

**Measuring Up: The Construction of Working-Class
Masculinity in the Knights of Labor**

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Abstract

Men's construction of masculinity has been a topic of much interest throughout the history of sociological gender studies. Although the dynamic and complex nature of the processes and social structures involved in masculinity construction has been identified and investigated, a majority of the research on this topic fails to explain the actual processes in terms of their direct influence on masculinity construction. Most previous work has relied on the theory of Hegemonic Masculinity to analyze these issues, but it has become clear that this theoretical approach has become ineffective in exploring the specific social practices and interaction of individual actors. In response to this, I use Tony Coles' theory of The Field of Masculinity as a way to build upon hegemonic theory and explore the different distinct ways in which men navigate their social world as they develop masculine identities. This is a case study in which I aim to find out how, and to what degree, the issues of class and gender played a role in the construction of masculinity for working-class men in the Knights of Labor movement of 1880s America. The KOL represent an important historical event in which working-class men were at a point of crisis, and the KOL became the setting for one of the most fervent periods of masculinity construction in United States history. The results show that class and gender were significant factors in these men's construction of masculinity, and that the field of masculinity does an excellent job of identifying and interpreting these processes.

Introduction

In the past twenty-five years, gender has become one of the most dominant fields of research in sociological work. Included in this vast collection of academic scholarship is research devoted to men's studies, and within this area of study lies the highly popular and much discussed issue of masculinity. Masculinity is difficult to define and resists generalization: If anything, sociology has demonstrated that, cross-culturally, masculinity is an institution of gender that takes many forms. The theories and understanding of gender in general and particularly of masculinity have, however, evolved over the years into new ideas and concepts that often build upon or reject the assertions and claims made in earlier studies. Scholarly literature aimed at exploring masculinity construction reveals a plethora of structural practices involving class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, age, and the like, that are remarkably fascinating and call for thorough investigation.

An effective study and analysis of masculinity production must account for and explain the social structure in which the particular masculinity or masculinities exist. Furthermore, research has suggested that both masculinities and structures must be viewed in terms of the various practices they are comprised of in order to understand the true process by which masculinity is produced (Joan Acker 1990; R.W. Connell 1982, 2004; Edward W. Morris 2008). This research explores masculinity by focusing on the Knights of Labor movement in America during the 1860s, a period during which masculinities were fervently produced, practiced, and transformed by the working-class members of this social structure through processes largely concerned with class and gender.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to examine the specific issue of how working-class men construct masculinity in male-dominated workplaces. In particular, the issue of masculinity construction is examined with a focus on the role and significance of the social institutions of class and gender involved in the process. The plethora of writing on

masculinity offers multiple theoretical bases and approaches to investigating masculinity in the workplace and finding answers to these questions.

However, much of the existing research on this topic limits its perspective exclusively to hegemonic theory. Hegemonic masculinity generally refers to the existence of a culturally normative ideal of male behavior. This concept maintains that men are pressured and encouraged by society to fulfill this model of masculinity – one that promotes male domination, female subordination, and a variety of other traits, skills, and characteristics that the model man is supposed to possess. Existing literature addresses men's confrontation with hegemonic masculinity and its role in identity formation in several different ways. For example, a study published in 2004 by Helga Kristin Hallgrimsdottir and Tracey Adams explored the similar issue of how masculinity was produced in the KOL movement. In fact, their study has served as the inspiration for my own current research. However, Hallgrimsdottir and Adams conducted their research and analysis using only hegemonic theory. I intend to approach the issue of masculinity construction in a slightly different way.

By employing two separate but fundamentally related theoretical frameworks concerning men and masculinity, and drawing from their combined qualities, this study aims to produce an analysis of working-class men's construction of masculine identities in the male-dominated workplace that can explain and account for their decisions, perceptions, and ideals with regard to gender and class. The theories I employ are used to complement each other in terms of analysis and interpretation.

R.W. Connell has made a number of lasting contributions to the field of sociology throughout her illustrious career, but none stand out quite like her renowned theory of *Hegemonic Masculinity*. The concepts and beliefs associated with this theoretical model are widely used and have been applied in countless studies over the years, and as a result they have contributed in many ways to the current leading research and academic literature in gender studies.

In order to advance the knowledge and understanding of this issue, I will rely on some of the existing research and findings of other similar studies that employ the theoretical concept of hegemonic masculinity, as made popular through the work of R.W. Connell, and then build upon these findings by using Tony Coles' theory of *The Field of*

Masculinity to explore and dissect the issue further. In the process of showing how these theories work together, I demonstrate how Coles' relatively newly created theory builds upon and supplements the older and more widely used hegemonic framework in revealing the dynamics and complexities of men's production of masculinities.

The method of analysis being used in this study consists of complementing the established conclusions drawn from hegemonic theory with the conceptual tools of Coles' field theory in order to develop those conclusions and investigate them more thoroughly. This study is not intended to result in the creation of a new theory of masculinity, nor is it meant to critique or discount hegemonic theory or the findings of research that uses it; I think that that they have made very powerful and influential discoveries that have laid the groundwork for current research and analyses of this issue. In fact, this particular study does not present many opportunities for disproving the claims of hegemonic theory. This is because much of my investigation begins at the point where previous analyses using hegemonic theory have stopped. My major criticism of hegemonic masculinity as a theory is not that it lacks legitimacy or validity, but rather that it is simply not comprehensive enough and, due to a lack of necessary theoretical tools and concepts, merely touches upon several issues without pursuing them further. In simple terms, this research is meant to use each theory to its full potential and to highlight the most meaningful and important aspects of masculinity construction.

