

# **Superiority Through Inferiority: Articulations of Power in Hybrid Masculinity**

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In 2001, Demetrakis Z. Demetriou published “Connell’s Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique” in which Demetriou addressed Robert W. Connell’s hegemonic masculinity (“The Concept of ‘Role’ and What to Do with It”) in regards to contemporary gender role theory. Connell defines hegemonic masculine traits as “white, Western, rational, calculative, individualistic, violent, and heterosexual” (Connell; Demetriou 347). Demetriou critiqued the underdevelopment in the theory of hegemonic masculinity, arguing that Connell’s concept fails to recognize different masculinity performances that also contribute to upholding the patriarchy’s power.

Demetriou instead introduced the concept of hybridity among masculine performance, specifically within the male gender identity. He notes that hegemonic masculinity (a) is inflexible in its interpretation of masculinity, thus extremely limited in its application, (b) fails to address power struggles among different masculine expressions, including race, and (c) makes hybrid masculinities appear as powerless opponents to the patriarchy, rather than capable contributors to it (Demetriou, 340-48). It’s important to note that hegemonic masculinity is understood among gender scholars as a negative practice, as it perpetuates harmful oppression of subordinate

groups (Connell); moreover, Demetriou does not deny the perpetuated oppression.

Demetriou's critique formulated the primary concept of "hybrid masculinity" (347) which refers to selective adoption of culturally subordinate and/or marginalized masculinities into privileged men's gender expressions, performances, and identities (Arxer 396-99; Bridges 247; Demetriou). Today, hybrid masculinity is recognized as common among young-adult men from privileged upbringings (Bridges and Pascoe 248; Schmitz 282). To provide evidence to his theory of hybridity, Demetriou conducts a case study regarding homosexual masculinities in comparison to male hegemonic bloc; maintaining that both masculinities uphold patriarchal standards despite feminine attributes (349). Evidence has since expanded, and today hybridity is not limited to homosexual masculinities, and now encompasses all varying expressions of masculinity. Hybrid masculinities, while not universally applied among gender theorists and scholars, are integral in understanding changes from traditional to contemporary gender roles, and expectations (Bridges 246). The concept of hybrid masculinity in contrast to hegemonic masculinity has opened scholarly discussions that further develop the theory as well as its implications.

Most research underlines the authority that the "individual" has on his own masculinity and sequential masculine performance (Bridges 247; Connell and Messerschmidt 844). Demetriou's data was collected through interviews conducted with individual men, rather than in groups. Studies following the publication of his concept of hybridity in masculinities presented research almost exclusively

through individual interviews, as well as meta-analyses on data collected prior to the 2001. In response, scholars such as Robert W. Connell and Janell Watson instead argue that for the theory of hybrid masculinity to be consistent, it must be studied through the lens of masculinity assemblage (Connell and Messerschmidt 844-45; Evers 894; Watson 110) — a concept that stresses the influence a man's sociological environment has on his performance of masculinity (Watson 107-09). Scholarship from both research methods are presented<sup>1</sup>.

### **Outward Appearance**

A man's outward appearance, such as his choice of dress, profoundly reinforces his power in the surrounding environment. Numerous scholars such as Ben Barry concluded that the manner in which men express themselves through fashion may not be the most overt nor intentional, yet is one of the clearest articulations of hybrid masculinity (658). For example, stereotyped feminine performances in shopping, such as spending great amounts of money and time, wearing feminine styles and/or patterns, grooming habits, tailoring clothing, or shopping exclusively at luxury name-brand stores are observed to be increasingly mainstream among professional male identities (Barber 40-42; Barry 648; Edward; Scheibling 225-27). Multiple studies regarding hybrid masculinity's connection to fashion have gathered that men adopt societally perceived subordinate traits

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<sup>1</sup>Please note that individual perspectives dominate much of the research on hybrid masculinity; masculinity studied through the lens of assemblage is, on balance, far less common. Thus, proportions of differing research methods in this literature review are not equal.

(Barry 648-50; Eisen 809) to create a sense of authenticity in their attire, and overall appearance (Eisen 809-10). This sense of authenticity differentiates hybrid masculinities from hegemonic masculinities, therefore the men are able to acquire a sense of maturity and superiority in comparison (Buerkle 176; Eisen 816-17).

The incorporation of traditional feminine fashion as a method of reinforcing dominant and subordinate masculinities has only recently been considered by gender performance scholars (Barry 648; Buerkle 172-73; Eisen 809) and thus, developed theories are limited in scope. However, of the prominent literature that currently exists, the findings have consistently revealed that men who adopt hybrid masculine traits (like feminine or non-hegemonic traits) into their physical appearances and social performances use these traits to claim superiority over traditional hegemonic masculinities (Barber 42-43; Barry 651-53). Thus, a paradox is created, in which the men who reject inferiority of their feminine dress actually re-establish superiority over feminine traits while adopting them for their appearance's benefit.

### **Voices of Hierarchy**

In contrast to conclusions regarding subconscious or covert articulation of masculinity through attire (Barry 658), the identification of hegemonic masculine traits as an "out-group" is, for most scholars, the epitome of hybrid masculine performance. In 2009, Richard O. de Visser emphasized that performances of hybrid masculine behaviors are often conscious, with the overt intention of countering societal expectations of hegemonic masculine traits (368).

Moreover, de Visser did not observe articulations of hybrid masculinities through appearance, instead he noted that the most overt behaviors were literally voiced by the subjects (367-68).

