



Problematizing contemporary Men/Masculinities theorizing: the contribution of Raewyn Connell and conceptual-terminological tensions today

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Abstract

Critical studies of men and masculinities (CSMM) have burgeoned in recent times. For this reason, it seems to me a useful moment to reflect on what I see as some tensions, even contradictions, in these studies. In keeping with Chantal Mouffe's espousal of the advantages of agonism rather than consensus, I suggest that heterogeneous theoretical directions in scholarship attending to men/masculinities are by no means to be discouraged. However, the various theoretical tools employed in this scholarship may be incommensurable and thus produce a certain inconsistency or even incoherence. In this context, I suggest that in order to more clearly articulate current theoretical/terminological debates it is important to undertake analysis of key conceptual distinctions and widely used terms, such as notions of structure and patriarchy, gender identities/masculinities/men, hegemony and hegemonic masculinity, and relations between gender and sexuality, amongst others. The aim here is not to produce or require homogeneity in studies of men/masculinities but rather to provide an opportunity to consider the epistemological frameworks which inform the political intentions and goals of this sphere of scholarship.

Keywords: Masculinities; postmodernism; modernism; theory; gender; Connell

Introduction

Critical studies of men and masculinities (CSMM) have burgeoned in recent times. For this reason, it seems to me a useful moment to reflect on what I see as crucial tensions, even contradictions, in these studies. I suggest that the various *theoretical* tools employed in CSMM may not be straightforwardly commensurable and thus produce a certain inconsistency or even incoherence.

In this setting, it is important to articulate current theoretical debates more clearly by considering widely used conceptions/terms, such as notions of structure and patriarchy, gender identities/masculinities/men, hegemony and hegemonic masculinity, and relations between gender and sexuality, amongst others. In particular some discussion of key conceptual/terminological distinctions is viewed as of use in this field of scholarship – a field in which I am actively engaged myself. The aim here is not, I stress, to produce or require homogeneity in CSMM but rather to provide an opportunity to consider the epistemological frameworks which inform the political intentions and goals of this sphere of scholarship.

In short, I intend in this paper to cover three main topics, with central attention to the third. Firstly, I outline CSMM's existing largely modernist orientation and its consequent distance from most current Gender/Sexuality theorizing. I then turn to CSMM's uneasy relationship with postmodernism, an uneasiness which I suggests produces muddled or even incoherent modes of analysis. Finally, key conceptual/terminological distinctions are discussed which are intended to assist with clarifying future directions in CSMM thinking.

Part 1: CSMM's existing accord with modernist thinking and its associated distance from most contemporary Gender/Sexuality theorizing

In keeping with Chantal Mouffe's espousal of the advantages of agonism rather than consensus (Mouffe 2005: 33; see also Skrzypiec 2011), I am certainly of the view that heterogeneous theoretical directions in scholarship attending to men/masculinities are by no means to be discouraged. However, I am concerned by what I see as an inclination in CSMM to employ modernist approaches/terms that are prevalent within the existing field while simultaneously referencing writers and vocabularies which are decidedly postmodern. (I use postmodern as a coverall term to include the more specific connotations of post-structuralism – unless specifically discussing structuralism and post-structuralism.)

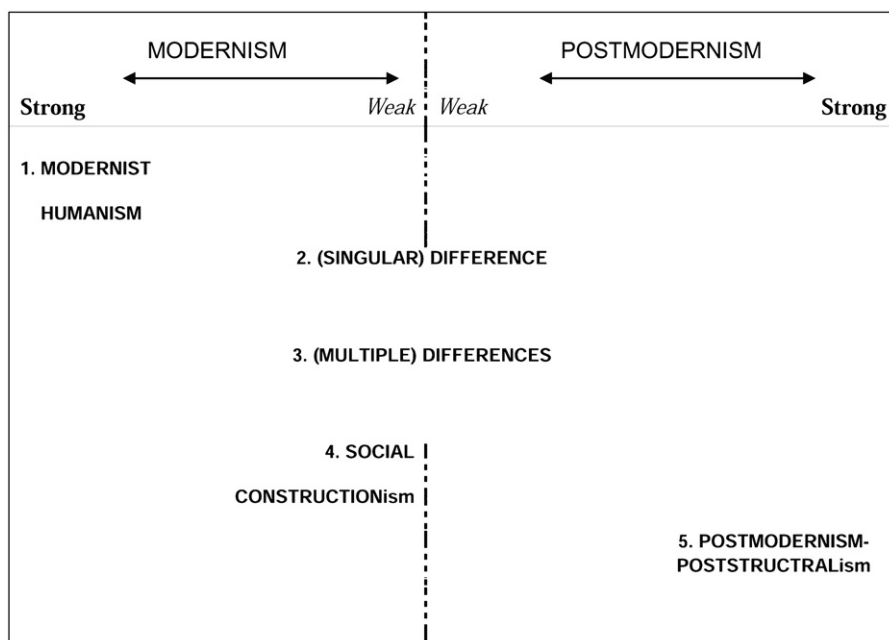
As I have noted in previous publications and presentations (Beasley 2012 forthcoming, 2011a, 2009, 2005), I view modernism and postmodernism as broad theoretical trajectories located on a continuum, rather than as distinct – much less necessarily oppositional. A few writers, such as Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott (2010), have in similar fashion attempted to bring into dialogue modernist and postmodern approaches. In the case of Jackson and Scott, in their largely modernist inflected account of sexuality theorizing, this involves connecting Goffman/Mead and Butler. From a somewhat more postmodern orientation, I have also endeavoured to undertake modes of analysis that might draw upon both when considering a variety of questions – such as,

