

“Omar comin’”: Examining hegemonic masculinities in *The Wire*

by

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Abstract

This research explores ways that masculinity is depicted in the HBO series *The Wire*, which aired for five seasons from 2002-2008. More specifically, I examine and analyze the character of Omar Little and his portrayals of hegemonic masculinities (HMs) and nonhegemonic masculinities (nonHMs) through a framework proposed by gender theorist James Messerschmidt. He calls for an unraveling of the concepts of HMs and nonHMs to aid in discovering which gender presentations accurately legitimate unequal patriarchal gender relations (2016). Omar Little transcends traditional notions of HMs based on his social location and provides insights about HMs and nonHMs that enhances clarity and understanding. An analysis of Omar’s gender presentation through the Messerschmidt framework offers young men and boys, and people in general, an opportunity to break away from the conventional ways in which masculinity is depicted and perceived in society. As an alternative to the traditional views of manhood that provide a standard to which young men and boys may feel compelled to fulfill, such representations of HMs and nonHMs in *The Wire* challenge the status quo and convey less oppressive and less violent ways of being a man.

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Chapter One: An Introduction to Hegemonic Masculinity and *The Wire*

The Wire is an American drama series that aired from 2002 to 2008 for five seasons on the television network Home Box Office (HBO). Numerous critics have highly acclaimed the series (such as Jones, 2018; Tucker, 2002; Weisberg, 2006; Wilde, 2007). Despite such praise, it was overlooked for drawing a huge audience and accruing awards (Bianco, 2008; Dillon & Crummey, 2015). Bianco (2008), a TV critic for *USA Today*, emphasizes several reasons why the series failed to produce a mass audience, one being the time length of series. He states, “If Simon wanted viewers to get to the end of the story, he clearly needed to get there faster himself.” In addition, an anonymous Emmy voter articulated their opinion about *The Wire*’s failure to win an Emmy: *The Wire*’s producers and actors are not visible in Los Angeles since the series is set and produced in Baltimore, people cannot relate to the drug culture in Baltimore, and complex plots are difficult to follow (as reported in Ryan, 2005). What *The Wire* has enjoyed that many popular shows do not is its ongoing critical acclaim and its role as the source of scholarly analysis, to which this thesis makes a contribution.

Research on *The Wire* has delved into one or more aspects of the political, social, and historical aspects of the show. Such aspects reflect its connection to the real-life implications of the “American dream”, such as capitalism, economic deprivation, social inequalities, gangs, murders, drugs, and the social institutions that help shape such destruction, disparity, and lies (Bandes, 2010; Deylami & Havercroft, 2015; Potter & Marshall, 2009). According to Chaddha and Wilson (2010), the show provides depth into the heart of such complex issues such as urban poverty, drugs, unemployment, and imprisonment, and their interconnected web that results in social inequalities in society, particularly for marginalized groups such as Black people.

However, such political and social events in *The Wire* are not my main focus. My main interest in *The Wire* is the concept of masculinity in general, and hegemonic masculinities (HMs) in particular. Few researchers have examined the construction of *The Wire* in relation to some form of masculinity (however, see Chakraborty, n.d.; Cooper, 2012; Deylami, 2015; Meaney, 2007; Peterson, 2009; Robbie, 2009; Waldron & Chambers, 2012; Wilson, 2017). During my exploration of the literature, which I detail in Chapter 2, I found one study that examined audience response to *The Wire*, specifically the fictional character, Omar Little, through a social justice perspective (LeBesco, 2009). Omar Little is depicted as a masculine renegade who deviates from the traditional notions of masculinity. Significantly, Omar is Black, gay, and poor. These central aspects of his social location are the context in which he demonstrates his masculinity. I explore and analyze Omar’s gender presentation, especially his presentation of hegemonic masculinities (HMs) and nonhegemonic masculinities (nonHMs) guided by Messerschmidt’s (2016) framework on HMs and nonHMs. My inquiry is guided by the question, *How might an analysis of Omar Little’s presentation of masculinity help to unravel hegemonic masculinities from nonhegemonic masculinities?* It is the task of unravelling that guides my research. My aim is to do so through an analysis of Omar Little’s gender presentation in the context of his social location.

I analyze Omar Little’s presentation of masculinities (HMs, dominant, dominating, and positive) and discuss various instances, using texts and visuals (see Appendix 1 for scenes and timeframes), to determine if they legitimate unequal gender relations or not. Put differently, the aim of my research is a content analysis by which to identify themes in Omar’s masculinity, guided by Messerschmidt’s framework on HMs and nonHMs.

What is Hegemony and how is it Connected to Masculinities?

Antonio Gramsci, a Marxist-thinker, is best known for conceptualizing the term “hegemony” in the 1920s. During his imprisonment from the Italian fascist regime, Gramsci wrote the *Prison Notebooks* between 1929 and 1935 (Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1999). For Gramsci, the term “cultural hegemony” described the dominance enacted by the civil and political states, which created hegemony through consent and coercion. The political states, such as criminal justice systems and police forces, control such power through force; however, civil states, such as media organizations and schooling, legitimize their power through consent. It is through consent and ideology by the ruling class that the masses are normalized and automatized. Thus, ideology is synonymous with power.

Since Gramsci, scholars have applied the concept of hegemony to various aspects of human society, including masculinity. Connell’s (1987) concept of hegemonic masculinity, for instance, refers to the way masculinity, through a masculine hierarchy, epitomizes and legitimizes the dominant ideologies associated with the idealized version of masculinity in relation to marginalized and subordinated masculinities. Such an arrangement of social hierarchy is developed and sustained through the means in which social institutions help to govern and control norms, values, beliefs, and behaviours. Positioned at the top of the hierarchy are the dominant groups—the elites that control the institutions and thus, help to perpetuate dominant ideologies and discourses in society in order to legitimize and maintain the dominant groups’ beliefs, values, and norms.

However, such power, as Foucault (Gordon, 1980) avers, can be resisted. Gramsci asserts that counter-hegemony can be produced as a means to deviate from the conventional and rupture the status quo. To diverge from common sense understandings of the world, then,

would mean to challenge the social institutions that perpetuate and legitimate normalcy. For example, Blair (2015) expresses that, from a musical point of view, David Bowie was one musician who ran counter to conventional music stars in the 1970's. The so-called glam rockstar challenged traditional notions of gender and sexuality.

In consideration of the forgoing claims about HM, a “critical” counter-hegemonic masculinity lens involves the study of critical theory, which, according to Horkheimer (1972/1982), “liberate[s] human beings from the circumstances that enslave them” (p. 244). Such counter-hegemonic masculinity, and I would add positive masculinities which will be described in more detail below, involves emancipating society by critiquing the social structures and power systems that help to shape it in hope of social change. Thus, combining HMs with critical theory provides opportunities to analyze the systems of power that govern and control how HMs are moulded and fostered in society, but also how they can be resisted and challenged.

HMs and nonHMs

Messerschmidt and Messner (2018) argue that HMs are differentiated from nonHMs, the latter including dominant and dominating masculinities as well as positive masculinities. According to them, “dominant” masculinities signify the most popular, powerful, celebrated, current, and widespread types of masculinity dependent on the social setting, while “dominating” masculinities refer to interactions that contain control, command, and power over situations and people (i.e. being the shot-caller) (Messerschmidt, 2016). “Positive” masculinities denote those relationships among and between men and women and other men as egalitarian (Messerschmidt, 2016).