Procedure / Method of Analysis

This is a case study, aimed at exploring the Knights of Labor movement in the United States during the 1880s, with the goal of a fuller understanding of the complex dynamics of working-class men's construction of masculinity. The KOL movement is an extremely appropriate subject for this research as it signifies a specific and prominent period in U.S. history when working-class men continuously produced, transformed, and manipulated masculine identities in a society that threatened to strip them of their manly status (Hallgrimsdottir and Adams, 273).

I begin by discussing the general background of the KOL and describing both the attitudes and characteristics of the organization as well as those of the larger social world

to which it belonged. This information will help frame and clarify the analysis and findings of the research discussed later on in this article. After that I discuss, in detail, the theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity as explained by R.W. Connell. I explain the benefits of hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical tool and establish the basic claims and assertions that this theory makes. Next, I move on to the discussion of Tony Coles' field of masculinity and explain how this theory reaffirms the assumptions of hegemonic theory and then expands upon it to reveal the deeper meaning of the conclusions that have been made and the overall interrelated nature of social institutions. Following this, I segue into the application of Coles' theory onto the KOL movement and begin my theoretical analysis of the working-class men who constructed masculinity within, or as a part of, the organization. For this I will be using information and data gathered from multiple reliable sources. I finish the article by presenting the main findings of my research, discussing the possible implications of these findings, and suggesting potential options and directions for future research to head towards that can build off of and improve upon my work to add to the research on men's masculinities.

I am limiting my focus to only examine the issue in regards to masculinity production of male (gender), working-class adults (class), and will only discuss other categories of individuals as they relate to the production of masculinity for this specific group. I depend on R.W. Connell's definition of class for this study and use it to help explain the social climate of the Knights of Labor in the 1880s. According to Connell, class is essentially the developing relation among all the various forms of social and structural practice: how they stimulate each other, oppose each other, and overlap each other (Connell 1982: 311). To properly articulate class, Connell contends that we must conceive of classes both as groups of people, defined according to cultural taste, and as positions in a structure of relations (306). Furthermore, class formation is a process addressed to the disunity inherent in a practical reality that is based on and defined by social struggle. When they have reached the point where there are not any other real options available, Connell claims that working-class men mobilize "on the basis of existing social networks to confront and contain the disruption" caused by their social and cultural exploitation (311). Such is the case for the working-class men who were involved in the Knights of Labor in the 1880s.

In gathering data from the sources I looked for particular attitudes and behavior of white working-class men in the KOL that pertained to the issues of class and gender. It has already been established through past work that the KOL was an active site of masculinity construction (Hallgrimsdottir and Adams 2004), therefore I operate with the belief that nearly every aspect of the KOL is in some way involved in this process of identity formation. After explaining the foundations of hegemonic masculinity and discussing the concepts and advantages associated with Coles' theoretical framework of the field of masculinity, I divide my analysis into two parts: (1) Masculinity and the field of class; (2) Masculinity and the field of gender.

Historical Background

The Knights of Labor was one of most successful organizations of its time in terms of achieving class organization and establishing a presence on the national scale, and it is considered by many to be the first mass membership labor organization in North America (Joseph Gerteis 2002: 580 ; Hallgrimsdottir and Adams, 275). Originally named The Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor, the organization was founded in Philadelphia in 1869 by local garment cutters and began as a secret brotherhood of white working-class men (Gerteis, 589 ; Hallgrimsdottir and Adams, 275). However, the organization soon developed greater ambitions and aspired to achieve a national presence, and in 1879 the KOL terminated its secret status and began openly recruiting workers from across the country. The KOL reached the peak of its notoriety and membership in the 1880s, a decade during which membership grew to over a half a million people and organizational local assemblies were established in every single state (Gerteis, 580).

Researchers and historians have pointed to several different reasons to explain just how and why the KOL became so popular and successful during the 1880s, but most agree that the key to its rise was what it claimed to offer to working-class men on both an individual and social level. As Joseph Gerteis explains in his extensive research, the KOL was created during a time when a great number of American men believed that "Fraternal orders fulfilled social as well as civic functions for members, mixing

principles of self-betterment, charity, and mutual aid” (Gerteis, 589). These appealing aspects of brotherhood, in addition to the variety of unique rituals and practices involved in fraternal organizations like the KOL, resonated with working-class men who saw in the KOL the legitimacy and support needed to produce an improved sense of self-worth and security in their personal masculinity (Hallgrimsdottir and Adams, 286). Moreover, North American workers could broadly relate to the KOL’s social, political, and economic agendas, and the Knights of Labor found great support for their opposition and criticism of the labor industry and government corruption (Hallgrimsdottir and Adams, 276). In particular, the politically and economically vulnerable were drawn to this movement for its creation of a *counterhegemonic* value system that supported their claims to worth and success. For those workers who faced discrimination and inequality stemming from the hegemonic masculine model, and who were systematically prevented from attaining a socially acceptable measure of success or manliness, the KOL offered a way to attain a satisfactory gender identity and also form an organized resistance to hegemonic expectations (Hallgrimsdottir and Adams, 285).

