore the coexistence of multiple masculinities in the workplace environment. However, this coexistence is not underpinned by a need to establish hegemony but rather legitimizes the inclusivity of behaviors and respect for diversity (Roberts, 2012; McCormack, 2014; Anderson and McCormack, 2016; Borkowska, 2016).

The critical consideration of social, economic, and cultural factors will have implications for the choice of theoretical paradigm. Nevertheless, it has to be highlighted that there is a potential problem with conceptualizing research on masculinity through the prism of theoretical paradigms. It might be suggested that this conceptual model ignores the holistic understanding and separates perspectives that overlap and interact with each other. Focusing on a particular approach could possibly restrict one's viewpoint. Of course, theoretical paradigms are not a fragmented representation of reality. There is a dynamic interconnectedness among them and they must be seen as overlapping and complementary ideologies. Therefore, this emerging complexity involved in conducting research cannot be addressed simply by a choice among theoretical paradigms. Having an awareness and knowledge related to the complexity of all theoretical paradigms might expand the horizons of an individual paradigmatic choice. There is a need to move beyond a selective understanding of conceptual frameworks and address issues of distinctiveness and holism of paradigms through reflexivity and critical thinking. One can choose a theoretical paradigm depending on the aim of the research and individual understanding of the social, cultural, and political relations. Nevertheless, working within a certain theoretical paradigm should be paired with an ability to acknowledge the strengths and limitations of chosen theoretical standpoints. It has to be borne in mind that consideration of limitations does not undermine the validity of the undertaken research. It contributes to creating a research agenda, which is thoughtful and critical.

The choice of the theoretical paradigm provides a meaningful and coherent structure for research projects (Cohen et al., 2007). However, it has further implications for research on masculinity. It essentially helps to overcome the false linear thinking about "old" and "new" theoretical paradigms or separation into "before" and "after" the hegemonic masculinity research. There is one more underlying dimension of the false linear thinking, namely, theoretical paradigms cannot stand in opposition to one

other. As theoretical paradigms do not become outdated, the concept of competing theories would not explain the reality adequately. For this reason, although there is a need to accept the distinctiveness of each theoretical paradigm, it is not feasible to reject certain paradigms to conceptualize one's research agenda. Of course, there is a risk of presenting theoretical paradigms as more static than they actually are. However, having a holistic awareness of theoretical paradigms is an important step toward overcoming the restricted and simplistic understanding of the research on masculinity.

Explaining the Nature of Theoretical Paradigms

Within the field of masculinity studies, a paradigm is often unspoken. There is no unified terminology to justify paradigmatic underpinnings of the research. Academics apply multiplicity of terms to define a single ideological perspective, "a theory" (e.g. Scoats, 2015, p. 2), "a concept" (e.g. Duncanson, 2015, p. 232; Walker and Eller, 2015, p. 2; Curtis, 2014, p. 121), or "a framework" (e.g. Creighton et al., 2015, p. 560), or base their research solely on the area of academic inquiry without referring to the wider theoretical paradigm (e.g. media messages; Sumerau et al., 2015). Both the use of multiple terminologies and focus placed on a conceptual theme cover to some degree researchers' theoretical understanding per se. However, it does not reflect the rational and overall theoretical underpinnings of the undertaken research. *Modus operandi* is embodied in the terminology and the nature of "theoretical paradigm".

There is a clear distinction to be drawn between what is defined as "theoretical paradigm" and "theory" (or concept or framework). In the context of masculinity studies, the theoretical paradigm would be an overall perspective, which reflects fundamental beliefs, entailed in the research about the nature of gender inequality. Thus, the theoretical paradigm facilitates a wider understanding of ideological underpinnings. The focus for a theoretical paradigm is to define one's approach to understanding reality, which influences the research style, whereas theory becomes one of the elements, which provides meaning to the studied phenomena. This theory might be used to explain the area of inquiry to pull together empirical data and/or to develop current conceptualization. Within the research context, theory might be confirmed, questioned, or rejected depending on the collected data (Cohen et al., 2007). The theoretical paradigm remains stable.

As can be seen in Table 1, within each theoretical paradigm, there are diverse areas of academic inquiry, where each inquiry might be underpinned by a different theory (it has to be pointed out that a similar area of investigation might be undertaken under different theoretical paradigms). For the research to be consistent, a theory has to be grounded in the realm of the chosen theoretical paradigm. To provide a clear example of this, patterns of employment are discussed through the prism of three different paradigms.

