

THE HEGEMONY IN MASCULINITY

INTRODUCTION

Raewyn Connell's term "hegemonic masculinity" is among the most widely used in the social science of gender. It seems often to replace the simpler term 'masculinity' to indicate a feminist focus on power. Little of that citation refers to hegemony as an ongoing outcome, however, and so it risks missing the point of Connell's focus on the consent given by women and other men to their subordinate or marginal status. The literature on hegemonic masculinity has advanced our knowledge of what distinguishes men, and of how people try to justify men's dominance; but we find far less research on consent as result. Scholars focus on the masculinity more than on the hegemony that it effects.

We dwell on acquiescence to oppression, and on the research that could elaborate and assess the theory that masculinity fosters it, because we believe this theory merits more specification, testing, and support than scholars have given it thus far. We illustrate the operationalization with analysis of a small pool of data on middle-aged men's responses to the drift toward social margins that they foresee as they grow old. We do this through a focus on the intersection of gender with relations of *age*, by which we mean the inequality between those who are old and those who are not.

Age is unique among inequalities in requiring that all people change categories, moving from the relative privilege of young adulthood to the marginal status of old age if they live long enough (Calasanti 2003). We argue below that this quality of age relations eases tests of the theory that masculinity can be hegemonic, and that study of the intersection of age and gender may explain consent to their marginal status by men who grow old.¹ To the extent that men desire the benefits of male dominance, they may affirm ideals of manhood that they foresee as

drifting out of reach as they age. That is, many men expect to fall short of hegemonic standards of manhood based in activities of younger years. Those often include combinations of such qualities as youthful appearance, vigorous sport and displays of strength, heterosexual prowess, and rapid advancement of breadwinning careers in competition with women and other men. To the extent that aging men voice support for such ideals while foreseeing loss of status and accepting that, then they may consent to an oppression that begins as they pass into old age. Relations of gender and age intersect to affect each other, in a way that allows us to add to the empirical support for the theory that masculinities can be hegemonic.

To specify this link between gender and age, we first review Connell's work as well as development of it with and by James Messerschmidt. We review diverse approaches to consent and then specify hegemony as correlation between speakers' affirmations of some *masculinity* (defined as group activities that distinguish men from others), their anticipation of the marginal status of a group they (at least will) belong to, and finally consent to that group's drop in status. Masculinity is hegemonic to the extent that work done to distinguish men also inspires at least some to consent to their group's submission to elite men.

MASCULINITY AND CONSENT

Connell's formulation specifies social relations that, however contradictory in the Marxist sense, are *hegemonic*; they organize groups of men who can dominate others by means short of violence. Hegemonic masculinity is the set of public faces of manhood that sustains the power of elites at others' expenses, that is, men's power at the expense of women, and elite men's power at the expense of other men (1987: 185). In Connell's theory, even men who do not live up to the ideals that justify the subordination of women may support such gender ideals,

even at their own cost, because “most men benefit from the subordination of women, and hegemonic masculinity is the cultural expression of this ascendancy” (p. 185).

After years of critique and research on the concept, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) retraced the theory to Gramsci and defined hegemonic masculinity in terms of “cultural consent, discursive centrality,” and of delegitimation of alternatives (p. 846). They noted that hegemony results not only from violent domination but involves nonviolent means to a consent to lower status instead. Such characteristics as “violence, aggression, and self-centeredness ... hardly would constitute hegemony—an idea that embeds certain notions of consent and participation by the subaltern groups” (p. 841). That is, hegemony is an outcome, an effect of successful support for ideals of masculinity.

Messerschmidt (2018) has followed with extended discussion and a distinction between *dominant* and *hegemonic* masculinities. Masculinities are dominant if they are widespread and popular in any context. However dominant they may be, they become hegemonic only if they “actually legitimate gender inequality and the subordination of women, femininities, and/or nonhegemonic masculinities” (p. 73).

We build upon this work, focusing as Messerschmidt has on the distinction between hegemonic and other popular or dominant masculinities. To this end, we specify the processes of the hegemony of masculinity as three phases:

- *collusive support* of certain gender ideals, by which people of a time and place collaborate to make a model of masculinity prominent in their region or organization;
- *subordination and marginalization* of oppressed groups by more elite ones in those settings; and
- *consent* to their subordinate or marginal status by the groups so oppressed.

The first and second of these are forms of domination, and they precede the hegemony that may occur in the third. Though many studies demonstrate both the collusion in, and the marginal status resulting from, support of this or that set of dominant gender ideals (for examples in the scholarship of old men, see Bartholomaeus & Tarrant 2016; Mann 2007; Mann & Tarrant 2016; Phoenix 2010), the demonstration of consent to that lowered status remains rare. We focus on that third and less common phase, which differentiates hegemonic from dominant masculinities.

Scholars have taken diverse approaches to recognizing the hegemony that masculinity can gain for gender inequity. Some use “justification” and “legitimation” to indicate rhetorical attempts to persuade groups to consent to their marginal status (e.g. Messerschmidt & Rohde 2018: 664; Schippers 2007; Weitzer & Kubrin 2009: 19-20). Much of that research stops short of demonstrating hegemony as outcome, however. It either assumes that a masculinity gains the consent of oppressed groups or sets that question aside. Lack of clear demonstration of consent may result from the dual referents of such verbs as “justify” and “legitimate.” Those words can refer either to claims by powerful groups that some masculinity justifies their dominance, OR to consent to those claims by marginal groups. “Justify” and “legitimate” can refer either to (would-be) causes or to their hegemonic effects.

For instance, in their research on South African university students, Talbot and Quayle (2010) use hegemony to refer both to the acceptability of ideals of masculinity (p. 256) and to the dominance of masculinity in a particular context (p. 257). They also include a measure of “buy-in,” or consent of a subordinated group, in women’s responses to gender ideals. Still, by ‘buy-in’ the authors mean the *collusive support* for the ideals, rather than the *consent* to their own subordination as women to men. As such, this research veers away from hegemony as outcome, back to the focus on gender ideals in a way that has been common among studies that use the

concept. They focus on dominant masculinities, and not the final moment of hegemony as demonstrated by consent.

Likewise, Messerschmidt (2018) follows such scholars as Schippers (2007) in focusing on the relation of masculinities to femininities. Hegemonic masculinities pair “superior” gendered qualities or ideals linked to boys and men with “inferior” ones attached to femininity. By doing so, those masculinities legitimate unequal gender relations (Messerschmidt 2018: 75). Though more relational than some of the research cited above, this also stops short of demonstrating consent as outcome. Masculinity may imply that some group’s lower status is just, without convincing anyone that it is, and thus without being hegemonic in effect.

Other approaches to hegemony vary more widely. Hearn (2004:59) discusses hegemony as the formation of the category *men*, though he does not specify consent. Lusher and Robbins (2009: 416) propose to observe consent in survey respondents’ expressions of positive affect toward powerful men. Matlon (2016) studies the intersection of gender and class and specifies the consent generated by hegemonic masculinity as avowal of consumerism and entrepreneurship. In that study, men of the Ivory Coast consent not to their exclusion but to sustaining neoliberal roles. None of these models of hegemony reach the point of demonstrating that any groups of men consent to their own marginal status.

This is not to say that no research has demonstrated consent as an outcome of masculinity. Irvine and Vermilya (2010) show how female veterinarians explain a gender gap in wages in their field. Such women account for men’s domination in two ways. They valorize men’s aggressive demand for fees over the nurturance of customers that other women in their profession do. And they impute their successes to their emulation of fathers and other men. They thus avoid contesting underpayment, by chalking it up to failures to meet standards of manhood.

Support of those ideals achieves hegemony by gaining a verbal consent.

Such reports are of great value but remain unusual. Rarer still is demonstration that any masculinity gains the consent of marginal men. We speculate that this relative lack of demonstration of the hegemony of any masculinity as an outcome among men owes not only to the double meanings of terms that we employ (e.g., “legitimate”), but also to the rarity with which men voice consent to lower status. If men seldom explain their oppression in terms of collective failures to achieve crucial standards of manhood, then a core of Connell’s original theory goes largely unsupported even though the theory may be valid.

We look for the consent to lowered status that marks the full accomplishment of hegemony; and we tighten the definition of that by imposing a standard for recognition in men’s accounts of masculinity and acceptance of that lower status. We believe that the hegemony is worth demonstrating, as an outcome that consenting parties can articulate. And we do this by focusing on relations among men, at the intersections of gender with the other inequities that divide men.

The reciprocal relation between manhood and womanhood lies at the heart of gender relations in both Connell’s original theory (1987) and the updates by Messerschmidt (2018). Though it is no less worthy of attention, space in this short paper does not permit us to demonstrate consent by women to their subordination, as Irvine and Vermilya (2010) have done. Because we focus on intersectionality and the importance of age relations, we study the consent to marginalization of some men by others, and next demonstrate how an intersectional approach to gender and age can allow test of the Gramscian aspect of this theory.

INTERSECTION OF GENDER WITH AGE

Sociologists of aging have shown that age relations distinguish between categories of people—here, between those who are “old” and those who are not—in ways that shape identities, power, and life chances (McMullin 2000; Calasanti 2003). Most groups naturalize age as categorical status, easily recognized and salient to most situations. They impute age to biology, and scorn old people’s deviations from youthful age ideals. Although the criteria for inclusion into such categories as “young,” “adult,” “middle aged,” and “old” vary by context, designation into any of these confers or retracts status, authority, and claims on wealth (Calasanti 2003). In the global North, young and middle-aged adults may be deemed not yet to have grown “old” and thus still eligible for intimate relationships; parenting; and/or for full employment, wages and advancement, depending on gender and other intersecting social locations. “Old” people eventually find themselves redefined as having grown too incompetent, unattractive, or frail for such employment, mating, or parenting; and excluded or urged to withdraw from those activities. They can gain esteem mainly to the extent that they engage in expensive consumption or unpaid domestic and community service.