embodied sociality and an ethic of 'social flesh', re-imagining sexual health, and social change in relation to heterosexuality and heteromascularity (on embodied sociality – Beasley and Bacchi 2010; 2007; 2000; on sexual health – Beasley 2008a; on heterosexuality/heteromascularity – Beasley 2011b, 2010).

Nevertheless, while it is certainly possible to consider eclectic interchanges or syncretic possibilities which engage both broad theoretical trajectories, this is by no means a straightforward exercise given that these trajectories operate on the basis of rather different theoretical assumptions. Certainly, as will become evident when I outline these assumptions and their meanings for CSMM, the differential trajectories of modernism and postmodernism – with their accompanying concepts and terminologies – cannot simply be stuck together without explanation. They emphatically do not 'go together like a horse and carriage'. And herein arises a potential difficulty for CSMM contemporary theorizing and its future directions. In short, employing theoretical tools from these different trajectories, unless carefully considered, is likely to result in a certain inconsistency or even incoherence.

To examine this point it is initially necessary to locate the forms of theorizing currently associated with CSMM. In *Gender and Sexuality: Critical Theories, Critical Thinkers* (2005) I sketched out the theoretical dispersal of different subfields within the Gender/Sexuality field by employing a schematic continuum ranging from strongly modernist to strongly postmodern thinking. The continuum shows in shorthand form the ways in which the major subfields in the Gender/Sexuality field – that is, Feminist and Sexuality Studies and Critical Studies in Men/Masculinities – draw upon a broadly similar theoretical terrain with similar main directions (see Figure I). I consider these subfields in terms of five main theoretical directions. Such a mapping does not and cannot cover every single framework, writer or text in the subfields, but rather is intended to illustrate their major trajectories. These main theoretical directions include 1. Modernist Humanism, 2. (Singular) Difference – i.e. Gender or Sexuality as the singular focus, 3. (Multiple) Differences – typically Gender and Race or Sexuality and Race, 4. Social Constructionism, and 5. Postmodernism. The crucial point is that the subfields of Feminist and Sexuality Studies and CSMM are not spread equally over the continuum of main theoretical directions. Indeed they are inclined to clump rather differently in particular locations across the continuum.¹

CSMM scholarship, unlike work within Feminist and Sexuality Studies, tends to clump under the rubric of the fourth theoretical direction – that is, CSMM scholarship may be generally characterized as weak modernist and as Social Constructionist. Social Constructionism (SC) describes a particular grouping of modernist thinkers in Gender/Sexuality studies. The SC approach conceives power in terms of social structures (as macro, foundational and determining) and is also more inclined than postmodern thinking to view power/structures negatively (in terms of oppression). SC writers assert that

Figure I: *The Gender/Sexuality Field – theoretical continuum and main directions*

identities are formed by the social structuring effects of power. However, they stress the historically/socially specific *social variability and complexity* of these identities rather than emphasizing virtually unlimited fluidity per se as postmodern thinkers are inclined to do. Hence, this particular theoretical direction may be distinguished from social constructionism (lower case), which refers to a broad anti-essentialist stance or strategy, and includes a whole range of perspectives including postmodern approaches (see Beasley 2005: 190–1, 225–9).

CSMM *theorizing* remains, for the most part, comparatively untouched by the waves of postmodern critique that have so heavily influenced the theoretical trajectories of other areas of the Gender/Sexuality field. The ongoing attachment of much CSMM scholarship to the modernist underpinnings of Social Constructionism is, for example, revealed in the almost ubiquitous usage of the concepts/terms derived from the highly influential work of Raewyn Connell.² As will be outlined in more detail shortly, Connell's concepts/terms involve a distinctly (modernist) Social Constructionist theoretical framing. While there are more references to postmodern perspectives in men/masculinities research which, for example, is oriented towards cultural studies rather than social sciences, nevertheless theoretical analyses, debates and tools within CSMM make use of Connell's work across all disciplinary boundaries. By contrast, Social Constructionism is much diminished in Feminist thought

and under serious challenge in critical Sexuality thinking. The prevalence of Social Constructionism in CSMM theorizing – as against that in Feminist and Sexuality Studies – highlights the seemingly growing gap between them (Beasley 2009).

