James W. Messerschmidt
University of Southern Maine, U.S.A.

Masculinities and Femicide[1]

Abstract   The relationship between masculinity and femicide has been virtually ignored in the literature on both masculinities and femicide. The aim of this paper then is to concentrate on the relationship between masculinities and femicide by first briefly summarizing feminist theorizing in the 1970s and 1980s and its relation to the emergence of Raewyn Connell's concept of "hegemonic masculinity." Following that, new directions in scholarly work on hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities are discussed, with particular attention directed to the recent work of the author on the relationship among hegemonic, dominant, dominating, and positive masculinities. Finally, the paper concludes by briefly illustrating how this new conception of masculinities can be applied to two types of femicide: intimate partner femicide and so-called "honor" femicides.

Keywords   Hegemonic Masculinity; Dominant Masculinity; Dominating Masculinity; Positive Masculinity; Intimate Partner Femicide; "Honor" Femicide; Patriarchy

James W. Messerschmidt is a Professor of Sociology in the Sociology, Criminology, and Economics Department at the University of Southern Maine. In addition to over fifty articles and book chapters, he has authored eleven books, most recently *Masculinities in the Making* (Rowman & Littlefield 2016) and *Crime as Structured Action: Doing Masculinities, Race, Class, Sexuality, and Crime* (Rowman & Littlefield 2014). In 2011, he received the "Outstanding Feminist Faculty Award" from the Women and Gender Studies Program at the University of Southern Maine for his notable contributions to scholarship in gender studies, and in 2012, he received the "Outstanding Alumni Award" from San Diego State University for his distinguished scholarly contributions to sociology, criminology, and gender studies. His current projects include a historical examination of the transition from patriarchy to gender in feminist theory and the relation among reflexivity and habit/routine in gender practice.

email address: mschmidt@maine.edu

Studies of femicide rarely discuss how particular masculinities are associated with differing types of this heinous crime. In this paper, I concentrate on this issue by first summarizing briefly feminist theorizing in the 1970s and 1980s and exploring its relation to the emergence of Raewyn Connell's concept of "hegemonic masculinity." Following that, I discuss new directions in scholarly work on hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities, with particular attention directed to my own work on the relationship among hegemonic, dominant, dominating, and positive masculinities. Finally, I close the paper by briefly illustrating how this new conception of masculinities can be applied to two types of femicide: intimate partner femicide and so-called "honor" femicides.

Feminist Theory and the Emergence of "Hegemonic Masculinity"

I define "femicide" as *the intentional killing of girls and women by boys and men because the victims are girls and women*, and this definition necessarily calls for an analysis of unequal gender relations in the pursuit of conceptualizing why femicide occurs. Historically, feminist approaches to femicide have turned to the concept of "patriarchy," arguing that femicide is simply one of the oppressive dangers girls and women face in a male-dominated, patriarchal society. For example, from the late 1970s to the 1980s, radical feminists argued that masculine power and privilege are the root cause of all social relations, all forms of inequality, and thus of femicide, and that the most important relations in any society are found in patriarchy; and that all other relations, such as class and race relations, are secondary and derive from male-female relations (Dworkin 1979; 1987; MacKinnon 1979; 1989). Radical feminism then advanced a structural and mono-causal explanation for gender inequality and femicide that concentrated on patriarchy (Radford and Russell 1992).

Because of this structured mono-causal explanation by radical feminism, another structured feminist theory also appeared during this time period to explain gender inequality—socialist feminism (Eisenstein 1979). Socialist feminists sought to conceptualize the intersection of patriarchy and capitalism, of gender and class inequality, and how that structural intersection impacts social action, such as femicide.

However, it was not long after the development of both radical and socialist feminism that solid criticisms of these perspectives began to appear. For example, scholars argued that both perspectives are deterministic in the sense that behavior is seen as simply resulting from a social system—either "patriarchy" or "patriarchal capitalism"—a social system that is external to the actor (Messerschmidt 1993). In such a view, individuals display little or no agency—their actions result directly from the structural system of patriarchy or patriarchal capitalism. Both radical and socialist feminism then failed to account for the intentions of actors and for how social action is a meaningful construct in itself.