These forms of masculinity build on Connell’s (1995) work wherein she coined the term “hegemonic masculinity” to refer to how dominant men sustain and legitimate their masculine power over women and marginalized men through the masculine hierarchy of what constitutes manhood in society. Messerschmidt and Messner (2018) further suggest that HMs are those that legitimate hierarchical gender and patriarchal relations. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) reformulated the concept of HM and made several revisions (which will be discussed further in the literature review section); one of which was a shift from HM (singular) to HMs (plural). Accordingly, I refer to hegemonic masculinities (HMs) in the plural throughout the thesis.

Drawing from the conceptualizations of nonHMs, and more specifically dominant, dominating, and positive masculinities, Messerschmidt (2012) highlights that such masculinities may or may not constitute HMs predicated on if they legitimate patriarchal relations or not. To put it another way, dominant and dominating masculinities may or may not correspond with HMs; however, if nonHMs overlap with HMs, it is because they legitimate patriarchal relations between and among women and other men. What Messerschmidt and Messner (2018) seem to suggest is that the litmus test of HMs is whether presentations of masculinity legitimize patriarchy. Thus, dominant, dominating, and positive masculinities might also be hegemonic but only if they perpetuate patriarchy and, consequently, inequality between men and women and among men. Messerschmidt (2016) suggests, “scholars must unravel dominant, dominating, and other types of nonhegemonic masculinities from hegemonic masculinities” (p. 34). Doing so is the aim of my research.

Connecting Media to Understanding Masculinities

Media, as a facet of popular culture, influences HMs stereotypes in society (Kareithi, 2014; Katz, 1999). Walton and Potvin (2009) argue that television, as one form of media, is

typically understood as mere entertainment. However, challenging the notion that television is simply entertainment unveils its influence on societal norms (Steinberg, 2007). Gauntlett (2002) and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) emphasize that various forms of entertainment media are cogent mediums through which dominant ideologies, ideas, norms, values, and discourses are reinforced and influence people in society. Such pressure can manifest as violence and other forms of behaviour (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Giroux (2011) contends that media have become a teaching machine that influences people's lives, behaviours, and social norms.

Images of masculine ideals in the entertainment industry, such as in magazines and advertisements, depict and disseminate for consumption notions of masculinities such as boxers, muscular football players, and military personnel. Some advertisements convey men's strength and virility. Other representations of manhood are represented through pornographic images of men sexually exploiting women (Katz, 1999), which overemphasize heterosexuality and the sexual conquest of women by men. In addition, Katz (1999) and Jackson and Moshin (2012) emphasize how different marginalized and subordinated groups, such as Black and gay men, are represented as lacking dominant ideals of masculinity within entertainment media.

Such portrayals of masculinities present to viewers, especially young men and boys, the standard of what it means to be masculine. Challenging representations of masculinity and using language that distinguishes between HMs and nonHMs through images and/or portrayals of men may help disrupt traditional notions of masculinity. With this conviction, young men and boys may be more informed about unequal gender relations in society. Such counter-hegemony, which would include “positive masculinities,” may also increase the possibility of changing what constitutes HMs in society. Thus, media can also be viewed as pedagogical (Kellner & Share, 2007). Making a distinction between HMs and nonHMs, as Messerschmidt (2016) put it, “further

facilitates the discovery and identification of ‘positive masculinities’, or those that actually may help to legitimate an egalitarian relationship between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities” (p. 34). Without such insights about HMs, combined with the broad assumption that movies and TV are “just entertainment,” men and boys risk the consequences of being *passive* rather than *active* consumers of media.

The theoretical framework of HMs and nonHMs draws directly from Messerschmidt’s (2016) conceptualizations that, according to him, offer opportunity for understanding HMs and what presentations constitute an unequal gender and/or patriarchal relation in society.

Who is Omar Little?

In the year 2012, when I was nineteen, I serendipitously came across the HBO television series *The Wire* while I was an undergraduate student. Although I did not watch it in its entirety at that time, what caught my attention was the character of Omar Little. His masculine appeal glistened as he strutted the streets. Such “street cred” was evident as the children and his enemies seemed to be in awe as he trekked across the community. He was aggressive and dominant compared to other men. What was interesting, though, was that I felt a deep connection to Omar. As previously described, he exuded various masculinities, some of which seemed to be unassociated with HMs. In other words, it seemed the case that Omar both adhered to and defied masculine norms. My perception led me to wonder how and under which conditions he broke away from masculine norms, and how he projects HMs and nonHMs?

Portrayed by Michael K. Williams, Omar is a modernized anti-hero character in *The Wire* and in US dramatic television, in general. He is one of the most prevalent and villainous characters in the show. His vocation is to rob drug dealers to make his livelihood. His criminal gangster-appeal layered with his furtiveness is compounded by a stark streetwise acumen.

Although his job of robbing drug dealers is often shrouded in secrecy, he prohibits the robbing of citizens—an ethical code by which he lives. Such a code allows him to enact violence only on those who are involved in criminality. Despite his anti-hero persona, Omar is mostly not a unique character in American television. *Dexter* is one example of television series, which ran from 2006 to 2013, in which an anti-hero character abides by an ethical code despite being a serial killer. Yet, the show appeals to audiences and viewers are meant to sympathize with the main character Dexter (Greig, personal communication, June 11, 2018). Such characteristics parallel Omar’s performances on screen; however, Omar’s most unique quality is his identity as a gay male, which sets him apart from other anti-heroes.

Omar is distinguished from other characters in the show by his visible scar across his face, cornrows, and long trench coat that oftentimes shrouds a shotgun—the primary weapon of choice (Collins, 2011). To many, he is seen as both a legend and a menace. Evident through the calling of his name in admiration but also to warn others of his presence, kids respect and acknowledge Omar as he infrequently treks through his community. Enemies perceive him as impenetrable and seem to avoid confrontations with such a legendary man (Brown & Kraehe, 2011). In addition to kids yelling, “Omar comin’!” as he swaggers through the community, they also imitate and emulate him.

Of critical importance to my study and my rationale for analyzing Omar Little are the social constructs he embodies, particularly that of being black, gay, and poor. Among White viewers, it would be easy to read Omar through a racist lens of “thug” despite his being gay. He is Black, causes violence, carries a gun, and lives in neglected Black neighbourhoods of Baltimore. However, a closer reading would indicate that his presentation of gender is unconventional, in which he both conforms to masculine norms and defies them. Such

transgressions to the status quo mean that while he adheres to masculine stereotypes by virtue of the qualities he possesses such as confidence, toughness, strength, and intimidation, he also defies them by also being gay, as well as possessing atypical masculine characteristics such as compassion, sympathy, and empathy.

Although *The Wire* ended in 2008, it remains relevant to explore the show as a way to examine and understand HMs from nonHMs. Potentially, the character of Omar might serve to inform young men and boys about HMs and nonHMs through what constitutes patriarchal relations and perhaps allowing some young men and boys to break away from their own presentations of HMs. In the show, boys in Omar’s neighbourhood admire him and look up to him. For real young men and boys, an examination of Omar’s presentation of masculinity can be an opportunity to learn about HMs and perhaps step outside of them.

In the film *Tough Guise: Violence, Media, and The Crisis in Masculinity*, directed by Sut Jhalley (1999), Jackson Katz, an anti-violence educator, demonstrates that men and boys are often placed in a narrow box of masculine stereotypes that provide them with ways of being a man such as being physically tough and physically strong. Stepping outside the masculine box and portraying non-traditional masculine characteristics such as empathy and compassion, may lead men and boys to be labelled a “fag” or a “sissy.” It may be the case that some men, perhaps cisgender men, may recognize masculine norms and begin to change the way they perceive it by breaking away from the conventional ways HMs and nonHMs are enacted by such men. It may also mean that those who deviate from such masculine norms that privilege White, cisgender men, such as gay and Black men, may have a better understanding as to why intersectionality matters to gender presentation and identity. In any case, because masculinities are subject to change and hegemony can be challenged, resisted, and adjusted (Connell & Messerschmidt,

2005), many scholars urge researchers to explore masculinities and alternative ways of being a man (e.g., Kimmel & Messner, 1995; Kimmel, 2008; Groes-Green, 2012) as well as the complexities of, and resistances to, masculinities (Christensen & Jenson, 2014).

