

FASHIONABLE QUEERNESS

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FASHIONABLE QUEERNESS: STRAIGHT APPROPRIATION OF QUEER FASHION

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Emerald Publishing Limited
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL.

First edition 2024

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83608-139-5 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-83608-138-8 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-83608-140-1 (Epub)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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PREFACE

In visual culture, the depiction of gender, particularly masculinity, has undergone profound transformations that mirror broader societal shifts. This book focuses on the intricate relationship between celebrity culture and contemporary masculinities, using the public appearances and fashion choices of Timothée Chalamet, Paul Mescal, and Barry Keoghan as prisms through which to explore these changes. The first chapter ‘Masculinities on Display’ sets the theoretical foundation for the study, tracing the contours of hegemony and the performative nature of gender as theorised by scholars like Judith Butler and Michel Foucault. By focusing on these Timothée Chalamet, Paul Mescal, and Barry Keoghan’s sartorial choices at high-visibility events, we begin to understand how celebrity culture can both challenge and reinforce traditional gender norms. Employing a critical visual media literacy framework, the subsequent chapters dissect various facets of this phenomenon. The second chapter, ‘Staging Masculinities’, investigates the site of production of mediated representations of these actors at promotional events and its role for new gender narratives. Here, the focus is on how traditional gender norms are queered and subverted, revealing the layers of intentionality behind celebrity fashion. The third chapter, ‘Tailoring Masculinities’, shifts our gaze to the site of the image itself, analysing how the composition and presentation of celebrity fashion at public events challenge conventional gender presentations. This analysis is enriched by a detailed examination of the technological, compositional, and social modalities that shape these visual representations.

The fourth chapter, ‘Audiencing Masculinities’, synthesises the insights gained from the earlier discussions, examining the broader implications of these celebrities’ fashion decisions for societal understandings of masculinity. This chapter speculates on the potential for celebrity-driven fashion to act as a catalyst for redefining traditional masculinity, suggesting a gradual yet significant shift in societal norms and expectations. This book aims not only to document and analyse the evolving landscape of gender expression within celebrity culture but also to contribute to the ongoing dialogue about gender

identity and power dynamics in contemporary society. By examining how these actors navigate the complexities of style, performance, and gender, we gain a deeper understanding of the possibilities and limitations of fashion as a form of cultural commentary.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr Sarah Meehan O'Callaghan and Jeremy Murphy from JM Agency for, once more, bringing clarity to my writing. Dr Daniel Ridge for believing in this project, my husband for his kindness in giving me time and space to do research and write, and my dear friend Eleni Kaipanou for her help with sourcing the images included in this book. Finally, I would like to thank Dr Ashley Morgan for the support, very useful advice, and overall academic generosity.

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MASCULINITIES ON DISPLAY: CELEBRITY INFLUENCE ON GENDER PERFORMANCE

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the interaction between celebrity culture and contemporary masculinities, introducing the public appearances of actors Timothée Chalamet, Paul Mescal, and Barry Keoghan that are under examination in the following chapters. The chapter sets the context of hegemony, heterosexuality, and masculinity, which will be the basis of the examination that is offered in the following chapters of these books where a showcase of their sartorial choices is presented to analyse whether they challenge traditional norms of gender and masculinity. The present chapter begins by setting a theoretical framework that draws on key theorists like Butler, Foucault, and Gramsci, emphasising the role of hegemony in reinforcing heteronormative standards. The analysis then moves to celebrities with attention to how they through their sartorial choices, particularly at high-visibility events like award shows, engage with and potentially subvert expected masculine norms. Despite being heterosexual men conforming to cisheteronormative societal norms in their personal lives, their public fashion choices serve as a form of cultural commentary that challenges rigid boundaries around male attire and behaviours. Furthermore, the chapter reviews relevant literature on the social construction of gender, the concept of hegemonic masculinity, and the performative

nature of gender, drawing on established studies to frame the actors' public presentations within broader societal and cultural dynamics. This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how gender norms are maintained and challenged within the sphere of celebrity culture.

Keywords: Celebrity culture; masculinities; hegemony; gender norms; public appearances; heteronormativity; fashion; gender performativity; social construction of gender; cultural commentary

This chapter opens with a theoretical paradigm that combines thinking on the intersections of hegemony, heterosexuality, masculinities, and celebrity culture. It provides the theoretical framework within which the following discussion will be based. This is a study that focuses on the public appearances of three well-known actors, Timothée Chalamet, Paul Mescal, and Barry Keoghan and in particular on the ways in which their public appearances have experimented with gender norms and how they appear to challenge normative expectations and expectations of masculinity. Chalamet, Mescal, and Keoghan are openly heterosexual men whose romantic affairs have often been subject to public commentary. As such, this is not a matter of celebrities whose romantic and sexual identities are in any way deviating from established cisheteronormative and patriarchal norms in relation to gender and sexuality, nor have their gender identity and/or sexual orientation ever been questioned. However, on various occasions, the actors have participated – with their public appearances – in the ongoing dialogue about gender and sexuality, possibly contributing to the ongoing challenge of the rigidly policed boundaries that define, in particular, what a man can wear and, ultimately, what defines a man at all, contributing to an attempt to challenge rigidly adhered to boundaries that define, in particular, what a man can wear and, ultimately, what defines a man at all.