Yet probably the most central critique of both radical and socialist feminism concentrated on the concept of patriarchy. Feminist scholars argued that this concept restricts the exploration of historical variation in gender relations, obscures the multiplicity of ways in which societies have defined gender, and therefore implies a structure that is fixed, missing the kaleidoscope of gender relations, both historically and cross-culturally. In addition, the concept was criticized for its unidimensional conceptualization of gender and its neglect of differences and power relations between men and women and among women and among men (Rowbotham 1981; Connell 1985; Beechey 1987; Acker 1989). Finally, in much theorizing of patriarchy, the categories of "women" and "men" are considered

as being in no need of further examination, finer differentiation, or a determination of how they came to be what they are, thereby ignoring the social construction of masculinities and femininities and the relations between and among them (Connell 1985).

This spectrum of criticism indicated that efforts to theorize *patriarchy* had come to an end, and thus this realization spawned new ideas about the social character of *gender*, including masculinities. In this regard, it was the work of Raewyn Connell (1987; 1995) that provided a perspective for conceptualizing gender inequality through an understanding of the social construction of masculinities and femininities. Connell's initial formulation of the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" concentrated on that form of masculinity in a given historical and society-wide setting that legitimates unequal gender relations between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities. Connell argued that hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities, as well as in relation to women. Both the *relational* and *legitimation* features were central to Connell's argument, involving a particular form of masculinity in unequal relation to a certain form of femininity—that is, "emphasized femininity"—which is practiced in a complementary, compliant, and accommodating subordinate relationship with hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, the achievement of hegemonic masculinity occurs largely through discursive legitimation (or justification), encouraging all to consent to, unite around, and embody such unequal gender relations. For Connell, then, there exists a "fit" between hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity that discursively and materially institutionalizes men and masculinity as more powerful than women and femininity (Connell 1987; 1995).

Connell emphasized that hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities are all subject to change because they come into existence in specific settings and under particular situations. Moreover, in the case of the former, there often exists a struggle for hegemony whereby older versions may be replaced by newer ones. The notion of hegemonic masculinity and non-hegemonic masculinities then opened up the possibility of change towards the abolition of gender inequalities and the creation of more egalitarian gender relations.

Connell's perspective found significant and enthusiastic application from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, being utilized in a variety of academic areas (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). However, and despite considerable favorable reception of Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity and notion of multiple non-hegemonic masculinities, her perspective nevertheless attracted criticism that focused almost exclusively on the concept of hegemonic masculinity. For example, concerns over the underlying concept of masculinity itself were raised, arguing that it may be flawed in various ways; questions regarding who actually represents hegemonic masculinity were advanced; it was noted that hegemonic masculinity simply reduces in practice to a reification of power or toxicity; and finally, it was suggested that the concept maintains an allegedly unsatisfactory theory of the masculine subject (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Reformulation

In a paper published in 2005, Connell and Messerschmidt responded to these criticisms and reformulated the concept of hegemonic masculinity in numerous ways. That reformulation first included certain aspects of the original formulation that empirical evidence over almost two decades of time indicated should be retained, in particular, the relational nature of the concept (among hegemonic masculinity, emphasized femininity, and non-hegemonic masculinities) and the idea that this relationship is a pattern of hegemony—not a pattern of simple domination. Also well supported historically are the seminal ideas that hegemonic masculinity need not be the most powerful and/or the most common pattern of masculinity in a particular setting, and that any formulation of the concept as simply constituting an assemblage of fixed, "masculine" character traits should be thoroughly transcended. Second, Connell and Messerschmidt suggested that a reformulated understanding of hegemonic masculinity must incorporate a more holistic grasp of gender inequality, which recognizes the agency of subordinated groups (e.g., women and gay men), as much as the power of hegemonic groups, and includes the mutual conditioning (or intersectionality) of gender with other social inequalities, such as class, race, age, sexuality, and nation. Third, Connell and Messerschmidt asserted that a more sophisticated treatment of embodiment in hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities was necessary, as well as conceptualizations of how hegemonic masculinity may be challenged, contested, and thus changed. Finally, Connell and Messerschmidt argued that, instead of simply recognizing hegemonic masculinity at only the society-wide level, scholars should analyze existing hegemonic masculinities empirically at three levels: first, the *local* (meaning constructed in arenas of face-to-face interaction in schools, organizations, and immediate communities); second, the *regional* (meaning constructed at the society-wide level); and third, the *global* (meaning constructed in such transnational arenas as world politics, business, and media).