Following his article, studies focusing on men's consciousness of their non-hegemonic masculinities were published. Interpretations of masculine behaviors were reshaped, as the concept of intentional behavior was applied to hybrid masculinities. In 2017, Rachel M. Schmitz furthered de Visser's argument. Schmitz concluded that not only do men purposefully perform hybrid masculinities to counter unfavorable hegemonic traits — they also use their defiance of said traits to identify as the morally "just" bloc (292).

Scholars accept both de Visser's theory and Schmitz's succeeding assertions, and many further note that hybrid masculinity cannot be properly studied without recognizing the positions of social power that are enjoyed by hybrid masculine traits (Bridges and Pascoe 250-53; Eisen 812; Watson 115). The suggestion of power being overtly reinforced *and* enjoyed by hybrid masculinities enabled significant developments in masculine studies. Notable observations were presented by Tristan Bridges and C.J. Pascoe; Bridges and Pascoe argue that men who communicate through non-hegemonic methods, such as public emotional vulnerability and social sensitivity, do little to dismantle patriarchal standards, thus instead producing hybrid forms of inequality (249-53). There are two notable hybrid masculinities observed by scholars that significantly reinforce gender inequalities.

*Entitled Speech*

Numerous studies concerning hybridity reveal masculine entitlement, in which the communication methods of hybrid masculine men are rarely for exchanges of knowledge, but instead are used to enforce dominance in their environment. Schmitz found that men who recognize and consequently “reject” oppressiveness upheld by hegemonic masculinities often feel entitled in gender discussions, specifically regarding men’s roles in feminist movements (284-85). These findings stand in agreement with newly published scholarship: identifying hegemonic traits as the “out-group” thus enables the in-group’s (being hybrid masculinities) entitlement in holistic gender discussions — not just those limited to hegemonic masculinities (Buerkle 171-72; Eisen 816; Schmitz 292).

Scholars point to hybrid entitled speech because it reveals that these particular masculinities benefit from existing patriarchal structures. Through this phenomenon, hybrid masculine privilege is upheld; men’s overt rejections of hegemonic masculinities do not dismantle patriarchal structures. Instead, hybrid masculine traits create a paradox in which male dominance is gained, and gender inequalities are not only maintained, but made more flexible, thus allowing inequalities to become increasingly pervasive in society (Bridges and Pascoe 247).

#### *Power of Vulnerability*

Male emotional vulnerability is closely observed by scholars because it produces similar social inequalities as hybrid entitled speech, despite the seemingly different masculine articulations. Daniel B. Eisen defines this phenomenon as the “Caring Man,” in which men portray hybrid masculinities through traditionally feminine

forms of emotional expression (804). These men actively promote their perceived vulnerability and emphasize that their behaviors are often misunderstood among hegemonic masculinities because said behaviors are recognized as feminine (de Visser and McDonnell; Eisen 804).

Men performing these hybrid masculinities again place hegemonic masculinities into an inferior “out-group.” And so, masculine vulnerability exists not with the intention of dismantling patriarchal systems (Eisen 816), but instead with the intention of benefiting specifically because their masculinities are not societally recognized to be hegemonic (Bridges 254; de Visser 370; de Visser and McDonnell 22). Moreover, societal animosity towards female/feminine emotional vulnerability does not progress/improve — instead it is only welcomed if performed by men (Bridges and Pascoe 254; Schmitz 283). Gender scholars emphasize that hybrid masculine vulnerability (a) is not actually vulnerability, as the men demonstrate no accountability nor sensitivity, and (b) bolsters systems of male dominance, as emotional vulnerability is only performed if, on balance, men benefit socially.

## **Conclusion**

An abundance of research has been conducted since Demetriou first proposed the concept of hybridity among masculine performance. Most notably, research has developed far beyond the bounds of Demetriou’s initial case study regarding hybridity among homosexual masculinities. Such developments have enabled in-depth research regarding common traits among hybrid gender performance,

cultural shifts in performed feminine traits, and variations in modern patriarchal systems. Furthermore, scholarship emphasized that hegemonic masculinity encompasses both masculine dominance enforced upon females *as well as* masculine dominance enforced upon hybrid masculine traits; thus, hegemonic masculinity can maintain power over subordinate masculinities, and is not just limited to patriarchal dominance over women.

Regarding research, I was able to find abundant studies discussing hybrid masculinity. However, I am still unable to conclude that the concept of hybrid masculinity is universally recognized in the same manner as Robert W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity. Simply put, hybrid masculinity is, still today, not universally recognized among gender scholars. One concern regarding research of hybrid masculinity was voiced by Janell Watson. Watson emphasized that the theory of hybrid masculinity is not fully developed, as there is limited research studying hybridity through the lens of masculinity assemblage. The lens of assemblage is not the only concept left unexplored. A substantial factor of Demetriou's theory that remains unexplored is that of internal masculinity versus external masculinity. There is limited research detailing internal masculinity, such as men's internal processing, interpretation, and subsequent performance of masculinity. Research regarding external masculinity was clearly abundant, as represented through Barry's study regarding expression through fashion, as well as Eisen's and Schmitz's studies regarding expressions through communication.



Another question raised by the hybrid masculine performance is its variance within different cultures, non-binary orientations, religions, and races. As the presented research clearly reveals, hybrid masculinities depend heavily on social interpretations of masculine performances. Because of the different masculine roles men adhere to across cultures, I feel that research regarding different cultures' performances of masculinity is necessary. Current research addresses hybrid masculinity through many independent observations, such as dress or communication of one's emotions. However, research addressing the intersectionality of masculine performances are limited. In other words, for the theory of hybrid masculinity to be validated among gender scholars, I feel it is vital for theorists to bridge the gap between masculine performances and cultural contexts.

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