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## Hegemonic masculinity: combining theory and practice in gender interventions

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The concept of hegemonic masculinity has been used in gender studies since the early-1980s to explain men's power over women. Stressing the legitimating power of consent (rather than crude physical or political power to ensure submission), it has been used to explain men's health behaviours and the use of violence. Gender activists and others seeking to change men's relations with women have mobilised the concept of hegemonic masculinity in interventions, but the links between gender theory and activism have often not been explored. The translation of 'hegemonic masculinity' into interventions is little examined. We show how, in South Africa and Sweden, the concept has been used to inform theoretically-based gender interventions and to ensure that men are brought into broader social efforts to build gender equity. We discuss the practical translational challenges of using gender theory broadly, and hegemonic masculinity in particular, in a Swedish case study, of the intervention *Machofabriken* [The Macho Factory], and illustrate how the concept is brought to life in this activist work with men. The concept has considerable practical application in developing a sustainable praxis of theoretically grounded interventions that are more likely to have enduring effect, but evaluating broader societal change in hegemonic masculinity remains an enduring challenge.

**Keywords:** Gender; hegemonic masculinity; interventions

### Introduction

How does the concept of hegemonic masculinity inform practical, on-the-ground work (as distinct from policy work) by those who try to change men's behaviour with a goal of building gender equity? Recent reviews of interventions with men and boys have highlighted the diversity of this work, its historical trajectory, as well as its broad global footprint (Flood 2011; Jewkes, Flood, and Lang 2014, 2014; Ricardo, Eads, and Barker 2012). A unifying aspect of much of this is an underlying premise that although men are structurally related to women in a superior position and inherently benefit from this

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what Raewyn Connell called the patriarchal dividend (Connell 1987), they do have a 'choice' about whether or not actively to occupy oppressive positions vis-à-vis women and other men or to resist these. This choice may be highly constrained due to a lack of exposure to other ideas and information, but it is ultimately still a choice, and in this respect presents itself as a target for change by gender activists. A central task for individual-level work with men to change gender relations is to initiate a process of reflection on the implications of ways of living, and awareness of alternatives, to explore and empower them to work for gender equity. Yet ideas about gender operate in social groups and include the disparate social value accorded men over women in many societies (Hearn et al. 2012), which informs not just how men think about themselves, but also how social groups relate, access resources and prescribe and proscribe particular behaviours. Changing hegemonic masculinity ultimately requires change in ideals shared at a societal level.

This paper derives from a collaborative project between masculinity scholars in South Africa and Sweden. We first provide an overview of the theoretical concept of hegemonic masculinity that is our focus, then we describe the context of the dialogue between South Africa and Sweden; in the next section we discuss challenges that may arise in the course of deploying the concept of hegemonic masculinity in interventions and highlight a case study of the intervention *Machofabriken* [The Macho Factory] from Sweden.

### **Hegemonic masculinity: a theoretical overview**

Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987) serves as an analytical instrument to identify those attitudes and practices among men that perpetuate gender inequality, involving both men's domination over women and the power of some men over other (often minority groups of) men. The concept has been widely used and debated, and over the years refined (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), with the basic idea that hegemonic masculinity is 'a culturally idealized form' and 'is both a personal and a collective project' (Donaldson 1993, 645). In a recent review, a 'usual' conceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity is described as:

a set of values, established by men in power that functions to include and exclude, and to organize society in gender unequal ways. It combines several features: a hierarchy of masculinities, differential access among men to power (over women and other men), and the interplay between men's identity, men's ideals, interactions, power, and patriarchy. (Jewkes and Morrell 2012, 40)

Masculinities are multiple, fluid and dynamic and hegemonic positions are not the only masculinities available in a given society. They may also be seen as positions that are occupied situationally, in that the position occupied, practices and values espoused in one context may be different from those of another. A core element of the construction of hegemonic masculinity is heterosexuality, and to a greater or lesser extent hegemonic masculinity is constructed as a gender position that is as much 'not gay' as it is 'not female'.

The notion of hegemony has its roots in the writing of Gramsci and is an essentially a position of dominance attained through relative consensus rather than regular force, even if underpinned by force (Gramsci 1971). The consensus is one that is built among those who benefit from the promotion of masculinity, as well as many of those who are

oppressed by it, notably women. Hegemonic masculinity is as much for women as for men a cultural ideal of manhood, which is rewarded by women's interests, attentions and efforts to replicate this ideal in their male relatives and associates.