Examining how Omar Little portrays HMs and nonHMs might lead to unraveling HMs and nonHMs in light of his being Black, gay, and poor. My thesis research is aimed at doing so. As I began to design the research for this thesis, I considered Omar Little’s behaviours, body language, facial expressions, and words as a collective text to gain insights that led to assessing them as HMs or nonHMs, or both. By analyzing Omar Little in such a way, it was my hope to develop insights on HMs by which readers might see similar patterns of HMs and nonHMs in other media. Thus, in Chapter 5, my discussion highlights educational possibilities and implications.

Who Am I?

Meet Jamie: a White, heterosexual male with a desire to be a young, Canadian badass. He thrived in athletic environments and it was this athleticism that enabled him to earn respect and popularity within the school. Working construction in an atmosphere filled with White, arrogant, and muscular men created a “tough guy” appearance. In addition, pursuing attractive women was on his full-time agenda, while education was non-existent. Attending parties at odd hours of the night was also a social event that allowed him to exude his masculinity.

That was the old me: immersing myself in a civilization of masculinity and/or HM. What I mean by this is that everything I participated in, including things such as sports, womanizing escapades, “tough guy” jobs (i.e. construction), skipping classes, being intellectual but not too intellectual, and working out consistently, constituted a performance-oriented lifestyle that focused primarily on how “manly” I could be. It was during these years that I often thought to

myself: how can merely “being a man” hold so much potential for popularity, status, money, and power in society? How about those men who do not conform to the stereotypical image of the idealized “real man”? High school sports were one area in the school that seemed to be, to a greater extent, about power, dominance, and masculinity.

In a particular instance, during a football practice, one of the coaches raised and boasted the question: “Are you hurt, or are you injured?” He answered his rhetorical question with something along the lines of: “If you are hurt you can continue to play, but if you are injured, then you have an excuse to come off the field.” In that instance, EVERYONE knew their role and the code of manhood: if you are hurt, suck it up and be a man; and if you are injured, it implied that if something terrible happens, and only something extremely awful, then you *may* come off the field. In other words, “grow some balls” and “be a man!” Such stereotypes of HM were often not thought about, nor did I care enough to even challenge or resist the status quo. Again, I was athletic, muscular, cisgender, White, lived a middle-class existence, and being a heterosexual out on the proverbial prowl, it was a common endeavour to flirt with attractive women. It was not until becoming educated in this domain that I began to think critically about my own behaviour and my unearned privilege in this world.

I also began to recognize the intersectionality of social categories that are interconnected with masculinity. This meant that I started to realize that not all men benefit equally from the patriarchal society of Western culture in the same ways as other men. Some men seemed to have more unearned privileges than others based on a masculine hierarchy (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Such masculine stratification means that I, being at the tip of the spear of masculinities as a heterosexual, able-bodied, White, male—and embodying specific characteristics (i.e. hegemonic masculinity), benefit and have more advantages than, for

example, most men of Colour, gay men, or able-bodied (cognitively or physically) people. What this also means is that minoritized men are perceived to lack masculine qualities that are consistent with HM.

Although I am a White and heterosexual male, accompanied by the many privileges that are associated with these identities, such social factors also created a sense of pressure and conformity as to how a man *should* be. Such factors are shaped by the way social institutions help to influence and govern gender norms (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Kimmel, 2008; Martino & Greig, 2012; Pascoe, 2007; Sussman, 2012; Thomson, 2002). Although I may not be oppressed in the way that minoritized men typically are, I was still affected by conforming to the narrow box of hegemonic masculine norms in Western culture. I felt compelled to portray and maintain my hegemonic masculine image without showing signs of atypical masculine norms such as weakness, vulnerability, empathy, gratitude, and compassion. Talking about or discussing my feelings with a friend or family member was out of the question. To do such a thing would label me with the epithets “pussy” or “fag.”

Again, despite the fact that I present and am perceived by others as demonstrating various “manly” characteristics, as a White, heterosexual male, I was also vulnerable, sensitive and had artistic characteristics considered uncommon for “alpha” males. In other words, I became privy to the fact that the way I projected my masculine persona was a façade in which my other non-traditional masculine traits were veiled. Being able to rupture such normative conventions of masculinity allowed me to change my own persona and idea of what it means to be a man. Looking back, if I had been taught to deviate from such masculine normalcy, perhaps I would have felt more comfortable presenting atypical masculine traits to the world without feelings of guilt and/or shame of not measuring up to manhood mores.

It is interesting how I was never able to break away from the conventional. Never once did I feel the need to let my artistic side become evident to others; very rarely did I show empathy for others; never did I reveal that I was actually vulnerable and scared in certain situations. Such masculine-generated behaviours led me to believe that “a man” was *always* confident, muscular, dominant, and competitive; to deviate would mean that I was not a man. What I often think about is the fact that I was *never* taught about HMs or nonHMs. For example, in school, such a concept was avoided and/or ignored. To be honest, exhibiting stereotypical masculine qualities were probably more encouraged in school, perhaps even implicitly (Mac an Ghaill, 1994), than not. Thus, my thesis is founded upon the hope that it would be of value, including to myself, to explore and analyze HMs and nonHMs. A focus on Omar Little is a compelling way to do so. Such an analysis may help to unravel the language used to identify HMs and nonHMs and which masculine presentations are considered to legitimate patriarchal relations.

People who have an influence on young men’s and boys’ lives, such as teachers, should teach about HMs as well as characteristics that are considered atypical in gender presentation such as empathy and compassion, though I acknowledge that such characteristics may vary widely across groups and cultures. More importantly, policymakers within the Ministry of Education should place emphasis on such re-structuring so that it can aid in teachers becoming more competent in their pedagogical approaches to teaching about HMs. Such pedagogical insights may help lead to the rupturing of conventional norms of HMs and to accepting alternative ways of being a man. In addition to policymakers and teachers promoting the exploration of HM in schools and, inevitably, classrooms, the public pedagogy of *The Wire*, may help young men and boys to understand how HMs play a role in their own existence and help to

shape masculinities that are less oppressive and more atypical in their masculine presentation. Ultimately, identifying HMs and nonHMs from Omar Little’s gender presentation in *The Wire* may be helpful in fostering resistance and change towards HMs.

Terminology

In this thesis, I use relevant terms that are defined as follows:

Hegemonic masculinity (HM). Hegemonic masculinity, described by Connell (1995), is how dominant groups legitimate their masculinity, which marginalizes women and other groups of men. To put another way, the notion of HM reflects unequal gender relations among and between women and other men that is relational and legitimates patriarchy in society. Men, through diverse characteristics such as toughness, high socioeconomic status, breadwinning, and muscularity, portray such hegemonic masculine norms.

Intersectionality. Intersectionality involves how people in society, based on their social locations (e.g., race, ethnicity, sex, and gender), are connected to various forms of privilege and oppression simultaneously. In other words, such social locations work collectively (Hankivsky, 2014), thus affecting everyone differently. It seems plausible, then, that social locations may affect masculinity, and in particular, those who embody HM, both relegating and advancing some men within the masculine hierarchy (Christensen & Jensen, 2014).