For old people with little income, destitution or near-poverty may await, as age relations exacerbate inequities over the life course, such as those based on race, ethnicity, class and gender. As a result, distributions of wealth are most polarized in old age, in part because (dis)advantages accumulate over decades of labor, paid and otherwise (Dannefer 2003; Crystal, Shea, and Reyes, 2016). Whether rich or poor, old people face expectations or mandates that they will step down from positions of organizational advantage, in favor of younger adults. Women among them are especially likely to find themselves called upon to provide unpaid caregiving in their homes and volunteer work in their communities, while spending down any

wealth (Calasanti 2009). And all old people draw growing stigma as sickly, unattractive and either sexless or abhorrent. In some contexts, they find decisions made for them, without their consent, including those relating to their medical care (Quinn, Gur, and Watson 2018; Whitton 1996).

Among intersecting inequalities, age may be especially well-suited to the demonstration of large-scale consent, because it is the one relation where status will change over time for all people who live long enough (Calasanti 2003). It thus allows for explicit, prospective consent to collective marginal status to a wide degree. Part of the routine accomplishment of age is to acknowledge the passing of years, to agree that old age limits capacity and lowers the status of those who age (Pietilä and Ojala 2011).

The devaluation, assumptions of disease and decline, and loss of status that accompanies designations of old age provide fertile ground for an anti-aging industry, with profits estimated to reach 331.41 billion dollars by 2021 (orbisresearch.com, 2017). Given that groups focus on skin and muscle tone, hair color, and other obvious features when they do their daily age categorization, merchants and physicians of the anti-aging industry often focus their ads and products on the alteration of those. They promise that their consumers can preserve or even optimize both “health” and the age-related appearance of having it (Fishman, Settersten, and Flatt, 2010). Service providers and gerontologists who work under the rubrics of anti-aging and “Successful Aging” call upon old people to resist what they and the general public deem ravages of age. They encourage old people to maintain the appearance, function, and activities of earlier years in hopes of retaining their status and esteem (Calasanti and King 2020).

As justifications for inequality go, Successful Aging (Rowe and Kahn 1998) works as an analogue to *laissez faire* racism (Bobo 1999), meant to correct the traditional ageism that scorns

old people as incompetent and useless. It does so not by addressing relations of inequality, but instead, like *laissez faire* racism, by building its disapproval of a marginal group into policies and programs focused on fully engaged citizenship and good health. Successful Aging advises old people to work hard to maintain the disposition of youth, through exercise and other health behaviors, and by maintaining the activities of their younger years well into retirement, by pursuing low-paid work and unpaid community or familial service. Analogous to advising women to be more like men or people of color to be more like whites, Successful Aging works as a second-order ageism, which both accepts the marginal status accorded anyone found to have grown too old and works to help people forestall that for themselves as long as possible (Calasanti and King 2020). It avoids critique of the stigma attached to old age, focusing instead on personal empowerment to be, in popular parlance, “80 years young!”

Responses to aging and ageism are gendered. Feminist gerontologists have demonstrated that the anti-aging industry focuses women on sexual attractiveness. By contrast, ads focus men on vigorous heterosexual performance and athletics (Calasanti and King 2005). Scholars have noted that popular images of very old men feature degendered, even feminized figures marginalized as a result of the degradations of age (Calasanti and King 2018; Marshall and Katz 2006), the abjection that anti-aging products are meant to help men avoid or at least forestall.

To specify the hegemony of masculinity, we show how age relations lead a few men at least indirectly to consent to some of the marginal status that retirement and other markers of aging bring. We show that aging men can do this as they both ponder their decreasing success in attaining ideals of powerful manhood and accept the consequences of such failure.

METHODS

For the sake of this specification of the hegemony of masculinity, we provide three illustrations, drawing from a small set of interviews with men who responded to questions about their aging. We intend this analysis neither to establish a pattern that we generalize to a larger population, nor to explore diverse forms of aging among men split by many inequalities. Instead, we illustrate the specification and demonstration of hegemony of one set of men over another. The diverse ways and extent to which men consent to their marginal status matters less than the method by which we recognize consent per se.

For this demonstration, we employ interview data from a study of middle-aged people (N=20) conducted by the second author, which included nine men in the U.S., ages 42-61 (Calasanti and King 2018).² That study concerned age relations, ageism, and how people experience their aging in this context. Given the fluidity of aging and the fact that people change slowly and at differential rates, the interviews focused on middle age. That is a time of relative privilege for many, when seniority can boost status and old age has yet to reduce it. At the same time, many middle-aged people begin to notice changes that mark them as “growing old,” which gives old age a special salience. The respondents we feature below are white and relatively well-educated. They described their health as good to excellent, and free of major disability.

The second author conducted initial data analysis for other reports. For the purpose of the present illustration of the specification of the theory in question, all authors re-examined the data, taking a constant-comparative approach, coding for verbal markers of age and gender category, for descriptions of age inequality, and for indication of acceptance of or consent to some marginal status. A collaborative, iterative coding process (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) employed an open-ended code sheet that recorded first-level codes in response to

questions that asked, for instance, how respondents think about aging and its impact on femininity or masculinity. Next, higher-level codes related responses across the first-level codes and themes that emerged (Luborsky, 1994).

Our analysis tracks verbal markers of age and gender category, and association of those mentions of gender and age with each other. We also traced mentions of marginality and anti-aging procedures intended to forestall that. With these analytic codes for age and gender categories, age-appropriate behavior, and marginal status in mind, we next provide analyses of self-reports of three middle-aged men who anticipate the effects of advancing age. We do this not to document the scope of any pattern in any larger population, or even in our small sample, but instead as a theoretical exercise, the specification of standards of evidence in support of Connell's theory.

MOMENTS OF HEGEMONY

To illustrate our specification of Connell's theory, we review responses to questions about the effect of age on gender and other aspects of their lives. Each of these speakers invokes all three moments of hegemonic masculinity noted above: *collusive support for linked ideals of gender and age*, in which advancing age threatens masculinity; *marginal status* in old age; and *consent*, expressed here as acceptance of (at least their own responsibility for) the marginal status that they will someday have. Though we use lengthy extracts to demonstrate links between concepts, we have edited transcripts for clarity. We have removed respondents' identifiers and interviewer's turns at talk, and otherwise shortened transcripts to focus on the most relevant speech.

The first respondent, Larry (61), links ideals of gender to those of age by tying them both

to heterosexual performance: “For men, it’s all geared about sexual prowess. ... It’s all about performance and ... hair color for men. It’s all about picking up women.” Asked whether masculinity alters with age, he argues that “certainly the virility is affected by- if you equate virility and masculinity, if that’s what you mean, then, sure, virility is affected by it.” In this first moment of the hegemony of masculinity, Larry adds his *support to the idealization of youthful gender* by opposing aging to the gender ideals of youth.

That is only the first of three moments necessary to establish hegemony, which rests on more than affirmation of ideals. Larry then establishes the *marginal status* of older men, citing both injury and declining ability to defend against assault:

I worry that I can’t go out in public because I am not able to protect myself and might become victimized. I worry about that issue- that someone would, you know, be- what’s the word I am thinking about? Robbed. I worry about that. Assaulted I guess. You know ... you couldn’t defend yourself and someone would, you know- that’s- you like to think people respect old people and not hassle them, but you know reality is different.

Having haltingly voiced fears of degradation or at least house-bound restriction in old age, Larry continues with a story of the third moment of masculinity’s hegemony, his *consent* to reduced status on the job. This third moment is the key to the hegemony:

We were interviewing a young [job applicant for our company], recruiting him; and boy, I ...really felt treated like I was an old man. ...The person wasn’t all that interested in what I was doing; but with the younger people he was very interactive. And they all really loved him; and ... with me it was sort of like- you know, “He doesn’t have many years left, so he’s sort of like ...”

In his direct consent to being pushed to professional margins, Larry speaks of having prioritized the need to hire this applicant over his own status, and having thought of this priority in terms of his old age:

I was [a part of the group doing the hiring] and I was talking to other [group] members, and I said, “Look, even though I had this interaction- look, this is a person we want to recruit. I said, you know, he reminded me a little bit too much of myself ... He’s got all the right credentials and things, he’s got the right ideas, you know. I think it’s the person we want to [hire].” ... It’s not about me, it’s about what’s good for the community and what’s good for the- well, the community.” ... That was a recent incident that happened that sort of you know- [told me that] “I think you are getting old. It’s happening.”

Indeed, as he suggests above, Larry already knew about ageism by the time of the events of this anecdote, reminded as he was of having once played the younger man’s role in sidelining older colleagues:

He looked at me like I did when I went interviewing and some older [colleagues] were somebody I hadn't heard of and therefore [I] didn't have to pay- I mean, I would be polite and nice, but I wasn't all that interested ...

By allowing himself to be sidelined in turn as a function of his own advancing age, the loss of the manhood of youth, Larry consents to marginal status. Masculinity becomes hegemonic.

Later, Larry switches from this overt consent, one form of hegemony, to a different vocabulary of consent, one based in a sense of *personal responsibility to fight* signs of age and forestall his shift to marginal status. Having reported that age diminishes masculinity based on

the ideals of (heterosexual) youth, and that older men become marginal, he then resolves to fight the process of aging by himself rather than contest the inequity. He implicitly consents to oppression, hoping merely to avoid marginal status through personal discipline for just as long as he can:

I certainly go off and fight the aging process. There's no question that "this guy isn't spending, you know, seven hours a week exercising, right? What's he doing? I mean, he wants to maintain a quality of life, you know, at this level." I don't want this slope off. ... You want to get as much- try to get as much as you can out of it. So, that's why, you know, want to stay physically fit.

As part of his fight for distance from a marginal group, Larry speaks of his daily use of exercise machines and use of a personal trainer.

I justify it in the sense that the other benefits you get out of that are, you know, equally important to stopping the aging issue. ... "You are only as old as you feel" has some resonance with me.

However, even as he mulls his fight to retain his "not old" status by treating old age as under his personal control, Larry remains resigned to an inevitable "slope" into *marginal status*:

At some point you say, okay, I am satisfied with this; this is about as good as its going to get for me, and therefore that's it. ... There's stages, it's like anything else, the five stages of whatever, you know: it is denial, and you end up trying to get acceptance. And aging is the same thing. ... I think I am going to work on strategies for what am I going to be doing when I am so restricted that I have to be in a very safe environment like [a comprehensive care community] where you are really not- you don't have to interact with the public- you don't become an

annoyance for someone- you are standing in a grocery line and you are an annoyance because you are not moving fast enough or you are driving your car and you worry you know people are, “What’s that old man doing?” and that kind of thing. So, you really ah- No, I don’t want to get in anybody’s way, in a sense.