Although some instances of theoretical engagement with more postmodern lines of enquiry may be found of writings within CSMM since the mid-1990s (Petersen 2003; Petersen 1998; Whitehead 2002; Martino 1999; Wetherell and Edley 1999), such engagement continues to be relatively uncommon. For this reason, it is possible for example, for Petersen and Whitehead and to write in the early 2000s about ‘developing’, ‘emerging’ or ‘new’ trends towards postmodernism in CSMM (Petersen 2003; Whitehead 2002; see also Bloodwood 2010) and for Edwards to present these trends as largely confined to cultural analysis in CSMM studies rather than to be found in its social theorizing (Edwards 2006: 4). Postmodern thinking, or at the very least an evident understanding of its complexities, is virtually a given in the theoretical frameworks and debates of Feminist and Sexuality Studies (see for example early commentators on the takeup of this theoretical ‘turn’, Barrett 1992: 204 and Seidman 1994: 2). By comparison, in CSMM theorizing, employment of postmodernism or a knowledge of its intricacies is by no means a certainty.

In earlier publications I have demonstrated this by pointing out four indicative elements: these elements include, antagonism to postmodern theory/theorists from key CSMM writers, a continuing adherence to understanding power as structural, centred and oppressive, a relatively unqualified and central investment in gender identities, an inclination to privilege gender as determining sexuality, and a tendency to reduce power relations (for example, with regard to hegemony and hegemonic masculinity) to particular social agents such that actual groups of dominant men are seen as ‘having’ power (Elias and Beasley 2009; Beasley 2008b). When noting the distance between CSMM thinking and much of Gender/Sexuality scholarship, my concern in such previous work has been to raise the issue that CSMM appears increasingly as anomalous in its comparatively unchanged adherence to a modernist theoretical framework (Beasley 2011a, 2009). However, such a concern leads in this paper to a further question regarding the coherence of CSMM theorizing when postmodern influences/perspectives do emerge.

Part 2: CSMM’s uneasy relationship with postmodern thinking

When CSMM scholars do invoke postmodern theory/theorists, they often appear to undertake this in an inexact, woolly or even muddled manner. Bob Pease, a major contributor to these theoretical considerations in CSMM, reveals a rare awareness that his asserted adoption of a postmodern approach is rather hesitant and not all of a piece. Pease, unlike many CSMM writers, does

explicitly acknowledge that he is attempting to bring together postmodern and modern approaches and that this endeavour is no simple exercise. While proposing that he is advancing a 'postmodern masculinity politics', Pease also notes his refusal to abandon the 'the values of modernity and Enlightenment project of human emancipation' (Pease 2000: 24). However, such an investment does not merely render his postmodernism 'weak', as he describes it, so much as placing it at odds with postmodernist proposals. Similarly while he stresses that not all men are the same and that 'men' is not a homogeneous grouping, such an emphasis upon the diversity of men does not represent a challenge to gender categories that would be in keeping with postmodern thinking. Rather simply pluralizing of the category 'men' is associated with the weak modernism/Social Constructionism that I have indicated is characteristic of existing CSMM scholarship. It does not offer a departure from that scholarship, as Pease appears to suggest. Further, his acceptance of approaches which demonstrate how social agents may refuse structures is entirely in keeping with the weak structuralism which presently predominates within CSMM thinking and is scarcely aligned with the decentred epistemology of postmodern thinking that he proposes to support (Pease 2000: 24).

All the same, Pease's work in a number of ways offers a thoughtful engagement with postmodernism. Much of the CSMM scholarship which attends to postmodern theorizing seems more theoretically underdeveloped than this and hence more clearly inconsistent. There is a sense in which writers concerned with studies of Men/Masculinities appear to be implicitly wrestling with postmodernism. A few may even wish to consider and even enlist its possibilities. Yet even these writers appear unable to shake the ubiquitous employment of modernist concepts/terminologies associated with contemporary CSMM. The upshot of this awkward grappling is an inclination to attach postmodern elements to a modernist frame of reference, without registering that postmodern and modernist approaches are far from straightforwardly commensurable.