In the Sweden-South Africa collaboration, there were a number of major debates. One was about whether the masculinity of men who are structurally subordinated in society, for example working-class men in Sweden or poor African men in South Africa, could be regarded as 'hegemonic', as these men do not perceive themselves to be 'in power'. In this respect, Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) elaboration that there can be more than one hegemonic masculinity within a society and it can pertain within sub-groups is helpful. It resonates with the experience of gender activists in the group about the utility of the concept in intervention work in subordinated communities.

However, the debate emphasised a challenge for those seeking to change masculinities, which lies in recognising that not all harmful masculinities are hegemonic (Connell 2005; Hearn 2004; Hearn et al. 2012). Some forms of destructive and exaggerated masculinities (or hypermasculinity [Herek 1987]) often develop among socially marginalised men in urban slums and emphasise power and force. They are not entirely separate from hegemonic masculinity to the extent that they emerge out of the relationship between hegemonic ideals and (some) men's ability to meet them. Their origins lie in adversity, including in violence experiences in childhood that have enduring psychological impact, manifesting in a lack of empathy and remorse, which enable acts of violence while positioning the male actors as themselves victims (Bourgeois 1996; Fulu et al. 2013; Jewkes et al. 2011, 2013; Mathews, Jewkes, and Abrahams 2011). Masculinities are constructed in ways that reflect poverty or power, regional cultures and neighbourhood dynamics. From Hindu understandings of violence in India (Mehta 2006) to bonds between men in Mexico (Magazine 2004) and youth understandings of sexuality and male control in South Africa (Wood and Jewkes 2001; Wood, Lambert, and Jewkes 2007), it is evident that subordinated men across the world are actors as well as acted upon. Moreover, there may be a conflation of individuals who are prone to violence because of childhood experience, peer cultures that exert peer pressure to commit violence, and social norms within the gender regimes, which legitimate violence. The confluence of these factors poses a formidable challenge to gender activists seeking to intervene.

The question about whether the use of violence was inimical to hegemonic masculinity was keenly debated. Hearn and others have argued that men's violence against women has not been a major focus in the development of the theoretical concept of hegemonic masculinity (Groes-Green 2009; Hearn 2012). At the same time the use of violence diminishes men, and so other approaches, such as hypermasculinity (Herek 1987), may be more useful than hegemonic masculinity to refer to men who use violence, since they do not conflate a hegemonic process with a gender stereotype. Violent and sexist masculine values and practices may be, but are not, necessarily hegemonic in a given culture (Messerschmidt 2012). The counter argument is that men who use violence and threaten violence often have a considerable repertoire of everyday acts of low-level violence, particularly directed against their partner at home, and this does not diminish their public stature. Indeed, this may even serve indirectly to enhance it to the extent that they may be seen as 'in control' of their homes. Given the private nature of intimate partner violence and frequent reluctance of women to talk about it, a considerable amount of its use is never known about by those outside the intimate relationship (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005). In South Africa, there is a considerable body of research on hegemonic masculinity (Morrell et al. 2013) that elaborates on the situated 'contents' of hegemonic masculinity and argues that demonstrating strength, toughness and the

capacity to use and often actual use of violence are very much part of hegemonic masculinity there. This is different from Sweden, and highlights the need to understand the content of hegemonic masculinity in different settings (Hearn et al. 2012). Masculinities are context-specific and bear the imprint of history (Cornwall, Edström, and Greig 2011).

The relationship between gender norms, social collectivities and the individual is complex, with each impacting on the other, with different force and effect at different times. Hegemonic masculinity has been largely utilised as a social structural concept to explain the legitimisation of masculinities through social institutions and social groups (Morrell, Jewkes, and Lindegger 2012). It can also be used in this way in interventions that seek to impact on social norms related to masculinity, but when interventions are with individual men or groups of men, its value is to surface (and then shift) values and attitudes and provoke reflection on behaviour.

Another understanding of hegemonic masculinity that has been debated and examined is that it is a problem not only for women, but also for men. The system that keeps men in a collectively dominant position over women and in competitive relations to other men comes at a cost for men in terms of their health and quality of life. Faced with an ideal where physical resilience is valorised, men find it harder to seek healthcare and engage in preventive activities. The impact is most clearly seen in a country like South Africa in excess mortality from violence and chronic diseases (Cornell et al. 2012; Matzopoulos et al. 2014; Seedat et al. 2009). Thus, change in hegemonic masculinity can herald tangible benefits for men, as well as for women.