In order to effectively and successfully manage such a large organization and achieve the ambitious level of social, cultural, and systematic change that the working class was fighting for, the Knights of Labor relied on two primary philosophical concepts. These two philosophies included the traditional values associated with “fraternalism,” and the political and economic tenets of “producerism,” and combined they served as the guiding force and basis for shaping policy in the KOL (Hallgrimsdottir and Adams, 275). There are several ways in which these two philosophies disagree with each other, which I think makes it all the more impressive that the KOL was able to carefully balance them for so many years. For example, fraternalism encouraged the bonds of men across class, while at the same time producerism emphasized the value of class over gender. Furthermore, fraternalism sought change through the formation of a unified brotherhood that transcended class just as producerism promoted social protest and activism as the best way to achieve structural change (Hallgrimsdottir and Adams, 276). Regardless, the KOL’s combined ideology of fraternalism and producerism gave the organization a powerful language of social protest that could be heard by the social elite and provided two distinct and helpful ways by which gender relations could be

viewed; Producerism stressed class loyalties and the belief that value resided in the labor of the producers of wealth regardless of economic standing, while fraternalism put an emphasis on the inherent separateness and difference between men and women (Hallgrimsdottir and Adams, 282).

The overriding theme throughout the various explanations for the emergence and rise of the KOL is that working-class men sought to improve their social condition and regain a dominant masculine identity in a society where they were neglected and disadvantaged by hegemonic masculine ideals. These men felt that they could address these pressing concerns through membership and support of the KOL. Masculinity was an issue of the utmost importance to working-class men at this time, and this can be explained to a great extent by understanding the unique structural, cultural, and historical conditions under which the Knights of Labor operated during the 1880s.

One significant piece of historical information is that masculinity was not seen as being biologically predisposed, determined by an innate maleness or femaleness, nor was it necessarily achieved through conformity to gender roles. Rather, one's manhood had to be achieved and demonstrated constantly through behavior, appearance, occupation, and the like, in order to be maintained. Consequently, this meant that the reason for the misery of the working class laid in their failure or inability to perform and maintain manhood appropriately. More specifically, this meant two main things: That no model of masculinity was permanent or impervious to change, and that a positive masculine identity was theoretically attainable and possible for everyone, including members the working class. Masculinity was measured in terms of manliness, and manhood defined the particular social characteristics that men were expected to acquire in order to be manly and, equally as important, to be honorable (Hallgrimsdottir and Adams, 277).

Members of the working class, however, felt that they were being maliciously restricted to functioning socially according to a value system in which self-control, self-advancement, and rationality were emphasized and measured in relation to hegemonic notions of masculinity that were being defined and supported by the middle and upper class (Hallgrimsdottir and Adams, 277). In what played out as a sort of gradual shift that went unchecked in the years leading up to a sudden moment of realization and panic, laborers and working-class individuals in the 1880s abruptly learned that the qualities and

skills they traditionally held were no longer considered to be culturally valuable or appropriate in most cases. At the same time, however, much merit was attributed to the traits and abilities that came naturally to most middle-class individuals (Gerteis, 586). Furthermore, the very definitions and significance of these socially valued qualities differed drastically from working-class conceptions of their meaning. For example, self-advancement was promoted by the higher classes as being determined by one's achievement in "gaining autonomy, financial success, and even a measure of wealth in the competitive arena of the marketplace" (Hallgrimsdottir and Adams, 278). Working-class individuals did not agree with this definition, nor did they have the resources or abilities required for success by those terms, so naturally they were left feeling somewhat helpless and defeated. This working-class sentiment was only strengthened by the worries about economic security and racial degeneracy that resulted as a consequence of increased European and Asian immigration to North America (Hallgrimsdottir and Adams, 277).

The combined influences of the social, cultural, and historical circumstances of the time, along with the directives and decisions made by the leaders of the KOL, resulted in a truly unique and interesting example of a class based labor organization that was remarkably diverse and had the ability to transcend the divisions of class, gender, and race in addressing a multitude of shared concerns. The KOL went against the common trend and employed a highly unorthodox strategy by which labor workers would be brought together across the lines of race, gender, skill level, and trade to pursue common goals and oppose shared economic and political discrimination. In many ways, producerism allowed for the inclusion of women and men from ethnic minorities into the Knights of Labor (Hallgrimsdottir and Adams, 276).

Following increasing pressure from within the organization, women won the right to join the KOL with a membership vote in 1881. What is more, the KOL even went so far as to support women's issues such as suffrage, equal pay, and equal rights. The significance of this is that KOL included and supported women at a time when other organizations were fighting to deter women away from the labor market and keep them in the home where they were assumed to belong (Hallgrimsdottir and Adams, 280).

Additional examples of this theme can be seen in how the KOL included black workers at

a time when the effects of the Civil War were still apparent in society, and also in the fact that the KOL's decade of prosperity in the 1880s was a time during which the debate and eventual passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act was a prominent social issue.

There was also a masculine hierarchy within the KOL that saw some men holding positions of dominance and others holding subordinated positions within the organization. In other words, there existed a hierarchy of dominant and subordinate masculinities within the larger institution that was itself part of a masculine hierarchy in which it was subordinate. This concept will become more clear once Coles' *field of masculinity* is introduced and explained, but for now it is reasonable to expect that masculine identities in the KOL were, to some extent, shaped and maintained through comparing and differentiating men across the categories of gender, race, and class according to their ability to achieve the group's counterhegemonic masculine ideal (Hallgrimsdottir and Adams, 282).