I would however note here that the sometimes incongruous and unreflective cobbling together of these different frames of reference is by no means limited to CSMM. Indeed the problem I identify as evident within CSMM is pertinent within a wide range of sociological thought, as well as in the social sciences more generally. It is particularly be found, for example, in social science writings which develop empirical studies, since these areas of work are perhaps especially difficult to re-imagine without the modernist investment in intrinsic pre-social intentional agents (see for related points (Olssen 1999: 89; Pringle 2005). In other words, the problem of awkward couplings of modernist and postmodern theoretical frameworks is not simply relevant to a few scholars nor is this problem confined to one field of social theorizing. Within the context of CSMM, the incoherence of the mixture may take the form of initial or occasional rhetorical gestures towards postmodernism, by making passing

reference to major figures such as Butler or Foucault, followed by development of analyses which in all other respects demonstrate a continuing adherence to modernist assumptions – including, among others, unqualified usage of terms like ‘patriarchy’ and ‘oppression’ and a focus upon detailing typologies of groups of men.

I will now clarify what I regard as muddled or more palpably inconsistent theorizing by outlining briefly something of the nature of the distinctions between modernist and postmodern modes of reference as they pertain to CSMM in relation to three major elements – that is, power, subjects and social change.

Key conceptual/terminological distinctions: power, subjects, and social change

In order to outline the features of the general inclination to employ a modernist frame of reference within CSMM, as against its comparatively underdeveloped relation to postmodernism, I will turn to the major theoretician in CSMM thinking, Raewyn Connell. I employ Connell’s approach as the means to outline crucial conceptual/terminological distinctions, and use Connell’s work as a starting point because her contribution to the field of studies of men/masculinities is acknowledged as unparalleled by virtually every commentator in it.

Connell’s work undoubtedly provides the ‘central reference point for many, if not most, writers on men and masculinity’ (Wetherell and Edley 1998: 156; see also Beasley 2005: 223). Such a degree of synergy within CSMM is furthered by Connell’s ongoing employment of a particular theoretical framing and associated concepts/terms over a long period of time (Beasley 2005: 181). In this setting, Hearn has drawn attention to Connell’s early development and ongoing usage of the term ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (first proposed in Connell 1983[1979]) – a term which is now virtually omnipresent in CSMM scholarship (Hearn 2004; Beasley 2005: 192). Because this terminology has unparalleled usage and occupies a uniquely privileged positioning within the field – along with associated terminologies such as ‘subordinated’ and ‘marginalised’ masculinities – Connell’s consistent modernist frame of reference is clearly significant for CSMM per se.

Modernist framing: structures, identities/agents, and resistance

Connell’s approach involves a challenge to the strong modernism we might link with the grand ambitions of nineteenth and twentieth century system makers, like Karl Marx and Claude Lévi-Strauss, who aimed to interpret society with a single set of determining laws. Instead of promoting a hidden

pan-human pattern to all of history, in common with a broad shift in social thinking away from a monolithic foundational structure to power in all societies over time (Lilla 2011: 26; Appiah 2010: 52), Connell develops a very consistently enunciated form of weak structuralism which *pluralises* structures in recognition of a range of relations of power. This plurality weakens the grip of the claims that had been associated with more singular conceptions of social structures that can be found in strong modernism. In so far as Connell moves away from an all-embracing holistic conception of the scope of class analysis, her account of structure is more open, more multiple.

Moreover, in Connell's weak structuralism, structures themselves are conceived in a less monolithic, more complex way. Structures in this way of thinking do not simply impose upon social subjects but are in dialectical interaction with them. Power delivered through social structures is no longer just one-way top-down oppression but is also reshaped and resisted from below. Along with many other contemporary social thinkers who developed modes of social theory in the second half of the twentieth century (for example, Bourdieu 1990, 1977; Goffman 1987[1959], 1974; Gagnon and Simon 1973; Berger and Luckmann 1966; see also Ritzer 2008 and Risman 2004), Connell is inclined to adopt an approach which rejects both macro structural determinism and its opposite – micro level agency by voluntarist subjects. She proposes instead a plural model of power relations in which gender (intersecting with other forms of power) is constituted out of interaction between structure and agents along lines similar to those outlined in Giddens' model of 'structuration' (Connell 1987, especially chapter 5; Giddens 1984). In this account, structures do not simply determine subjects.

Clearly, however, this framing does not involve a rejection of a modernist concern with structures of power, but rather merely a rejection of strong structuralist principles. Connell's weak structuralism is inclined to eschew monolithic accounts of structure from above and has room for contesting multiple modes of power, thus providing a more plural, less one-way and therefore less straightforwardly deterministic account of gender (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 843; Connell 1987: 184; see Collier 2010: 459). She retains a structuralist account of gender constituted through four structuring mechanisms that extend throughout social life and which she describes in terms of power, production/labour, cathexis (emotional/sexual relations) and symbolism, drawing upon the ground-breaking structuralist model developed earlier by Juliet Mitchell (Connell 2000: 208; Beasley 2005: 191–2, 226). Yet, Connell is also at pains to retain the complex detail of subjects. Her account of gendered power as oppression – that is, patriarchy – imposes upon the micro-level of subjects to produce gendered identities/beings, which in turn respond to, resist and reconstitute structure (Connell 2010, 2002, 2000; Holmes 2007: 51).

This approach assumes that subjects remain distinct from structure: the two interact rather than being one and the same thing. Since subjects are

intentional agents that are incompletely shaped by structures and respond to them, gender is 'done to' subjects but they also 'do' gender – they are doers. Here subjects show the limit of structures and hence room for social change. Social change is a consequence of the actions of subjects who break with these structures and thus resist them.

This focus on subjects as the site of social change is indicative of a weak modernist emphasis on the pre-existent (though historically specified) subject who is acted upon by centralized oppressive structures but has 'agency' and can act in response (see for a related discussion, Pringle 2005: 260).³ Though Connell stresses plural hierarchical organized subjects, the identities she outlines are largely conceived as unified and stable platforms for action whether complicit or resistant. This form of modernist theorizing concentrates on particular modes of 'being'. An example here is what Connell designates as the hegemony of the global gender order, transnational businessmen (2000: 46). Such an approach tends to stabilize gender identities/masculinities as plural yet largely homogenous groupings. This is particularly evident in Connell's empirical work on men.

Some writers in CSMM, especially those employing empirical studies, place even greater emphasis upon how unified subjects 'do gender' and hence make use of theories/concepts/terms – such as 'frames' (Goffman 1974) and 'scripts' (Gagnon and Simon 1973; see also West and Zimmerman 1987) – which are more disposed towards agentic voluntarism and understanding subjects as doers. However, these theoretical tools constitute *doing in terms of being*. Actions are represented as an expression of unified selfhood/identity shaped by macro social forces. While interpretative sociologies such as those developed by Goffman and Gagnon and Simon do not, I should point out, constitute the self as coherent in terms of having a homogenous agenda, these writers nevertheless outline a notion of subjects as unitary agents in another sense – that is, as intentional actors who negotiate social prescriptions. Though Connell's work places rather more emphasis upon gender as something done to us, both her approach and that of those writers who focus more upon the experiential/psychological/dramaturgical aspects of 'doing gender' (Holmes 2007: 51–9), share a conception of gender identity/being as a platform for intentional action with a cognitive social agent at the helm. It is entirely in keeping with this modernist framing of structure, identity/being, and of agents/doers generating social change, for Connell to express scepticism concerning postmodern agendas and thinkers such as Judith Butler (Beasley 2009).

Connell's consistent modernist Social Constructionism is articulated in her account of gender identities as formed by a social structure of gender taking the historically specific form of male dominance – patriarchy: an account which constitutes power as macro and oppressive. Her Social Constructionist perspective involves an emphasis upon gender in the form of patriarchy, not as an eternal, all-embracing and determining structure, but rather as subject to

considerable historical/cultural variability. Connell's conception of patriarchy as historically specific structural oppression, and of hegemony as the strategic means by which consent to patriarchal rule is naturalized and thereby reproduced, is not surprisingly connected to an insistence that masculinities are not all the same (Elias and Beasley 2009; Beasley 2008b), but rather plural and hierarchically organized. She proposes that patriarchy involves a pyramid of groups of actual men, such as those who are hegemons (transnational businessmen) or marginalized ('black'/ethnically-racially stigmatized men). Patriarchy and gender identities/masculinities become coterminous with a hierarchy of categories of actual men (Connell 2005 [1995]) – a point to which I will return.

Postmodern framing: Discourses, practices, and 'deterritorialization'

In order to consider how a postmodern framing of CSMM would offer a different set of assumptions than those available in modernist accounts like those of Connell, I will now offer some general points of comparison by employing the work of Mouffe, Butler and Foucault among others – as these are among the most likely postmodern thinkers to be employed in CSMM (see, for example, in Howson 2005).

While Connell pluralizes structures and acknowledges their incomplete impact in her recognition of the diversity of social subjects as agents, this more flexible account is by no means much the same, or along much the same lines, as the emphasis on the virtually unlimited fluidity of power/discourses/identities to be found in postmodern thinking. In distinct contrast to Connell's approach, postmodern theorizing conceives power as decentred, as having no foundational centre or centres. Power is a matter of competing discourses which are *not externally imposed* upon subjects. Since *subjects are not distinct from discourses* but instead produced by them, power is constitutive and not merely prohibitive. Hence subjects do not break from/resist structures as autonomous agents who thereby enact social change, as is the case in modernist thinking. Rather the competing character of discourses which produce subjects is the means to a variety of modes of conduct, enabling the creation of what Deleuze and Guattari call deterritorializing lines of flight from the horizon of dominant discourses – an 'undoing' or destabilization of discourses (Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1972]).

In this context, social change arises out of contestation between discourses – for example, contestation around the formation of hegemonic articulations. Social change does not arise from some quality of self-agency that is understood as separate from social structures and intrinsic within subjects. In postmodern thinking, there is no prior content to the subject which moves to escape externalized power's impositions: there is no intrinsic prior 'internality' to the subject. Subjects in postmodern theorizing are not – as Connell

conceives them – (externally) constrained by structures, but rather they *are* (made up of) discourses (see Pringle 2005: 260). They are discursive ‘assemblages’ – a terminology borrowed from the art world and employed by Deleuze and Guattari to emphasize that subjects are not pre-existent seamless unities but more loose collections of interactive and moving components. In this setting, social change is not to be viewed as symptomatic of intentional agency, as the (heroic) marker of the self-made ‘rational man’. Instead, ‘resistance’ is cast as precisely the instability of the discursive horizon (Deleuze and Guattari 1987 [1980]: 367).

Connell’s weak modernist account of power, the self and social change involves the reconciliation of structure and agency by bringing together gender as ‘done *to* us’ (structure) and gender as ‘done *by* us’ (agency). However, in the postmodern theorizing of Judith Butler, for example, gender ‘*is* done’ by stylized repetition. It is normalized/naturalized by repeated practices (Butler 1990).⁴ There is no espousal in the Butler’s work of externalized power or of a pre-existent internally constituted doer who responds to external power. As Butler puts it, there is no ‘“doer” behind the deed’ (Butler 1990: 25). Rather postmodern approaches like hers stress a radical destabilization of identities/subjects, which are conceived as ‘more fleeting, incoherent and fragmented than many of us would have believed’ (Edley 2001: 195). There is no grounding unity to subjects in such analyses.

By contrast, Connell’s account of several types/groupings of masculinity, which is the prevalent model for most CSMM scholarship – even that described in terms of postmodern agendas (for example, see Martino 1999), appears as steeped in a modernist understanding of identity. Connell’s stress upon pluralizing groups of subjects gives way in postmodern thinking to a qualitatively different attention to fluidity *across and within* subjects. Identities/subjects in postmodern thinking are not to be approached in terms of ‘being’ – as whole, unified stable entities which provide a platform for action and social change – but instead as constantly remade (Edley 2001), as shifting assemblages of *practices*. Thus, when postmodern thinkers like Butler refer to gender as ‘performative’, this should not be misread as (dramaturgical) performance. Gender, for Butler, precisely ‘*is not performed*’ – that is, gender is not an undertaking (voluntarist or individual) by agentic actors (Holmes 2007: 60, emphasis added).

Yet despite this distance between Butler’s approach and that of modernist thinkers like Connell, CSMM writers who wish to make use of postmodern modes of analysis very commonly employ these scholars in conjunction with little or no attempt to explore how their different theoretical directions might be rendered compatible (see Hudson 2011; Cooper 2009; Aitchison 2007; Petroski and Edley 2006; Lay 2000; see also for related gender-masculinities research Schippers 2007; Brooks 2006; Paechter 2003). In similar fashion, CSMM writers sometimes employ postmodern figures like Butler in

conjunction with modernist theorists like Goffman, who are even more strongly 'doer' oriented than Connell. Since in postmodern approaches gender/masculinity is not conceived as something we purposively undertake, let alone choose to do, Goffman's 'frames' or Gagnon's 'scripts' or even Giddens' (and Connell's) conception of the 'reflexive self' (Giddens 1991; Connell 1987: 95) do not sit easily alongside postmodern conceptions of discourses and discursive practices, nor alongside the frame of analysis employed by writers like Butler.

Given the emphasis upon fluidity across and within subjects and upon assemblages of practices (rather than agentic actors), the theorization of subjects in postmodern thinking moves in different directions from modernist concepts/terminologies. Postmodern theorizations with regard to subjects tend to develop along two major lines. In one version, subjects/identities are understood as constructed through difference – that is, in relation to the Other (see for example Mouffe 2009; Butler 1990; Gallop 1985). In this version the postmodern assumption that subjectivity/identity is empty of any pre-given foundation or inner direction, is conceived in terms of its constitution as 'lack'. Such an account is closely aligned to Lacanian psychoanalytic and poststructuralist linguistic concerns with binary oppositions. However, other postmodern thinkers reject this conception of negative lack and by contrast theorize subjectivity/identity in terms of abundance and positive flows (Lloyd and Little 2009; Tønder and Thomassen 2005; Skrzypiec 2011: chapter 4). Here 'the other' is not positioned as oppositional to the self' (see Jackson and Scott 2010: 114–15).⁵ This form of postmodern perspective is, for example, evident in Foucault's approving comments on the approach of Deleuze and Guattari:

[w]ithdraw allegiance from the old categories of the Negative (law, limit, castration, lack, lacuna), which the Western thought has so long held sacred as a form of power and an access to reality. Prefer what is positive and multiple, difference over uniformity, flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems. Believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic (Foucault 1977, in Deleuze and Guattari 2004[1972]: xv).

