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# Shifting Patterns of Gender Relations

## Interview with "*Masculinities*" Author, Raewyn Connell

by Greg MacDougall, [rabble.ca](http://rabble.ca) - News for the rest of us. 

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Professor Raewyn Connell (Photo by Dianne Leggett)

**R**aewyn Connell, an Australian academic who specialises in social constructions of masculinity, brought her wealth of knowledge to Canada to talk about the state of gender equity.

As one of four speakers on the "Breaking Barriers" plenary at last month's Women's Worlds 2011 conference in Ottawa, Canada, Connell said the session covered a wide range: "things like gender education, personal stories, what's happening in the world, what's the position of Muslim women for instance in relation to feminism, how the Arab Spring is changing people's perceptions of what can happen in the world and women's role in that was one of the highlights, questions of violence ... It's a somewhat scary experience

***When you're looking at masculinities, you're not only looking at an individual personality or character, you're also looking at football teams, corporations, armies, governments ...***

**[laughs] you're sitting up there on a brightly lit stage, with a thousand or more people in the room."**

Connell, who holds a University Chair at Sydney University, described her work the following day in an interview.

She made it clear this work goes beyond individual efforts: "I'm part of research teams, out of which this has come ... It's to a large extent about the debates that go on in the field, the research techniques that are available, and the rethinking that I might have done of these, that inform my research."

On a personal level however, she has a long involvement with gender equity issues, alongside her work with gay men on community education around H.I.V./AIDS and, having "grappled with gender issues in my personal life as a transsexual woman," it drove an interest in the field and "maybe a little bit has helped me to become aware of the contradictions and complexity in gender, which is good for research of course."

She describes masculinities (plural) as "not only individual behaviours, but — I think this is very important — social practices, organised social practices by groups and interactions too" as part of what constructs the powerful meanings of masculinities.

"When you're looking at masculinities, you're not only looking at an individual personality or character, you're also looking at football teams, corporations, armies, governments, and so forth, all of which are involved in constructing gender," she said.

"One of the crucial findings when this research field developed, about twenty years ago, is that there's no one thing that you can call masculinity. There are multiple masculinities, there are different patterns of social practice, different patterns of social behaviour, and very typically — for instance if you go and do research in a school — you'll find a number of different patterns of masculinity the boys are learning or practising, and which have often sort of hierarchical relations between them. So there might be one version of masculinity which is more honoured in the school, and others ... [may be] looked down or frowned on."

### Advertising

She talked about how strong this influence is.

"That's often where you get the relationship with sexuality, because very often — it's not universal, but very often — the hegemonic, the most honoured, the powerful version of masculinity is heterosexual, whereas disavowed/rejected forms of masculinity are often associated, rightly or wrongly, with being gay." She noted that often young boys learn to apply terms such as "fag" or "poofster" in a derogatory way long before they actually learn the sexual meaning of the words.

"So you get social and cultural hierarchies of masculinity, and that's quite an important fact about the way the gender system, and the gender order as a whole, works."

In the context of talking about historical and shifting patterns of masculinities, she observed that "a violent and dominating form of masculinity [can] become dominant in the society and that can be very damaging and dangerous for other people."

Connell said some girls and women learn and engage in patterns of masculinity, but that it is mainly boys and men who do so. She also talks about femininities, noting that there is not as much research done overall on their constructions (although a fair bit is done on models of femininity in the mass media) — adding "you don't find the same patterns of femininity as you do of masculinity, because the overall position of men and women in the gender order is different, that's what feminism is about, because of the massive economic and political inequalities."

This, she said, invited greater flexibility and coping strategies on the part of women.

"I think there are different strategies women adopt in a situation where men have predominant power ... then there will be different strategies that different groups of women adopt in response to that: some more combative, some more accepting or compromising."

She talks about the different ways ("interventions") being used to change patterns of masculinity to sustain more equal, less violent relationships with women.

"There's a lot of work that goes on about this, it doesn't attract much public attention usually, but there's work in the schools, there's work in development agencies, there are community programs around such things as violence prevention, that's one of the major areas of action, that are trying to change entrenched patterns, for instance domestic violence."

And she also credited the feminist community.

"Of course, a lot of feminist activity is trying to change patterns of interactions between men and women with the implied consequence that this may also change patterns of masculinity among men, as men and boys come to learn more democratic and respectful and equal ways of behaving towards women."