## Context

From its outset, the purpose of the collaborative project was to investigate the way in which hegemonic masculinity was understood in the two national contexts and how it was translated into practical gender equality work. The project was interested to understand how the concept was used in academic research and, more popularly, by activists and the lay public as the concept is now used quite widely. A means of doing this was to engage gender activists in conversation with academic researchers. Both in South Africa and Sweden, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have emerged to undertake gender work with men, and these are generally staffed by committed gender activists who engage at multiple levels with issues of gender inequality, including developing materials and working with men, negotiating with government, using legal instruments and mounting protests. Although in both of the contexts gender equity was formally embraced as a goal and valued as a social good, there were significant economic, social-historical and cultural differences. Sweden had a relatively long history of feminism and social democracy, following its long-running imperial past; South Africa was a new constitutional democracy emerging from half a century of institutional and economic apartheid and three centuries of colonialism. Patriarchy was shaped in relation to racial inequalities, traditional social structures and economic disparities, and these were key intersectional features of the gender order. By contrast, Sweden has a strong history of state interventions such as the provision of paternity leave though aspects of gender inequality, including violence, certainly persist (Hearn et al. 2012; Johansson and Klinth 2008).

National differences meant that the interventions undertaken by NGOs that we discussed shared both similarities and differences. In South Africa, gender interventions with men have historically focused on two major problems – violence and HIV

transmission. In Sweden, violence has also been a major focus, but other key interventions have worked with fatherhood and related aspects of the domestic and labour market divisions of labour. While South African interventions have diversified to include work on more enduring issues, such as fatherhood and unemployment, many of the interventions had short-term goals – reducing gender-based violence, reducing HIV transmission – with longer-term goals of transforming gender norms and behaviours. Swedish interventions have worked more towards longer-term goals. Changing values and attitudes that underpin, express and legitimise the everyday activities that perpetuate gender inequality has generally been the focus of their work. In South Africa, gender activists have worked largely in a political culture that espouses gender equity ‘talk’ and has a strong legislative framework, but where the ‘walk’ of political leadership has largely countermanded these efforts (Morrell et al. 2013). In Sweden, political leadership and social policy have been mostly consistent in supporting work of gender activists and have led to a relatively rapid gender change over the last 50 years (Hearn et al. 2012).

Differences between South Africa and Sweden were discussed over the four-year life of the project, with meetings held alternately in South Africa and Sweden. It became clear that there were different views about the ways in which hegemonic masculinity could be used in analysing gender relations, which reflected, in part, the different contexts and the challenges that flowed therefrom. Despite these differences, it was also clear that gender activists in both countries found some value in the concept and operationalised it in their programmes.

## **Changing hegemonic masculinity: challenge of translating theory into action**

### ***Setting goals***

The concept of hegemonic masculinity is sometimes used as part of a theory of change, but more commonly is seen in terms of identifying a key element in the gender order that is part of an explanation for the existence and perpetuation of gender inequality. While it is never fixed and explicitly accommodates change over time, and centrally argues that masculinities are by nature fluid and dynamic, it is not intended to enable identification of significant moments when hegemonic masculinity is more rather than less gender equitable. The concept of hegemonic masculinity can be actively incorporated into intervention design to enable change. It can be part of an intervention’s theory of change, but the question of whether hegemonic masculinity can change to the point of being not oppressive to women, and what happens to the hierarchy of masculinities at that point remains unclear.

One of the major debates in the project was about whether it was correct to view Sweden as a country that had ‘achieved’ gender equity and thus where hegemonic masculinity was largely egalitarian. Viewed from the lens of Swedish gender researchers and activists, any conclusion that gender equity in Sweden was ‘mission accomplished’ was not defensible. For as long as gender binaries and gendered power hierarchies have not been deconstructed and the gender order is upheld by the constant differentiation between masculinity and femininity, men will maintain hegemony (Hearn 2004). Yet when Sweden was compared to South African patriarchy, the gender order in Sweden was enviable. It seems that there is a danger in defining gender inequality interventions as a zero-sum game where unless patriarchy is demonstrably upended, changes over time in hegemonic masculinity are not celebrated, but treated with suspicion.