It is absolutely necessary to gain a solid understanding of this historical information if any worthwhile analysis of masculinity in the Knights of Labor is to be reached. Influences coming from both the internal and external, the controllable and the uncontrollable, the structural and the historical all provide a situation in which the issue can only be revealed through a lens fit for that specific place and time. In order to understand things on a micro level, one must also be able to recognize the issue and place its components on a macro level. Building from this, it is reasonable to argue that this issue can only be fully understood by taking into account masculinity's relationship and intersection with class, gender, and race within the KOL. In addition, one must acknowledge the full depth and dynamics of the interactions between multiple different dominant and subordinate forms or manifestations of masculinity that exist in the tremendously complex social realm of the working class. Previous studies have achieved these goals to a varied extent, and I believe that by building off of this research and introducing a new set of analytical tools I will be able to explore further into the issue and offer a fresh perspective on the working class's construction of masculinity.

Theory

The two theories I am using are R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and Tony Coles theory of the field of masculinity. The value of hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical tool rests in its ability to identify, at the structural level, the layers of multiple masculinities and their relations to one another. Additionally, utilizing the theory of hegemonic masculinity allows the researcher to "recognize the fluidity of gender identities and power" (Coles 2009: 32). Understood from this perspective, men's masculinities may be marginalized by factors such as age or ethnicity, but these hierarchical relations are continuously open to challenge and change "such that the dominance of hegemonic masculinity is susceptible to the challenges of subordinated and marginalized masculinities and femininities" (32). Therefore, hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the particular form of masculinity that is culturally accepted as being most dominant at any given time within the field of masculinity (41).

There are limitations to the theoretical concept of hegemonic masculinity. For example, hegemonic masculinity fails to account for the variety of interconnected masculinities that exist within particular dominant or subordinate masculine identities and disregards the complexities of various dominant or subordinate masculinities that exist (Coles 2009: 32). Also, individuals who are subordinated by hegemonic masculinity can still assume a dominant position in relation to other men in their subgroup by drawing on certain elements of the socially dominant masculinities (33). In essence, research employing the theoretical concept of hegemonic masculinity tends to describe male power and dominance at a structural level with an insufficient examination and understanding of how power is organized at the individual level in terms of complicity and resistance (33). It is insufficient to locate or identify a point of importance, or reveal a pattern of social interaction that could potentially influence masculinity construction, if you are unable to explain not only *that* it exists, but also *how* and *why* it exists and functions as a part of that particular environment.

Hegemonic Masculinity

R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity is fundamentally constructed around the notion that the gender system developed in society is not generated from the

social identity being added to the biological. Rather, the gender system consists of the social acting as a defining force on the biological, and society is such that gender categories are constantly under construction and are intrinsically contradictory. Individuals must constantly work to sustain the social definition of gender because the biological rationale cannot support the gender categories on its own (Connell 1992: 316). This corresponds perfectly with the circumstances and conditions surrounding the Knights of Labor in the 1880s, when Americans believed that gender identities needed to be performed and maintained through social interaction, and that masculinity and femininity were not based on an arbitrary biological differentiation. Connell explains that we do experience gender in our bodies, but only to the extent that our bodies become social actors that interact with others in social affairs and, in turn, contribute to the creation of a social world. Ultimately, the product of this creative process is a society where masculine hegemony pervades every social institution and structure, and according to Connell, “It is in this social world that inequality arises, that women are oppressed, that political struggle occurs” (Connell 1997: 8).

Building upon this, Connell asserts that masculinities are constructed or accomplished through a variety of concurrent relationships and social processes (Connell 1997: 8 ; Connell 1992: 742). Connell clarifies this concept concisely and succinctly, stating how “A specific masculinity is not constituted in isolation, but in relation to other masculinities and to femininities through the structure of gender and through other social structures” (Connell 1992: 745). Differentiation is certainly an important factor in this process, but Connell also urges the importance of institutional and personal practices. Furthermore, the patterns of relationships produced by the operation of these practices create “characteristic situations with characteristic constraints,” meaning that they serve to shape the very meanings and definitions in the social world that play an integral role in masculine identity formation in the first place (Connell 1982: 318).

Connell argues, and I agree, that this complex and interrelated nature of the processes involved in masculine identity construction creates a situation in which the working class cannot be seen as an independent issue that can be easily generalized (Connell 1982: 318). In other words, there is no universal “situation of the working class” because other issues, such as gender, differentiate the situations of individuals

within the working class and, as a result, this affects their production of masculine identities. Research suggests that class and gender should be viewed as being forms of structuring that can be found in the same practices at the same time; gender identity and class structure are produced through and in conjunction with each other (Acker, 146 ; Connell 1982: 317). As Connell puts it, “their class fate is worked out in and through their gender; and vice versa” (Connell, 318).

Connell basically contends that virtually every aspect of individuals’ and groups’ lived experiences is influenced by hegemonic masculinity; it exists everywhere and for everyone and, as a consequence, collective practices arise. The existence of a masculinized public culture in turn provides individuals and groups with the opportunity to use gender as an effective means of resistance to subordination and a way to improve their cultural status and eliminate inequalities. For example, men sometimes attempt to publicly construct a hegemonic form of masculinity, based on their shared set of interpersonal and institutional practices, that connects them to the larger cultural community and gives them a positive masculine identity and position within it. Moreover, Connell explains that this display of social masculinization is commonly seen with men working comfortably in a male-dominated manual trade, therefore this concept helps to fundamentally explain the conditions under which the Knights of Labor functioned in the 1880s, and how those conditions helped shape the decisions and actions of white, working-class men (Connell 1992: 741).