I asked her what actually works in changing these patterns. "That's very situational. What might work in a white suburb in Canada might not work in one of the cities of violence against women in Mexico, and what works or doesn't work there may or may not work in India. So I'm reluctant to say there's a one size fits all solution."

But there were commonalities, Connell said.

"Broadly, involving men in developing their own strategies for change is really important," and not only telling or ordering them to change. "Men themselves have to be engaged, boys have to be engaged in the process of changing gender relations. Often men will find it very interesting to do this, boys in schools want to learn about gender — it matters to them, it's important in their lives — so that kind of community education process I have a reasonable amount of faith in."

She also noted the need to work with and about institutions, specifically those like the military, police and prison system, where a lot of gender-based violence comes from — or in cases of post-conflict/rebuilding societies, to actually be designing the institutions from the ground up — to be gender inclusive, peaceable and respectful.

In terms of the required motivation or interest to engage in changing patterns, Connell called it an incremental process.

"We're dealing with a system of privilege and exclusion, and the people who benefit from that system are extremely unlikely to engage immediately in a large program of change ... Even in fairly hierarchical and violent institutions, some people can see that the long-term survival or welfare of the system depends on something changing. To give another example, parents often want good gender education in the schools, because they know that the world their kids will be living in is different than the world they grew up in, and they want the best for their kid, not necessarily a reproduction of what they got from their parents."

There are different patterns of masculinity, Connell said, "And that tells you from the start that there will be different responses to any proposals for change."

In terms of where we are now, she believed many countries have experienced an inter-generational shift in the last generation towards attitudes that favour more equality between men and women.

"But there are also situations in the world where things have gone very badly wrong for women," she said, citing the new patriarchy being constructed in Russia, and horrendous amount of gender-based violence in parts of Mexico near the U.S. border.

"Things can go wrong as well as things can go right, so that's what makes the politics of gender both difficult and urgent."

## Raewyn Connell

**Edited From Wikipedia:**  Born in 1944, Raewyn Connell is an Australian Sociologist and Professor at the University of Sydney and is internationally acclaimed for her work on hegemonic masculinity and men's studies. Raewyn is also a transsexual woman, completing her transition late in life and as such, almost all her earlier work was published under the gender-neutral name "R.W. Connell".



She was educated at Manly and North Sydney High Schools, and has degrees from the University of Melbourne and University of Sydney. She has held jobs at universities in Australia, including being the founding professor of sociology at Macquarie University 1976-1991. In the United States she was visiting professor of Australian studies at Harvard University 1991-1992, and professor of sociology at University of California Santa Cruz 1992-1995. She was a rank-and-file member of the Australian Labor Party (before the party shifted to the right in the early 1980s), and a trade unionist.

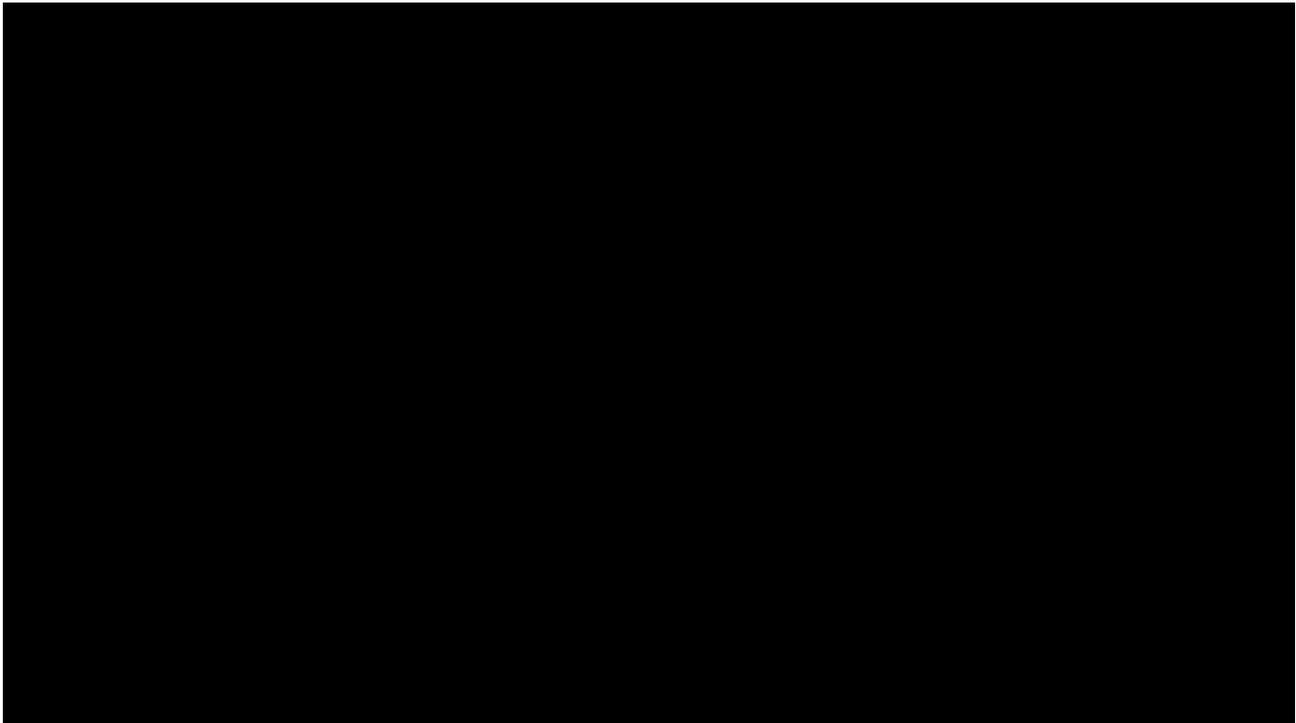
Raewyn first became known for research on large-scale class dynamics and the ways that class and gender hierarchies are re-