Before conducting a study to explore how, to what extent, and if Chalamet, Mescal, and Keoghan's public appearances indeed contribute to the discussion of gender and masculinities, it is important to review existing studies that focus on the social construction of gender and the role of hegemony in maintaining a gendered order which dictates how men and women ought to behave and exist in the world according to their gender. It is expected that such an introduction will give the reader an understanding of the power dynamics in operation within gender paradigms so as to better understand the importance of the actors' actions. Therefore, the following section provides

a brief overview of the existing literature on hegemony within gender and sexuality studies.

1.1. HEGEMONY AND/IN GENDER AND SEXUALITY STUDIES

Exploring the relationship between heteronormativity and other societal power dynamics, theorists such as [Butler \(1993\)](#), [Anzaldúa \(2000\)](#), [Giffney \(2004\)](#), and [Eng et al. \(2005\)](#) have focused on the concept of hegemony to deepen our comprehension of how heteronormativity establishes and maintains its authority. [Genschel's \(1996\)](#) perspective explores the relationship between heteronormativity and hegemony, asserting that heteronormativity is not a contested force but rather an accepted social norm. [Lorenz \(2009\)](#) builds on Genschel's notion, investigating how heteronormativity secures its widespread acceptance. Drawing from [Silverman's \(1992\)](#) 'dominant fictions'¹ and [Foucault's \(1978\)](#) 'tactical polyvalence of discourses',² [Lorenz \(2009\)](#) argues that heteronormative consensus arises from individuals' ongoing struggles against hegemonic influences.

In the work *Heteronormativität* ([Hartman et al., 2007](#)), the idea of continuous subjective resistance against hegemonic influences as a means of stabilising heteronormativity becomes the foundation for exploring the interplay of hegemony and heteronormativity. Here, hegemony is seen as a structure perpetuated through dominance struggles, with heteronormativity representing a subset or domain of hegemony. [Wagenknecht \(2007\)](#) introduces a material dimension to heteronormativity, using hegemony to explain how 'queer politics of citizenship' engage in clashes over hegemony, where the meanings and judgements of sexual practices intersect with resource struggles, all governed by the same forces. These discussions exemplify how gender, queer, and sexuality studies enhance the dialogue between hegemony and heteronormativity, highlighting queer theory's inclination to critique power dynamics. By merging queer theory and hegemony, these critiques gain more potency.³ Importantly, each exploration of hegemony and heteronormativity contributes to a broader comprehension of heteronormativity within the context of power relations.

Before delving deeper, it is essential to revisit Antoni Gramsci's original conception of hegemony. While some, like [Forgacs \(2000\)](#), assert that Gramsci primarily positioned hegemony within economic terms, the preceding discussion on its use by gender, queer, and sexuality theorists suggests that hegemony can govern various types of relationships.⁴ Gramsci's starting point was to understand how capitalism, despite its exploitative nature, maintains

stability within the sociopolitical order. This stability, according to Gramsci, stems from hegemony, which, resulting from intellectual and moral leadership, encourages people to conform to the status quo, even when doing so is against their own interests. Gramsci's hegemony does not entail forceful persuasion but rather encourages practices that produce 'common sense'. Put simply, cultural mechanisms, such as the media, present certain situations as 'natural', or unavoidable. In turn, when audiences find themselves in these situations, they are less likely to challenge the conditions that brought them to such situations and more likely to accept them as unavoidable.

Following Gramsci, scholars agree that consensus is pivotal to hegemony, yet many theorists challenge the notion that only leading groups or political entities enact hegemony. It is proposed that hegemonic rule relies not just on dominant groups but also on socio-cultural concepts, shared norms, and ingrained normalities. For instance, heteronormativity can become hegemonic without a specific leadership claim. To illustrate this argument, the book aims to showcase how media, particularly as it relates to celebrities, serve as arenas of ideological struggle, upholding and challenging hegemonic notions of heterosexuality and masculinity.

