

# **Masculinities and the Gendering of Men in Disaster Management and Response**

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# Gender and Disasters

- Disaster studies has been slow to address gender issues in the management of disasters.
- Early contributions focused on the different ways in which disasters impacted on women and men.
- Most of the gender and disaster literature has focused on women's experiences.
- Most gender aware disaster researchers focus more on the impact of disasters rather than prevention.

# **What does a critical masculinity theorist have to contribute to the gendering of disasters?**

- Understanding masculinity
- Understanding men's privilege
- Understanding rural masculinities
- Understanding mateship
- Understanding men's experiences of trauma
- Understanding men's gendered experiences of disasters
- Understanding men's involvement in disaster prevention

# Challenging essentialist views about masculinity

- Essentialist theorists attribute intrinsically different natures to men and women.
- Aggressive, dominant, competitive behaviours of men are regarded as a product of nature.
- Men are seen to have an 'aggression advantage' over women which is used to explain men's social dominance.
- This is the 'common sense' view of masculinity which is likely to be evident among fire fighters and disaster managers.

# Challenging sex role theories

- Argues that men and women are socialised into appropriate sex roles.
- The focus of sex role theory is on establishing new role models for men.
- By focusing on one normative standard of masculinity, sex role theory is unable to account for diversity and difference in men's lives.
- Sex role theory underemphasises the economic and political power that men exercise over women.

# Understanding the complexity of masculinity

- Multiple masculinities: Understanding diversity among men is essential to understanding men's lives.
- There are relations of hierarchy between men.
- Masculinity is socially structured and institutionalised. It is embedded in organisational structures.
- Masculinities are enacted by men.

# Hegemonic masculinities

- Culturally dominant in a given setting.
- Idealised and promoted as a desirable attainment for young men to strive towards.
- Presented as heterosexual, aggressive, authoritative and courageous.
- The manliness of men and boys is judged by their ability to measure up to this standard.
- Sport, work and power over women are signifiers.
- Associated with aggressiveness and capacity for violence.

# Marginalised and subordinate masculinities

- The diversity of masculinities is marked by hierarchy and exclusion.
- Men do not benefit equally from the 'patriarchal dividend'.
- Useful in understanding the relationship between gender and other dimensions of stratification such as class, race and sexuality.
- Men 'do' masculinity differently depending on where they are situated.



# Complicit masculinities

- Men who not meet the normative standard of hegemonic masculinity but nevertheless benefit from it in various ways.
- Complicit masculinities maintain the structures and ideologies that reproduce gender hierarchy.
- Most men are perpetrators of gender inequality and do little to challenge the patriarchal gender order.

# Understanding men's privilege

- Privilege is 'systematically conferred advantages individuals enjoy by virtue of their membership in dominant groups' (Bailey 1998).
- Most privilege is not recognised by those who have it.
- Male privilege leads men to believe that they are entitled to receive services from women.

# The rural context of natural disasters

- Greater social and political conservatism.
- Stronger enforcement of gender rules and traditional roles in the family.
- A strong belief in the privacy of family.
- Distrust of outsiders.
- Greater levels of surveillance of women.
- Strong social controls operating through informal processes.

# Men's dominance in rural communities

- Men's control of local decision making bodies.
- The segregated men's service clubs.
- Men's control of the churches.
- The dominance of male sport
- The role of pub drinking in gender segregation
- The domestic division of labour.
- The subordination of women in employment.
- The traditional gender attitudes of men and women (Dempsey 1992).

# The rural crisis

- Processes of economic restructuring
- High levels of unemployment
- Corporate downsizing
- Decline in real wages
- Changes in technology
- Decline in manufacturing jobs and other traditional rural male occupations.
- Sale of farms and the entry of women into the domain of men on farms.

# The impact of the rural crisis on men

- Melancholia, nostalgia and loss.
- Men define their value through paid work but there isn't enough for all of them.
- Grief among rural men in relation to failed expectations in relationships
- Increasing rates of suicide of men in rural areas
- Increased rates of alcoholism among rural men
- Restriction to low paid casual work
- Declining self esteem
- Emphasis on stoicism and rugged individualism

# The myths of mateship

- Supporting one another in life and death situations
- Implies that a mate will stick by you
- Loyalty to one's mate above observance of law
- Forms the basis of myths of national identity
- ANZAC period establishes Australian identity
- Mateship is celebrated in sport and communal drinking

# The other side of mateship

- Interpersonal satisfactions of mateship are achieved at the cost of dissatisfaction for women.
- Mateship embodies toughness and a disdain for 'weak' emotion.
- Male heterosexual identity in mateship is reproduced by fear and hatred of gay men
- Mateship is constructed against the image of Indigenous men, migrant men and non-caucasian men.
- Mateship is linked to pack rape and sexual assault.



# Understanding men's experience of trauma

- Trauma involves loss of control of self.
- Ideas about masculinity influence men's experience of trauma.
- Trauma as a loss of control can be seen as a failure in masculinity.
- The medical language of PTSD leaves men with a sense of failure as men.
- Living up to traditional masculinity is itself a traumatic experience.

# Understanding disaster responses in the context of masculinity

- Masculinity and voluntary fire fighting organisations.
- Masculinity and fire fighting.
- Masculinity and risk
- Masculinity and reconstruction.
- Masculinity and fire prevention.
- Masculinity and gender equality

# Masculinity and fire fighting

- Iconic image of the fire fighter as one of bravery, heroism, danger and courage.
- Fire fighting draws upon facets of hegemonic masculinity.
- Fire fighters 'prove' their masculinity by being seen to take risks.
- The emotional burden of public perceptions of heroism.

# Masculinity and risk

- Evacuation or staying to fight the fire: Gender differences in perceived risk
- Are these gender differences a product of socialisation or are they grounded in the reality of different levels of risk?
- Risk taking is a prominent aspect of masculinity.
- Taking risks is a way in which men 'prove' their masculinity.

# Masculinity and reconstruction

- The disruption of masculinity and men's dominance following disasters.
- The impact of masculinity on men's responses to disasters.
- Hyper-masculinity as a response by men to loss of dominance.
- The increase in men's violence against women following disasters.

# Masculinity and fire prevention

- Evidence that fire fighters resist involvement in fire prevention activities.
- Are fire fighters are more interested in saving lives 'at the sharp end' as Baigent (2001) argues?
- Are fire fighters interested in doing themselves out of a job?

# Moving towards gender equality following disasters?

- That the crisis generated by a disaster can destabilise hierarchical gender patterns.
- When does a disaster unsettle gender hierarchy and when does it reproduce gender inequalities?
- Some men who cannot practice hegemonic masculinity may develop more egalitarian subjectivities and practices (Pacholok 2013).

# Why should men challenge gender inequality?

- Personal wellbeing (negative effects on men)
- Relational interests (based on men's relationships with women)
- Collective interests (gender equality is relevant to the wider community).
- Principle (political and ethical reasons) (Connell 2003)

How much should we focus on what men have to gain as opposed to the ethical responsibility for men to challenge gender inequality?



# Democratic masculinity or moral selfhood?

- To reconstruct masculinity requires that it is possible for men to feel good about being men without the negative repercussions of traditional masculinity.
- Does this mean reconstructing the notion of what it is to be a 'real man'?
- Alternatively, does it mean that men have to break with notions of masculinity altogether and foster a sense of moral selfhood?  
(Stoltenberg 1993).