

# 7

# Re-framing Connell

The major goal of this thesis is to develop a theory that emphasises pathways towards progressive change among men. The difficulty facing such a project, as noted by Connell (1987:xiii), is that men benefit from current gender arrangements, so that fostering progressive change among men at a collective level appears either, at best extremely unlikely, because it would require widespread altruism by men to act in support of the interests of others or, at worst impossible, because all change leads to a reinforcement of men's already established patriarchal privilege.

My starting hypothesis is that this difficulty is an artefact of existing theory rather than a phenomenon in the empirically available world. In examining the Connellian framework, Chapter 3 argued that Connell confuses patriarchy's *claim* to legitimacy with a fully manifested reality, and that this confusion leads him to conceptualise patriarchal authority as completely pervading and ultimately determining all aspects of gender in social life. The result is that Connell casts a 'depressing pall' over the possibilities for progressive change among men. He notes the possibility that individual men may change in response to motivations arising from their own personal life. But he repeatedly stresses that *collective* action by men towards *progressive* change is impossible.

The depressing pall cast by Connell arises at the point in his framework where he inadequately theorises the 'cultural' processes which create and stabilize the key association in his framework, the association between authority and masculinity (see Chapter 3). Because there is no theory offered at this point in the framework, he is unable to rely on a methodological rigor to help him identify the limits to the reach of this

key cultural mechanism. As a result he over-ascribes its reach, leading to his picture of patriarchal logic as being all-pervasive in shaping gender.

To counter this theoretical lacuna in Connell, Chapter 4 offered a theoretical basis to understand cultural associations in general as arising from linguistic operations of meaning-creation. Laclau and Mouffe argue that these cultural associations can then become operationalised into political contestations and, ultimately into new practical social formations. Building on this basis, Chapters 5 and 6 create a theory in which discourses are a way to theorise the meeting point between culturally generated meanings, the actions of individual people, and social structures. On this account the terrain of gender described in the Connellian framework is more usefully seen as a discrete *discourse of gender* rather than a pervasive description of the entire terrain of gender. In order to support this proposal the next step is to re-describe the principal elements of the Connellian framework as a discourse. This is the work of the current chapter.

The chapter starts by mapping the principal meaning elements of the Connellian framework as a discourse. Five subsequent sections describe the four masculinities identified by Connell and a brief discussion of femininities. A concluding section summarises my findings and clarifies the shortcomings of the Connellian framework.

### ***Connellian framework as a discourse***

In the picture of discourses developed in this thesis, the minimal mechanism of a discourse is two subject positions articulating at a nodal point. None of these elements are theoretically or temporally prior. A discourse comes into being as a locus of enacted meaning, emerging from a tension between the difference from and equivalence to some selected existing meanings. The difference/equivalence tension with its resultant new meaning is at first handled in the 'cultural' arena: the media, movies, theatre and art, social protest, conversation, and so on. Stabilisation of the new meaning into a discourse occurs when this meaning becomes linked, via organised and routinely repeated actions, to identifiable groups of people, specific material resources, and institutional forms and effects. Two examples of this process are Laclau and Mouffe's account of the emergence of the Marxist discourse of class, and the feminist discourse linking women's access to education with the general principal of equality (see Chapters 4 and 5).

In the case of the discourse described by Connell, the nodal point is the proposition that social authority is connected with masculinity. This proposition evokes,

at the meaning level, a 'men' and a 'women' (or 'masculinity' and 'femininity') whose relation to the nodal point is specified in the nodal point's content. The 'men' of this discourse is synonymous with social authority, distinct from its 'women', which is not. This effect at the meaning level can be observed in practical life: the nodal point's proposition about the world is enacted by actual people who identify with the 'men' and 'women' evoked by the nodal proposition.

To recap the description of nodal points from Chapter 4, a nodal point is the nexus of meaning for the entire discourse, the "necessary passage point... through which all traffic must pass" (Clegg 1989:204). The nodal point is a proposition about the world with which all the subject positions in the discourse have some relation. That is, all subject positions agree that the nodal point is important, though of course the subject positions vary considerably as to the nature or reason for the nodal point's importance. In the discourse reviewed most extensively by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), the Marxist discourse of class, the idea of 'class' is a nodal idea, and the statement with which all subject positions might agree is something like "social relations are organised along class lines", or "class organises economic relations" or similar. In other words, the statement implicit in the nodal point performs the function of indicating to people "don't enter into this space unless you agree class is important". The relations between the subject positions of a discourse will appear to be meaningless or chaotic while a person does not agree with the nodal statement, so that a disinterested observer may ask "why are these people fighting over class when classes are irrelevant?"

The terrain delineated by Connell rests in "the general association of authority with masculinity" (Connell 1987:109), which I have restated as "social authority resides with men." This nodal statement defines the extent of the applicability of the discourse: for this discourse to have traction in a social context the people present must accept that the nodal statement is applicable to the action under way. Without this acceptance, that is, without having passed through that specific 'necessary passage point', the current action will not appear to express masculine authority. For example, feminist discourses might enable us to see the current action as expressing illegitimate (and thus unauthorised) violence rather than legitimate authority. Or discourses privileging women's superior knowledge of emotions and intimate relationships may enable us to see the action as a man blustering to hide his vulnerability.

But there are many situations in social life in which masculine authority pertains. Compared to the examples of other discourses discussed in detail in this thesis, those of class and gender equality, the discourse of masculine authority is both very old and very extensive. Thus the nodal proposition about men's authority is one of the most extensive themes in social life. However it is not universally pervasive in the way Connell portrays it, and the theory developed in this thesis is intended to enable us to observe more clearly both how it gains its effects, and the limits to those effects.

Connell asserts that the cultural association of masculinity and authority becomes a 'structural fact' of men's global domination of women (Connell 1987:183). The phenomenon Connell is pointing to here can now be more precisely described. The nodal proposition that social authority resides with men minimally evokes a 'men' and a 'women' (and other subject positions as well) whose actions appear coherent and understandable within the meaning-frame encompassed by the nodal proposition. When people are enacting these subject positions their actions shape the world on the basis that the nodal point *is real*, and as a result social relations occur, social institutions are formed and material resources are created and harnessed on that basis. Thus the discourse of masculine authority, anchored in a specific proposition about the world, comes to shape a material reality which reflects the belief implicit in the proposition. People act as though masculine authority is legitimate, and so it *becomes* legitimate: the proposition becomes sedimented into social relations, forms and effects. Thus, after the discourse has been in existence for some time, we can look around at social life, as Connell does, and find material evidence that masculine authority resides with men.

But the superordinate position of men has not achieved anything beyond being a contingent claim. It certainly has become sedimented into law, and into many other aspects of social life, and thus is backed up by the harsh realities of material limits, systemised violence, and so on. But it has not managed to jump the tracks of contingent meaning and become welded into a 'structural fact' that is beyond the humdrum yet immensely diverse negotiations of meaning in social life. Masculine authority holds together only in a specific circumstance which occurs when people pass through the 'necessary passage point' of belief in the application of the nodal point. That hundreds of millions of people routinely pass through this passage point every day does not change its contingent nature into anything more concrete.

The limited traction of any nodal point and any discourse enables significant change to occur. Currently existing relations and social forms can be re-signified, that is, they can come to mean quite different things, as we have seen in the case of the discourses of class and gender equality. New hegemonies can be formed, and new discourses stabilised. And because Connell failed to theorise the process by which authority and masculinity come to be associated and how that association is continuously affirmed, he has inflated its reach, with the result that he fails to perceive that the very same process associating authority and masculinity can operate on different contents to produce different material outcomes.

### ***Hegemonic masculinity***

The most widely known aspect of the Connellian framework, the concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’, can now be re-framed. The most well-known definition of hegemonic masculinity is as “the currently accepted solution to the problem of patriarchal legitimacy” (Connell 1995:77).

There is by now a relatively well-established body of critique of this concept. Donaldson (1993:643) points out that the concept does not entirely resolve the extent to which gender relations arise from an autonomous gender order, or how closely gender disparities are linked to a patriarchal economic nation-state. A similar criticism is more extensively developed by Holter (2005:21), who argues that it is important to delineate two quite different sets of relations: “gender as a *system of meaning* that is distinguishable from patriarchy as a *structure of power*.”

...the gender system is not simply an echo of the structures of inequality. It develops its own dynamics, sometimes acting on its own, often with tension and conflict-filled relation to patriarchal structures. (Holter 2005:22)

This line of critique suggests the possibility that patriarchy is not as pervasive or extensive as Connell theorises.

Focusing more precisely on hegemonic masculinity itself, and developing a critique offered by Flood (2002), Beasley (2008:88) points to the

... slippage between its meaning as a *political mechanism* tied to the word *hegemony*—referring to cultural/moral leadership to ensure popular or mass consent to particular forms of rule—to its meaning as a descriptive word referring to *dominant* (most powerful and/or most widespread) versions of manhood, and finally to its meaning as an empirical reference specifically to *actual groups of men*.

Reflecting the difficulty in theorising the connection between hegemonic masculinity and actual men, Hearn (2004) is concerned that a focus on hegemony risks eliding what men actually do. He lists “three unresolved problems” in relation to the definition of hegemony masculinity:

First, are we talking about cultural representations, everyday practices or institutional structures? Second, how exactly do the various dominant and dominating ways that men are... connect with each other? Third, why is it necessary to hang on to the concept of masculinity rather than, say, men’s practices? (Hearn 2004:58).

