Masculinities and the Gendering of Men in Disaster Management and Response

Bob Pease

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 perpetuators 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-caucasion 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).