The ultimate challenge for gender activists is change in the 'idealised form' of masculinity, which will result in the most enduring impact on a society, and yet most interventions are driven by the short-term goal of change in the attitudes and behaviour of individual men. A goal that is much easier to evaluate, with gender attitude scales and measures of use of violence, but that uncertainly maps on to the broader social project of change in an ideal. If interventions focus on particular men, then it becomes necessary to acknowledge contradictions and inconsistencies that will limit the impact of interventions, and to acknowledge that such interventions are incremental rather than widely socially transformative.

### *Talking gender*

In most settings, it is possible to provide a context in which men and women will talk about their roles, relations and expectations, but transformative work on 'gender' implies a deep engagement that goes beyond this. A first hurdle is often gaining the attention of those who are to be engaged. Discussions of gendered power often need to be approached indirectly, lest resistance is encountered to processes that may be variously seen as outrageous in questioning men's power, or ridiculous, where men's power is 'taken for granted'. If gender identities or power relations are not seen as 'a problem', it is hard to get engagement in gender interventions. Gender activists have often learned the need to open discussions indirectly, often through eliciting what is seen as a problem in the locale or by the target group, and to use these as a way in to discussions. This is done very effectively in an exercise in the Stepping Stones (Welbourn 1995) manual entitled *The Joys and Problems of Sex*, where the group, who have come together to discuss HIV prevention, are asked to call out (or write on paper) words linked to sex that reflect joys, problems or both. These are then discussed in order to enable group ownership of the 'problems', which opens the door to later discussion of their causes and consequences in a process of critical reflection and a facilitated dialogue on the gendered nature of these problems.

The challenge for gender activists is to engage with gender, and inevitably gender roles, without losing the analysis of power and gender identity. Gender roles and norms are familiar, and much easier to discuss in groups than reflection on gender binaries, values and power. There are a range of tools that gender activists can draw on in enabling change, these span the pedagogical theories of Paulo Freire (1970) (i.e., change through dialogue, reflexivity and consciousness-raising) to contributions from discursive psychology such as Edley and Wetherell (1997, 215) (i.e., 'cultural struggle vividly reproduced in talk') and Frosh Phoenix and Pattman (2002) (i.e., through 'restoring agency' through critical observation, reflection and exposure to counter-normative discourses). All of these can become tools within transformative processes.

Men's rights movements champion the idea of men as 'victims' (in the face of women's empowerment) through an analysis that ignores the structural dimensions of men's power (Maddison 1999). Gender activists have the challenge of opening up discussion of men's vulnerability, while steering group analysis of the situation of men away from the men's rights movement position. It's an essential discussion, as experience of personal trauma, for example in the form of abuse in childhood or homophobic abuse, has been linked to a greater propensity among men to use violence against women (Fulu et al. 2013), and many men who present a hypermasculinity have a personal trauma history. Allowing space to engage with men's vulnerability is a key element in exploring masculine identities, as well as allowing men to feel supported and



accepted, rather than blamed and judged. It is also critical to processes of breaking down the gender binary, where vulnerability is seen as reflecting feminised weakness and enabling discussion of multiple masculinities.

### *Creating, securing and keeping a constituency*

To enable change, it is essential to reflect on the social construction of hegemonic masculinity. If an ideal of masculinity is a product of social processes, as opposed to 'natural', it can be changed. The Swedish intervention, *The Macho Factory* (see below) addresses this centrally in its title. For other interventions, social construction of hegemonic masculinity and subordinate masculinities and femininities can be made visible through exercises that both 'reveal' how men and women receive messages, and from whom, about what is expected of them as men and women, and how behaviour is rewarded and transgressions sanctioned. From a Freirian change model perspective, interventions that facilitate dialogue create opportunities to reflect, innovate and thereby transform positioning (Blackbeard and Lindegger 2014; Stromquist 2014). As shown in autophotography studies in South Africa, participatory groups can form around processes of documenting and discussing experiences, dilemmas and contexts of masculinity, thereby dialoguing new possibilities for individual and group positioning (Blackbeard and Lindegger, 2014). It is generally not possible to reach and retain men in participatory processes without engagement with men's vulnerability and positive aspects of masculinity, so it is essential for interventions to balance reflection on the power, vulnerabilities and oppression of hegemonic masculinity and positive aspects of men's aspirations.