Echoing Hearn’s first question, and following a concise discussion of the principal conceptual critiques of Connell, Lusher and Robins (2009) sum up the conceptual difficulties as follows:

Hegemonic masculinity is a multilevel concept operating at local, regional and global levels which also simultaneously engages cultural, individual and structural factors. Further, these cultural, individual, and structural components are interdependent. However, previous methodological and theoretical interpretations often assert the primacy of one of these three to the exclusion of the others, and it is often the structural components that are understated. The problem lies primarily in the fact that the interdependency between structures, individuals and culture has not been explicitly expressed theoretically. (Lusher and Robins 2009:389)

The analysis developed in this thesis can bring more clarity to the definition of hegemonic masculinity, especially to conceptualising the “interdependency between structures, individuals and culture”. As argued in Chapter 5, one of the impacts of the existence of discourses is a distribution of social resources according to the gradients in capacities created within the meaning-terrain of a specific discourse. Indeed, the desire to stabilise a new proposition about the world, and to gain the resulting benefits, is very often the primary motivation for groups that create new discourses. In creating new discourses activist groups are displaying the social leadership aspect of hegemony which was recognised by Gramsci to be very important. One example of social leadership resulting in a new hegemony is the Marxist discourse of ‘class’, in which the ‘workers’ gain political leverage as the discourse becomes stabilised. Another example of social leadership resulting in hegemony is the feminist discourse regarding women’s education, sketched in Chapter 4, which gives its ‘women’ political leverage by connecting their lack of education to gender inequality.

These discourses of class and of gender equality include a subject position which could be said to be ‘hegemonic’ in the discourse, that is, that subject position is associated

with the leaders of the discourse's creation, and it clearly gains more resources as a result of the discourse existing and continuing to operate. This hegemonic subject position could thus be said to have an interest in promulgating the gradient in capacities generated in that discourse, and especially to have an interest in that gradient continuing to benefit the hegemonic subject position. In the discourses of class and gender equality, that hegemonic subject position is 'workers' and 'women' respectively. In the discourse of masculine authority, the hegemonic subject position is 'men'.

In discourses of class and gender equality the actual social groups identifying with the hegemonic subject position exercise social leadership, and at the same time will act to resist attempts to dismantle the discourse which benefits them. The same is true, according to Connell, with the men identified with hegemonic masculinity.

Thus Connell's hegemonic masculinity looks remarkably similar to a subject position, albeit a superordinate subject position, so that the clearest way to define Connell's hegemonic masculinity is as *the subject position 'men' in the discourse of masculine authority*. This definition clears away a number of the difficulties noted above by Lusher and Robins (2009), Beasley (2008) and others. The 'men' of masculine authority are quite distinct from physical people, in that it is not analytically tenable to link the discourse-specific subject position 'men' to any group defined by terms external to that discourse. This is so because subject positions are not at all the same as actual people. Rather, people take up subject positions as *part of* unfolding social action and as *part of* their self-identity. This requires that people can carry off the subject position, that is, act in such a way as to achieve verisimilitude with the general requirements of coherence for that subject position.

My use of 'verisimilitude' here, rather than 'truth' or tangible material verification, is appropriate when we consider high profile cases of fraud by men posing as wealthy, high-status or otherwise conventionally successful. One example is Bernie Madoff, who over several decades perpetrated the largest fraud in US history, portraying himself as a successful yet careful pillar of the New York Jewish community (Applebaum *et al.* 2008; SMH 2008). For 30-odd years it was not relevant that there was no 'actual' or 'real' substance to Madoff's financial success. He was able to carry off the appearance continuously, and in consequence built a 'real' life in the sense that his life went on, he got older, his children grew up, and the life of community in which he was a member proceeded.

Taking up a subject position may be a matter of more short-term opportunism to exploit a passing situation, for example bluffing one's way out of an embarrassing corner. It may be a matter of providing entertainment, such as the performances of drag artists. But a particular subject position can also become absolutely crucial for individuals. The theory of identity as an ensemble of subject positions presented in Chapter 4 enables us to see that the specific subject position 'men' can come to be very significant in the ensemble of subject positions which make up a person's identity. Thus some men become deeply invested personally in masculine authority's 'men', and can be observed living substantial parts of their lives in that subject position.