However, whatever the version of subjectivity/identity offered in postmodern thinking, such approaches share an antagonism to modernist accounts of identities as unified stable platforms for action that can be revealed or protected, or can throw off power. Postmodern thinkers do not focus on 'being' but rather upon 'subject positions' – that is, placement of subjects in multiple contesting discourses, such that 'every social agent is...the locus of many subject positions' (Mouffe 1988: 89–90; Skrzypiec 2011: chapter 4).

This refusal of any inner unity to gender identities/subjects, a refusal of notions of 'being' in favour of fluid inchoate *practices* is associated in postmodern thinking with a focus on 'undoing' or 'troubling' gender (Butler 2004; 1990). The impact of such thinking in the Gender/Sexuality field is that there is

a well-established antagonism to the presumed limits of gender categories found in Sexuality Studies which is now also relatively widespread in Feminism. An exemplary instance of this development is worth noting. 'Gender difference' was a central focus of feminist work in the 1980s – a focus constituted around the identity category of women (Beasley 2005: 45–59). However, by the mid-1990s this crucial concern theme had shifted sharply towards a critique of such identity categories under the banner of postmodern inflected analysis (Beasley 2009). Indeed, postmodern lines of thinking within Feminist and Sexuality Studies were increasingly inclined to interpret destabilization of power precisely in terms of destabilization of identity and effectively to construe an emphasis upon identities to be politically problematic (Beasley 1999: 95). While postmodern interest in 'undoing' gender does not require the abandonment of gender categories as sites of analysis, it does require a reconfiguring of them such that these identities are rendered permanently open and contestable (see Seidman 1996: 12). This attention to unravelling identity categories involves destabilizing understandings of gender as largely homogeneous groupings.

By contrast, writers in CSMM typically retain certain ongoing investments in identities. While the intention is certainly to critique, for example, the category of 'men' as a social category – rather than to re-affirm the category as an essentialist identity – CSMM retains a strong and continuously reiterated commitment to starting with gender and gender categories. Postmodern theorists do not share this commitment and precisely question such a starting point (Beasley 2009). The stress on gender identities, on 'being', that marks CSMM, while facilitating a pluralizing of gender identities/masculinities, is often manifest in the inclination to develop homogenizing typologies (Francis 2010) and, relatedly, in a focus upon homogenized groups of *actual* men. This inclination is evident in Connell's account of hegemonic masculinity. Though she has asserted that a 'relational approach to gender' prevents overly unitary conceptions of gendered subjects (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 837–43) and has deplored the ways in which the concept of hegemonic masculinity has sometimes been reduced to a particular 'static character type' (Connell 2008: 244), her own analysis enables the political logic of hegemonic positioning to be characterized in terms of a specific homogenized group of actual dominant men, transnational businessmen.

As Chantal Mouffe puts it, modernist approaches are inclined to conflate power relations with particular social agents (Mouffe 1996: 25). This is linked to modernist assumptions regarding power as structural oppression and as a property that can be owned by particular people. Connell's conception of hegemonic masculinity, for instance, proposes that actual groups of men *possess* power (Beasley 2009, 2008b). Suffice to say that postmodernism is at odds with Connell's modernist assumption that power is structural oppression and is a property that can be owned by particular people, and thus bestowed or

confiscated. According to Foucault, power circulates, functioning like a chain and is 'employed and exercised through a netlike organisation' such that '[i]ndividuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application (1980: 98).

Conclusion

In this paper I initially outlined CSMM's largely modernist orientation. My concern here was to articulate the theoretical frame of reference employed by most CSMM writers. Key scholars such as Raewyn Connell offer a very consistent and eloquent adherence to modernism. I see the explicit articulation of this frame of reference as a useful and timely undertaking because CSMM theorizing remains, for the most part, untouched by the waves of postmodern critique that have so heavily influenced other areas of the Gender/Sexuality field. Thus CSMM's modernist frame of reference is associated with an increasing gap between its theoretical/terminological approach and most Gender/Sexuality thinking (Beasley 2009). Moreover, while attention to postmodernism remains relatively uncommon in CSMM, when there *is* some attempt to engage with it, the result is often muddled or even incoherent. Such is the debt to modernism within CSMM's most widely employed and accepted concepts and terms, that usage of an approach which offers a different theoretical trajectory to modernism is uneasy and frequently inconsistent. In this context, I outlined some conceptual/terminological distinctions to assist in clarifying future directions in CSMM thinking.