Larry *accepts responsibility* for at least trying to forestall entry into a stigmatized, marginal category, just as he consents to the lower status that he will one day endure. This indirect consent operates not through overt acceptance of marginal status but instead through acceptance of personal responsibility for avoiding it as long as possible via personal discipline. This lack of objection to the age relations that push him to the margin, and acceptance of personal responsibility for the outcome, combine to form an expression of indirect consent. Many people exercise every day for the sake of health without implying consent. But not everyone treats lack of exercise as pathway to lower status. Larry blames himself for a marginality that he both links to loss of a masculinity and treats as the effect of his own inevitable failure. Doing all of this, he ratifies the larger relation of inequality, the intersection of age with gender that will victimize him in the end.

A second respondent, Jimmy (51), voices support for age-based gender ideals, as he describes the effect of aging on masculinity:

I don’t think it could help it, you know? I just think as you get older it’s the thing you worry about, you know? ... I couldn’t imagine growing *more* masculine as you got older. ... Words like “virile” and “strong” and “young” all come into masculinity. [Getting older is] getting less- [going] in the wrong direction.

Jimmy expresses his fears of domination of old men by young ones, in his account of the effect of old age on his status as well as on his manhood:

You just don't want to be, um, excluded from things because you're, you know, you're a certain age or you're not looked at the same because you- you know, you're seen as, you know, over the hill. ... To be old would be- I guess it would be- for me- I think, when you're old is when you've resigned yourself to not working, to, um- I don't know. I don't like it, I don't like that topic.

This unusually broken passage suggests what Jimmy explicates at the end of that turn, his dislike of talk of age relations and the marginal status that he sees as his fate. He does not critique age domination, however, but accepts personal blame for the low status that awaits him. Asked of his experience of middle age, he speaks instead of personal responsibility for avoidance of that dominated status:

I've been very paranoid about staying fit ... I know that someday you'll be old, and I know that life can get you and it's depressing sometimes, if you look at it realistically. ... My favorite thing is to talk about reversing it. If we were getting younger every day, life would be awesome, you know? ... Honestly, if I thought a product would help me be more attractive or be more confident or to, um, enhance any part of my life, I don't know why I wouldn't use it, you know, I really don't.

Like Larry, Jimmy tends to see this gendered age marginal status in personal terms rather than critique the intersecting relations that drive old people to that. In this third moment of the hegemony of masculinity, he both ties old age to marginal status and takes responsibility for retaining, for as long as he can, his gendered signs of youth. Rather than rebuke young men for sidelining the old, he accepts as his personal burden the attempt to avoid aging into that marginal group. In this way, and like Larry (above), he voices implicit consent to the marginal status of those who cannot approximate those gender ideals.

We dwell on a third respondent, Andy, who speaks of his sense of responsibility to strive for ideals of young manhood by telling a sports story. The 54-year old respondent, who has already stated that he feels like he is in his forties, replies to the query, “Do you think that aging affects a man’s masculinity?” in terms of performance:

I have come to see the challenges of masculinity as being about, number one, are you fundamentally appropriate? ... Your appropriateness depends upon your individual being and your individual performance. So, if you can do it, whatever the context is, then you are appropriate and you fit and you are okay. Hence, you are only as good as the last time you performed, or whatever that might mean; and that could turn into performance anxiety of all sorts.

Having established manhood as performance, Andy tells of conflict during a soccer game. He combines the first two moments of hegemonic masculinity, his support for performance-based gender ideals and the lower status of old age awaiting those who fail to perform in that gendered way:

The story is that I- when I blew my knee out, I was out, and wondering “Oh no, am I done?” and, “Am I sedentary, so that, you know, am I done?” So, there’s the image of sitting: “Have I been sat down?”

I come back slowly, get involved, and play and get better; and I am doing okay. I’m alright. Then, late in the season ... I am playing soccer ... There’s a guy who’s about 28 years old, 6’2”, 6’3” maybe, 250 pounds, and kind of a jerk...But I never saw him before, and I didn’t know he was well-known as a jerk. I was going after the ball or something happened that he just crushed me. And I got pissed and said something; and then he said something back, and so it goes, back

and forth. And then it got nasty ... But this went on and went on; ... [and] I mean he did something else to tackle me, and then, when I had the ball, and he threw an elbow, and I threw one back. I mean I upped the ante on the physical encounter, all right, and just lost it. We didn't have a fight (I mean, he probably would have killed me); but we, ah- this went on, and it took me out of the game. I completely lost it. I no longer could really play. But it went on and on and on. And I walked out in shock: "What the hell just happened? Why?"

And, ah, I mean, the way I came to think about it is somehow- I mean, I was very concerned the whole winter about proving myself. So, in that sense, it was coming back from an injury. But it wasn't an injury for a 20-year old. I mean, I have had some injuries, never that serious, but I have been out for a while with an injury; and you come back. This time it's an injury and I'm sitting: "Is this the end, all right?" So, coming back, my question is "Am I done? Am I coming back?" So, the whole issue of proving myself was much more to the surface, much closer to the surface. And ... [it's because] the intensity of the issue of masculinity was heightened because of age, that I lost it with this guy.

