

A Level Sociology - Summer Work

To be handed in during the first week of term.

Overview

In Sociology A Level you will be expected to understand, explain and evaluate a number of key studies throughout the course. For this piece of work, you will be looking at a study about Gender Identity which is part of the Culture and Identity unit that you will start in September.

Before you start, it is important to note that in order to be successful in Sociology you will need to develop a 'toolkit' of skills including:

- Knowing and applying key ideas (concepts) in an argument eg: *hegemonic masculinity*
- Understanding and applying a 'perspective' (theory or viewpoint) eg: *feminism*
- Considering the usefulness of the research method used in a study eg: *interviews*
- Evaluating an argument by considering the pros and cons of a viewpoint in the context of today's society, often using current trends (contemporary examples) eg: *percentage of female breadwinners*

Task

Please write at least **two sides** (600 words) and answer the following: Discuss the significance of R.Connell's study on hegemonic gender identity. To do this, you need to read the material including:

1. Extract from Connell's study
2. Other sociological arguments
3. Current trends on male and female roles from the *British Social Attitudes Survey*

You may want to take brief notes first, or highlight the key points. Then, write a response following the broad plan outlined below.

- What are the main aims of Connell's research?
- What is hegemonic identity?
- How does Connell view hegemonic masculinity? Give examples
- What are the alternatives to hegemonic masculinity and are these alternatives relevant today? Extension: Can you find further alternatives? NB: Reference your source.
- Why have these changes emerged according to sociologists and how have some men reacted?
- Using research from the British Social Attitudes survey about changing gender roles, explain the significance of Connell's findings. Do the trends support or contradict her findings?
- Conclude by summarising the debate and offering a judgement. Is Connell's study useful/relevant and why?



1. Extract: *Hegemonic Gender Identity*
R. Connell, 1995, 2009

R. Connell argues there is no single version of masculinity or femininity in societies such as modern Britain. Instead, there are several different ways of being male and female. Nevertheless, there is still a dominant or hegemonic type of masculinity and a traditional set of ideas about how men and women are supposed to behave in the UK has dominated our culture until fairly recently.

Hegemonic masculinity in Britain today is the masculinity of white, middle-class men. It values rationality, control, power, toughness and dominance, and looks down on weakness and anything which is seen as being effeminate (behaviour and mannerisms seen as typical of women). From this point of view, openly displaying emotion and affection are seen as more feminine behaviours. Hegemonic masculinity still sees traditional gender roles as normal (if a little more flexible than in the past) with men still seen as the primary breadwinners and women as the primary carers. Hegemonic masculinity still assumes that men should be the head of the household. However, hegemonic masculinity is not the only type of masculinity; there are variations on it and new alternatives are emerging.

