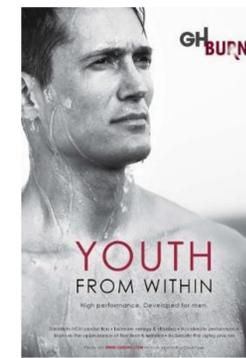


An Exploration of Older Men's Acceptance of Age Inequality

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Introduction

Age relations treat old people as marginal to occupational and dating networks, stigmatizing them as unattractive and unfit to do valuable work (Calasanti 2003; King 2006).

Those systems intersect with *gender*, in which men gain privilege by associating themselves with skilled, valuable work and athletic performance, and women with sexual receptivity and artificial display (Calasanti and King 2007).

In the intersection of age and gender, men lose much of their privileges as they grow old and leave the workplace, dismissed as no longer able to perform on valued jobs (King and Calasanti 2013).

A large anti-aging industry markets to men products that promise to restore sexual potency and workplace assertiveness, as ways to counter the emasculating effects of old age (Calasanti 2007).

Among studies of inequality, that of *age relations* provides a unique opportunity to test the extent to which a group can reify its own eventual subordination. This is due to the temporal nature of age relations (Calasanti 2007; Spector-Mersel 2006). We test for the hegemonic effect of masculinity.

Literature Review

In our previous research on U.S. and Finnish samples, the latter collected at a paper mill, male and female respondents reported that middle age inspired them to regard many bodily changes as more than transitory; and they assume personal responsibility (Calasanti, Pietilä, Ojala, King 2013).

Additional analysis of the Finnish data also showed that working-class men under 40 portray older and younger men as careless, even irresponsible, toward health and its maintenance. They used age categories to avoid any sense of themselves as becoming old (Pietilä, Ojala, Calasanti, King 2013).

The most recent analysis found that these men gave voice to neo-liberalism, arguing that, though they cannot prevent their ageing, they can and should control their health and physical performance, and thus try to remain men for as long as possible (Ojala, Calasanti, King, Pietilä 2014).

Theory

Connell (1987) suggests that many men affirm local gender ideals in ways that gain the consent, to relations of domination, of many women and subordinate men.

Connell has been at pains to distance her Gramscian argument from the listing of masculine traits or norms without obvious links to stratification (e.g. Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

However, most scholars use her concept to frame lists of conventional sets of ideals instead. In such usage of the concept, Connell's Gramscian notion of consent competes for scholarly attention with the dominance of gender ideals and lists of the ideals themselves. (See King and Calasanti 2013 for a review.)

Tracing their theory to Gramsci, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) define hegemonic masculinity in terms of its effect (consent of the dominated). However, they focus, in their discussions of research, on the claims made instead: What people say about manhood, as well as the commonly observed ways in which men differ from women. This shift, from abstract definition of hegemony as an outcome, to research on observable affirmations of gender ideals and differences, has resulted in a situation in which few scholars demonstrate hegemony as an effect.

We return to the theory of hegemony by defining our terms as follows:

Masculinity: group activities that distinguish males from others

Hegemonic: maintaining consent to inequality

- effect, not attempt; reception, not expression

Where the literature on hegemonic masculinity has focused on claims not responses, as the hegemony, we propose to reverse that focus and show how masculinity *achieves* hegemony in age relations. That is, we show how it can inspire aging men to accept their marginalization, as measured by analysis of their responses.

Methods

This exploratory research used initial interviews to solicit responses that guided revisions of the interview guide, leading to additional questions about anti-aging strategies.

The revised instrument includes questions designed to elicit descriptions of how respondents view changes in their bodies, the extent to which they use goods and services of the anti-aging industry to control these changes, and how they describe and assess use of these products and services.

Procedures included:

- semi-structured, in-depth interviews
 - averaged 2.5 hours
 - recorded and transcribed professionally, and then coded using QSR NUD*IST 6.0
- analysis through a creative process of inductive reasoning and theorizing.
- Data were collected and analyzed in an iterative process, leading to the development of new questions in later interviews (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

Sample

- This study employed a purposive, convenience sample, recruiting respondents to reflect diversity in relation to gender, occupation, and sexuality.

- Ages range from 43-61 among men, 44-59 among women.

- All but one of each group has some college education, and all but four in each group have advanced degrees.

- All are employed, all but two of the men and all but three of the women in professional or semi-professional jobs.

- Only one man and one woman have worked jobs that involve heavy, predominantly physical labor.

Results

Men focus on diminishment of masculinity and status with advancing age:

Male respondents accept that aging will diminish their status largely because it robs them of means of physical and professional performance. Some feel themselves descending into a pathetic state.

- Certainly, **the loss of freedom and power**, if you want to put it that way, the loss of certain freedoms- I see my mom in this assisted living and every week she tells me that she wants to go: 'I **want to die, I am not doing anything, what am I doing here? This is ridiculous.**' ... So, I think I am going to work on strategies for what am I going to be doing when I am so restricted that I have to be in a very safe environment like [retirement community] Warm Hearth where you don't have to interact with the public, **you don't become an annoyance** for someone- you are standing in a grocery line and you are an annoyance because you are not moving fast enough or you are driving your car and you worry- you know- people are, 'What's that old man doing?' and that kind of thing. So, you really are- No, **I don't want to get in anybody's way**, in a sense. It's a very complicated mix of feelings about what it means to get older ...

- [During a physical fight with another man,] the whole issue of proving myself was much closer to the surface. And I think it's because, **the intensity of the issue of masculinity was heightened because of age**, that I lost it with this guy. I don't think it would have happened before; I might have been pissed at him. But it's because I was uncertain of myself and insecure of myself, about what's happening to me physically, [that] a physical challenge became a much bigger issue than it ever would in the past.

- As you get older it's the thing you worry about ... **I couldn't imagine growing more masculine as you got older...** [W]ords like virile and strong and young all come into masculinity. ...

- For me, it's like you just don't want to be excluded from things because you're, a certain age or you're not looked at the same because you, you know, **you're seen as, you know, over the hill.** ... Like I say I always, I just know this, I know that someday you'll be old, and I know that life can get you and it's depressing sometimes if you look at it realistically, and I go, you know what I think I can handle it as long as I don't ever use any type of alcohol or drug, and I think I can handle it if I'm in good shape because I may be old or whatever, but your body is still good. **I think it would depress me to where it would be a battle if I didn't have control of myself** and that if I wasn't, if I didn't like what I lived in.

- I . . . **associate aging with sedentary existence . . . And I view sedentary as decline . . .** It's forced sedentary existence . . . It's the ruptured Achilles forever. ... [I]f old, then . . . you are no longer a part, you are no longer the player, you are on the periphery. . . . Because you have got one more step and then you are gone. ... And maybe that's partly what **I resist by working hard and by working energetically. I don't want to be seen as being brain dead.** So, that's all linked up to my image of ... being ... marginalized, peripheral, on my way out. Sedentary is linked to both.

Personal Responsibility for Control

Male respondents are particularly likely to speak of the "fight" against the descent into old status.

Neo-liberal ideologies prescribe individual responsibility for risks previously assumed by larger groups. Male respondents in this study appear to accept this, which leads them also to accept the subordination that will come when their attempts to avoid categorization as "old" eventually, inevitably fail.

- It's the adage, if you don't use it, you lose it. So, the less active you are, the quicker the aging process is gonna come up on you ... **What have you done to try to be the best you can be; or have you decided 'who cares?'** ... You never stop [working on your body]. That goes on forever.

- If you live a healthy lifestyle and do what you are supposed to do, you aren't gonna have any problem. Statistically, most people are not gonna have any problems. ... **I am going to fight it the best I can, just to allow myself to be healthier and a better quality of life as long as I can.** It's not for anybody else. It's for me. ... The physicalness of my body, I try to keep doing things to continue that adaptation; and science has shown that we can do that. So, if we can do that, why shouldn't we?

- Honestly, **if I thought a product would help me be more attractive or confident or enhance any part of my life, I don't know why I wouldn't use it ... My favorite thing is to talk about reversing it.** If we were getting younger everyday, life would be awesome, you know?

Respondents fight the aging process but know that, in the long run, they will lose. They construct the effects of aging as those of inevitable biology and accept individual responsibility for that.

Anti-aging strategies	Women	Men
Cosmetic surgery	2	0
Cosmetics/ceuticals	10	2
Exercise	9	8
Diet modification	10	8
Vitamin/supplement	9	8
	n=10	n=9

Conclusions

Respondents affirm youth-based of manhood, vow to fight to live up to them for as long as they are able, and accept that the fight, once lost, can and should leave them in subordination to younger people. They speak neither of age relations as social outcomes, nor of collective struggle to reorganize it. This is the age *hegemony* affected by masculinity.

Implications:

Most reviews of the role of hegemonic masculinity in age relations miss the central point of Connell's theory, which is one of consent to subordination rather than lists of widespread or widely celebrated traits.

Acceptance of the subordinate status of old age by old people amounts to a form of *hegemony*.

Connell's theory of gendered hegemony remains confusing in its proliferation of definitions of it. By defining hegemony more strictly, as the achievement of the consent of subordinate groups to their low status, we find ideals of manhood and womanhood implicated in age hegemony. We operationalize that as the admission, by aging women and men, that their aging can and should lower their status once they are no longer able to win their fights against it. Youth-based ideals of womanhood are thus as hegemonic as those of men are. In this sense, Connell may be wrong to exclude ideals of womanhood from the theory of hegemony.

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