Distinguishing between oppression and consent in theories of hegemony, Ludwig (2011) asserts that hegemony operates through the latter. Ludwig argues that hegemony relies on the activities of subjects which are both self-directed and externally influenced; that is, they are autonomous processes but driven by culture. In that sense, hegemony is performative in that its production and reproduction are located within people's actions, in the way they live their lives. This performative aspect of hegemony inspired theorists like Butler (1990), Ludwig (2011), and Messerschmidt (2018) to develop concepts such as the heterosexual matrix, hegemonic masculinities, and heteronormative hegemony. Through their work, these theorists identify how hegemony, as a sociopolitical structure, is built, how individuals consent to their own suppression, and how, if possible, to disrupt the cycle of power and consent. Hegemony gains its power from the fact that it requires consent from the people on whom hegemonic power is to be exercised.⁵

1.2. HETEROSEXUAL MATRIX

Judith Butler's (1990) analysis investigates the dynamic between power and gender, introducing the concept of the '[...] heterosexual matrix [...]' (p. 151) as a power structure that shapes our perceptions of gender and sex. Butler asserts that our understanding of biological sex differences is socially

constructed rather than innately biological.⁶ What appears to be innate physiological distinctions between men and women is socially translated into values, judgements, and beliefs about gendered behaviour and desires. This ‘heterosexual matrix’ challenges the assumption that gender results from a predetermined sex; instead, it proposes that gender is constructed within the discursive context of this matrix. Butler also argues that gender functions as a norm, explaining how this norm gives rise to the binary concept of genders.

This norm establishes the existence of two genders, each defined in relation to the other and desired by the difference of its opposite. Compulsory and normalised heterosexuality institutionalises this binary gender relation, differentiating masculinity from femininity through heterosexual desire practices.⁷ In essence, individuals do not simply embody male or female genders; rather, they *perform* maleness or femaleness, with gender being attributed and received through these performative acts. These acts are ongoing and repetitive, contributing to the seeming naturalisation of sex differences.

Butler’s theories have significantly reshaped our understanding of sex, gender, and the construction of the male–female binary. Their ideas have influenced third-wave feminists⁸ and contemporary queer scholars.⁹ However, some scholars have pointed out shortcomings in their theories, particularly regarding the absence of a comprehensive analysis of power dynamics within and surrounding the heterosexual matrix.¹⁰ Ludwig (2011) critiques Butler’s approach, highlighting limitations in their conceptualisation of power.

Ludwig’s critique initially addresses the term ‘heterosexual matrix’ itself, arguing that while it highlights heterosexuality’s role as a shaping social force, it inadequately captures the broader scope of heteronormativity as a structural influence across personal, social, and cultural dimensions.¹¹ Ludwig suggests replacing ‘heterosexual’ with ‘heteronormative’ for a more encompassing understanding (p. 87).¹² Additionally, Ludwig scrutinises Butler’s notion of gender construction based on a rejection of the opposite gender, identifying an inherent gender hierarchy that Butler fails to fully incorporate into their theory.

Ludwig further examines Butler’s concept of performativity, highlighting its reciprocal relationship with power within the heterosexual matrix. Gender is brought into existence through performative acts dictated by the matrix, while the matrix derives its power from these very acts. Yet, Butler’s theories lack systematic analysis of how the heterosexual matrix gains and exercises power. Ludwig proposes that bridging the ideas of Gramsci’s hegemony and Butler’s heterosexual matrix can address these gaps, leading to Ludwig’s own concept of ‘heteronormative hegemony’, which will be discussed subsequently.

1.3. HETERONORMATIVE HEGEMONY

Ludwig (2011) begins her analysis by addressing the notable absence in Butler's theories of an adequate tool to systematically conceptualise the often contradictory actions of individuals as they navigate power dynamics. In essence, Butler fails to address the mechanisms through which subjects engage heteronormative scripts in their everyday performative practices. Ludwig argues, 'Butler does not address the question of *how* and *through which techniques* the subject applies heteronormative scripts in everyday performance practices' (p. 90, original emphasis).

Another aspect of Butler's work that Ludwig critiques is the abstract nature of the 'heterosexual matrix'. Ludwig points out that the connection between social actions, relations, and forces with this matrix remains unexplored in Butler's theories. Consequently, despite Butler's efforts to highlight the implications of the heterosexual matrix and the gender norm in shaping gendered subjects, their theories fall short of offering a means to subvert these constructs.

Ludwig argues that adopting the concept of 'hegemony' in place of the 'heterosexual matrix' can provide a more precise understanding of how heteronormativity operates in subtle and contradictory ways. Drawing from Butler's later work *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Ludwig suggests that incorporating hegemony allows for a more dynamic understanding of power and its enactment. This shift enables an exploration of how individuals consent to and perpetuate covert power dynamics. Ludwig then proposes the concept of 'heteronormative hegemony' as a theoretical framework.¹³

Heteronormative hegemony, according to Ludwig, not only facilitates the analysis of state regulations but also helps comprehend these regulations as outcomes of interactions within civil society. Ludwig emphasises the need to move beyond viewing state power solely from a top-down perspective, considering how society members contribute to and stabilise state power from the bottom up.