Scholars have since applied this reformulated concept of hegemonic masculinity in a number of ways, from specifically examining hegemonic masculinities at the local, regional, and global levels; through demonstrating how women and subordinated men, under certain circumstances, may actually contribute to the cultivation of hegemonic masculinity; to demonstrating how hegemonic masculinities may be open to challenge and possibly reproduced in new form; and to analyzing how neoliberal globalization impacts the construction of hegemonic masculinities in several countries in Asia, Africa, and Central and Latin America (Messerschmidt 2012).

It emerges clearly from these and other studies that scholars are now conducting impressive research on how specific, unequal, structured gender relationships between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities are legitimated—they are capturing certain of the essential features of the all-pervasive reproduction of unequal gender relations. Indeed, this research documents the continued significance of the concept of hegemonic masculinity and simultaneously

inspires additional gender research that further extends our knowledge in similar and/or previously unexplored areas. Nevertheless, problems remain.

Problems Remain

Almost 18 years ago, the American sociologist, Pat Martin (1998), raised the issue of inconsistent applications of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, observing insightfully that some scholars equated the concept with a fixed type of masculinity, or with whatever type of masculinity happened to be dominant at a particular time and place. More recently, the Australian sociologist, Christine Beasley (2008), labeled such inconsistent applications "slippage," arguing that "dominant" forms of masculinity—such as those that are the most culturally celebrated or the most common in particular settings—may actually do little to legitimate men's power over women and, therefore, should not be labeled hegemonic masculinities. American sociologist, Mimi Schippers (2007), had similarly argued that it is essential to distinguish masculinities that legitimate men's power from those that do not.

Martin's, Beasley's, and Schipper's insights unfortunately continue to ring true, as there remains a fundamental tendency among some scholars to read hegemonic masculinity as a static character type and to ignore the whole question of gender relations, and thus the legitimation of gender inequality. Furthermore, some scholars continue to equate hegemonic masculinity with: 1) particular masculinities that simply are dominant—that is, the most culturally celebrated or the most common in particular settings—but do *not* legitimate gender inequality, or 2) those masculinities practiced by certain men—such as politicians, corporate heads, and celebrities—simply because they are in positions of power, ignoring once again questions of gender relations and the legitimation of gender inequality.

A New Formulation

Permit me now to turn to my most recent work on hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities that builds on my 2005 co-authored paper with Connell and addresses seriously the criticisms of Martin (1998), Beasley (2008), and Schippers (2007). As previously mentioned, to elucidate the significance and salience of hegemonic masculinities, gender scholars must distinguish masculinities that legitimate gender inequality from those that do not, and I have now begun to accomplish this. For example, in my most recent book, *Masculinities in the Making*, I distinguish "hegemonic masculinities" from "dominant," "dominating," and "positive" forms of masculinities (Messerschmidt 2016). I define *hegemonic masculinities* as those masculinities constructed locally, regionally, and globally that legitimate an unequal relationship between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities, and that hegemonic masculinities must be culturally ascendant to provide a rationale for social action through consent and compliance. *Dominant masculinities* are not always associated with and linked to gender hegemony, but refer to (locally, regionally, and globally) the most celebrated, common, or current form of masculinity in a particular social setting; *dominating masculinities* refer to those masculinities (locally, regionally, and globally) that also do not necessarily legitimate unequal relationships between men and women, masculinities and femininities, but rather involve commanding and controlling particular interactions, exercising power and control over people and events: "calling the shots" and "running the show." While dominant and dominating masculinities may sometimes also be hegemonic, dominant and dominating masculinities are never hegemonic if they fail to legitimate unequal gender relations in a cultural context. *Positive masculinities* are those masculinities (locally, regionally, and globally) that contribute to legitimating egalitarian relations between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities.

Research on such dominant, dominating, and positive masculinities is significant because it enables a more distinct conceptualization of how hegemonic masculinities are unique among the diversity of masculinities, and because drawing a clear distinction between hegemonic and dominant and dominating masculinities will enable scholars to recognize and research various non-hegemonic yet powerful masculinities, and how the latter differ from hegemonic masculinities, as well as how they differ among themselves.

Furthermore, identifying gendered practices that do not legitimate patriarchal relations should be considered valuable, in the sense of recognizing and pinpointing possible positive masculinities and thus gender practices and relations that feminists support: positive masculinities that challenge gender hegemony and consequently have crucial implications for social policy.

Application

In closing, then, let me now apply this new formulation of masculinities just outlined to two differing types of femicide: intimate partner femicide and so-called "honor" femicide. I begin with intimate partner femicide.

