Nature/nurture

- Are gender roles a result of our biological sex (our ‘nature’)?

- Or are they the result of how we have been raised and socialised (our ‘nurture’)?

- Mackinnon (2003) argues that there is no way to come to a definitive conclusion in the nature vs. nurture debate and that it is more useful to consider that both our biological make-up and our upbringing in society play a role in creating our gender identities.
MASCULINITIES VS. MASCULINITY

• Michel Foucault - gender is socially constructed by discourse

• Language limits not only what we can SAY (he/she; him/her)

• But also what we can SEE

• Discourse acts to maintain a social hierarchy which places men on top

• Patricia Sexton (1970): ‘male norms stress values such as courage, inner direction, certain forms of aggression, autonomy, mastery, technological skill, group solidarity, adventure and considerable amounts of toughness in mind and body’ (Quoted in Carrigan et al. 75)

• These are the values promoted on the football pitch, in politics, in the corporate boardroom, in the military.
Hegemonic Masculinity

• Hegemony is a Marxist concept first explored by Antonio Gramsci

• It = ‘the winning and holding of power” (Donaldson 644)

• Hegemony also involves the ability to define morality and what types of behaviour are ‘natural’ and ‘normal’

• Hegemony can convince us that those who do not conform to what is ‘normal’ should be punished for being different, or ‘other’

• Hegemonic masculinity subordinates women

• But also subordinates other forms of being male
Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality* (1976)

- Dangers of hegemonic masculinity in its most extreme forms: fascism, white supremacy, hate crimes against gays
- Foucault interested in how power is enforced
- Doctors and scientists in the 19th c. studied sexuality
- Those sexual behaviours which varied from heterosexual norms were labelled as ‘abnormal’ and, ultimately, regulated
- Homosexuality was forbidden by LAW - did not become legal in the UK until 1967
- Mandatory heterosexuality was therefore enforced by threat of punishment.
- But other ways of controlling and regulating behaviour...
Surveillance and the Panopticon

- Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish*

- The panopticon featured a single guard stationed in the centre of a circular prison from which he could see all prisoners in their cells.

- Prisoners could not see the guard – so could not know if they were being watched.

- But *could be* under surveillance at any given time.

- Foucault suggests that ideology functions this way: we feel we are under surveillance.

- Anti-gay hate crimes; slut shaming forms of discipline and punishment.

- Images of real or imagined surveillance recur in film.
Hypermasculinity

- Males under particular pressure to perform gender roles

- The ‘tomboy’ a popular icon in film: Scout Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962); Katniss Everdene in *The Hunger Games* tetralogy

- But feminine boys are NOT a cultural icon

- Hypermasculinity is valued for males

- Studies of masculinity ‘exploded in the 1980s...with the rise of the action hero and the spectacle of the male body – and more particularly its muscles’ (Edwards 42)

- A change to the ‘gaze’: men’s bodies objectified

- But by whom and for what purposes?
Film and the normalising of violence

- Glen Lewis: ‘aggressive male behaviour is accepted as a normal part of everyday life’ (cited in Mackinnon 11)

- Violent male icons include Schwarzenegger, Stallone, Jackman, Bale, Damon, Neeson

- Origin in 1980s is attributed to economic instability among working class white males + the rise in power of ethnic minority males

- Move from manual labour to mental labour in late 20th c. =

- The decline in practical uses for the muscular male body

- No longer associated with power, dominance and control in the workplace and household

- Women entering labour market and competing for jobs

- Muscles and strength thus become signifiers in films for a return to masculine power and authority

- And also misogyny: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYtQMhnBtTw
Masculinity in Crisis

• Walsh, F. (2010: 10) *Male Trouble*: ‘recent studies have revealed how throughout the twentieth century, national crises and trauma (translated as emasculating) have been quickly followed by period of remasculization’

• Fascism in Germany due to humiliation over World War I defeat (George Mosse)

• ‘Uncertain maleness’ in 1970s/80s Britain the result of 2nd wave feminism, rise in gay rights, downfall of traditional industry (Leon Hunt)

• The case of *Fight Club* (1996)
‘Homosocial Desire’ / ‘Homosocial Bonding’: A desires B because C desires B
Homosocial Desire (continued)

- Not the same as homosexual desire

- It is often antagonistic to homosexuality

- Homosocial bonding occurs in the locker room, boardroom and social club

- Love stories in film often deal with a triangular relationship between two men and one woman

- In which the relationship between the men is more important than the relationship between either of the men and the woman

- Examples: *Star Wars* (1977) and the *Twilight* and *Hunger Games* films (among MANY others)
Homosocial Bonding (the ‘bromance’)

• Not sexual love stories, but love stories nonetheless.

• Sherlock Holmes and Watson, Riggs and Murtaugh, Harry Potter and Ron Weasley, Frodo Baggins and Samwise Gamgee

• [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_NmCh42hZM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_NmCh42hZM)
The ‘New Man’ and Single Male Parents

• Caring, sensitive, emotionally-skilled and often shares in household chores and childcare

• Career-minded, but also focuses on consumption, appearance and emotions

New Dads

• **The Full Monty** (1997)
  - working class male character pursues a traditionally female role (a stripper)
  - a dad who wants to take care of his child
  - Relationship between father and son strengthens over the course of the film
  - Set against the backdrop of economically-depressed northern city (Sheffield)
  - Links the idea of the new man with masculinity in crisis, the transgressing of gender boundaries and display of the male body
  - Traditionally feminine activity (dance) becomes site of anxiety and liberation
  - Compare to *Billy Elliot*?
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4wuH9pSSRo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4wuH9pSSRo)

• **Terminator 2: Judgment Day** (1991) - melds roles of violent and nurturing masculinity
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tksN5Jaan9E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tksN5Jaan9E)
The Metrosexual and New Lad Culture

• 1990s - Metrosexual male
  • Refashioned version of new man - young, middle class, trendy, urban

• 1980s/90s - New Lad - seen as a response to gender equality; backlash to feminism
  • New lad characterised by interest in football, drinking, sex, loutish behaviour, objectification of women
  • Sexism a result of defensive heterosexuality
  • Closely associated with sexism and homophobia

• The ‘new lad’ or ‘lad culture’ associated with
  • And...*The Inbetweeners Movie* (2011)
Other forms of masculinity

- The most powerful forms of masculinity are not just associated with being male, but also with being heterosexual and white.

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER:

- Which representations of masculinities tend to dominate films?
- Which tend to be excluded?
- How are subordinate masculinities portrayed in films?
References:


