

# Global Masculinities: Restoration and Resistance

By Michael Kimmel.

This is the first of three sections of an article that will appear in the coming issues of Gender Policy Review.

It has become almost axiomatic that gender is inextricably implicated in the development process. "Human development, if not engendered, is endangered" was a central message of the 1995 Human Development Report.

The pioneering efforts of feminist scholars over the past three decades have established that development is an uneven process, not only within and between nations, but also between the sexes. Women and men are differently situated culturally and economically, with unequal access to material and cultural resources, different and unequal relationships to the provision and consumption of material goods, and different and unequal access to the political process that guides economic development.

Thus we read, for example, of the global "feminization of poverty," that women represent approximately 70% of the 1.3 billion poor people in the world (Beneria and Bisnath, 1996, p. 6). We examine the impact of women's fertility and marital status on their access to economic and political power, the ways in which women's unpaid domestic labor remains statistically invisible in efforts to reduce or eradicate poverty.

It is still the case that when we think or read about gender, we think and read about women. In part, of course, this is as it should be. It was women scholars and policymakers who first brought gender to our attention, through the hidden costs and statistical invisibility of women's participation. It was women who made gender visible as a category of analysis, as a variable that must be factored into any discussion of development. Today, although we understand that development is a gendered process, the impact of development on men remains relatively less well-understood.

This "invisibility" of masculinity in discussions of development has political dimensions. The processes that confer privilege to one group and not another group are often invisible to those upon whom that privilege is conferred. Thus, not having to think about race is one of the luxuries of being white, just as not having to think about gender is one of the "patriarchal dividends" of gender inequality.

The invisibility of masculinity reproduces gender inequality, both materially and ideologically. Thus any initiative to improve the condition of women must include efforts to involve men. In fact, I believe that any effort to further gender equality that does not include men is doomed to failure. Of course, most initiatives towards gender equality must, and will continue to focus on women's empowerment. But achieving the vision of gender equality is not possible without changes in men's lives as well as in women's.

If our first task is to make masculinity visible in the development process, this necessitates that we recognize the ways in which definitions of masculinity vary. The various social and behavioral sciences have elaborated the differing meanings of masculinity over time (history), across cultures (anthropology), over the course of a man's life (developmental psychology), and within any one culture among different

social groups (sociology).

Masculinity, in this view, is not a constant, universal essence, but rather an ever-changing fluid assemblage of meanings and behaviors that vary dramatically. Thus we speak of masculinities, in recognition of the different definitions of manhood that we construct. By pluralizing the term, we acknowledge that masculinity means different things to different groups of men at different times.

Speaking specifically about the American case, for example, we understand that within any one society at any one moment, there are multiple meanings of manhood. Simply put, not all American men are the same. Our experiences depend on class, race, ethnicity, age, and region of the country. Each of these axes modifies the others. For example, what it means to be an older, black, gay man in Cleveland is different from what it means to a young, white, heterosexual farm boy in Iowa.

However, to pluralize the term does not mean that all masculinities are equal. Typically, each nation constructs a model of masculinity against which each man measures himself. This hegemonic image of manhood is constructed often through articulation of differences with a variety of "others"-- racial or sexual minorities, and, of course, women. The hegemonic definition of masculinity is "constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women," writes sociologist R. W. Connell (1987, p. 183). As the sociologist Erving Goffman (1963, p. 128) once wrote,

In an important sense there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant, father, of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record in sports. . . Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself - during moments at least - as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior.

In each society, then, there are multiple definitions of masculinity, some more valorized than others. In all cases, masculinities are constructed in relation to femininities and express the multiple ways in which gender identity is articulated through a gender order, in which gender is not only a property of individuals but a process of institutions and a dynamic of power relations between groups. That is, the gender order expresses men's power over women (male domination) and the power of some men over other men (by race, sexuality, ethnicity, age, able-bodiedness).

### **Masculinities and Power**

Any discussion of gender necessitates such a discussion of power. Men's power over women is expressed in two arenas:

Public patriarchy refers to the institutional arrangements of a society, the predominance of males in all power positions within the economy and polity, both locally and nationally, as well as the "gendering" of those institutions themselves (by which the criteria for promotion, for example, appear to be gender-neutral, but actually reproduce the gender order).