made in the everyday life of schools. In the late 1980s she developed a social theory of gender relations which emphasised that gender is a large-scale social structure and not just a matter of personal identity. In applied fields she has worked on poverty and education, sexuality and AIDS prevention, and labour movement strategy.

She is best known outside Australia for studies of the social construction of masculinity. She was one of the founders of this research field, and her book *Masculinities*, (published in 1995 and republished in 2005) is the most-cited book in the field. The concept of "hegemonic masculinity" has been particularly influential and has attracted much debate. She has been an advisor to UNESCO and UNO initiatives relating men, boys and masculinities to gender equality and peacemaking.

Connell's sociology emphasises the historical nature of social reality and the transformative character of social practice. Her writing tries to combine empirical detail, structural analysis, critique, and relevance to practice. Much of her empirical work uses biographical (life-history) interviewing, in education, family life and workplaces. She has written or co-written twenty-one books and more than 150 research papers. Her work is translated into sixteen languages.

For more information about Raewyn Connell, including her many thoughts on theory, intellectuals, gender and sexuality, masculinities, class, education and some of her poetry, please visit Raewyn's website.



Conversation with author of the book *Masculinities* - Raewyn Connell was one of four speakers on the "Breaking Barriers" plenary at the [Women's Worlds 2011 Conference](#) in Ottawa, Canada. This interview is conducted by Greg Macdougall, video production by Common Cause Media.



**Confronting Equality: Gender, Knowledge and Global Change**

Author: Raewyn Connell

Published by: Polity (2011)

I.S.B.N.-13 978-0745653518.

**From Amazon Books:** What does social equality mean now, in a world of markets, global power and new forms of knowledge? In this new book, Raewyn Connell combines vivid research with theoretical insight and radical politics to address this question. The focus moves across gender equality struggles, family change, class and education, intellectual workers, and the global dimension of social science, to contemporary theorists of knowledge and global power, and the political dilemmas of today's left. Written with clarity and passion, this book proposes a bold agenda for social science, and shows it in action. Raewyn Connell is known internationally for her powerfully argued and field-defining books *Masculinities*, *Gender and Power*, *Making the Difference*, and *Southern Theory*. This new volume gathers together a broad spectrum of her recent work which distinctively combines close-focus field research and large-scale theory, and brings this to bear on those questions of social justice and struggles for change that have long been at the heart of her writing, and will have wide-ranging implications for the social sciences and social activism in the twenty-first century.

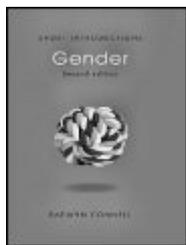
**Gender: Short Introductions**

Author: Raewyn Connell

Published by: Polity; 2 edition (2009)

I.S.B.N.-13 978-0745645681.