Connell’s hegemonic theory essentially contends that the dominant, or “hegemonic,” form of masculinity present in a society represents the most successful strategy for subordinating women at that given time. In its most basic and common form, hegemonic masculinity revolves ideologically around heterosexuality, aggression, competition, and the exclusion of women from social communities; it is founded upon the principles of hierarchy and establishing superiority over women as well as other men (Connell 1997: 8). Although this masculine ideal is clearly catered towards men, Connell explains that all men do not benefit equally from this system, nor do they necessarily share the same concepts or definitions of masculinity for the particular system. Furthermore, in reality most men do not live according to the “traditional male role,” and very few exemplify the traditional masculine characteristics emphasized by hegemonic

masculinity (Connell 1997: 9). The primary implication of these social conditions is that “certain constructions of masculinity are hegemonic, while others are subordinated or marginalized”, therefore multiple different forms of masculinity can exist (Connell 1992: 736).

Within these different forms of masculinity are countless social processes and interactions that commonly involve hierarchies, alliances, and oppressions. First and foremost, there is one kind of masculine politics in which men fully support and reinforce hegemonic masculinity by engaging in a sort of masculine propaganda campaign that crafts ideal images of men or endorses the concept of male supremacy through pop-culture, movies, books, and the like, that emphasize and accentuate men’s superior abilities, physical strength, and intellect. The men in society who receive the greatest advantages and profit the most from a system of masculine hegemony subscribe to this form of masculinity. For the society in which the Knights of Labor existed in the 1880s, the members of the middle and upper class who were ardently despised by the working-class men of the KOL represent this kind of masculine identity (Connell 1997: 9).

Connell also states that there are subordinated masculinities, formed at the bottom of the gender hierarchy among men (Connell 1997: 8). These are essentially those groups or individuals do not possess any of the culturally redeemable qualities that grant men power in a hegemonic society and who cannot formulate any kind of respectable masculine identity due to the continuous efforts by other men to subordinate them and maintain inequality. The working-class men of the KOL were indeed subordinated and discriminated against, but I do not consider them to be the type of individuals Connell describes here. Rather, I identify the European and Chinese immigrants coming into the United States during this period as the group who most embodies these types of subordinated masculinities that Connell presents.

In addition, Connell asserts that there are also “forms of masculinity found among men who are complicit in the patriarchal system” (Connell 1997: 8). Connell explains that these complicit forms of masculinity are the most prevalent in society, consisting of men who are accept many of the benefits that the masculine ideology bestows upon them. However, they do not actively pursue hegemonic ideals and refrain from exercising power in acts of aggression, discrimination, or dominance (8). I believe that the working-

class men of the KOL being examined in this study followed this model of masculinity for much of their lives and came to appreciate and expect the comfortable position that this put them in. However, this form was abandoned in the years leading up to the 1880s primarily due to the fact that the core principles and values of the hegemonic masculine model in society had changed, which meant that working-class men were no longer gaining the same benefits as they had before with their complicit behavior.

I contend, as others have, that these working-class men responded to this situation by adopting a different form of masculinity with a politics that, as Connell describes, constructs “both alternatives to the hegemonic pattern, and specialized versions of it” (1997: 8). Connell understands this as the type of situation where men pursue a model of masculinity that has some resemblance to the dominant hegemonic model, but they adapt and manipulate certain elements to create a unique masculine model that serves their specific needs (8). The Knights of Labor represented the unified movement of working-class men who followed this form of masculinity in an attempt to reestablish a strong masculine identity and oppose the discriminating forces of hegemonic masculinity.

Men tend to conform to the hegemonic model and its social processes in virtually all situations, even though it may sometimes appear otherwise. Connell explains that, for example, men who demonstrate support for social equality and anti-discrimination policies do so only because those things align with their own personal plan or strategy for social achievement and performing masculinity; participation would likely not occur if there was any possible chance that being involved in these activities could threaten the positions of power these men held in their own personal relationships (1997: 7).

Hegemonic theory, however, does not explore the dynamics of this example of social behavior. To Connell, and others who abide by the tenets of masculine hegemony, this is identified as simply being another part of the social struggle between dominant and subordinate forms of masculinity, and the true implications of this are left ignored.

While hegemonic theory explains *that* this happens and also, to some extent, *why* it happens, it fails to explain exactly *what* is happening in terms of the processes involved and also *how* those processes actively influence men’s construction of masculinities. In fact, Connell almost seems to use this example only to defend and reinforce her own theoretical ideology, seeing it as simply being evidence of the existence of hegemonic

masculinity in society and the extent to which masculinity is determined by the “psychological investment men make in this system of unequal power, income and respect” (Connell 1997: 8). Moreover, this is seen in hegemonic theory as an example of how any opposition or threat to this system that could potentially reduce men’s power or eliminate advantages is perceived by men as being an “attack on masculinity” (Connell 1997: 8).

If social processes like the behavior and practices described by Connell do in fact exist, then there must be an investigation of the interrelated nature of masculinities and the potential for multiple influential, formative discourses to occur simultaneously between different masculine forms. When looking at the Knights of Labor with this in mind, actions such as the inclusion and support of women and racial minorities can be interpreted as being strategic moves involving the social institutions of class, gender, and race that were made in accordance with the social aspirations and masculine performance of the white, working-class men that made up the core of the organization. Key elements of masculinity construction likely exist in this area of social interaction and revealing them would undoubtedly contribute to a fuller and more accurate understanding of how masculinity is produced both for the working class and also in general terms. Herein lies the need for Tony Coles’ masculine theory, which provides the additional theoretical and analytical tools necessary for this issue to be exposed.

The Field of Masculinity

The Field of Masculinity, developed by Tony Coles, is predicated on the notion that masculinity is varied in how it is understood, experienced, and lived out in daily practice, and that “men’s masculinities are constantly in flux” (Coles 2009: 30). In addition, Coles has stressed the urgent need for research to move away from the structural perspective when examining masculinity and instead interpret masculinities as “collective human projects that are individually lived out” (2009: 33). While the theory of hegemonic masculinity called for a focus on the structural and institutional processes involved in masculinity construction, the field of masculinity stresses the need to focus on the individual and view masculinity construction in terms of the individual’s involvement in structural and institutional practices.

By incorporating the great French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus, capital, and fields* into Connell's understanding of hegemonic masculinity, Tony Coles produced a theoretical framework that is able to explain, "how and why men challenge and reject notions of hegemonic masculinity, and provides a framework for the strategies men use to negotiate masculinities" (Coles 2008: 234). Based on this claim alone, Coles' theory already promises to answer a substantial portion of my primary research question, and I have barely even scratched the surface of this theoretical model of masculinity construction.

According to Coles, extending upon Bourdieu's concept of fields to generate a "field of masculinity" is both a logical and fitting approach to conceptualizing a social world in which there is constant disagreement over the definitions or understandings of the social criteria that determine what is, or is not, masculine, and where individuals with power defend their status against those who pursue change. Coles describes this type of social interaction as being "a relationship of orthodoxy and heterodoxy" (Coles 2008: 235). This relationship may sound similar to the idea of domination and subordination described in hegemonic masculinity, but it does not mean the same thing. Orthodoxy refers to the practice of observing and complying with the established cultural norms and definitions endorsed by the currently hegemonic form of masculinity in society. Heterodoxy, on the other hand, refers to the condition of being opposed to those same norms and definitions. In other words, while hegemonic masculinity presents a view of society in which the fundamental relationship roles consist of either dominating or being dominated, Coles' field theory infuses elements of attitude and action into the relationship and characterizes not only where each role stands in the social hierarchy, but also the basic explains the basic sentiment of each group and what their active roles are in terms of constructing masculine identities.

Coles explains very clearly how the Bourdieuan concepts of habitus, capital, and fields both serve a purpose in his masculine theory and also fit suitably with the theoretical model of hegemonic masculinity:

One does not operate in isolation to the other, and both are forming and formative, reproducing and generative. Thus, habitus, capital, and fields allow for the consideration of how individuals and groups function to

support or subvert structures within the social order and the strategies that are used at the subconscious level to negotiate positions. (Coles 2009: 36)

It is important to note how Coles' contends that many of the decisions and strategies made during men's construction of masculinity are made on the *subconscious* level. I believe that this vital detail is essential to the field theory's ability to explore issues and social domains that are inaccessible to hegemonic theory. The idea that many of the strategies used and dynamics involved in the production of masculinity may not necessarily correspond with what is recognized and perceived publicly, and that these processes may even be unknown to the individual actors involved in masculinity construction, provides the field theory with an enormous amount of flexibility, freedom, and capability in its exploration, interpretation, and analysis of masculinity construction.

Coles' believes that the Bourdieuan concepts of habitus, capital, and fields are exactly what hegemonic masculinity is lacking as a theoretical framework, and they were incorporated because they each contribute significant insight to the exploration of masculinities that specifically address the deficiencies of the hegemonic theory. The first concept, habitus, helps explain how men use masculinity as a strategy to function socially in everyday situations. Coles claims that men negotiate masculinity in their daily lives within a social community comprised of multiple different practices that operate in synch with each other (Coles 2009: 37). Again, Coles reiterates the notion that, although men's behavior and masculine performance indicate this strategy, they are not consciously aware of it. Coles explains that, dependent on situational opportunities or constraints, these men demonstrate either conservation or subversion in their daily interactions as actors in the field of masculinity (38). Furthermore, in the field of masculinity, "The struggle for legitimacy ... between dominant and subordinated masculinities is validated by habitus and the belief that one's own masculinity is natural and true" (39).

The next concept, capital, is defined by Coles as being an "object of struggle within fields and which functions as a social relation of power" (Coles 2008: 234). Staying true to Bourdieu's understanding of the term, Coles states that there are three main types of capital that are prevalent in society: economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital. Furthermore, Coles explains that individuals behave differently and have different social priorities depending on what form of capital they possess, or do not

possess, and their actions are also determined by what social field they are located in and the of their capital in that particular place (235). For example, performing hegemonic masculinity requires a large amount of physical, economic, and cultural capital in the field of masculinity. As Coles explains, the men who possess this specific capital and perform hegemonic masculinity act to defend, protect, and reinforce the values and beliefs of the masculine model in order to maintain the current masculine hierarchy that grants them superior social status and masculine identity that most other individuals aspire for (237).