On his account, an age-driven threat to gender identity inspires overcompensation, a display of masculine bravado. Andy then combines the second two moments of hegemonic masculinity, as he elaborates both his fears of marginal status in older age and his sense of personal responsibility for resisting it.

I am resisting sedentary life, which I associate with middle age and older, and want it changed. ... And I do it by hanging on to a little younger image where-

getting older, but still active. ... I view sedentary as decline. It's forced sedentary existence. It's the blown knee forever.

Asked "Why do people not want to be seen as old?" Andy replies with an affirmation of the marginal status of old age and his personal duty to avoid entry into it:

If old, then outside, so you are no longer a part, you are no longer the player, you are on the periphery. Because you have got one more step, and then you are gone. So, I guess that's part of it: "Wait a minute, I am still a part here. ... I'm here, and I will do everything that I would have done." And maybe that's partly what I resist by working hard and by working energetically. I don't want to be seen as being brain dead. So, that's all linked up to my image of the marginal, being marginally- marginalized, peripheral, on my way out.

Andy consents to the marginal status of those old people who cease to labor. He works to help himself and others like him avoid the appearance of having done so and thus being pushed to the periphery, for as long as possible. He fights against his own marginal status but tacitly accepts that old people who fail to work so hard and energetically having it coming.

These middle-aged men work through the three moments of hegemonic masculinity specified in our literature review. First, they *support gender ideals based in youth*. Second, they note the fear that advancing age make it harder to live up to those, that old men face *marginal status* because of age. Finally, they voice their *sense of personal responsibility for fighting that shift*. They work to avoid recategorization as old even as they accept the marginal status of those who appear sedentary and thus unmanly. By leaving the effects of relations of gender and age unaddressed, and accepting personal responsibility for avoiding the marginal status that they link to old manhood, they tacitly consent to the inequalities. At this intersection of gender and age,

we find the hegemony of masculinity.

DISCUSSION

On the basis of this small pattern in men's self-reports, we specify elements of masculinity's hegemony: the affirmation of gender ideals and the links of those to images of age; the marginal status that they anticipate for themselves; and finally the most crucial moment, the *consent* to that status either explicated by resignation or implied by focus on personal initiative in avoiding it. We show how concerns with manhood, combined with individualist understandings of the lowered status of old people, inspire these men to consent to the life on the margins that appears to await them if they live long enough to seem truly old. This illustrates the oft-neglected heart of Connell's concept, the consent to be pushed aside, voiced in terms of ideals of manhood.

Hegemony appears in these extracts in two forms. First, we see overt consent to the marginal status of old people. We see this in the first respondent, Larry, who reports having recommended hiring a younger professional who had snubbed him for his advancing age, a position that he locates on the social margin. Larry also consents to being restricted when frail, so as neither to suffer assault nor to annoy others. The second, less overt sign of Larry's consent appears in his attempt to avoid the marginal status rather than question or denounce the large-scale inequality. Many people work to avoid stigma through hard, manly performance without giving consent to lowered status; but Larry goes further in describing that stigma as a matter of social marginality, while avoiding any critique of the collective oppression. In describing this as a relation of inequality between groups rather than merely a personal challenge, but then treating the prospect of his move toward the margin as result of his own failure, he indirectly consents to the stigma placed on old people as a group. He does not want to be marginal; but he never

questions the push to the margins that old people face. The combination of these moves is the key: he defines the stigma as a relation between groups, and then holds himself accountable for the unhappy fate.

This second form of consent is more insidious and may be more popular. Speakers reject marginal status for themselves and fight against their entry into the low-status group via anti-aging disciplines. They will work hard to avoid becoming “old” and treat signs of old age as personal failings. Taking blame for loss of status implies consent to the status relations. They voice at least indirect consent to the relations of age that privilege young men. This is hegemonic masculinity.

We speculate that this second, more tacit form of consent to the marginal status of old men is more popular because it feels like a (mostly personal) fight to help aging men avoid an unquestioned relation of inequity. Few people think sociologically about inequality on a daily basis; and the acceptance of personal blame for widespread marginal status is a part of a neoliberal thought. Those who find themselves without high-paying jobs or other forms of respect may take blame for failing to work hard enough. This form of ageism holds that old men can be vital and virile if they try hard enough, that any scorn of them as old is their own fault for failing to work so hard. For men, it means loss of the virility that grounds their masculinity. Striving for this brass ring may lend some optimistic comfort to each person who tries it, but does so at the cost of maintaining the exclusion of those who will not. This hegemonic masculinity may sustain a gendered ageism.

We do not mean that mundane routines of exercise and other hard work, whether focused on virility or other ideals of health, all imply consent to marginal status of those who cease to exert themselves that way. Anyone can work at the gym without consenting to inequality. We

see more than diligence in the responses reviewed above. We see not only ideals of hard work linked to gender and age, but also explicit discussion of the marginal status of those who fail and acceptance of personal responsibility for avoiding that margin. This particular framing of exertion and virility, as the one defense that an aging man has against a push to the margin that all will feel, is where we find the consent at the heart of hegemony.