The synthesis of heteronormativity and hegemony enriches the understanding of the former through the dynamic quality of the latter. Heteronormative hegemony, as Ludwig argues, emerges from social struggles within civil society and subsequently manifests in state policies. This perspective opens the door to examining how heteronormative hegemony gains its authority rather than just regarding it as a sovereign power.

Ludwig contends that this kind of dynamic theorising allows for the incorporation of social relations and struggles and their potential to transform the heterosexual matrix. This approach views heteronormativity as a dynamic

power formation that operates through self-technologies. It also suggests that the constitution of gendered subjects can be theorised as a result of both subjugation and empowerment.

The dynamic nature of hegemony becomes evident in Ludwig's discussion of gendered subjects as products of both subjugation and empowerment. Subjugation and empowerment are not external to heteronormative hegemony but can interact with and modify it.¹⁴ This aligns with the concept of 'queering', which challenges norms through nonconventional methods, practices and identities.

Ludwig highlights that even as society becomes more tolerant and diverse, these developments often represent transformations within the parameters of heteronormativity rather than complete challenges to it. Connell (1987) and later Messerschmidt (2018) examine masculinity as a social construct with attention to the ways in which patriarchy and heteronormativity affect the way men and masculinities are socially constructed. They demonstrate how the social construction of masculinity contributes to asymmetrical and unequal relationships among men.

1.4. HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY/ITES

The notion of hegemonic masculinity, initially conceptualised by Connell (1987), reformulated by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), and expanded upon by Messerschmidt (2018), significantly contributes to our understanding of how unequal gender relations are legitimised across men and women as well as among different forms of masculinity and femininity (2018, p. ix). In his work *Hegemonic Masculinity* (2018), Messerschmidt contextualises the concept within a theoretical and sociopolitical context, tracing its development from feminist scholarship, particularly radical and socialist feminist thought.¹⁵ The interpretation of patriarchal frameworks as systems of oppression was a pivotal theoretical shift that gave rise to concepts like 'hegemonic masculinity' (p. 22), marking a crucial project in feminist discourse.

As demonstrated earlier, moving from patriarchal frameworks to a focus on gender not only fostered the emergence of the concept of hegemonic masculinity but also paved the way for ideas like the heterosexual matrix and heteronormative hegemony. Connell (1985, p. 267) initially formulated the concept of hegemonic masculinity as a theory of gender practice to address issues within the feminist thought of her time. She focused on understanding the structure of gender relations as a fundamental element in all aspects of practice. Unlike prior theories that merely addressed role expectations and

gender identity formation, one significant aspect highlighted by scholars was the examination of how power is exercised by one gender over the other, especially men over women. Messerschmidt (2018, p. 28) further elaborates that Connell (1987, 1995) conceived hegemonic masculinity as a specific form of gendered hierarchy within a particular historical and societal context that legitimates unequal gender relations across men and women, different forms of masculinity and femininity, and among various forms of masculinity.¹⁶

Over time, scholars embraced and expanded the concept, investigating the consequences and mechanisms of hegemony, the diversity within masculinities, and shifts within hegemonic masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2018, pp. 31–32). While hegemonic masculinity gained acceptance in gender and sexuality studies, criticism also arose. Responding to these criticisms, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) revised the concept, discarding elements of its original formulation: simplified portrayals of social relations, rigid characterisation as a single type, and ambiguities concerning the relationship between hegemonic and dominant masculinities. The reformed notion of hegemonic masculinity addresses four key areas: the structure of gender hierarchy, the arrangement of masculine configurations, the process of social embodiment, and the dynamics of masculinities (Messerschmidt, 2018, p. 50). These diverse factors highlight the dynamic and productive nature of hegemonic masculinity, suggesting that its deconstruction could enable subversion of hegemonic power dynamics. Messerschmidt's reformulation acknowledges the hierarchical aspect of relationships among hegemonic masculinity, femininity, and other forms of masculinity. It recognises intersections with other social inequalities, emphasising not only the power of the hegemonic group but also the agency of subordinated groups. This revised concept also allows for the challenge, contestation, alteration, and dismantling of both hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities, and promotes the analysis of hegemonic masculinities at different levels (local, regional, and global).

A significant shift in the reformulated concept is the focus on 'hegemonic masculinities' in the plural rather than 'hegemonic masculinity', explored further in Messerschmidt's work. He contends that the theory of hegemonic masculinities, in its plurality, models relationships among men, women, masculinity, and femininity. Hegemonic masculinities, due to their ubiquity, often perpetuate gender inequality by normalising unequal relations, both publicly and privately. This normalcy occurs at local, regional, and global levels through relational practices and discursive meanings. Just as Ludwig's argument emphasised the historical and socio-cultural specificity of hegemony, Messerschmidt highlights the same for hegemonic masculinities, which shape acceptable gender behaviour within specific contexts.