However there is no isomorphic equivalence between a subject position and an actual person or group of people, no matter how earnestly people desire to 'fully live the dream', as it were. This enables more comprehensive analysis of the lives of men such as Max Mosley (Chapter 5), who in some situations appears a conventionally powerful man while in other situations appears tactically weak or marginalised. And the contingent nature of the discursive frames in which the *label* 'men' has coherence also explains the way in which the tables can be turned on ostensibly powerful men when other actors achieve a frame-shift in social action so as to foreground discourses of, say, class, colonialism, age, or gender equality.

Regarding the political concept of hegemony, the account developed in this thesis emphasises that hegemony can be understood as very different to domination, at least in democratic polities, since it does not create a fixed social topography, nor generate a hierarchy within a bounded social space. The gradients in capacities created in discourses certainly could be described as a hierarchy, so that to some extent it is helpful to say that 'hegemonic masculinity' that is, masculine authority's 'men', is at the top of a hierarchy. But the account of discourses developed here makes clear that such a hierarchy pertains only within the reach of its nodal point, that is, the proposition that social authority resides with men. Within other discourses this hierarchy may not operate, and indeed the gradient in capacities between analogous subject positions may be entirely reversed. A case in point is the academic discourse of the study of men and masculinity out of which the Connellian framework emerges, in which the very same 'men' of masculine authority are denied authority in relation to gender issues, and are treated with deep suspicion.

The account of discourses offered in this thesis enables observation of the limits to the traction of any hegemony, so that it becomes possible to see that new hegemonies are

constantly being created. The reach of these new hegemonies may not be as extensive as well-established hegemonies such as the 'men' of masculine authority, but their effects are just as tangible and real. The creation of new hegemonies does not require the dissolution or suppression of existing hegemonies, since multiple discourses occur side by side in social life as a matter of course. Thus, alongside the hegemony of 'men' in masculine authority, there is also the hegemony of 'feminism' in gender equality, and even the current hegemony of the concept 'hegemonic masculinity' in masculinity studies.

All of these discourses have their own powers, that is, their own meaning-level coherences linked with material resources and social forms. Certainly, because the discourse of masculine authority is far older and thus more extensively sedimented in the material aspects of social life, it has more extensive reach than the other discourses. In addition, because of its historical antiquity we do not have access to its emergence, as we have with the more recent discourses with less reach. Nevertheless the discourse of masculine authority achieves its traction in social life via *the same pattern of political relations* as all other discourses, has the same sort of vulnerabilities, and is open to the same political disruptions and challenges. It is precisely because of these inherent limitations of all hegemonies and their discourses that social change is both possible, and is in fact, as Laclau and Mouffe (1985:138) argue, in democracies a permanent feature of social life.

As discussed above, Hearn (2004) and Lusher and Robins (2009) raise the issue of theorising the interdependencies between structure, individuals and culture. Lusher and Robins suggest that one of these three is usually prioritised, with the structure aspects usually understated. The theoretical developments in this thesis emphasise the cultural aspects because I am concerned to address their theoretical absence in the Connellian framework, which several writers (for example, Edwards 2006:3) describe as biased towards structure. As a result it could be inferred that 'meaning comes first' – that meaning is more important or theoretically prior to individuals and structure.

The main theoretical proposal in this thesis is that the concept of discourses, as developed here, is a way to conceptualise the interdependencies between structure, individuals and culture, so that understanding any one of those three requires examination of the other two. Happily, a great deal of work has already been done in theorising structure and its intersection with the actions of individuals. Like Connell, I

rely on the work of Giddens (1968; 1976, 1984) for an excellent account of how structure emerges from action and at the same time creates the conditions for action. Connell formulates this nexus as ‘practice’ (Connell 1987:Ch 4). What is missing from Connell’s account is a theorisation of the extensive reach of identifiably similar patterns of practice across vast geographic distances and hundreds of millions of people. Connell rather vaguely refers to this aspect of social life in terms of “skeletal and simplified” accounts of masculinity and femininity which are of necessity “stylised and impoverished” because at the very large scale of their operation “the easily symbolised aspects of interaction become more prominent,” (1987:183-184). However a more detailed description of this mechanism is the formation, called, in this thesis, discourses – that is, ‘nodal points’ as propositions about the world which are enacted as concrete subject positions in social action. Nodal points have the qualities of simplicity and impoverished content which enable them to be applied in a limitless number of situations. But in the account in this thesis ‘nodal point’ is conceptualised as the point of articulation between at least two subject positions, and this concept enables us to theorise in two directions. One direction is towards the entirely non-material realm of meaning, where a nodal point is a proposition about the world constructed entirely in language. The other direction is towards the material realm of action (including speech), in which concrete persons enact subject positions and the interaction between these subject positions gives material expression to the nodal point and also brings into being the subject positions themselves.