Counter-hegemony. A concept derived from Antonio Gramsci’s conceptualization of hegemony. He considered hegemony to be the way in which the ruling class legitimizes its dominance over other (social) groups through consent. Such persuasion often leads the general population to understand things as natural and/or normal (Donaldson, 1993). Counter-hegemony, then, involves the way people challenge and resist normative assumptions, beliefs, and expectations (Cox & Schilthuis, 2012). In the context of hegemonic masculinity, counter-

hegemony would mean to challenge and/or resist dominant constructions of masculinity. For example, a man showing empathy towards his son would run counter to the dominant construction of masculinity in the sense that perhaps some fathers feel they need to project a masculine bravado towards their male children (Katz, 1999).

Organization

In this chapter, I explained the purpose and rationale for the research I conducted for this thesis. In the next chapter, I offer a review of the literature about HMs. I examine the influence of gender and masculinity studies on HMs, and later, discuss the extant critiques of HMs. I then explore the theoretical terrain pertaining to the intersectionality of masculinity and the potential risk factors involved. Moreover, an in-depth investigation of HMs in *The Wire* is also explored.

Chapter Three provides a description of critical discourse analysis (CDA), the methodology I utilized in my research. I also provide the reader with a methods section on how I conducted my research by analyzing Omar’s presentation of HMs and nonHMs. CDA offers a theoretical framework for identifying and interpreting the way in which Omar Little portrays HMs and nonHMs.

In Chapter Four, I present and discuss my findings. In particular, I introduce Omar’s presentation of HMs and nonHMs and later, discuss findings that resonate with extant literature. Finally, in Chapter Five I propose future directions for research and offer concluding insights on the educational value of understanding HMs and nonHMs.

Chapter Two: Hegemonic Masculinity: An Exploration of The Literature

In this chapter, I examine theories of HMs and highlight debates about it that have evolved over the years. Specifically, I analyze gender and masculinity, and afterwards I problematize HMs. I delineate an intersectionality approach and discuss the toxic effects of masculinity and accruing masculine capital. Intersectionality is useful in this study by virtue of the intersection of diverse social locations such as gender, race, and class, in relation to the ways in which systems of power such as military, media, and laws help shape privilege and oppression in society (Hankivsky, 2014). It is noteworthy that, at times, I refer to HM in the singular, since some researchers refer to HM as opposed to HMs, which highlights the need to expand and provide accurate language for such a critical concept.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I address the following research question: *How might an analysis of Omar Little’s presentation of masculinity help to unravel hegemonic masculinities from nonhegemonic masculinities?*

My research adds to the terrain of the literature by focusing on HMs and nonHMs of *The Wire*, especially through the gender presentation of Omar Little. Analyzing Omar Little’s gender presentation led to plausible messages that may potentially be conveyed to viewers in general, and young men and boys in particular, about HM.

Gender

As a child, it seemed inherent, at least to me, that sex and gender were dependent on one another. In other words, it seemed natural that if one was born with a penis, then one must be male and thus, a boy. However, as I became educated in the domain of gender studies, I began to question this view and formulate my own conceptions of what constitutes gender overall and masculinity specifically.

West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender is not what one is, but rather what one “does”, predicated on social arrangements. From my understanding, then, gender is based upon situations wherein one positions oneself and how others, therefore, evaluate one. In her 1990 book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, influential gender theorist Judith Butler follows West and Zimmerman (1987) asserting that gender is a socially constructed phenomenon that is independent of sex. She rejects the essentialist view and proposes that sex does not determine one’s gender; rather, gender is “performative.” In lieu of innate characteristics that are assumed, she describes it as “an incessant activity performed, in part, without one’s knowing and without one’s willing” (Butler, 2004, p. 2), socially produced and reproduced through social interactions and institutions, such as schools, media, and families, within a given culture.

The social constructionist view of gender proposed by Butler (2004) debunks the myth that gender might be biological. Such a myth means that when a baby is born its gender identity is assigned at birth based on visual inspection of genitalia. Most babies who have penises are assigned “boy” and facets of masculinities are activated immediately. For example, boys are steered towards the colour blue, while the colour pink is often avoided (LoBue & DeLoache, 2011), although in other cultures, colour traditions at birth may be different from those in Western societies. Toys such as vehicles and tools are more likely to be provided for boys, while girls are more likely to be provided with dolls and fictional characters (Pomerleau, Bolduc, Malcuit, & Cossette, 1990). Sports also seem to be regulated in similar ways for boys, such as encouraging physical contact sports, such as football and hockey, and shaming so called soft-sports such as cheerleading and dance. Specifically, gender identity is assigned at birth by the association of cultural values, beliefs, and norms, and the regulation of gender presentation

thereafter, is fostered. It is through regulating certain arenas of society, such as sports (i.e. “hard sports” are for men and “soft sports” are for women), and repeating such normalcy over time, that normalization becomes “normal.”

For Spade and Valentine (2008), gender is parallel to a prism: as light passes through it, it becomes a variety of vibrant colours, emphasizing the complexities and malleability of gender as multifaceted and fluid. According to Aaron H. Devor (in de Guerre, 2015), factoring in the complex cross-cultural history of gender suggests that quantifying gender into typologies need to be factored beyond the number two. Such considerations problematize the often-assumed dichotomous nature or dualism of gender that permeates society. For example, people easily assume that men enjoy lifting weights and building muscle whereas women appreciate wearing make-up and “dressing-up”. Such normalization is perhaps what Foucault described as “régime of truth” where discourses in every society have acceptable and falsified statements of truth (Gordon, 1980, p. 131). Again, it seems as though gender normalization through repetition systematizes the masses.

Potvin (2011) offers a vivid example of normalization through school spaces such as sports. She contends that football players are assumed to be male and extol the virtues of aggressiveness, muscularity, and power, whereas cheerleaders are assumed to be female and possess qualities such as being thin, petite, and beautiful. She further explains, “there is no handbook” that articulates these understandings of gendered patterns in society (p. 17). From my experiences participating in the ragged and robust sport of football in high school, I noticed that girls who endeavoured to be on the team were excluded and in a way, coerced to quit. Evidently, these girls were challenging the status quo by resisting the power that institutions hold with respect to gendered norms and sports. But oftentimes, as they probably found out, it is difficult to

escape such ideologies. Similarly, Schacht (1996) claims that male rugby players oftentimes reinforce and produce masculinity through typical images that define manhood such as strength, pain tolerance, and misogynistic criticism.

Boy football players, on the other hand, often gawked at the girls who were trying out for the team and engaged in discourses in the locker room afterwards that were frequently sexist. Even the coaches, by ways of attitude and speech, seemed to be in awe. Such attitudes and values, I argue, create drawbacks. For instance, they infer that, a) women possess a subordinate position to men; and b) females are compared to the dominant gender: males. As one would guess, they ended up quitting and departed from the rough terrain of playing football to become the “water girls”. A transfer from the sport to a so-called “girls’ job” highlights broader implications such as the conventional role women often play within the household: being subservient to men. Such power imbalances between males and females are evident not only in sport but in broader areas of society based on a patriarchal system where men hold power and dominance over women and where men compete with each other for dominance over other men (Atkinson, 2011; Knuttila, 2016). Such implicit understandings of gender in schools, including other arenas within the school, such as the curriculum and classrooms, produce and reproduce norms, values, and beliefs (Martino & Pallota-Chiarolli, 2003).

Viewing gender through a social constructionist lens ruptures the dichotomous thinking of gender and reconceptualizes it. Stereotypical notions of masculinity presume that gender is a mutually exclusive duality. A reconceptualization opens the door for a proliferation of gender identities and expressions (Devor, 1989). With this understanding, then, viewing *The Wire* through the lens of Messerschmidt (2016) offers to enhance clarity and understanding of HMs and nonHMs and may potentially inform young men and boys in particular, and people in

general, about HMs. In the following section, I cast a critical lens on masculinity, or rather *masculinities*, which shadows Butler’s (1990), Spade and Valentine’s (2008), and West and Zimmerman’s (1987) assessments about gender.

