

Rethinking R.W. Connell's Masculinity Theory: Toward a Gender Analysis of the Hegemonic Struggles of Masculinities

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Masculinity studies in Japan have thus far relied on R.W. Connell's masculinity theory, which is famous for its emphasis on the plurality and hierarchy of masculinity. However, there have been few efforts to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of her theory for gender analysis, from the perspective of masculinity, in contemporary Japan. Defining Japanese society as one that is diversifying and transforming more and more, this paper argues that Connell's theory has not only advantages but also limitations in analyzing such a society because of its features, including the transcendent assumption of hierarchical relations among masculinities and the decreased emphasis on the relationship between men and women. The former feature indicates an overall assumption in her works that identifies the hierarchy among multiple masculinities not from a perspective of everyday gender practices, but from a perspective of social structures other than gender, such as economic structure. The latter feature indicates her tendency to limit the analytical focus to men's issues. Therefore, in her discussion, the relationships between men and women are likely to recede into the background; those who study masculinities in Japan also share this weakness. In other words, Connell does not bring up hegemonic masculinity's operative definition, and identifies it in terms of background structures, which does not include gender. As a result, the empirical studies based on Connell's theory, including her own, frequently fail to capture relationships among masculinities as well as relationships between men and women. Based on these ideas, this paper will explore a more useful way to analyze Japanese society from the perspective of masculinity. Finally, it asserts that it is necessary to focus on the process of hegemonic struggle rather than on hegemonic masculinity and that gender structures need to be understood as pluralistic. These are absolutely essential concepts not only for analyzing masculinities, but gender relationships and structures as well.