Lastly, Coles defines his third Bourdieuan concept, fields, as being “domains of social life that are relational and malleable and may be inter-institutional or intra-institutional in scope” (Coles 2008: 234). The key concept of the field is that it is inextricably tied to habitus, and that attitudes and actions develop from the relationship between the two. As Coles makes clear, fields are the home of social institutions such as religion and law, and by nature they are directly responsible for producing the social environment in which habitus operates (Coles 2009: 35). In addition, the notion that a field can consist of just a single social institution or could encompass multiple institutions is as meaningful as it is complex. To avoid confusion I must mention that when Coles uses the term “institution” in this situation he is referring to objective structures rather than subjective ones. So while religion represents a field, the actual places of worship do not, and while law is also an established field, the courtroom is not. Coles cites the field of gender as an example of an intra-institutional social realm in which multiple individual fields overlap with each other and, in turn, allow for several different subfields and social institutions to exist. Overall, one of the most significant understandings to be gained from the concept of fields is that individuals have the freedom to move around amongst different fields and subfields. From this perspective, individuals have many more options and a much higher sense of control over their own lives and the interactions, performances, and behavior from which the social world and their masculine identity is shaped (36).

Clearly, the concepts and ideas associated with Coles’ masculine theory that have been discussed up to this point have already shown that the field of masculinity presents a unique and interesting perspective of masculinity construction that is, to a certain extent,

characterized by the enhancement and reorientation of the most substantial concepts and understandings that exist at the ideological heart of hegemonic masculinity as a theory. Now that the discussion about the basic conceptual ideas and definitions incorporated in Coles' masculine field theory is finished, I will move next into a description of the more specific processes involved in the construction of masculinities, and I will also identify some other things that are especially applicable to the issue of masculinity construction for the white, working-class men of 1880's America who were involved as members of the Knights of Labor movement.

In constructing masculine identities some men may support particular aspects of hegemonic masculinity that correspond with the personal qualities they possess that fulfill the hegemonic ideal, but these men and the vast majority of other men do not necessarily see their own model of masculinity as being inferior in any way to that of the hegemonic ideal (2008: 234). Even men in subordinated positions may feel that their masculinity is fine, especially if other men behave similar to them, and may even be in a dominant position to other men within their subgroup.

One of the most interesting and pertinent elements of the field theory is a concept that Coles calls *mosaic masculinities* (2008: 238). This concept refers to some of the alternative methods men use to negotiate masculinity, deal with hegemonic masculinity, and ultimately formulate their own satisfactory and respectable masculine identities. The term "mosaic" is appropriate in the sense that this concept describes the way in which those not at the top of the socially hegemonic system of masculinity, men who have masculine identities that are subordinated by hegemonic masculinity, will pick and choose from the different elements and aspects of the hegemonic masculinity, keeping those that privilege them and eliminating the rest. After a complete alteration of the hegemonic masculine model so that it consists of just a few of the original elements of hegemonic masculinity and is filled out the rest of the way by customized standards, the end result is a masculine identity that is both valued by individuals in the field of masculinity and also validated by the few remaining elements of hegemonic masculinity.

But Coles asserts that even this is not a perfect solution or strategy for overcoming hegemonic oppression. No matter how well crafted the mosaic masculinity is, it is impossible for any man to completely transform a subordinated masculinity into

the socially hegemonic form due to the fact that they lack the capital necessary for a total hegemonic performance of masculinity. As a consequence, this means that men performing mosaic masculinities will always remain subordinated by hegemonic masculinity to an extent (2008: 238). However, Coles explains that these men successfully perform hegemonic masculinity in certain aspects of their masculine identity, and as a result they actively subordinate certain masculinities (238). In summation, men who are able to form mosaic masculinities receive a level hegemonic power, and although they are still subordinated to a degree by hegemonic masculinity, that level of hegemonic power places them in a dominant position relative to the masculinities of other men (240).

Another example of the interrelated and comprehensive nature of Coles' field theory is demonstrated in how struggles and issues in one field can have direct implications in others (2009: 39). While gender claims an obvious role in forming a masculine identity, Coles argues that external forces such as class and ethnicity "intersect with the field of masculinity to form complex matrices that allow for a variety of masculinities to exist" (38). This is a very valuable insight for this study, given the fact that the focus is on learning how gender, class and race are related to, and involved in, the processes of masculinity construction for the white, working-class men in the Knights of Labor.

While it has been established that, according to Coles' theory, masculine identities and their positions in the hegemonic hierarchy are determined by individuals' relationships and interactions with others, as well as the amount of capital that these individuals possess, the masculine field theory also suggests another important factor. Coles contends, "It may also depend on the subfield in which they operate in the field of masculinity as to whether they believe their masculinity to be a dominant or legitimate form of masculinity" (2009: 42). To clarify this, Coles explains that, just as hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant form of masculinity within the overall field of masculinity in society, there are also a wide variety of subfields located in the field of masculinity, such as working-class masculinity and black masculinity, that have their own understanding of capital as well as an alternate version of the dynamic relationship between dominance and subordination (2008: 235).

This theoretical understanding allows forms of masculinity that are subordinated by hegemonic masculinity to simultaneously exercise a degree of hegemony over other masculinities by traveling to a field in which their capital holds more value (2008: 235). In essence, subfields offer men the opportunity to perform dominant masculine identities in places where their capital is valued even though they may assume a subordinate position relative to hegemonic masculinity in the field of masculinity as a whole (2009: 39). By supporting dominant masculinities within various subfields that valued their type of capital, these men could attain a dominant masculine identity as well as legitimize their identity as being hegemonic (2008: 246).