Domestic patriarchy refers to the emotional and familial arrangements in a society, the ways in which men's power in the public arena is reproduced at the level of private life. This includes male-female relationships as well as family life, child socialization and the like.

Both public patriarchy and domestic patriarchy are held together by the threat, implicit or explicit, of violence. Public patriarchy, of course, includes the military and police apparatus of society, which are also explicitly gendered institutions (revealed in their increased opposition to women's entry). Rape and domestic violence sustain domestic patriarchy.

These two expressions of men's power over women are neither uniform nor monolithic; they vary enormously, are constantly under flux. Equally, they are not coincident, so that increases or decreases in one invariably produces increases or decreases in the other. Nor are they so directly linked that a decrease in one automatically produces an increase in the other, although there will be pressures in that direction.

Thus women's entry into the work force or increased representation in legislatures undermine public patriarchy and will likely produce both backlash efforts to reinforce domestic patriarchy (covenant marriage, tightening divorce laws to restrain women's exit from the home, increased domestic assault) or even a virulent resurgence of domestic patriarchy (the Taliban). At the same time, increased public presence will also undermine domestic patriarchy (shared parenting and housework).

## **The Global Context**

Equally crucial for our understanding of the integration of masculinity into the study of development, however, is to recognize the ways in which globalization reconfigures and reshapes the arena in which these national and local masculinities are articulated, and transforms the shape of domestic and public patriarchies.

Globalization disrupts and reconfigures traditional, neocolonial, or other national, regional or local economic, political and cultural arrangements. In so doing, globalization transforms local articulations of both domestic and public patriarchy. Thus, for example globalization includes the gradual proletarianization of local peasantries, as market criteria replace subsistence and survival. Local small craft producers, small farmers, and independent peasants traditionally stake their notions of masculinity in ownership of land and economic autonomy in their work; these are increasingly transferred upwards in the class hierarchy and outwards to transnational corporations. Proletarianization also leads to massive labor migrations - typically migrations of male workers - who leave their homes and populate migrant enclaves, squatter camps, labor camps.

Globalization thus presents another level at which hegemonic and local masculinities are constructed. Globalization was always a gendered process. As Andre Gunder Frank pointed out several decades ago in his studies of economic development, development and underdevelopment were not simply stages through which all countries pass, that there was no single continuum along which individual nations might be positioned. Rather, he argued, there was a relationship between development and

underdevelopment, that, in fact, the development of some countries implied the specific and deliberate underdevelopment of others. The creation of the metropole was simultaneous and coordinated with the creation of the periphery.

As with economic development, so too with gender, with the historical constructions of the meanings of masculinity. As the hegemonic ideal was being created, it was created against a screen of "others" whose masculinity was thus problematized and devalued. Hegemonic and subaltern emerged in mutual, but unequal interaction in a gendered social and economic order.

Thus, for example, colonial administrations often problematized the masculinity of the colonized. Thus, for example, in British India, Bengali men were perceived as weak and effeminate, though Pathas and Sikhs were perceived as hypermasculine – violent and uncontrolled (see Sinha, 1995). Similar distinctions were made in South Africa between Hottentots and Zulus, and in North America between Navaho or Algonquin on the one hand, Sioux, Apache and Cheyenne on the other (see Connell, 1998: 14). In many colonial situations, the colonized men were called "boys" by the colonizers (see Shire, 1994).

Today, although they appear to be gender-neutral, the institutional arrangements of global society are equally gendered. The marketplace, multinational corporations and transnational geopolitical institutions (World Court, United Nations, European Union) and their attendant ideological principles (economic rationality, liberal individualism) express a gendered logic. The "increasingly unregulated power of transnational corporations places strategic power in the hands of particular groups of men," while the language of globalization remains gender neutral so that "the 'individual' of neoliberal theory has in general the attributes and interests of a male entrepreneur" (Connell, 1998, p. 15).