One of the critical questions in developing processes of gender change is whether it is possible to deconstruct gender as a binary. Alsop, Fitzsimmons and Lennon (2002) argue that 'even critical studies of masculinity which draw on a social constructionism often retain a residual essentialism that a division between men and women and the assumption that masculinity belongs to men and femininity to women unquestioningly underpins analysis' (132). Essentially, *The Macho Factory* provides an example of both the importance of and an approach for deconstructing gender binaries. There are other possible approaches, and these may include participatory exercises that emphasise the overlap between traits of men and women (e.g., both can be caring or strong), for example through free listing of men and women's characteristics and attributes required for their gendered work and then comparing what appears on both lists and discussing what cannot appear on the list of the other.

One of the challenges with small-group work is to find ways for the group to change in the face of social norms that encourage conformity (Campbell and Cornish 2012). The group environment itself is somewhat enabling, especially if it builds group selection on an existing group of peers (i.e., deliberate friendship-group recruitment). But it is hard for individuals to change, or sustain change, in the face of unchallenged broader social norms and so, in this respect, intervention at multiple levels within a social environment or other community is much more likely to be effective (Jewkes, Flood, and Lang 2014).

Further, the relational construction of gender is critical and it is much more likely that interventions that engage both men and women in critical reflection on gender identities, roles and practices will be successful (Jewkes, Flood, and Lang 2014). The concept of hegemonic masculinity is predicated on the subordination of women and girls, yet the latter are a key element in the construction and reproduction of the social

model (Jewkes and Morrell 2012). Thus, work with women and girls is needed to create an environment in which men can change and sustain change, and where this will be embraced by women as partners, or potential partners (Talbot and Quayle 2010).

This work with women needs to proceed with gender analysis on a very similar discursive and reflective journey to that followed by men, so that women can develop critical consciousness of their right to live without subjugation by men as well as their role in reproducing their subordinate position through gender socialisation, their contribution to gender hierarchy through social sanctioning and marginalisation of certain femininities and masculinities, and responses to oppression in the family and community. Research on how women change has also highlighted the importance of change in the structural nature of relations between men and women through economically empowering women (Jewkes, Flood, and Lang 2014). For example, interventions such as the IMAGE microfinance and gender intervention in South Africa, which addressed the material insecurity of women and their gendered subordination, have been shown to enable women to protect themselves from intimate partner violence two years after the intervention, whereas, by contrast, just engaging women in microfinance (or elsewhere gender interventions alone) is not effective (Pronyk et al. 2006).

Interventions that seek fundamentally to change ideals of masculinity have been termed ‘gender transformative’ (Barker, Ricardo, and Nascimento 2007). This suggests that they are able to make a dramatic change in the relationship between masculinity and gender equity. However, a more cautious analysis of the types of change that are secured by such interventions suggests that men’s strides towards gender equity are at best incremental (Gibbs et al. 2014; Jewkes, Wood, and Duvvury 2010). Some interventions with men have shown an ability to reduce perpetration of violence, but the relationship between this and change in hegemonic masculinity is uncertain because the relationship between violence and hegemonic masculinity is itself contested (Jewkes et al. 2008). This observation does not mean that revolutionary change cannot ever be achieved, but it does suggest that in order to do so, interventions supporting structural and individual change need to be substantially different, and perhaps delivered over a much longer time frame than is currently common practice.

Donor-funded interventions are often expected to demonstrate short- or medium-term impact. This may bias intervention selection towards ones that are more likely to do this – essentially individually-based interventions – rather than more diffuse social-norm change models such as SHARE or SASA! in Uganda or COMBAT developed by the Gender Centre in Accra, Ghana, which only expect to achieve long-term goals after multi-year work in a community (Abramsky et al. 2012; Wagman et al. 2015).

### **A case study from Sweden: The Macho Factory (*Machofabriken*)**

The Macho Factory comprises educational material and associated activities designed for use in Sweden by professionals working with young people in schools, sports clubs and other leisure activities for young people aged 13–25 years. The aim is increased gender equity and violence prevention, by ‘breaking the link’ between masculinity and violence, and by focusing on how social norms of masculinity can be challenged and changed. The material consists of 17 short films and related exercises, divided into six different themes, along with an extended tutorial manual (Lundqvist et al. 2010). The material is intended to be used in mixed-gender groups of 5 to 20, but can also be used in groups with only girls or only boys.

The Macho Factory was developed with the idea that masculinity norms need to be at the centre when working with violence prevention, and could work as a way to change expectations on young men to use violence. When developing the material, several gender theories have been used. The material is based on ethnomethodological (West and Zimmerman 1987) and poststructuralist (Butler 1990) perspectives on gender; that is, gender is seen as something individuals learn and enact in everyday, embodied interaction. These theories are manifested in the name of the programme; the macho concept that has often been used to characterise certain dominant and/or stigmatised masculinities is combined with a concept that signals the social construction of gender. The Macho Factory therefore indicates the ‘doing’ and ‘undoing’ of masculinity.

The programme is explicitly inspired by masculinity theory, particularly hegemonic masculinity and hypermasculinity (Herek 1987), even if the link to the concept of hegemonic masculinity varies in the different parts of the material. Another important influence is gender system theory (Hirdman 1990), which presents two supporting logics that reproduce gender hierarchy: one is the male-female dichotomy and the other is the hierarchy according to which the man is the norm. Perhaps the most important influences are queer theory (Butler 1990; Sedgwick 1990) and intersectionality theory (Crenshaw 1991), which contribute with norm-critical, anti-essentialist perspectives on gender. Gender transformative programmes cannot simply emphasise how intersections of gender, class and race exacerbate violence in some groups, but it is also necessary to deconstruct social categories since there is otherwise a risk of essentialising certain groups of men as being more violent or oppressive than others (Gottzén and Jonsson 2012). Drawing on queer and intersectionality theories, the basic idea of the programme is that it is not enough to create more ‘gender equal men’, but that gender binaries and gendered power hierarchies have to be deconstructed since the gender order is upheld by the constant differentiation between masculinity and femininity. Crucial is which individuals and bodies are seen as masculine, who is able to define what is seen as proper masculine behaviour and which embodied individuals are seen as the Other. In this context, violence is positioned as a resource to accomplish proper masculinity and male superiority (cf. Messerschmidt 1993).

In order to explain the relation between individual and structure, where they are not seen as separate and fixed entities, the Macho Factory uses the idea of the box as a metaphor for the corporeal and material possibilities, and limitations, of attempts to accomplish masculine ideals. The content of these ideals is developed in each group by writing down the prohibitions and prescriptions associated with being inside the box. The box is always presented as a place that gives security and higher status, and that is connected to power and the monopoly of violence. But the box has also some limitations. It prohibits transgressions of masculine norms at the cost of losing privileges. However, individuals are also able to move in and out of the box and manage privileges. Women and individuals coded as ‘too feminine’ or in other ways breaching heterosexual and masculine norms are, according to the material, not able to get inside the box but could be close to it and could orientate themselves to its norms – or not. The option of violent behaviours to solve dilemmas is not sanctioned in group facilitation.

When developing The Macho Factory,<sup>1</sup> the group used ‘association exercises’ in which various masculinity archetypes were structured in relation to Connell’s (2005) hierarchical model. Because of the perception that hegemonic masculinity in Sweden is a power position where the use of violence is not necessary, the notion of hypermasculinity was used to reflect the use of extreme forms of violence that may be connected to a lower-status position, as it may create suffering ill health, and lower social status.

This is illustrated by one of the short films in the programme material, namely, *The Locker Room*, where boys towel-whip one another. At first it is play, then one boy becomes too violent, accentuates what is allowed as play, with the consequence that he is regarded as problematic and is excluded from the group. The film tries to illustrate how boys and men who do not use 'serious' violence are responsible for making violence a possible alternative for those who 'cross the line'. Destructive forms of violence are enabled when less severe forms of violence are enjoyed and used to create different forms of homosociality. Those boys and men who do not use violence, but are not condemning it (since it might result in group exclusion with loss of status), have indirect responsibility for more severe forms of violence used by some men (Kelly 1988). Boys may incite and provoke certain forms of violence without losing hegemonic position, but the ones using violence run the risk of being subordinated.

The *Macho Factory* also directly targets men's violence against women. For instance, one film illustrates an interrogation with a young man suspected of assaulting his female partner and how he defends himself. The film aims to demonstrate how men are able to blame their victims and deny responsibility for their own violence. Another movie, *Hem-makväll* (literally translated as Home Night), portrays a young man that has raped his girlfriend but normalises his behaviour and does not want to identify himself as 'someone who rapes'. This film also discusses the relation between normalised, man-to-man violence to violence against women as the character compares his girlfriend's victimhood with his own experience of other men's violence, which he rationalises does not need to be taken seriously. In the accompanying exercises, such minimising of sexual violence is challenged by scrutinising common accounts for violence and how they relate to hegemonic forms of masculinity, such as notions of men's entitlement to women's bodies.