Masculinities

Masculinity tends to be observed through an essentialist lens of gender whereby gender is presumed an essential element of human beings, perhaps as a genetic code. For masculinity, specifically, an essentialist theory might involve testosterone theory (Atkinson, 2011). Such a theory was sought to define masculinity as an inherent biological identity (Sussman, 2012). Sapolsky (1997), an American neuro-endocrinologist, emphasizes that testosterone plays a role in human behaviour, especially with respect to aggression, but it is not the sole aspect. He suggests that behaviour such as violence goes beyond merely a genetic reason and is associated with other factors such as social and environmental influences. Sussman (2012) contends that a genetic masculine DNA code is nonexistent in the human genes. If testosterone plays the most important role in determining masculine behaviour, *all* men would hold similar qualities, characteristics, beliefs, norms, and values across local, regional, and global contexts. For example, Sasson-Levy (2014) explains that in Israeli culture, masculinity is achieved through joining the military, whereas Herdt (1982) found that the Sambian tribe in Papua New Guinea accomplished masculinity through homosexual relations, more specifically pederasty, as well as other rituals that they considered sacred. Thus, many people in diverse cultures, nations, and societies enact various *masculinities* rather than a single, over-arching, and monolithic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Martino & Greig, 2012).

The transition from masculinity to masculinities allows for a more accurate representation of the historical, social, cultural, and political forces that affect the diverse ways

people enact masculinities (Connell, 1995; 2006; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Kimmel, 2008; Martino & Greig, 2012; Sussman, 2012; Thomson, 2002). In particular, masculinities are socially constructed and produced and reproduced through social institutions such as families, peer groups, media, school, and religion, to name a few.

A critical point to highlight, however, is that masculinities are not the exclusive domain of men; many women also enact masculinities in various ways. In *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam (1998) contends that since masculinity can be understood as a social construction rather than a biological one, it seems reasonable to assume that social scripts of masculinity can be extrapolated to the idea of females portraying masculinity. In this sense, male masculinities, such as heroic ones, can be perceived across both females and males, meaning that “male masculinities” is a misnomer. Perhaps this is most notably personified through the famous Rosie the Riveter propaganda campaign during World War II, which sought to increase women’s non-traditional roles in the workforce economy (Honey, 1984). The iconic figure highlighted the need to empower female workers and shift the public opinion about typical men’s industrial occupations that were proscribed for women (Alves & Roberts, 2012).

As Kossoudji and Dresser (1992) clarify, although women began working in non-traditional careers outside of the home, many women were laid-off after World War II and relegated back to traditional employment such as homemaking. Fast-forward to contemporary society and through the emergence of second wave feminism, women have made gains in various professional sectors previously relegated exclusively to men. Although such a transition has led to an increase in women in the workforce, men continue to possess a superior rank in society. Given men’s higher rank in society, HMs retain its legitimacy and power through the systematic oppression of women that works to keep them in their proverbial place as a

subordinate position to men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). It is also the case that such dominance over women, through the social organization of masculinity, works together to disadvantage some men, which will be explained in more detail below, and underscores my focus on HMs.

Hegemonic Masculinity

As I discussed above, hegemony, as a concept theorized by Gramsci (Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1999), highlights the way in which reigning structural forces, such as the government, employed a covert way of controlling the masses through ideological persuasion rather than brute force (Hearn, 2004). His theory describes how power is achieved through ascendancy by propagating norms, values, and beliefs through consent (Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1999). The process of normalization, as Foucault (1975/1977) articulates, is embedded within institutions such as schools, hospitals, and factories to name a few, with the intention of controlling and homogenizing society. Connell (1995) conceptualized hegemonic masculinity as an idealized form of masculinity, which some men, perhaps even most, endeavour to emulate. It is situated at the pinnacle of the gender hierarchy by which all other masculinities within a gender order, including subordinated and marginalized, as well as women, are measured (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985; Connell, 1995). For those who do not conform, it seems as though they are subordinated.

Connell (1995) extrapolates from Gramsci's (Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1999) theory of hegemony to theorize HM, which seems to be an inherent and common-sense-like idea of masculinity imbedded throughout society. Widely considered to be the pinnacle of masculinities in a certain culture and society, HM produces and reproduces power and authority over other men and women through, as Knuttila (2016) explains, the patriarchal dividend. The patriarchal

dividend benefits most men and oppresses women by virtue of economic and political means (Connell, 1996a). Under a patriarchal system, Connell (1995) contends that such prestige is shone through admiration and honour in addition to the material benefits that men possess.

However, it should be noted that not all men benefit equally from the dividend such as gay men and some working-class men (Connell, 1996a). It seems reasonable to assume that privileged men continue to gain from the patriarchal dividend, and social institutions produce and reproduce such benefits for those men who are complicit in such hegemonic practices. Such ideas are evident in how Jewkes et al. (2015) conceptualize HM as:

a set of values, established by men in power that functions to include and exclude, and to organize society in gender unequal ways. It combines several features: a hierarchy of masculinities, differential access among men to power (over women and other men), and the interplay between men's identity, men's ideals, interactions, power, and patriarchy (p. 113).

Connell argues that HM, then, is organized in relation to nonhegemonic masculinities characterized by subordinated, marginalized, complicit, and protest masculinities. Those who are marginalized but maintain power in Western contexts, stereotypical of local hegemonic masculinities, demonstrate protest masculinities; however, they lack power at the institutional levels in which violence and aggression may ensue. The term “protest” seems to imply that some men lack the confidence in their masculine identity, which leads some men to act out in destructive, violent, aggressive, and criminal ways (Broude, 1990). For example, Connell (1995/2005) articulates that young men who are unemployed “have lost most of the patriarchal dividend. For instance, they have missed out on the economic gain over women that accrues to men in employment” (p. 116). Thus, poverty and marginalization may influence some men to

use violence.

On the other hand, the majority of men express complicit masculinities. It seems as though complicit masculinities are those that generally do not measure up to expectations of HM, but still receive certain privileges from the patriarchal order. Marginalized masculinities are related to men whose class and race are disenfranchised in society. Subordinate masculinities are men whose material reality deviates from normative masculine practices (Connell, 1995). People who hold subordinate masculinities are those such who identify, or are perceived, as a sexual or gender minority (Rogan, 2015) as well as straight men’s gender presentations that are considered to be feminine. Such masculinities are important to note because they position themselves in relation to HM.

Learning Hegemonic Masculinity

Bodies also play an intricate role in the establishment of HMs. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) contend that bodies are linked to social practices in which they exist. Connell (2001) acknowledges that bodies are agents and objects in social practice. More specifically, bodies help shape “social action” by outlining the “courses of social conduct” that aid in producing “social practice” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 851). Kehler and Atkinson (2010) investigated the way schools help shape dominant ideologies such as muscularity and dominance, leaving some boys who lack such advantages vulnerable and exposed to pejorative language. One way that schools participate in the making of bodies is through school sport where the exemplification of a “dangerous and ruggedly” masculine man may be personified through a competitive environment (p. viii).