As a result, the impact of global economic and political restructuring is greater on women. At the national and global level, the world gender order privileges men in a variety of ways, such as unequal wages, unequal labor force participation, unequal structures of ownership and control of property, unequal control over one's body, as well as cultural and sexual privileges. What's more, in the economic south, for example, aid programs disproportionately affect women, while in the metropole, the attack on the welfare state generally weakens the position of women, domestically and publicly. These effects, however, are less the result of bad policies or, even less the results of bad - inept or evil - policymakers, and more the results of the gendered logic of these institutions and processes themselves (Enloe, 1990; Connell, 1998).

### **Hegemonic Masculinity and its Discontents**

In addition, the patterns of masculinity embedded within these gendered institutions also are rapidly becoming the dominant global hegemonic model of masculinity, against which all local, regional and national masculinities are played out and increasingly refer. The emergent global hegemonic version of masculinity is readily identifiable:

He sits in first class waiting rooms or in elegant business hotels the world over in a designer business suit, speaking English, eating "continental" cuisine, talking on his cell phone, his laptop computer plugged into any electrical outlet, while he watches CNN

International on television. Temperamentally, he is increasingly cosmopolitan, with liberal tastes in consumption (and sexuality) and conservative political ideas of limited government control of the economy. This has the additional effect of increasing the power of the hegemonic countries within the global political and economic arena, since everyone, no matter where they are from, talks and acts like they do.

These processes of globalization, and the emergence of a global hegemonic masculinity has the ironic effect of increasingly "gendering" local, regional and national resistance to incorporation into the global arena as subordinated entities. Scholars have pointed out the ways in which religious fundamentalism and ethnic nationalism use local cultural symbols to express regional resistance to incorporation (see especially Jurgensmeyer, 1995; 2000; Barber, 1995). However, these religious and ethnic expressions are often manifest as gender revolts, and include a virulent resurgence of domestic patriarchy (as in the militant misogyny of Iran or Afghanistan); the problematization of global masculinities or neighboring masculinities (as in the former Yugoslavia); and the overt symbolic efforts to claim a distinct "manhood" along religious or ethnic lines to which others do not have access and which will restore manhood to the formerly privileged (white militias and skinhead racists in Europe).

Thus gender becomes one of the chief organizing principles of local, regional and national resistance to globalization, whether expressed in religious or secular, ethnic or national terms. These processes involve flattening or eliminating local or regional distinctions, cultural homogenization as citizens and social heterogenization as new ethnic groups move to new countries in labor migration efforts. Movements thus tap racist and nativist sentiments at the same time as they can tap local and regional protectionism and isolationism. They become gendered as oppositional movements also tap into a vague masculine resentment of economic displacement, loss of autonomy, collapse of domestic patriarchy that accompany further integration into the global economy. Efforts to reclaim economic autonomy, to reassert political control, and revive traditional domestic arrangements thus take on the veneer of restoring manhood.

To illustrate these themes, one could consider several political movements of men, in North America or elsewhere. Indeed, PromiseKeepers, men's rights and fathers' rights groups all respond to the perceived erosion of public patriarchy with an attempted restoration of some version of domestic patriarchy. The mythopoetic men's movement responds instead to a perceived erosion of domestic patriarchy with assertions of separate mythic or natural space for men to experience their power – since they can no longer experience it in either the public or private spheres. (For more on the movements of men, see Kimmel, 1996, Kimmel, ed., 1996, and Messner, 1998).

In the following sections of this paper, I will examine two types of movements of men in contemporary North America – one hegemonic movement which seeks to use a variety of ideological and political resources to re-establish and reassert hegemonic masculinity, and another set of counter-hegemonic movements which seek to further dismantle both public and domestic patriarchies.

Michael Kimmel is a Professor of Sociology at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He has written and edited numerous books on masculinity and lectures widely on gender issues. Some of Kimmel's works include *Manhood: The American Quest* (1996), he is also Editor of *Changing Men* (1987), *Men Confront Pornography* (1990), and with Michael Messner, *Men's Lives* (1995).

www.genderpolicy.org

[gender-policy@mailcity.com](mailto:gender-policy@mailcity.com)