The methods in the programme aim at enacting everyday situations in order to enable new ways to act and thus create change. The films are also tools for raising situations that may be too sensitive or difficult to discuss otherwise (Falk-Lundqvist 2010). Several of the methods used in *The Macho Factory* are inspired by drama education, with the basic notion that enactment in itself creates new understandings and enables changed behaviour (Byréus 2012). The explicit aim with the programme is to create spaces where young men are not expected to defend their position in the box. Through this, the aim is to help participants to do masculinity in new ways, which in the end they may practise outside the programme. One way to create such space is through so-called forum theatre, developed by Augusto Boal (1992, 1995), which is a form of critical theatre that enacts scenes with oppressors and oppressed. While the audience is not allowed to change the oppressor, it may suggest how to reduce oppression by, for instance, making the individuals act differently and not giving oppressors their consent. The *Macho Factory* is clearly inspired by forum theatre and the short films may be compared to Boal's dramas, but with the structuralist tendencies (with already given hierarchies) toned down. In order to discuss the short films, the programme also uses 'hearing' exercises, where participants try to understand and question the intentions of the characters, as well as to create new stories and situations. For instance, participants may first see a film where a girl is sexualised when she auditions for a bass player position in a band. After the film, participants enact a scene where they enter the male characters in the film and answer to questions from the other participants about how they felt and thought when they behaved the way they did. This is a way to explore and question norms behind sexism.

Finally, a central dilemma in *The Macho Factory* is that the intervention is dependent on individuals, whilst gender inequality and oppression is societal. Leadership of

group processes are crucial in order for the methods to lead to change and not reproduce power relations (Byréus 2012). The programme also employs exercises designed to create a secure and open environment by developing communication skills in competent group leadership. Trust between participants is a crucial prerequisite for challenging and changing gender norms (Wheelan 2010).

## Conclusion

This paper illustrates how the concept of hegemonic masculinity is, and can be, used in interventions for building gender equity and to reduce gender-based violence against women. Hegemonic masculinity identifies how gender power operates at multiple levels, it provides an overarching framework for understanding how gender inequalities are produced and reproduced, both in the long term and the quotidian. On the other hand, because hegemonic masculinity is a concept that accommodates fluidity and dynamism, it is not easy to identify stasis or movement. Most interventions sidestep this problem by operating on a short-term project basis that addresses specific elements of hegemonic masculinity. This allows interventions to effect changes at individual, group and discursive levels or on individual male practices (such as reducing gender-based violence), which may impact on individuals but, unless taken to scale, will not by themselves contribute to change in the gender order.

Despite being an abstraction, hegemonic masculinity can practicably be put to use in interventions. This requires that careful attention be paid to the mechanisms that the theory that encompasses hegemonic masculinity identifies as being central to men's domination of women. Research and practice related to gender-based violence prevention has highlighted the importance of using theoretically-based interventions and the much greater likelihood that these will be effective in bringing about change (Jewkes, Flood, and Lang 2014). We have shown that the theoretical concept of hegemonic masculinity is a key part of the evidence that needs to be worked into gender interventions and through so doing can result in interventions that seek to change men's practices, identities and relations with women to reduce violence, promote gender equity and improve men's health. While gender theorists have debated the utility of the concept, the parallel field of activism has been actively engaging with it and shown its value in both understanding men's power over women and configurations of practice, as well as providing examples of how masculinity is transformed in a context where there is critical consciousness about the process and goals as well as a willingness to refine the theory. In so doing, both activists and theorists have enriched the concept of hegemonic masculinity through its critical application in transnational contexts.

Gender activists contribute to theory by translating in practical, hands-on contexts, an abstract concept into constituent parts and, at the same time, contribute to understandings of how gender relations, identities and regimes are transformed and what the obstacles are that prevent movement. As the example of Macho Factory shows, this involves a reflective process that constantly brings the theoretical concept of hegemonic masculinity into conversation with the practical challenges of intervention work.