Asch and Fine (1992) express that “having a disability [is] seen as synonymous with being dependent, childlike, and helpless—an image fundamentally challenging all that is

embodied in the ideal male: virility, autonomy, and independence” (p. 141). Thus, disabled men in particular are in conflict with masculinity (Shuttleworth, Wedgwood, & Wilson, 2012). For instance, Ostrander (2008) conducted a study of eleven former and current young men gang members who had a violently-acquired spinal cord injury (VASCI). In addition to other factors concerning their injury such as environmental effects, a major finding was that the men thought of themselves as less manly and focused on their identity as a male with a disability rather than a *person* who is disabled. Moreover, the participants discussed masculinity issues pertaining to sexual partners and encounters, defending oneself, and body image.

Another example wherein some men and boys learn such hegemonic traits is through societal forces such as the pervasive media organization. Various forms of entertainment media are powerful venues through which ideologies, ideas, norms, values, and discourses of masculinity are reinforced and influence boys and men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Gauntlett, 2002). Donald and MacDonald (2011) aver that films associated with war, adventure and westerns, reinforce manhood mores. For example, *Rambo* personifies masculinity wherein his chiselled body, womanizing persona, warrior mentality, and dominance ensures the audience that he is in fact a hero, and in my view, ensures that heroic masculinity is normative (Muse, 1993), although I acknowledge that not all war films coincide with the narrow representations of masculinity in *Rambo*. *Saving Private Ryan* is a key example. Released in 1998, *Saving Private Ryan* is a war film that portrays U.S. soldiers that embark on a mission to find a fellow soldier, Private Ryan, and along the way embark on their own personal journeys.

Given these theories about HM, it is not surprising that the majority of violent crime in Western contexts is perpetrated by men (Katz, 1999), including domestic violence (Hester, 2009), school shootings (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003), arson, murder, aggravated assault (Federal

Bureau of Investigation, 1999), sexualized violence including rape, and murder and non-negligent manslaughter (Crime in the United States, 2011). Men have higher rates of suicide in most countries as compared to females (Hawton, 2000), are less likely to seek help through professional assistance (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Vogel, Heimerdinger-Edwards, Hammer, & Hubbard, 2011), indulge in more risky behaviours (Connell, 2002) such as reckless driving, drug taking, undue alcohol intake, and sex-seeking activities (Kimmel, 2008), and are more prone to HIV due to the connection of masculinity and virility (UNICEF, 1997).

According to Powell (2008), “domestic violence in the African American community is affected by various factors such as concentrated poverty, high levels of unemployment, and a lack of affordable housing” (p. 312). Hawkins (2018) states that the Black underclass in America is associated with high levels of violence such as interpersonal aggression. Such research reflects Ford’s (2011) research that found that Black men’s idealized masculinity is projections of characteristics such as strength and toughness. This leads me to believe that violence related to non-white men intersect with class and race in the sense that people who are non-white and underclass may engage in violent behaviour as a way to cope with their ongoing struggles with dimensions of oppression such as economic deprivation and racial identity, not to mention as a way to assert power in ways that are available.

Connell (1995), with many other scholars such as Kimmel and Mahler (2003), and Murnen, Wright, and Kaluzny (2002), suggest that the underlying issue in these forms of violence is gendered norms of masculinity and their connection to violence. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) contend, many men are pressured to conform to masculine norms of being tough and unemotional, and from my standpoint, avoid accusations of being “soft” or even a “queer” or a “fag.” Pascoe (2007) articulates that people who do not conform to stereotypical

gendered norms will likely face negative repercussions such as verbal harassment.

Huesmann (2007) found that violence and aggression are normalized in contemporary society through violent depictions on TV and in other media. As discussed above, Giroux (2011) describes this social influence as public pedagogy, meaning that entertainment media have become a dominant source of mass teaching, and in my view, a type of teaching machine, that influences people’s lives, behaviours, and social norms. Such pressure, shaped by the power of media, can manifest as dominance, control, power, and violence (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Given the aforementioned claims, such gendered norms of masculinity and their connection to violence, the social organization of masculinity, the presence of bodies, and the power of media organizations, are critical to understand in connection to my research study. Such concepts are important because Omar Little, the character in *The Wire*, both supports such HMs and nonHMs as previously described, and is antithetical to the normative construction of masculinity. In other words, an openly gay and Black man, as personified by Omar Little, both defies and conforms to HMs. It is with this contention that I analyzed HMs and nonHMs with respect to Omar Little.

Critiques of HMs

Although HM seems to be a monolithic and fantasized in the way that it is portrayed in popular culture and media, there have been notable critiques and criticisms that must be examined from a critical standpoint. Wetherell and Edley (1999) contend that the concept of HM lacks the practicality of mundane life. That is, it focuses excessively on the theoretical aspects such as the idea that there is one fixed caricature of HM without taking into account the construction of the concept in multiplicity. In addition, they assert that it examines social norms

and characteristics people possess such as strength and toughness, and ignore the psychological aspects.

Jefferson (2002) is one researcher who rejects the view that the concept of HM should be used in singular form. Rather, he asserts that there are various hegemonic masculine contexts. From my understanding, depending on the particular corners of one's social world, some men may hold hegemonic power in one location but lack the power in another. In other words, although there may be one (perceived ideal) type of manliness in the public eye, power is situated differently dependent on the public and private spheres of one's social world (Coles, 2009). Therefore, one may fit the (perceived) hegemonic ideal in the public sense, but in different situations may fail to attain that image.

Coles (2009) enhances this interpretation by recognizing that HM does not take into account the lived realities of men in relation to the domination of other men, irrespective of a subordinate position in a social location. He argues that multiple “dominant” masculinities constitute a more accurate representation of HM since he maintains that minoritized groups can be identified as having a dominant masculine position in society dependent upon subfields. He offers the example that gay men can have their own dominant gay masculinities that exist within HM (e.g., being sexually aggressive). Coles' (2009) and Jefferson's (2002) arguments are convincing and offer a more nuanced approach that acknowledges the lives of men in relation to the individual himself and the individual in relation to diverse social groups.

Expounding further, consider, for instance, that an intellectual, White, heterosexual male, who is a doctor, entering into the social world of a construction worker may feel intimidated, scared, and lack the competence to work construction. By examining the psychological aspects that Wetherell and Edley (1999) noted, as well as the social context (i.e., construction work), it

seems as though specific social contexts might negatively impact individual men. Although they may be “successful” based on financial status, as well as possess hegemonic masculinity such as heterosexuality and thus, hold a superior hierarchical status, it is unclear whether such masculinity holds when entering an unfamiliar arena. From my understanding, Atkinson (2011) describes this as “pastiche hegemony” in the sense that an individual may only contain power in one social setting but not within other social settings. By extension, Atkinson (2011) explains that an individual may hold power within the home, but lack such authority in work settings, which may be the case for working-class men. Pastiche hegemony, then, supports Butler’s (1990) notion of “performativity” and West and Zimmerman’s (1987) theory that illustrates that gender is always “doing”. It also supports Goffman’s (1956) notion of dramaturgy, which builds on the idea that life is a stage and social actors take on various roles depending on the specific and immediate context as well as cultural values, beliefs, and norms. Such dramaturgical analysis highlights the way people act, how others perceive them, and how they perceive others in social interactions similar to that of a theatrical performance. In a literal way, the model connects to masculinity as it is portrayed in shows such as *The Wire*, and specific to my research, Omar Little’s presentation of hegemonic masculinity. Such concepts suggest that examining HM at the individual level and through discursive interactions is imperative.

Hearn (2004) echoes the above claims by adding that the concept places itself above the means by which most men can achieve such idealism. In fact, he contends that it is unattainable. Therefore, he proposes a shift from hegemonic masculinities to how social practices among men actually exist within the gender structures of society. Whitehead (1999) seems to suggest that it is challenging to understand who is truly considered hegemonically masculine. In contrast, Beasley (2008) harkens to such understandings and attempts to extend Connell’s (1995) theory

of hegemonic masculinity by reconsidering its legitimacy. She first narrows its characterization by assessing it as a discursive political ideology that involves a connecting of masculinities within the hierarchy. Afterwards, she proposes that because of the expanding and globalized world, which includes transnational business masculinities, a diversification of HM must be recognized. Therefore, she suggests a pluralistic view on hegemonic masculinities by utilizing the terms “sub” and “supra” hegemonic.