The particular view of discourses developed here rests in a specific notion of hegemony: a discourse maintains its traction in social life because it effectively frames the current action. This definition is somewhat similar to Connell’s definition of “the capacity to set the terms in which events are understood and issues discussed” (1987:107), but in my account there is no single group that can guarantee such a capacity. Rather, disputes over which frame is to be foregrounded are common in social life, so that the momentary foregrounding of a single frame or discourse (that is, “the *terms* in which events are understood and issues discussed”) is very largely a co-operative achievement. Because of this, any hegemony is subject to the disruptions inherent in co-operative endeavours: participants at any moment may attempt to shift frames, and these attempts may or may not succeed, depending on contingent conditions. In addition over longer periods new hegemonies can be created, which can substantially alter the wider terrain in which existing hegemonies operate.

But in the theory of discourse-based social life any hegemony holds sway only within the terrain circumscribed by the discourse out of which that specific hegemony arises. Every discourse has a horizon of meaning, and beyond this horizon the only thing sayable from within the discourse is that life is meaningless beyond that horizon. It is here in this apparently meaningless realm that the richness of social life is constantly escaping the reach of existing hegemonies, enabling the possibility of new meanings and eventually new hegemonies.

In summary, then, a clearer definition of Connell's hegemonic masculinity is as the subject position 'men' in the discourse of masculine authority, whose nodal point is that social authority resides with men.

### ***Subordination***

The other significant formations of masculinity described in the Connellian framework can now be re-described, starting with subordination. Connell describes a gradient of dominance and subordination between heterosexual and homosexual men, and the strongest reason that homosexual men are subordinated is because of their "symbolic blurring with femininity" (1995:78-79).

Laclau and Mouffe observe that subordination is not inherently oppressive or domineering (1985:153-4). The notion of gradients in capacity (Chapter 6 Sect. II) develops this theme by pointing out that subordination is an extremely widespread relationship in social life, and is fundamentally enabling, for example, of intersections between individuals and major social systems. In the case of relations between men, subordinations can be very constructive as in the case where a more experienced man mentors a man with less experience.

However within the Connellian framework the term 'subordination' points to relations which are anything but benign. The cultural association of masculinity and authority rests in a specific picture of authority as substantial, clear and defined. The way to enact such authority in the Western formulation is via the familiar masculine pattern of toughness, confidence and inviolability. Practices which do not resonate with this pattern are, within the discourse of masculine authority, taken to indicate 'women'. On many occasions men's actions do not fit the prescription of masculine toughness. One of the most highly charged actions is sex and/or affection between men. When this occurs the meaning-frame of the discourse of masculine authority renders such actions as 'not-men' and therefore 'women'. Given that 'women' occupies a subordinate position in the

discourse, within the logic of the discourse men's 'not-men' actions must also be subordinated.

Thus, although the most clearly visible subordination is between heterosexual and homosexual men, any actions (for example, 'throwing like a girl') which do not resonate with the accepted formulation of authoritative or legitimated masculinity leave men open to subordination in relation to the discourse's 'men'. It is worth noting here that the specific nexus between masculinity and authority is very culturally and temporally specific. As Foucault (1992) notes, other cultures such as the ancient Athenians routinely link social authority with homosexual sex and affectionate relationships between men. Thus we can see that the modern Western hegemonic masculinity is a specific pattern of physical isolation from others via containment within the skin of the individual's body, and associated with a muting of most expressions of emotion except those which enhance the appearance of toughness and inviolability.

The important point here, though, is that subordination applies only to men who could potentially enact hegemonic masculinity but actually don't. The inference is that such men are intentionally disrupting the social order available within the masculine authority discourse, and they thus appear to call for intense sanctions such as physical violence or death at the hands of those in a superordinate position in the discourse, that is. those men who take up hegemonic masculinity as a major subject position within the ensemble of their identity.

### ***Marginalisation***

Marginalisation, in contrast, applies to persons who can never acceptably fill the subject position 'men' (that is, enact hegemonic masculinity), either due to specific physical attributes such as age, skin colour, sex, or due to a style of comportment such as class attitude or language skills. These attributes or styles of presentation which form the basis of marginalisation must be available to other people in interaction, either visibly, aurally, or via other means such as writing, since the discursive effect of marginalisation occurs within social action. Thus, for example, chronological age is not in itself a source of marginalisation. There are now numerous examples of extremely powerful men of advanced age, yet much younger men may be marginalised in settings of public power due to their evident frailty or physical incapacity. The key thing is the presentation of self and the meanings that others apply to that presented self.