Intimate Partner Femicide

For men who eventually commit femicide against their intimate female partner, the evidence indicates that, over the course of the relationship, the eventual perpetrator attempts increasingly to dominate his partner through physical battering. In other words, when a femicide is the outcome, the battering has usually been progressively persistent and severe (Campbell et al. 2007). Men who engage in intimate partner femicide assume they have the right to dominate their partner violently and, overwhelmingly, female partners are beaten for issues centering on, for example, household labor, possessiveness, and sexual jealousy (Adams 2007; Goussinsky and Yassour-Borochowitz 2012). Therefore, the eventual perpetrator is constructing a wholly dominating masculinity, whereby he is commanding and controlling the relationship, he is exercising power and authority over his partner, and he is employing physical violence to call the shots and run the show.

However, intimate partner femicides usually occur when the man concludes that he is losing his power to dominate and control what he sees as his possession. Intimate partner femicides are almost always immediately preceded by a major

confrontation in the privatized setting of the home that they usually both share (Dobash and Dobash 2015). Moreover, the confrontation most likely centers on the female partner acting independently of his commands and requirements by engaging in certain practices, such as attempts to end the relationship, planning to move out of the house or actually moves out, or establishing a new relationship with another man. Her attempted or actual separation and sovereignty in fact threaten and challenge his masculine control directly; the conflict over his possessiveness of her as his own is at once intensified, and the man ultimately rationalizes that, "If I can't have her, no one can," and the result often is a femicide (Dobash and Dobash 2015). In other words, when he realizes that his possession is vanishing, or actually has vanished and will most likely not return, he becomes acutely angry, enters into a resentful rage, and kills his partner because, from his point of view, he has been seriously wronged.

Intimate partner femicide reproduces the gender inequality that the female partner has challenged because the very act of femicide inscribes the female victim—who now embodies weakness and vulnerability—as feminine and the perpetrator—who now embodies strength and invulnerability—as masculine, thereby constructing an "inferior" partner and a "superior" perpetrator. For the perpetrator, then, gender difference and inequality are re-established in his mind through intimate partner femicide. The perpetrator restores his dominating masculinity by once again commanding and controlling the violent interaction through exercising aggressive and dominating power over "his"

partner and the situation—he ultimately assures himself that no one other than him will ever "own" her.

So-Called "Honor" Femicide

So-called "honor" femicide refers to the killing of a female family member by a male family member due to the belief that the female has allegedly brought gendered dishonor upon the family. In societies where so-called "honor" femicide occurs, the mere perception that a woman has behaved in a gendered way that supposedly "dishonors" her family is sufficient to set in motion a series of events leading to a femicide (Dogan 2016; Grzyb 2016). For example, members of the extended family may plan together how to respond to the offending revelation; an important aspect is the ostensible reputation of the family in their respective community and the stigma associated with possibly losing social status within that community. If it is determined that the family has been dishonored, then immediate retribution is exercised to restore that alleged honor in order for the family to avoid losing status in the community (Gill, Strange, and Roberts 2014; Begikhani, Gill, and Hague 2015).

A male member of the family will usually then be chosen to carry out the killing; he will most likely experience pressure from the family and/or community to reportedly restore the family honor, and such men are celebrated for their "bravery" once the femicide has been completed (Dogan 2016; Grzyb 2016). The killing is broadcast throughout the community and thus the perpetrator is pub-

licly constructed as a masculine hero within both the family and the community (Gill, Strange, and Roberts 2014).

The distinct character of this type of femicide is that it takes place within the context of family- and community-wide masculine control over women and their bodies. This control of women is achieved through the ever-present threat and fear of violence, if a woman should construct bodily practices that venture outside her predetermined and policed femininity. In such a situation, "honor" is simply code for hegemonic masculinity and "dishonor" is code for challenging that hegemonic masculinity. In other words, the discourse of "family dishonor" is a major aspect of gender hegemony embedded in the family and community, but it is simultaneously a measure of the imperfection of that gender hegemony. So-called "honor" femicide occurs when the men of the family fear their control over the bodies of women is breaking down because of women's gendered "transgressions." Gender antecedents by women that ultimately lead men to engage in femicide include, for example: 1) refusing to enter an arranged marriage; 2) being in a disapproved relationship; 3) having sex outside of marriage; 4) being the victim of rape; 5) dressing in inappropriate ways; 6) engaging in same-sex sexuality; and 7) seeking a divorce, even from an abusive husband. When a woman steps outside the bounds of acceptable femininity, men turn to so-called "honor" femicide to regain control and reproduce hegemonic masculinity within the family and the community. In such settings, hegemonic masculinity has been compromised through the behav-

ior of the "offending" woman and the femicide at once restores that hegemonic masculinity and thus gender inequality. "Honor" femicide thus reinstates the compliant and accommodating notion of femininity in such families and communities, encouraging all to unite around unequal gender relations—so-called "honor" femicide therefore serves to legitimate, at the local level, an unequal relationship between men and women, and masculinity and femininity.