Analysis

Masculinity and the Field of Class

The KOL subscribed to a “producerist” notion of class, which essentially emphasized the importance of personal production rather than personal ownership (Gerteis, 589). This helped to eliminate the division of skilled and unskilled workers, and also served to pose production and participation as viable, socially respected ways to improve their status and position within the workplace and society as a whole (Gerteis 590). Gerteis refers to these qualities of production and participation as “civic virtue” (Gerteis 590). The Chinese and European immigrants were not thought to be capable of this civic virtue, therefore they were not only excluded from membership in the KOL but also seen as being deficient in basic qualities that all men should possess (Gerteis 591). In addition, civic virtue separated white working-class men (producers) from those above them who were considered by workers to be the major source of the inequalities that served to reduce their status and power (Gerteis 601). So, by using a producerist definition of class the working-class men of the KOL were able to establish a set of values and expectations that benefited their claims to manliness and simultaneously identify others as being unmanly, just as explained by Coles in the field of masculinity. According to the field of masculinity, this is an example of men operating in the field of class in order to give them an advantage in the field of masculinity – by embodying these class characteristics you are also doing very manly, masculine things.

Masculinity and the Field of Gender

The KOL did not entirely reject the dominant view of men's and women's proper roles, and although they showed support and protection in ways to women and tried to redefine them as virtuous and commendable, they were also attracted to the breadwinner image due to the belief that it could help them get higher wages and, in turn, fulfill certain hegemonic notions of masculinity (Hallgrimsdottir and Adams, 282). The presence of women presented working-class men with the opportunity to "protect working women from the dangers posed by lascivious and immoral employers and poor working conditions" (282).

The support and protection of women was not a clear rejection of the ideology of separate spheres but rather functioned as another way in which working-class men could demonstrate and reinforce their masculinity within an ideological agenda of gender equality that adjusted the separate spheres ideology to the practical considerations of working-class life (283). The KOL's support of women was seen as simply a response to the overall conditions of the working-class, not an issue of gender. "However, appeals to change the circumstances of working women's lives were, more often than not, stated in ways that suggest that the ultimate goal was to return these women to lives of domesticity" (283).

The working-class men in the KOL tended to emphasize their masculinity as innate and conflate their maleness with their masculinity, just as Coles describes in his theory (Coles 2008: 240). This struggle in the field of gender has influenced struggles in the field of masculinity (2009: 40). For example, "...men have tried to defend their position of dominance by falling on essentialist arguments that necessarily separate men from women" (40). Furthermore, "The essentialist argument creates instability in the field of masculinity as subordinated men use the argument of essentialism generated in the field of gender to subvert hegemonic masculinity" (40). Using the essentialist argument "... sexual orientation becomes redundant in relation to masculinity as men are masculine by virtue of their biology, not their sexuality" (40). Overall, this is a perfect

example of how Coles describes social change as being produced in one field to influence change in others.

Conclusion

Tony Coles embarked upon the process of building his own masculine theory with the hopes that he would be able to produce a new, progressive theoretical model that could at least offer a view of masculinity that was different from anything that had been seen before. Fortunately for the sociological community, he was able to exceed expectations and created a theoretical framework that incorporated the same fundamental social landscape as hegemonic masculinity and could be used to supplement hegemonic theory by investigating and answering unresolved questions. Furthermore, Coles' theory demonstrated that it had the analytical capacity to position these findings within a social world that is filled with a myriad of different processes and practices that occur simultaneously within, between, and across various social structures and cultural institutions, and which operate over all individual and collective levels.

The findings from this research suggest that men are able to negotiate masculinities in a number of significant ways that allow them to support a range of dominant masculinities. In supporting alternative dominant masculinities away from the hegemonic ideal, the working-class men of the KOL were able to both challenge hegemonic masculinity and avoid being subordinated by it in the context of their everyday lives. (Coles 2008: 246). The lived reality for these men was one in which they used the capital that they own to resist and challenge the superiority of hegemonic masculinity while legitimizing their own position. Coles interprets this, and I found the same thing, as strategy allowed them to feel that their masculinity is valid in relation to hegemonic masculinity and superior in relation to other subordinate masculinities (246).

I agree with the notion that, for the KOL, challenging hegemonic conceptions of masculinity was inextricably embedded into their overall challenge to dominant social, political, and economic institutional inequalities (Hallgrimsdottir and Adams, 273). Furthermore, I also found that the KOL's counterhegemonic conception of masculinity did not reject hegemonic masculinity altogether, but instead simultaneously existed both

parallel to it and in opposition to it (287). These men challenged certain elements of the dominant masculine ideal while accepting others, and in turn the movement was able to appropriate select aspects of the masculine hegemonic ideal and transform them into being beneficial to working class manhood.

The implications of this research are great. As they explain in their research, “In the span of a few decades, foreign investment, corporate flight, downsizing, and automation have suddenly left members of the working class without a steady family wage, which, compounded with the dissipation of labor unions, has left many white working-class men feeling emasculated and angry” (Fine, Weis, Addeleston and Hall 1998: 67). We are currently in a situation that greatly resembles that of the KOL in the 1880s. Therefore, the more we are able to take away from this investigation, the better.

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