Like subordinations, marginalisations may be relatively benign as well, for example, the parodic appellation ‘wog’ in Australia, which can be used in a self-deprecating way by immigrants, and as a term of affection by others if such ‘wogs’ accept their marginality. Indeed the term can be used as a way to authorise immigrants as legitimate Australians by noting, but at the same time bridging, obvious differences in skin colour, language skills and so on (O’Grady 1962). Here the marginalised characteristics become the basis for a specific new formula for legitimacy.

How can we conceptualise marginalisation as an operation of discourses? Chapter 6 argues that discourses involve gradients in capacity between their subject positions, for example, one gradient renders ‘men’ greater capacity in the gender authority discourse while another gradient renders ‘women’ greater capacity in the gender equality discourse. The previous section of this chapter argues that subordination among men occurs in the masculine authority discourse as actual men’s practices or self-presentations move further from the hegemonic ideal. That is, lesser discursive capacities are available to these men, who are further down the gradient in capacities specified by the discourse. At some point that gradient will reach a zero point where some practices have no capacity at all within the discourse, that is, those practices are rendered entirely meaningless within the terms of that discourse. In other words, there is a point at which certain practices which are physically enactable become displaced to the margins of the discourse. Thus another way to describe Connell’s ‘marginalised masculinities’ is as configurations of practice which are excluded from the capacities generated by the discourse of masculine authority.

Another aspect of the discursive effect of marginalisation is that the margin of one discourse may form part of another discourse. The subject positions which Connell suggests are marginalised are not marginalised simply because they are men but rather because they are particular sorts or sub-groups of men: black, old, working class, young, and so on. These are all subject positions in that they are manifest via people’s bodies and/or actions (including speech). These groups of men are not simply men but *particular* men, that is, these subject positions do not arise solely within the masculine authority discourse. Rather they emerge at the intersection of the masculine authority discourse with other discourses such as race, class and age. These other discourses qualify the general ‘men’ of masculine authority in a particular way, but at the same time masculine authority may qualify the other discourses as well.

To continue with the example of the intersection of masculine authority with discourses of age, a successful business man of, say, 40 may be seen as a respected established figure by young entrepreneurs in their 20s but be marginalised as too young by recruiters for a Fortune 500 board position. However, this complexity is definitely contextual: a rather different view of age may hold sway in, for instance, the new field of internet social networking, where a 40 year old may be marginalised because of advanced age.

All of these discourses of race, class, gender, age, ability and so on, have their own resources, their own meaning systems and their own coherences. And social interaction proceeds as these various discourses are foregrounded and backgrounded by the actions and responses of the participants in the interaction. This explains how the distinctly situational character of the gradients in capacity between actual persons can shift around quite markedly in the one interaction. For example, while in many situations a white middle aged man in a suit can relatively easily out-manoeuvre a white middle aged man in overalls, this is by no means true in all circumstances. In many situations blue-collar men can be distinctly more powerful than white-collar men, and this does not merely rest on the threat of working class violence, as Connell suggests (1987:109). Working class men or black men can use specialised skills or localised knowledge inaccessible to more apparently privileged men. And, as with the 'reversals' Connell notes between men and women, these situations are not simply incidental to the flow of power but an expression of the essential generativity and complexity of power and the distinctly situational nature of legitimacy in social life.

### ***Complicity***

Like subordination, complicity is also linked to actions but complicity is more usefully seen as a situational quality rather than a specific subject position. During a dispute over frames involving the masculine authority nodal point, or when the masculine authority discourse is in play but backgrounded, a person may generally support the interaction proceeding, that is, they will not act to disrupt the interaction or significantly alter its flow.

This, then, is a relatively neutral position to take in interaction to the extent that it does not introduce new frames or initiate disputes over frames. As Connell suggests, in relation to the masculine authority discourse most men take this position most of the time (1995:79). Most people (men and women) take this position most of the time when they

are not momentarily contributing to the action. It is primarily a matter of accepting the cogency or relevance of the numerous nodal points currently in play in interaction. For example, the nodal point of the masculine authority discourse is something like ‘social authority resides properly with men’, while the nodal point of feminism discourses is something like ‘equality has a gender dimension to it.’ It is quite possible for a person to acquiesce in both these statements simultaneously and foreground one or the other as circumstances arise in interaction. Accepting these nodal points as being cogent does not at all specify in advance which subject position the person may take up when a discourse is foregrounded in interaction. Indeed, for strategic reasons people may swap subject positions in the most amusing or maddening ways in interaction.

But Connell’s use of the term ‘complicity’ has a darker connotation: that most men are complicit in a pattern of social relations from which they benefit and for which they can disclaim responsibility. This is why Connell (1983:30; 1987:213-215) claims that most men act in ‘bad faith’ in relation to gender: most men get the patriarchal dividend without taking the risks of being in the “front line” (1995:79).