I suggested through this outline of distinctions that if CSMM writers wish to engage with postmodern thought, it is by no means sufficient simply to mention writers like Butler or Foucault, rename gender identities as 'subject positions', put the term 'men' in inverted commas, or dutifully note a caveat or two about such gender identities while continuing to consider them as unified categories and continuing to constitute gender relations as the homogenous entity, men, facing another homogenous entity, women (Mouffe 2005: 78). If CSMM scholars aim to consider the possibilities of postmodern approaches, then commonly (indeed ubiquitously) employed concepts/terms in CSMM – such as structure, patriarchy, oppression, hegemony, gender identity/ies, men/masculinities, hegemonic masculinity, marginalized masculinities, subordinated masculinities, as well as associated conceptions of social change – will require some serious re-thinking and cannot simply be combined with post-modern theoretical tools.

Beyond the danger of incoherence, there are several important reasons for such a re-thinking. I will note just two. Firstly, given that CSMM continues to define itself in relation to a broadly feminist sympathetic or more usually 'pro-feminist' perspective (Connell 2005[1995]; Flood 2002[1997]; Whitehead 2002; Messner 1997; Kimmel 1992), it seems to me necessary for CSMM

scholars to consider carefully how they might engage with postmodern approaches since feminism itself now appears to have largely abandoned the modernist theoretical agenda which remains dominant in CSMM (Beasley 2011a, 2009). Without such reflection, CSMM's commitment to a pro-feminist stance at the least is not currently theoretically straightforward.

Secondly, it is possible, even likely, that new inventive modes of theorizing in the Gender/Sexuality field may be advanced by thoughtful development of eclectic interchanges or syncretic possibilities which draw upon both modernist and postmodern theoretical trajectories. An instance of this might, for example, arise in potential junctures between Connell's 'relational' conception of gender (Connell 2002; Beasley 2005: 223) and some postmodern writings on the constitution of subjects. Connell's emphasis on gender identities 'forged *in relation* to others' (Jackson and Scott 2010: 114–15), is in certain respects in accord with the Deleuzian/Foucaultian emphasis, mentioned earlier, on positive multiple mobile connections (rather than on negative 'lack'/prohibitions) in relation the formation of subjects.

Acknowledgment that modernist and postmodern modes of thinking cannot simply be stuck together – that is, a careful recognition of their differences – ironically precisely provides space for possible junctures between them, such as those outlined above. I draw attention in this context to Jami Weinstein's account of what she calls 'theory sex' (2010), in order to note the creative potential that might be invoked by considering interactions between these different forms of theorizing. Rather than regarding all such attempts at linking apparently dissonant forms as inevitably condemned to internal contradiction, I prefer the embrace of mobile theoretical uncertainties enunciated by Deleuze and Guattari. Given the focus upon the problem of theoretical incoherence in this paper, this might appear odd. Yet it seems to me that it is quite possible to outline difficulties attached to lumping together incongruous theoretical trajectories without attention to their differences, while simultaneously endorsing their possibilities for interaction. Detailed recognition of such differences in particular contexts, such as I have outlined in this paper – as well as analysis of the existing strengths and weaknesses of these trajectories – can enable due consideration of their non-unitary, impermanent and mobile character and hence their capacities for association. It is in this spirit that I have, as noted earlier, attempted in previous works to bring modernist and postmodern approaches into dialogue. In upholding Mouffe's espousal of agonism, I aim to attend critically to problems of incoherence, but also to encourage rather than extinguish the potential for 'theory sex', the potential for making connections between vibrant heterogeneous theoretical directions.

In summary, my intention is not to produce or require homogeneity in CSMM but rather to provide an opportunity to scrutinize more closely the epistemological frameworks which inform our political intentions and goals

including, for instance, how we understand what is politically at stake and how we conceive and undertake social change.

(Date accepted: August 2012)

Notes

1. The Figure in this paper, developed in previous work (Beasley 2005), maps CSMM scholarship in relation to Feminist and Sexuality Studies, under the rubric of the broader Gender/Sexuality field. For a more singularly focused mapping of CSMM scholarship, see Ashe 2007.

2. While Connell's concepts/terms are pervasive in CSMM, they have been the subject of ongoing discussion and, of course, their acceptance is not absolute (see for example, Hearn 2004).

3. While arguably 'agency' is not necessarily co-terminus with conceptualizations of a pre-social subject, this is commonly how

it is interpreted and is certainly the most usual understanding of it in CSMM.

4. Here I differ somewhat from Mary Holmes' concisely elegant description of Butler's postmodern approach as gender 'does us'. I see this account as perhaps too close to replicating a modernist externalized conception of power acting upon subjects (2007: 51–9).

5. In my view Jackson and Scott incorrectly overstate the case when they equate the notion of identity as lack with postmodern thinking per se, and seem not to acknowledge a range of major postmodern thinkers who actively reject such a notion.

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