Conclusion

In this paper, I briefly summarized feminist theorizing in the 1970s and 1980s that set the stage for the emergence of the concept of hegemonic masculinity. I then presented the criticisms leveled against this concept and therefore the arrival of new directions in scholarly work on hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities. As part of these new directions, I considered my most recent work on hegemonic, dominant, dominating, and positive masculinities. Further, given that the concept of patriarchy fails to examine the differences among the category of "men" (as well as "women"), the concentration on gender diversity—and in this case, masculinities—provides that distinction among men and masculinities, and thereby advances a detailed conceptualization of the contrasting masculinities involved in two distinct types of femicide; namely, intimate partner femicide and so-called "honor" femicides. The direct implication of this discussion, then, is that examining masculinities will deepen comprehension about why different types of femicide are perpetrated.

References

Acker, Joan. 1989. "The Problem with Patriarchy." *Sociology* 23:235-240.

Adams, David. 2007. *Why Do They Kill? Men Who Murder Their Intimate Partners*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.

Beasley, Christine. 2008. "Re-Thinking Hegemonic Masculinity in a Globalizing World." *Men and Masculinities* 11:86-103.

Beechey, Veronica. 1987. *Unequal Work*. London: Verso.

Begikhani, Nazand, Aisha K. Gill, and Gill Hague. 2015. *Honour-Based Violence: Experiences and Counter-Strategies in Iraqi Kurdistan and the UK Kurdish Diaspora*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Campbell, Jacquelyn C. et. al. 2007. "Intimate Partner Homicide: Review and Implications of Research and Policy." *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse* 8(3):246-269.

Connell, Raewyn. 1985. "Theorizing Gender." *Sociology* 19:260-272.

Connell, Raewyn. 1987. *Gender and Power*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Connell, Raewyn. 1995. *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Connell, Rawyn and James W. Messerschmidt. 2005. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender & Society* 19:829-859.

Dobash, R. Emerson and Russell P. Dobash. 2015. *When Men Murder Women*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Dogan, Recep. 2016. "The Dynamics of Honor Killings and the Perpetrators' Experiences." *Homicide Studies* 20(1): 53-79.

Dworkin, Andrea. 1979. *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*. New York: Plume.

Dworkin, Andrea. 1987. *Intercourse*. New York: Free Press.

Eisenstein, Zillah, (ed.). 1979. *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Gill, Aisha K., Carolyn Strange, and Karl Roberts, (eds.). 2014. *"Honour" Killing and Violence: Theory, Policy and Practice*. New York: Palgrave.

Goussinsky, Ruhama and Dalit Yassour-Borochowitz. 2012. "'I Killed Her, But I Never Laid a Finger on Her'—A Phenomenological Difference between Wife-Killing and Wife-Battering." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 17(6): 553-564.

Grzyb, Magdalena A. 2016. "An Explanation of Honour-Related Killings of Women in Europe through Bourdieu's Concept of Symbolic Violence and Masculine Domination." *Current Sociology* 64(7):1036-1053.

MacKinnon, Catherine. 1979. *Sexual Harassment of Working Women*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

MacKinnon, Catherine. 1989. *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Martin, Pat. 1998. "Why Can't a Man Be More Like a Woman? Reflections on Connell's *Masculinities*." *Gender and Society* 12(4):472-474.

Messerschmidt, James W. 1993. *Masculinities and Crime*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Messerschmidt, James W. 2012. "Engendering Gendered Knowledge: Assessing the Academic Appropriation of Hegemonic Masculinity." *Men and Masculinities* 15: 56-76.

Messerschmidt, James W. 2016. *Masculinities in the Making*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Radford, Jill and Diana E. H. Russell, (eds.). 1992. *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*. New York: Twayne.

Rowbotham, Sheila. 1981. "The Trouble with 'Patriarchy.'" Pp. 364-373 in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, edited by R. Samuel. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Schippers, Mimi. 2007. "Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony." *Theory & Society* 36:85-102.