Inquiring more about how researchers themselves study HM, Moller (2007) offers an interesting researcher-participant view of the connection between masculinity and power. He asserts that researchers risk falling into the trap of thinking about others’ hegemonic practices without examining their own HM. Furthermore, the term hegemonic masculinity, he claims, is overly political in the sense that it only examines *patterns* of hierarchy and hegemony in men’s lives instead of analyzing the nuances of masculinity in actual practice. For example, he maintains that Connell’s (1995/2005) work on masculinity interprets any man’s experiences as a power dynamic, which recognizes masculinity as an oppressive force. Moller (2007) avers that one should not examine HM in obviousness and instead observe it from a non-power standpoint and analyze concepts such as vulnerability or disempowerment in relation to masculinities. In other words, vulnerability and disempowerment offer renewed insights that seek to rupture purportedly obvious *patterns* of masculinity embedded in Connell’s work on HM, and in its place, view the plurality, complexity, and contradictions of masculine feelings and experiences.

Demetriou (2001) recognizes the “hegemony over women” and “hegemony over subordinate masculinities”, which he names as external hegemony for the former and internal hegemony for the latter. However, he also points out that non-hegemonic masculinities are only “alternatives” that never seem to “penetrate” the hegemonic ideal (p. 347). Thus, he asserts that

nonhegemonic and hegemonic masculinities are dualistic and they do not meld together but are rather separate. Bridging from Demetriou (2001), Christensen and Jensen (2014) propose that there must be a distinction between internal (between men) and external (oppression of women) hegemony. In regards to external hegemony, since the concept of HM is perceived by many scholars as a patriarchal gendered system that oppresses women, they highlight the need to re-evaluate such an idea and understand the more nuanced and complex ways masculinities can legitimize patriarchy without oppressing women. Such re-evaluation techniques are useful by reason of the way HM is malleable and ever-changing through history and culture.

For example, although some men may exhibit transnational business masculinity in the workplace and whereas domestic work tends to be largely associated with women, within some cultures such as the dominant cultures in Scandinavia, there tends to be a more egalitarian environment between men and women (Christensen & Jensen, 2014). Further, the authors argue that intersectionality of diverse social locations influences and helps shape masculinity, which will be expanded in more detail below. Such observations thus point to the necessity to examine social categories and the power relations between and within different masculinities rather than masculinities as fixed categories. Given this intersectional approach, it makes it plausible for my research to examine how masculinities are performed and hegemony challenged by Omar Little.

Arxer (2011) contends that there are not only multiple masculinities but also a hybrid HM, which utilizes non-hegemonic masculine traits in conjunction with hegemonic traits within heterosexual homosocial relations. Such diversity in HM supports the view that HM can be resisted and changed, which expands the concept of HM to understand other ways of being a man, therefore, HM is not fixed and can be observed more evidently through time and/or place. More specifically, while utilizing ethnographic research via observations, Arxer (2011) found

that during homosocial group relations, men portrayed not only qualities of emotional detachment, competitiveness, and sexual objectification of women but in addition, emotionality and cooperation. Such nonhegemonic masculine elements were appropriated with hegemonic masculine ideals.

Cheng (1999) studied marginalized masculinities and the defense mechanisms some may put up when in an undesired situation. Studying such variation in how we, as a society, view HM may potentially be used to enhance marginalized and subordinated men. For example, analyzing how and under what conditions Omar Little breaks away from hegemonic masculine norms, led to probable messages that may be received by viewers in general, and young men and boys specifically, about HM. Omar Little, both Black and openly gay, projects equanimity and is well respected, confident, tough, and muscular: traits epitomizing HM. Thus, analyzing Omar reveals a more counter-hegemonic gender presentation that disrupts the status quo with respect to HM.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) re-analyzed most of the claims just described and put forth a revised conception of HM that includes the following elements: (a) distinguishing between masculinities, (b) HMs are relational and not one specific pattern of domination, (c) there is not one fixed global representation of HM; (d) a focus on the intersectionality of diverse social locations including sexuality and race. In addition, most scholars seem to argue that the concept of HM lacks the *local* aspect and claim that too much emphasis is placed on regional and global levels. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) address this problem by stating that HM is an idealized form of masculinities that must be examined at the structural levels of society predicated on the underpinnings of patriarchy. Therefore, Connell (1998) and Messerschmidt (2008) posit that researching at the global levels where transnational corporations hold power in society is beneficial. Connell (2001) reaffirms this elsewhere by stating that globalization has

created new arenas in which power is situated “on a world scale...which provide new arenas for the construction of masculinities: transnational corporations, global markets, global media, [and] intergovernmental institutions” (p. 24). The point, then, is that scholars need to examine masculinities at the nexus among the local, regional, and global.

Accordingly, Talbot and Quayle (2010) studied a group of young South African women’s constructions of hegemonic masculinity in relation to context, including but not limited to family and work. They found that the women preferred a construction of masculinity that was considered to be the “nice guy” in contexts such as work, but would rather have a man who constituted traditional notions of masculinity in contexts such as family and romance. Thus, Talbot and Quayle’s analysis suggests that HMs are contextual and the legitimation of patriarchal relations remains preserved based on how some young women’s views closely resemble the ideal masculinity.

From a global perspective, Groes-Green (2012) proposes the concept of “philogynous masculinities,” a concept that opens “a theoretical landscape that is able to embrace contextual variations of men’s and women’s own enactments and notions of gender, power, and equality, rather than a priori assuming universal gender inequalities across diverse cultural settings” (p. 107). He found that, due to neoliberal initiatives and the increasingly high unemployment rates in Mozambique, some men resort to a) sexual capital, which he conceptualizes as improving one’s sexual performance towards women or b) performing violence towards women as an alternative to economic power and to show off the tough guy image. Based on his findings, he suggests that researchers must distinguish between masculinities; more specifically, subordinated versus hegemonic masculinities, since to term such masculinities in Maputo, Mozambique, as “hegemonic” would take away from the complexities of the gender hierarchy and the social

inequalities that persist.

Other research on HMs include: a) how HMs can be redefined and involve new approaches for patriarchal relations (Duncanson, 2009; Light, 2007); HMs in relation to the subordination of women in rap albums (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009); HMs in the TV series *Two and a Half Men* (Hatfield, 2010); and HMs through a diverse lens at the local, regional, and global levels (Hatfield, 2010; Morris, 2008; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009).

Relevant to my research, Messerschmidt (2016) helped to distinguish between HMs and nonHMs that aimed to clarify the often misunderstandings and confusion surrounding the concept of HMs. He deemed that HMs consisted of only those masculinities that legitimate patriarchal gender relations at the local, regional, and global levels. Dominant masculinities consist of a form of masculinity that is the most celebrated or current in a given social setting. Messerschmidt (2016) offers an example of boys in schools that were dominant. He states that they had characteristics such as athleticism, heterosexuality, and toughness as well as attended parties and were considered to be popular. However, it must be noted that they did not legitimate gender inequality. Messerschmidt (2016) discusses dominating masculinities as those masculinities that “involve commanding and controlling specific interactions and exercising power and control over people and events--‘calling the shots’ and ‘running the show’” (p. 33) in either the local, regional, or global settings. As an example, Messerschmidt (2016) states that during the Iraq War, George W. Bush engaged in hard diplomacy rather than involving in peaceful negotiations with other leaders.