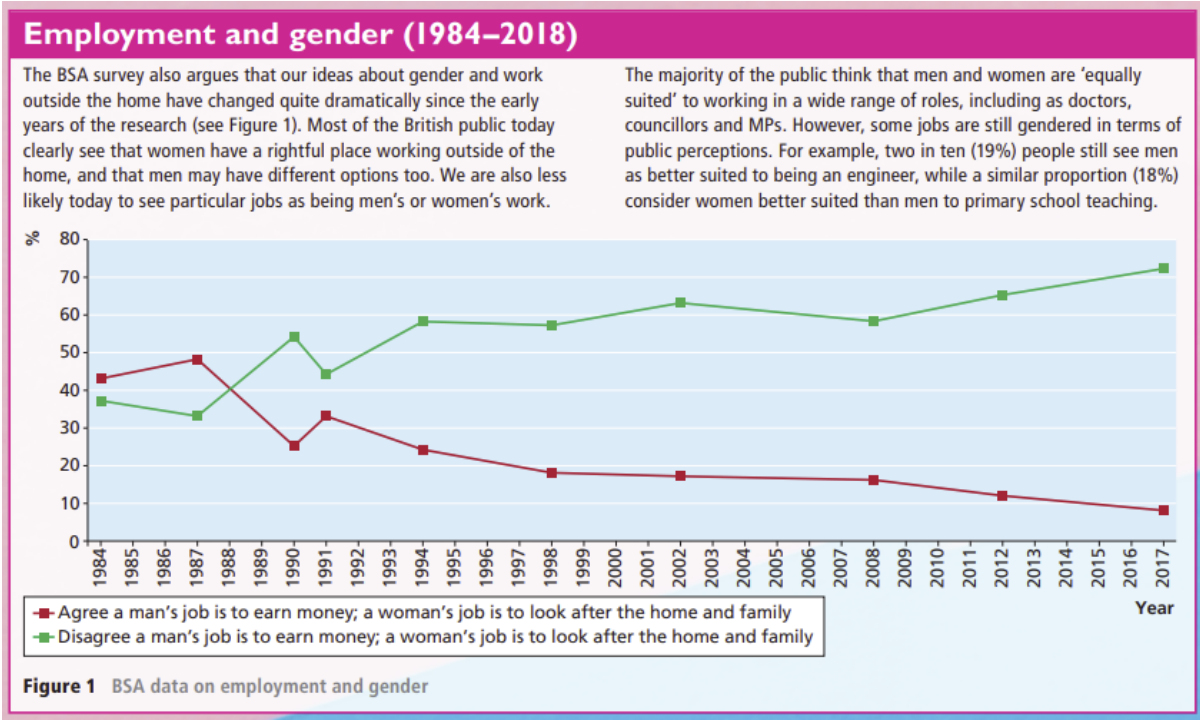
R. Connell argues that masculinity today is experiencing a change. There now exist, in addition to hegemonic types of masculinity, other alternative types of masculinity. They are not as high status as hegemonic forms, but they are at least becoming more acceptable. Gay masculinity is one example. Another is sensitive, non-competitive form of masculinity sometimes associated with men who have become vegetarians or who support the environment movement. Other sociologists have identified a range of new emerging types of masculinity:

2. Other sociological arguments

- Some sociologists suggest that a 'new man' has emerged in recent decades who is more in touch with his feminine and emotional feelings, and who shares childcare and housework with his female partner. However, others have suggested that is merely a creation of the advertising industry and that surveys show that although men have increased their share of domestic and childcare tasks, true equality within the home is a long way off.
- Mort (1996) has highlighted the emergence of metrosexual men. These are heterosexual males who are concerned with their image and consequently invest in personal grooming products such as hair conditioners and skincare products. David Beckham is often cited as a prime example of a metrosexual man
- Mac an Ghail (1996) claims that hegemonic masculinity may be experiencing a 'crisis of masculinity' because of the decline of traditional industries and the resulting unemployment. Work is central to the identity of traditional men, and unemployment can therefore lead to a loss of self-esteem and status as well as a loss of identification with others. Younger males may see their futures as bleak and so view schooling and qualifications as irrelevant to their needs. This may reinforce educational failure as they seek alternative sources of status in activities in which they can stress their masculinity, such as delinquency (minor crime) and gang violence.



3. Current trends on male and female roles from the British Social Attitudes Survey (below)



Childcare (2012–18)

The survey focuses on specific issues in each year. In its latest version, published in 2019 (based on interviews conducted in 2018), there were some interesting questions mapping changes in views around gender, identity and relationships. For example, one question looked at changes over time in views about childcare among those people with school-age children. There have been small studies during the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020 suggesting that women were picking up more childcare duties and household tasks. The BSA suggests some changes in views on gender, childcare and work, even when comparing 2012 with 2018 (see Table 1). Views seem to be shifting away from traditional ideas on this issue, even in this short period.

Table 1 Views on the best way for a family with a child under school-age to organise family and work life, 2012 and 2018

	2012 (%)	2018 (%)
The mother stays at home and the father works full time	31	19
The mother works part time and the father works full time	38	32
Both the mother and the father work full time	4	6
Both the mother and the father work part time	5	9
The father works part time and the mother works full time	—	*
The father stays at home and the mother works full time	*	*
Can't choose	19	30
Unweighted base	950	1504

* = fewer than 0.5% of respondents; — = zero