CONCLUSION

Study of the hegemony that masculinity can effect has much to gain from focus on the intersection of gender with age. The gerontological paradigm Successful Aging is an institutional version of what we find in these interviews, the call to take personal responsibility for one's marginal status in old age. That call takes note of inequality, foresees the speaker slipping into marginal status, but maintains personal blame for failure and thus implies consent to the marginal status of old people as a group. To understand the role of this ageism in masculinity, we must attend to age as a relation of inequality that intersects with gender, ability, sexuality, class, age, nation and others, often achieving forms of hegemony that reproduce them. Feminist theory has made relatively little advance in this field, in part because feminist analyses of age draw little scholarly attention. We suggest that one of the most widely cited theories in feminist sociology becomes easier to illustrate and test if we explore this frontier, where age and gender intersect, and listen to fears of growing old.

This small demonstration can assess neither the expanse nor the varieties of hegemony that masculinity can effect. We do not know how popular either of the two kinds of consent has become among aging men. Because we rely on literatures and data collected in North America and in nations of northern Europe, we are in no position to generalize to any larger populations.

The whiteness and location in the U.S. of these men may skew their expressions of consent in many ways. For example, these men are relatively privileged, such that the drop in status that they foresee may be especially salient, perhaps leading them to be more conscious of impending failure, more likely to voice their response to it. The consent that we document may be easier to find than it would be among men with less privilege. We look forward to studies that will show us how much consent is overt vs. insidious, or more popular with men than with women, and how those vary by region and time. We hope to learn how it might vary by sexuality, by transition between or avoidance of gender categories, by ability, nation, race, and class as well. In the meantime, we draw attention to the important theory at the heart of this oft-cited concept, one worth more demonstration than it has thus far received.

NOTES

¹ Connell (1995: 78-81) distinguished between subordination and marginalization of masculinities. *Subordination* of gay and/or effeminate men occurs “internal to the gender order” (p. 80), expelling their masculinities from whatever counts as hegemonic at the time (p. 78). By contrast, *marginalization* occurs at the intersections of inequalities, gender and at least one other such as race or class. We question the notion that the subordination of such groups as gay men is internal to the gender order; and we do this on the basis of decades of scholarship on sexuality as a distinct inequality. Still, we find Connell’s concepts useful. Age and sexuality, like race and class, are relations of inequality that intersect with gender to have distinct effects on masculinity. We refer to the status of old men as *marginal*, as Connell does those of working class and nonwhite men.

² Most respondents had completed college and some had advanced degrees. All of the men were employed, seven of them semi-professional or professional. Two of the men were not heterosexual, and two of the straight men were unmarried. The second author conducted all but one of the semi-structured interviews (one was conducted by a graduate assistant) in 2006-07, in locations chosen by each respondent. Lasting an average of two hours, all were digitally recorded, with respondents' permission, and transcribed verbatim by a professional. (For a more complete discussion of methods, see Calasanti and King 2018.)

REFERENCES

- Bartholomaeus, Clare, and Anna Tarrant. "Masculinities at the Margins of "Middle Adulthood": What a Consideration of Young Age and Old Age Offers Masculinities Theorizing." *Men and Masculinities* 19, no. 4 (2016): 351-69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184x15588592>.
- Bobo, Lawrence D. "Prejudice as Group Position: Microfoundations of a Sociological Approach to Racism and Race Relations." *Journal of Social Issues* 55, no. 3 (1999): 445-72. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1111/0022-4537.00127>.
- Calasanti, Toni. 2003. "Theorizing Age Relations." In *The Need for Theory: Critical Approaches to Social Gerontology for the 21st Century*, edited by Simon Biggs, Ariela Lowenstein, and Jon Hendricks, 199–218. Amityville, NY: Baywood.
- Calasanti, Toni, and Neal King. 2005. "Firming the Floppy Penis: Age, Class, and Gender Relations in the Lives of Old Men." *Men and Masculinities* 8, no. 1: 3–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X04268799>

- Calasanti, Toni. 2009. "Theorizing Feminist Gerontology, Sexuality, and Beyond: An Intersectional Approach." In *Handbook of Theories of Aging*, edited by Vern L. Bengtson, 471–85. New York: Springer.
- Calasanti, Toni, and Neal King. 2018. "The Dynamic Nature of Gender and Aging Bodies." *Journal of Aging Studies* 45: 11–17. [https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2018.01.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2018.01.002). <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0890406518300124>
- Calasanti, Toni, and Neal King. 2020. "Beyond Successful Aging 2.0: Inequalities, Ageism, and the Case for Normalizing Old Ages." *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbaa037>
- Connell, R. W. "Hegemonic Masculinity and Emphasized Femininity." In *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics*, 183-88. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987.
- Connell, R. W. *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Connell, R. W., and James W. Messerschmidt. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 829-59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>.
- Crystal, Stephen, Dennis G Shea, and Adriana M Reyes. "Cumulative Advantage, Cumulative Disadvantage, and Evolving Patterns of Late-Life Inequality." *The Gerontologist* 57, no. 5 (2016): 910-20. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnw056>.
- Dannefer, Dale. "Cumulative Advantage/Disadvantage and the Life Course: Cross-Fertilizing Age and Social Science Theory." *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* 58, no. 6 (2003): S327-37.