In Connell’s account of complicity, then, bad faith must be very widespread. For example, most people with left wing sympathies complicitly act in bad faith in relation to the broad left wing project of social justice, at least, that is, most people with anything above the global average level of personal wealth. So most people in Western countries get the benefits of wealth without having to face the realities of violent uprising from poorer peoples or of injury or death from dangerous or precarious working conditions. In wealthy countries these risks are heavily controlled through physical distance, legislation and all the machinery of enforcement, so that all that most of the population has to do is simply go along with existing discourses. The same is true with respect to discourses of gender: most people go along with them.

In other words complicity, like subordination, is a very widespread phenomenon. Connell highlights the relationship between men’s complicity and ‘bad faith’, which casts men’s complicity as especially immoral because men benefit thereby. But given that complicity and its attendant benefits is so extremely widespread in social life, Connell’s argument is in effect that social life, in its present form, is immoral. Whether or not one supports such a view, my focus in this thesis is upon theory rather than particular moral stances and, given the widespread nature of complicity, Connell’s notion of ‘complicit masculinity’ when shorn of its linkage with bad faith adds little of theoretical interest.

Complicity is of course interesting in the sense that most people, most of the time, act without challenging the conditions in which they act, and as a result familiar social arrangements and durable social systems continue to be created. Most women most of the time also comply with patriarchal discourses, and even radical feminists have entered into ostensibly patriarchal formations such as academia, the publishing industry and the mainstream media in order to communicate and disseminate ideas. But the account of social life occurring as multiple discourses (Chapter 5) enables us to also consider that complicity with patriarchy does not prevent complicity with radically different discourses at the same time.

### ***Femininities***

The notion of 'femininities' is rather under-theorised in the Connellian framework (Schippers 2007), which has led to little research on femininities in social life, in sharp contrast with the wealth of research on masculinities stimulated by the Connellian framework (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:848). This section re-describes 'femininity' as dealing with the relationship in the masculine authority discourse between the subject position 'women' and the nodal proposition that social authority resides with men. This subject position 'women', like the discourse's subject position 'men', coheres within the meaning terrain attained by the discourse's nodal point. In other words 'femininity' is how to do 'being a woman' when social authority resides with men. 'Women' is subordinate to 'men', and this is the principal axis of subordination. But also there is a marginalising effect in relation to women themselves, in which certain practices properly connote 'women' while other practices go beyond the horizon of the discourse. For example, because of the subordinate position of 'women' in relation to 'men', women have the possibility to gain some masculine-like authority by appearing to be 'surrogate men' (hooks 1981:192). Such actions are marginalised from within masculine authority's 'women', but are authorised as the hegemonic 'women' of specific feminist discourses.

Turning now to the issue of complicity, the benefit from complicity is, as Connell suggests, easy access to the resources of the discourse without having to risk much, for example, in a frame dispute. Certainly the discourse of masculine authority allocates lesser resources to women overall, but this is not to say that women are allocated no capacities at all. Complicity with the discourse brings substantial benefits to women in the areas in which women are commonly allocated authority as agents of men: mother, homemaker, sex object, beauty and so on. All that is required here is that women simply

go along with the meanings and subject positions of the discourse of masculine authority. There is some overlap here with 'emphasised femininity' and with aspects of 'ambivalent femininity'.

As with the possibility of men seeking to foreground the masculine authority discourse in a frame dispute, women can also do this, even though women are rendered of less value. Nevertheless in those areas in which women enjoy authority, that authority is substantive: there are real resources women are able to draw upon to enact authority. This situation is indistinguishable from what Connell calls 'emphasised femininity'. In addition, like men, women may be motivated to foreground the masculine authority discourse because it brings them the benefit of familiarity, that is, they can utilize a familiar repertoire of actions related to masculine authority's subject position 'women.

Connell also mentions another formation associated with women: a 'protest' femininity which is, he suggests, an inevitable reflection of the differential interests arising from gender inequality. Chapter 6 argues that this is a subject position which has been elaborated by feminists to become hegemonised into the nodal point of the discourse of feminism. From this new discourse women are able both to articulate new subject positions for women and also to newly critique the established discourse of masculine authority. The significance, and indeed the existence, of this new discourse is elided in the Connellian description of the terrain of gender. Related to this elision, he does not offer a theoretical account of how the emergence of feminist discourses changes the terrain of gender from men's viewpoint.

Nevertheless, as with all new nodal points, protest femininity still remains a subject position in the masculine authority discourse, although when women act within this latter position they are constrained by the implicit engagement with the nodal point of that discourse, which accords lesser authority to women than men. This means that enacting protest femininity always has the flavour of a rearguard action because it remains involved in challenging and/or rejecting that nodal point's legitimacy. Strategically it is more effective for women to change frames to foreground feminist discourses because feminism offers pathways for women to act with authority in relation to gender equality. This strategy is not always manageable for women all of the time, although, notably, younger generations (both women and men) foreground the discourse of feminism in many situations.