Among the important findings that flow from combining theory with practice is that masculinity itself should not be presented as inherently problematic or oppressive. It is essential that interventions with individual men should focus on the male privileges that stem from the patriarchal social order and change in practices and beliefs of men, whilst contributing to an overarching goal of change in the configuration of masculine ideals. This challenge is also the Achilles heel of much gender work that seeks to take a theory

that operates at a community or social structural level and implement it at individual and group levels. Alone, the effects of such work will be slow. Multi-level interventions that seek to enable and facilitate sustainable changes, including change in social norms, are much more likely to be successful in advancing the global project of building gender equity. A further implication is that work with women to secure change in social norms is essential in order to create an environment in which there can be sustained change among individual men.

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### Note

1. The Macho Factory was developed by Amphi Poduktion, an educational company specialised in gender-based social change, on behalf of three organisations working on violence against women, the National Organisation for Women's and Young Women's Shelters in Sweden (ROKS), Unizon (formerly Swedish Association of Women's Shelters and Young Women's Empowerment Centres) and Men for Gender Equality Sweden. The material was developed over three years and included a researcher reference group, a youth pilot group, a methods development group with educators, several script and manuscript writers and a film team. All included, 149 people were involved in developing the Macho Factory, 55% of whom were men or boys. After the initial development, teachers and youth recreation leaders tested the programme with 439 girls and 491 boys between 13 and 25 years of age in different parts of Sweden and in a variety of settings, and then gave feedback to the programme developers. There are no records about class and ethnic background of the participants in this first wave of test groups. More than 500 group leaders were trained in the material in the first two years.

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## Résumé

Depuis le début des années 80, le concept de masculinité hégémonique est utilisé dans les études de genre pour expliquer le pouvoir des hommes sur les femmes. Soulignant le pouvoir de légitimation du consentement (plutôt que le pouvoir physique brut ou politique pour assurer la soumission), il a été utilisé pour expliquer les comportements de santé des hommes et le recours à la violence. Si les militants pour l'égalité des genres et les autres personnes engagées pour changer les relations entre hommes et femmes ont mobilisé le concept de masculinité hégémonique dans les interventions, les liens entre la théorie du genre et le militantisme n'ont guère été explorés. La traduction de « masculinité hégémonique » dans les interventions est peu examinée. Nous montrons comment, en Afrique du Sud et en Suède, ce concept a été utilisé pour orienter les interventions sur le genre basées sur cette théorie et garantir que les hommes soient associés à des activités sociales plus larges pour construire l'égalité des genres. Nous discutons des défis translationnels pratiques d'une large utilisation de la théorie du genre et de la masculinité hégémonique, en particulier dans un cas d'étude suédois, de l'intervention machofabriken [fabrique de machos] et montrons comment le concept prend forme dans cette approche de militantisme avec les hommes. Le concept a une application pratique considérable dans le développement d'une praxis durable d'interventions théoriquement ancrées qui sont plus susceptibles d'avoir un effet persistant, mais l'évaluation d'un changement sociétal plus large dans la masculinité hégémonique reste un défi qui perdure.

## **Resumen**

Desde principios de los ochenta se ha utilizado el concepto de masculinidad hegemónica en los estudios sobre los diferentes sexos para explicar el poder de los hombres sobre las mujeres. Al recalcar el poder legitimante del consentimiento (más que el primitivo poder físico o político para garantizar la sumisión), el concepto ha servido para interpretar las conductas con respecto a la salud y el uso de la violencia por parte de los hombres. Los activistas en cuestiones de género y otras personas que quieren cambiar las relaciones de los hombres con las mujeres han movilizado el concepto de masculinidad hegemónica en las intervenciones, no obstante con frecuencia no se han estudiado los vínculos entre la teoría de los sexos y el activismo. Y tampoco se ha analizado suficientemente la traducción de “masculinidad hegemónica” en las intervenciones. Aquí demostramos cómo ha servido este concepto en Sudáfrica y Suecia para crear intervenciones sexuales de base teórica y asegurar que los hombres participen en acciones sociales más amplias para fomentar la igualdad entre los sexos. Analizamos los retos prácticos de interpretación al utilizar más ampliamente la teoría de los sexos y sobre todo la masculinidad hegemónica en un estudio monográfico sueco, del programa *Machofabriken* [La fábrica machista], e ilustramos cómo este concepto cobra vida en este trabajo de activistas con los hombres. Este concepto tiene una amplia aplicación práctica en el desarrollo de una praxis sostenible de intervenciones de base teórica con más probabilidad de que tengan un efecto duradero, sin embargo, evaluar el cambio social más amplio en la masculinidad hegemónica sigue siendo un reto continuo.