

Theorising progressive change among men

Text for the “Three minute thesis” competition held at University of New England, August 2010. The competition is intended to give students a chance to showcase their PhD thesis project to an interested general audience. This entry won the social sciences category.

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One of the biggest contributions from feminism is the view that women suffer inequality because women are not valued as much as men. So feminism shows us that men are crucially involved in women’s inequality, and because of this men are also being studied.

The main theory about men at the moment is that men benefit from current gender arrangements, and this means men are not motivated to change those arrangements. Men have to be forced to change, and so when we talk about gender, men are seen as a problem.

But I argue in my thesis that this ‘problem of men’ is not so much a problem with actual men. It’s mostly a problem with theory.

Gender is primarily framed as an issue about women. And the “problem of men” actually comes out of the way that frame’s set up: the main reason for studying men is to do something about women’s inequality.

Now we certainly need to fix women’s inequality. But even though we’re studying men we never really find out what gender means from men’s point of view because men’s point of view is outside the frame of study. It’s not part of why we’re studying men.

This means there’s a big gap in what we know about gender in our society. And one of the things in that gap is the question of men and change.

My thesis creates a larger frame through which we can see a wide terrain of gender. In this larger frame, women’s inequality and men’s role in it is certainly a big part of the terrain. But it’s not the whole terrain. There’s also parts where women are empowered and parts where men are marginalised.

Most importantly my larger frame enables us to investigate women’s inequality and men’s marginalisations as different features in this whole terrain of gender. We can come to see gender as a major organising principle in social life that creates real problems for everyone, but the problems for women can be really different from the problems for men.

This wider “gender landscape” enables us to find out about the gender issues for men and see them articulating with feminist concerns. That is, men’s issues and women’s issues can interact, and shape each other and be shaped by each other.

This means that men’s issues become part of the frame through which we understand gender, and this potentially creates men as empowered agents of progressive change. And when men are empowered and women are empowered, then we have real and lasting change.