**From Amazon Books:** How can we understand gender in the contemporary world? What differences now exist between women and men? How are masculinities and femininities made? And



what is the impact of globalization on gender issues? Raewyn Connell, one of the world's leading scholars in the field, answers these questions and more. In this book she provides a readable introduction to modern gender studies, covering empirical research from all parts of the world in addition to theory and politics. As well as introducing the field, *Gender* provides a powerful contemporary framework for gender analysis with a distinctive global awareness. Highlighting the multi-dimensional character of gender relations, Connell shows how to link personal life with large-scale organizational structures and how gender politics changes its form in changing situations. The second edition of this influential and accessible book brings the review of research up to date and includes new discussions of gender theory in the global periphery, the legacy of colonialism, the intersection of structures, the impact of deconstructionist theory and politics, and understanding transsexual and transgender lives. *Gender* is engaged scholarship that moves from personal experience to global problems and offers a unique perspective on gender issues today.



#### Masculinities

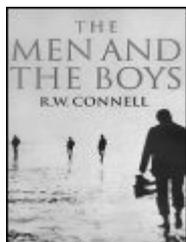
Author: Raewyn Connell

Published by: University of California Press; 2 edition (2005)

I.S.B.N.-13 978-0520246980.

**From Amazon Books:** This is an exciting new edition of R.W. Connell's groundbreaking text, which has become a classic work on the nature and construction of masculine identity. In its first edition, *Masculinities* provided one of the most important voices in feminist scholarship by men. Connell argued that there is no such thing as a single concept of masculinity, but, rather, that many different masculinities exist, each associated with different positions of power. In a world in which

gender order continues to extend privilege to men over women, but that also raises difficult issues for men and boys, Connell's account is more pertinent than ever. In the new edition's substantial new introduction and conclusion, Connell discusses the development of masculinity studies in the ten years since the book's initial publication. She explores global gender relations, new theories, and practical uses of masculinity research. Looking to the future, her new concluding chapter addresses the politics of masculinities, and the implications of masculinity research as a way of understanding current world issues. Against the backdrop of an increasingly divided world, one that is presently dominated by neo-conservative politics, Connell's account highlights a series of compelling questions about the future of human society. This second edition of Connell's classic book will be essential reading for students taking courses on masculinities and gender studies and will be of interest to students and scholars across the humanities and social sciences.



#### The Men and the Boys

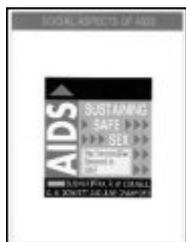
Author: Raewyn Connell

Published by: University of California Press (2001)

I.S.B.N.-13 978-0520228696.

**From Amazon Books:** Questions about men and boys have aroused remarkable media attention and public interest in recent years. But what have we learned about masculinity, and where is our thinking on the subject headed? In this important book, R.W. Connell continues her pioneering work by taking the next step in understanding the dynamics of contemporary masculinity: incorporating the international dimension. The first sustained discussion of masculinity and globalization, *The*

*Men and the Boys* links cutting-edge theory with fascinating case studies to point us toward change - in scholarship and public policy as well as in the lives of individual men. This powerful book looks at a range of intriguing and controversial subjects, including the question of sex between men, men's bodies and health, education, the prevention of violence, and much more. It includes the voices of many men, both straight and gay, in a series of vivid life histories that include a compelling account of "iron man" Steve Donoghue and many others who describe coming to terms with their sexuality, their childhoods, and their experiences at school and work. As he reveals the price men and boys across cultures pay for patriarchy, Connell makes a persuasive case for men to change their conduct in order to create a more cooperative and peaceful world.



#### Sustaining Safe Sex: Gay Communities Respond to AIDS. (Social Aspects of AIDS.)

Author: Raewyn Connell, June Crawford, G.W. Dowsett, Susan Kippax

Published by: Routledge (1993)

I.S.B.N.-13 978-0750701341.

**From Google Books:** AIDS is not simply a concern for scientists, doctors and medical researchers, it has important social dimensions too. These include cultural, individual and media responses to AIDS./AIDS., stigmatization and discrimination, perceptions of risk, and issues to do with counselling, care and health promotion. This new series of books brings together work from many disciplines including psychology, sociology, cultural and media studies, anthropology,

education and history.



Author: Raewyn Connell  
Published by: Stanford University Press (1987)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978-0804714303.

**From Amazon Books:**  This book is an introductory textbook on sexual politics and an original contribution to the reformulation of social and political theory. In a discussion of, among other issues, psychoanalysis, Marxism and feminist theories, the structure of gender relations, and working class feminism, the author has produced a work of synthesis and scholarship which should be of interest to students and professionals in sociology, politics, women's studies and to

anyone interested in the field of sexual politics.

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The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.