The “masculinity in relation to second-wave feminism” paradigm might focus on the reproduction of inequalities between men and women. Studies such as the European Commission’s *Gender Pay Gap Statistics* (Eurostat, 2015) or the UK Office for National Statistics’ *Women in the Labour Market* (ONS, 2013) manifest male dominance in the context of employment. First, the “gendering” of work is visible in the earnings of full-time female workers, which are 16.1% lower than those of full-time male workers (Eurostat, 2015). It is also common that, in most European Union countries, women who work in the same occupations as men earn substantially less than their male coworkers (Eurostat, 2015). Similarly, the types and levels of occupation are often a concern when discussing the employment outcomes and opportunities for women. Women are much more likely than men to be involved in caring and leisure occupations (regarded by society as inferior and less rewarding; ONS, 2013). Moreover, women are more likely to be employed on a part-time basis (ONS, 2013). Thus, within the family, when one person has to stop working to raise children, it is usually a lower-paid partner. Consequently, the contemporary labor market upholds forms of gender inequality.

Within the “Connellian conceptualization of masculinity”, one might choose to focus on the reproduction of inequalities among men. Following this overall line of reasoning, one might argue that in the current economic climate working-class men are limited to low-paid work at the lowest end of the labor market without having too many prospects (McDowell, 2009). The development of democratic capitalist societies and the scientific-technological revolution in the West in the 1980s and 1990s challenged traditional notions of masculinity (Seidler, 1993). Educational capital rather than traditional skills became the main productive force and redefined the nature of jobs. There were fewer traditional jobs such as shipbuilding or mining that could sustain a working-class man in a position of the family’s breadwinner.

Moreover, routine production jobs in the auto, steel, or rubber industries were significantly reduced. The general economic decline, which started in the late 1980s, contributed to substantial cuts of blue-collar employees. Following the recession that hit Europe and North America from 2007/2008, men from the lower socioeconomic background and without significant educational capital faced increased difficulties in the labor market. They have smaller chances than their parents to succeed due to the precarious state of employment and high rates of labor turnover. Similarly, the process of qualification inflation under which jobs that once used to be available to early school leavers are now increasingly available to those with postcompulsory education, lowering the opportunity for working-class men to enter well-paid employment. Therefore, one might argue that inequalities among men still exist where social class and educational qualifications have a crucial impact on their life chances and possibilities.

It is also possible to frame the theme of employment within the Andersonian “inclusivity of masculine behaviours” paradigm. The model underpinning this paradigm might be rooted in the growing number of educational, political, and social movements promoting equality and social justice. On the international stage, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948 [2010]), the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966 [1996]), and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966) were being developed to place value on human rights. Although these declarations had no means of political enforcement, they were offering a framework of moral principals. In the western world, since the 1990s, a discourse of human rights (arising principally from the United Nations) gathered momentum and has been used to foster widespread changes in education and social policy. These changes have been reinforced by the rise of third-way politics based on the principles of democracy and social inclusion (Giddens, 1994). Workers’ rights have been structured around a fight against forced labor, claims for fair wages and decent working conditions, or the right to create and join trade unions. In the United Kingdom since the 1980s, to increase levels of employability, a policy was in place to widen the participation in postcompulsory education by traditionally underrepresented sections of society (e.g. students from low socioeconomic backgrounds). Paradoxically, one might argue that this greater access to education does not necessarily contribute to the eradication of social inequalities. The gap

between those with no qualifications and those with academic credentials becomes more difficult to bridge. With the precarious nature of jobs, younger and less educated workers are often trapped in the peripheral positions of the labor market. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that the popularization of the human rights agenda paired with increased participation in postcompulsory education influenced (to some degree) social awareness of issues related to discrimination. That is not to suggest that social inequality has been removed, but certain forms of discrimination in education and employment (e.g. based on gender, race, religion, sexuality, and physical or mental disability) are no longer socially acceptable in the western societies. The “inclusive masculinity” paradigm acknowledges this institutional as well as the individual level of human rights awareness in the context of gender equality.

As can be seen from the discussion on employment, one might suggest that recognizing a theoretical paradigm and then theory should become a universal practice across the research on masculinity. Choosing between the two would produce valuable but limited (to some degree) research. Theoretical paradigms have significant implications for broader ideological messages of the research, whereas theory provides a coherent explanation of the researched phenomena (Cohen et al., 2007). Nevertheless, both theoretical paradigm and theory having considerable impact on the research process need to be consistent with one another.

The above discussion fails to take into account the possibility that some researchers might attempt to draw on more than one theoretical paradigm. For some scholars, academically rigorous research should be shaped by a single paradigmatic approach. For others, to capture the comprehensiveness of reality, they might consider the use of more than one theoretical paradigm. Nevertheless, conceptually, theoretical paradigms complement each other to certain degree, and for this reason, there is a possibility for paradigmatic integration within a single research.

Why Theoretical Paradigms Do Not Become Outdated

The continuity of theoretical paradigms and nonlinearity of perspectives shape the way in which gender equality is conceptualized. Breaking down the dichotomy between “old” and “new” creates potential for a deeper understanding of contemporary gender issues. Old gender inequalities still have a significant impact on

the life chances and opportunities of people. The issues of marginalization based on gender are relevant to Global North and Global South; only the context of debate might be slightly different. In different parts of the world, gender awareness is at diverse developmental stages. In many developing countries, women are vulnerable to forms of physical violence, trafficking, rape, and murder; they are forced to engage in under-age marriages and have less access to education than men (Hudson et. al, 2014). In short, gender awareness is very low. In the context of western countries, one might argue that gender equality is to some degree illusionary. Despite women's increased presence in employment, education, and politics, men continue to dominate the world's political parties, media, companies, and corporations. Women also earn substantially less than their male co-workers.

At the same time, it has to be pointed out that within the contemporary debate about social change the concept of gender equality is being redefined. New patterns of socioeconomic inequalities emerge, creating new forms of division. People might be under the impression of existing solidarity and equality among men. However, it is clear that race, class, and economic and intellectual capital create relations of power and subordination within masculine groups. Wealthy upper-class or middle-class white men are seen through the prism of hegemonic and dominant masculinity, whereas working-class men of color are more often marginalized and socially excluded (Connell, 1995; Whitehead, 2002; Seidler, 1993). Thus, there is no reason to abandon perspectives that prioritize gender-based, class-based, or, for example, race-based experiences. This differentiation of experiences might help explain gender relations and thereby gender inequalities. Gender disparities are continuously spatialized as geographic location shapes the nature of inequalities. Consequently, to recognize social hierarchies, there is a need to think in local, national, and global terms. In this context, it appears reasonable to understand theoretical paradigms in a nonlinear manner.

The changing landscape of cultural, political, and economic conditions has reshaped the way in which people conceptualize issues related to identity and belonging. As discussed above, the UN conventions along with social movements set a new discourse on inequality, respect, disadvantage, and difference. Moreover, the technological revolution in the West in the 1990s challenged traditional notions of social interaction and communication. Castells (2000) indicated that

informationization, the spread and accessibility to the same content all over the world, offers the possibility for marginalized voices to be heard. With greater access to information, people have a better understanding of the human rights agenda, which contributes to the democratization of social expectations (but it does not imply that relations of hierarchy and gender inequalities have disappeared).¹

Different paradigms might appear to be grounded in essentially different conceptual perspectives; however, they are united in their attempt to theorize and address gender issues. Research on gender is crucial for understanding social differences in the context of western culture as well as developing countries where gender awareness is still very low. Academic engagement in theories of gender equality along with social activism and individual self-reflection might transform the facets of the unequal status quo.

Synthesizing the Themes of the Paper

Traditional approaches to understanding research on masculinity are based on the assumptions of linearity of theoretical paradigms. This paper presents an alternative framework that aims to bridge across time-scale divisions to produce a more comprehensive view on conducting research within the field of masculinity studies. The central argument rests on the idea that “theoretical paradigms should be seen as nonlinear” in their nature. Such an interpretation allows one to grasp the complexity of contemporary social contexts and move beyond contextualizing research on masculinity as fixed by time-related stages. To support this claim, it is suggested that (a) theoretical paradigms are united in their search for addressing gender inequalities, (b) theoretical paradigms are not in hierarchical relations but rather underpin different conceptual frameworks, and finally (c) a researcher ought to show critical awareness in relation to the strengths and limitations of each theoretical paradigm to avoid simplistic assumptions and closed-minded judgments and interpretations of research.

Another key argument of this paper is that research on masculinity could implement the concept of theoretical paradigm(s) to achieve a clearer conceptualization of

¹ It has to be pointed out that technology in developing countries is not a widely accessible medium of communication, as personal computers and the Internet access come at a very high cost. At the same time, the lack of a basic level of literacy, mostly among women, makes it very difficult, for example, for African countries to gain any benefits offered by the Internet. Gender disparities are continuously spatialized as geographic location shapes the nature of inequalities. Consequently, to recognize social hierarchies, there is a need to think in local, national, and global terms. In this context, it appears reasonable to understand theoretical paradigms in a nonlinear manner.

conducting research within the field. Replacing multiple terminologies with the unified term of “theoretical paradigm” might systemize important aspects of theoretical and methodological issues involved in the research. That is not to suggest that distinction among theoretical paradigms is clear-cut but might provide the basis for a formulation of research aims and objectives; in this context, academic research becomes theoretically rigorous and coherent. Nevertheless, what has to be investigated further is a correspondence between particular theoretical paradigms and theories. The challenge for research on masculinity is to find a systematic way of organizing “old” and “new” theoretical ideas in a comprehensive framework, which is not based on linearity.

The discussion in this paper invites a re-examination of theoretical and methodological assumptions involved in the study of men and masculinities. The complexity of three theoretical paradigms appears to be rooted in different levels of conceptualizing gender. However, to produce a holistic understanding of gender issues, there is a need to develop mutually accepting approaches to studying gender.

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