It should be noted here that the discourse of feminism does not remove or supercede the masculine authority discourse. That is, it is not able to negate men's authority or reverse the gradient in capacity between women and men rendered by the masculine authority discourse. Rather, the discourse of feminism is a new discourse with its own coherence and its own resources which operates in conjunction with the masculine authority discourse. The conjunction, as we have seen, revolves around the meaning relation between the two discourses: feminism in effect harnesses some of the resources of existing discourses with the general issue of equality. Thus the resource of 'authority' is still present but is articulated with 'equality'. This new articulation offers an authoritative platform for women external to the established masculine authority discourse, and it is this externality to the established discourse which enables entirely new views and new critiques of the established discourse, of which Connell's is one.

## **Conclusion**

The multi-discourse view of social life developed in this thesis extends the principal features of the Connellian framework beyond Connell's view that these are *only* positions in a hierarchy or positions devolving from 'interests'. The terrain described in the framework can now be clearly seen as the terrain circumscribed by the world in which the nodal proposition "social authority resides with men" attains traction. This traction is reinforced by the material formations of social life, which have emerged in part from the enactment of that nodal proposition. However the traction masculine authority attains in social life remains vulnerable to all the disruptions and disputes possible with respect to any discourse.

On this account Connell's various 'masculinities' describe the variety of relations possible between actual men and the discourse's proposition about masculine authority. In other words, the characteristic called 'masculinity' refers only to the relation between actual persons and the social power arrangements specific to the discourse of masculine authority. And Connell's 'hegemonic masculinity' is the subject position 'men' in that discourse, that is, the way to be the fully legitimated 'men' in a world circumscribed by the nodal point of masculine authority.

Theorizing the significance of meaning-creation for politics and for material social systems affirms that Connell's formations can appear as positions in hierarchies and do have 'interests' attached, but these are only *some* of the effects of *processes of meaning* which cohere and stabilise discourses in general. The multi-discourses view

describes some of the general characteristics of these processes of meaning, enabling the terrain described by Connell to be located alongside other effects, other nodal points and other formations of gender which Connell either does not include or notes as unimportant. In short, the multi-discourse view of social life *re-frames* the Connellian framework, enabling orderly analysis of a wider range of gender phenomena, of which the phenomena described in the Connellian framework form an important part.

The Connellian framework is valuable in its portrayal of patriarchal gender relations as a social creation and not a biological inevitability. This is an enormous step forward in sociological terms. But Connell's fundamental mistake is to imagine that the existing discourse he describes and the analytical frame he uses, covers the entire terrain of legitimate or desirable possibilities for gender. As we have seen, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue that democracies are characterised by the open-ended possibility of creating more discourses, and this thesis develops their insight to suggest some of the mechanisms by which this occurs. However, Connell does not include this possibility in developing the Connellian framework – and it is from this lacuna that the depressing pall over the possibilities for progressive change among men arises.

By taking the position that inequality and injustice are empirically discoverable, Connell in effect removes them from play, allocating them to a nodal role in his framework. This in turn closes out the possibility of articulation between his 'men' and what inequality and injustice might mean, and to whom. As a result, researchers who use the Connellian framework to analyse men's activism are unable to see the nascent articulations already being explored at the grass roots level, and hence are unable to foster specifically progressive articulations.

Addressing gender inequality is important, but the discursive frame through which Connell views the terrain of gender in social life unfortunately marginalises the majority of men from active involvement in defining gender equality and hence in realising it in social life. The Connellian framework constructs most men as "outside the frame" (Chapter 1) of progressive gender politics – that is, most men are marginalised from the process of identifying the problematics which shape progressive gender politics.

Every discourse involves marginalisations in order to provide the horizon of the coherence which the discourse creates, and the Connellian framework is no different in this regard. As far as bringing about change in gender relations, reducing marginalisation can be brought about by proliferating the number of discourses – a project which Laclau

and Mouffe (1985) call ‘radical and plural democracy’ – so as to increase the range of possible discourses which can be foregrounded in concrete social interaction.

But if this is so, what happens with existing discourses such as the discourse of masculine authority? Are we stuck with patriarchy for ever? And if it is possible to create entirely new discourses which are attractive to men, that is, that a significant number of men actually want to get involved in, what might such discourses be about, and how might their construction be commenced? And finally, what is there to prevent new discourses which are attractive to men from perpetuating the patriarchal double standard, or gender inequality? These strategic and pragmatic questions will be discussed in the next and final chapter.