- Fishman, Jennifer R., Richard A. Settersten, Jr., and Michael A. Flatt. "In the Vanguard of Biomedicine? The Curious and Contradictory Case of Anti-Ageing Medicine." In *Technogenarians: Studying Health and Illness through an Ageing, Science, and Technology Lens*, edited by Kelly A. Joyce and Meika Loe, 25-37. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- Hearn, Jeff. "From Hegemonic Masculinity to the Hegemony of Men." *Feminist Theory* 5, no. 1 (2004): 49-72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700104040813>.
- Irvine, Leslie, and Jenny R. Vermilya. "Gender Work in a Feminized Profession." *Gender & Society* 24, no. 1 (2010): 56-82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243209355978>.
- Luborsky, Mark R. "The Identification and Analysis of Themes and Patterns." In *Qualitative Methods in Aging Research*, edited by Jaber F. Gubrium and Andrea Sankar, 189-210. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994.
- Lusher, Dean, and Garry Robins. "Hegemonic and Other Masculinities in Local Social Contexts." *Men and Masculinities* 11, no. 4 (2009): 387-423. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184x06298776>.
- Mann, Robin. "Out of the Shadows?: Grandfatherhood, Age and Masculinities." *Journal of Aging Studies* 21, no. 4 (2007): 281-91. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2007.05.008>.
- Mann, Robin, Anna Tarrant, and George W Leeson. "Grandfatherhood: Shifting Masculinities in Later Life." *Sociology* 50, no. 3 (2016): 594-610. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038515572586>.

- Marshall, Barbara L., and Stephen Katz. "From Androgyny to Androgens: Re-Sexing the Aging Body." In *Age Matters*, edited by Toni M. Calasanti and Kathleen F. Slevin, 75-97. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Matlon, Jordanna. "Racial Capitalism and the Crisis of Black Masculinity." *American Sociological Review* 81, no. 5 (2016): 1014-38.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122416658294>.
- McMullin, Julie Ann. "Diversity and the State of Sociological Aging Theory." *The Gerontologist* 40, no. 5 (2000): 517-30. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/40.5.517>.
- McMullin, Julie Ann, and Ellie D. Berger. "The Case of Unemployed Older Workers." In *Age Matters: Realigning Feminist Thinking*, edited by Toni M. Calasanti and Kathleen F. Slevin, 201-24. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Messerschmidt, James W. "Engendering Gendered Knowledge: Assessing the Academic Appropriation of Hegemonic Masculinity." *Men and Masculinities* 15, no. 1 (2012): 56-76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184x11428384>.
- Messerschmidt, James W. *Hegemonic Masculinity: Formulation, Reformulation, and Amplification*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018.
- Messerschmidt, James W., and Achim Rohde. "Osama Bin Laden and His Jihadist Global Hegemonic Masculinity." *Gender & Society* 32, no. 5 (2018): 663-85.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243218770358>.
- Miles, Matthew B., and A. M. Huberman. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994.

- Orbisresearch.com. "Global Anti-Aging Market 2017 Is Growing Rapidly and Expected to Reach \$331.41 Billion by 2021 – Orbis Research." Orbis Research, Accessed 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/brandfeatures/venture-capital/article?id=11480>.
- Phoenix, Cassandra. "Auto-Photography in Aging Studies: Exploring Issues of Identity Construction in Mature Bodybuilders." *Journal of Aging Studies* 24, no. 3 (2010): 167-80. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2008.12.007>.
- Pietilä, Ilkka, and Hanna Ojala. 2011. "Acting Age in the Context of Health: Middle-Aged Working-Class Men Talking About Bodies and Aging." *Journal of Aging Studies* 25, no. 4: 380–89. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2011.01.005>. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0890406511000223>
- Pritchard-Jones, Laura. "Ageism and Autonomy in Health Care: Explorations through a Relational Lens." *Health Care Analysis* 25, no. 1 (2017): 72-89. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10728-014-0288-1>.
- Quinn, Gerard, Ayelet Gur, and Joanne Watson. "Ageism, Moral Agency and Autonomy: Getting Beyond Guardianship in the 21st Century." In *Ageing, Ageism and the Law*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2018.
- Rowe, John. W., and Robert. L. Kahn. "Human Aging: Usual and Successful." *Science* 237, no. 4811 (1987): 143-9. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.3299702>.
- Schippers, Mimi. "Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony." *Theory and Society* 36, no. 1 (2007): 85-102. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-007-9022-4>.
- Talbot, Kirsten, and Michael Quayle. "The Perils of Being a Nice Guy: Contextual Variation in Five Young Women's Constructions of Acceptable Hegemonic and Alternative

Masculinities.” *Men and Masculinities* 13, no. 2 (2010): 255-78.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X09350408>.

Taylor, Steven J., and Robert Bogdan. *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: The Search for Meanings*. 2nd ed. New York: Wiley, 1984.

Weitzer, Ronald, and Charis E. Kubrin. “Misogyny in Rap Music: A Content Analysis of Prevalence and Meanings.” *Men and Masculinities* 12, no. 1 (2009): 3-29.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184x08327696>.

Whitton, Linda S. “Ageism: Paternalism and Prejudice.” *DePaul Law Review*, no. 2 (1996): 453-

82. 482. <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/deplr46&i=463>