It is noteworthy that both dominant and dominating masculinities can potentially constitute HMs if they legitimate unequal gendered relations. Positive masculinities involve egalitarian relationships between men and women. For example, Messerschmidt (2016) found

that some boys in school were inclusive and hung around those who were laid-back. In addition, other views were that heterosexuality and misogyny were not emphasized, and the boys celebrated differences. Thus, positive masculinities cannot be considered HMs, but rather counter-hegemonic since they aim to disrupt gender inequality and promote gender equity amongst men and women. Furthermore, Messerschmidt (2016) adds that more work must be conducted on positive masculinity and how they flourish based on gender relations.

Following scholars such as Coles (2009), Groes-Green (2012), Wetherell and Edley (1999), and Hearn (2004), and Messerschmidt (2016) in particular, I maintain that HMs must be distinguished from nonHMs to enhance clarity about which masculinities legitimate patriarchal relations and which encompass alternative ways of being a man. I analyze the gender presentation of Omar Little and have identified his HMs and nonHMs in a way that enhances clarity, understanding, and perspective towards HMs. Unraveling the notions of HMs and nonHMs may help to inform young men and boys, and people in general, about HMs in a way that erodes its influence in their lives. Such messages may be useful in breaking away from conventional notions of HMs to discover and espouse alternative and less oppressive ways of being a man. In what follows, I explore the scholarship on the intersectionality of masculinities and the toxic effects that can be potentially fostered.

Intersectionality of Masculinities and the Toxicity Effect

As discussed above, HMs are accorded the social status that places it at the summit of masculinities. From my perspective, there is no denying the socio-political forces that position HMs as legitimating within the gender order, dominating women and marginalized men. However, the intersection of social locations, such as class and race, may privilege some people in certain areas and oppress them in others (Coston & Kimmel, 2012). Omar Little occupies such

a social space, being Black, gay and poor, while also identifying as a man. Intersectionality influences one's experiences and beliefs concerning gender (Shields, 2008). It offers an understanding of how people are shaped by diverse social locations (i.e., race, gender, and class). Such social locations are contextualized in systems of power such as laws and state governments. Privilege and oppression are “shaped by colonialism, imperialism, racism, homophobia, ableism and patriarchy”, based on these processes (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 2). This means that although some men may be privileged because they are advantaged by gender and sexuality (i.e. male and heterosexual), they may also be oppressed by race (i.e. Black men) and class (i.e., poor). For instance, minoritized groups, such as Hispanics and African Americans, are overrepresented in lower-skilled jobs where incomes have been declining and wherein illegal activities may ensue (Duster, 1997; LaFree & Drass, 1996). However, it is often difficult to acknowledge one's own privilege (McIntosh, 1988; Coston & Kimmel, 2012).

Drawing from the concept of intersectionality, Cheng (1999) argues that masculinity is desired by most men in the idealized form known as HM, independent of social location. He focuses on how HM is constructed in relation to minoritized groups. He postulates that White, heterosexual men must validate their HM by deliberately acting aggressively or violently towards the marginalized group such as homosexuals, nerds, and women. Such dominance seems to create a defence mechanism with minoritized groups themselves. They may enact a hegemonic masculine role within their group as well as broader society in order to distract others' perceptions of them based on their presentation of gender.

For instance, a White, skinny, gay man may be marginalized through his body size and sexuality, however, in a managerial position, for example, he may be perceived as masculine based on his position of power. Cheng (1999) provides the example of Bill Gates. Perhaps one

needs to question: would a “nerd” such as him be looked at in awe and/or physically frighten you if he were not in such a powerful socio-economic position in society? The point is, as Gramsci describes in his *Prison Notebooks*, which has been edited and translated by Hoare and Nowell-Smith (1999) from Lawrence and Wishart’s (1971) edition, power is about garnering and maintaining it, which means that, in the case of Bill Gates, based on his intellect and managerial position, he rose through the ranks of masculinities by gaining social status in certain social positions such as socio-economic status. Thus, if an individual lacks masculinity in one area, they can, in a way, compensate through other social categories (see de Visser, Smith, & McDonnell, 2009). Cheng’s (1999) research appears to provide a detailed description of how people in general, and minoritized groups in particular, will perform various types of acts to be perceived as conforming to the hegemonic masculine regime.

Similar to Cheng (1999), Coston and Kimmel (2012) investigated the connection between intersectionality and oppression with the view that some men are privileged in one location, but oppressed in others. By focusing on gay, working class, and disabled men, they claim that when a privileged location is removed, such as being able-bodied, it is often perceived as an emasculatory practice. That is, men are not perceived as “men” proceeded by their other marginalized location. As a case in point, I wrote “gay, working class, and disabled men”, rather than “men who are gay, working class, or disabled.”

On a related note, the problem with Coston and Kimmel’s argument is that working-class jobs, such as construction and trades, are broadly associated with men, and men in such professions are typically seen as ruggedly masculine despite not having the social status or power of men in so-called white-collar professions. Nevertheless, the process in which people tend to use strategies to alleviate their stigmatized location, Coston and Kimmel conclude, are better

explained using Goffman's (1963) theory of stigmatization. Men who are marginalized in a specific site attempt to over-exaggerate their differences (minstrelization), exaggerate similarities (normification), and/or maximize differences (Militant Chauvinism).

Minstrelization refers to exaggeration by those who are stigmatized towards those who have power. For instance, a stigmatized person who is exaggerating their differences to the dominant group may over-conform to stereotypes. On the other hand, normification calls attention to how stigmatized groups exaggerate the similarities by explaining that they are, in fact, similar to the dominant group (Goffman, 1963). For example, Coston and Kimmel (2012) write that an example of normification is when gay men and lesbians advocate for same-sex marriage, also known from a policy perspective as marriage equality. Militant Chauvinism alludes to when stigmatized groups feel they are not only different, but also better than the dominant group (Goffman, 1963). From my perspective, then, such chauvinism would mean that Black men, for instance, would maximize their differences in support of themselves to show or prove to the dominant group that they are indeed better. Similar to Cheng's (1999) research, Coston and Kimmel's study expands the notion that some men, irrespective of their social location, will attempt to enact HM by providing alternative strategies to be considered or perceived as HM.

Cheng's (1999) research is also supported by Ford (2011) who examined the process in which Black college men construct Black masculinity in order to fulfill an idealized image of masculinity predicated on social constructions of what it means to be a Black man. Based on interviews, he discovered that many Black men's idealized masculinity is the thug-like image that possesses qualities such as: materialistic, tough, strong, heterosexual, womanizing, Black (not tanned or White), and reticent for both inter and intragroup interactions. This is similar to

Majors' (1998/2017) findings, which illustrate how some Black men will fashion a “cool pose”, one way in which some Black men may respond to the racialized and institutionalized limitations imposed on them (p. 21). By extension, Majors (1998/2017) claims that the “cool pose” is a pathway to transcend the oppressive conditions of society and allows Black men to express themselves in ways that attempt to reach a dominant masculinity (p. 17). From my perspective, it appears as though this thug-like image parallels a masculine bravado that some Black men are perhaps attempting to emulate to compensate for their lower social status in a society built upon White privilege; although I acknowledge that bodily power may be necessary for some non-white men based on their economic conditions and environment.

What is also significant is the notion of bodies. Characterized by a mesomorphic physique such as a chiseled chest, arms, and shoulders, in combination with a narrowed waist (Kimmel & Mahalik, 2004), Martin and Govender (2011) noticed that conformity to orthodox masculine ideology disfigures boys' sense of self-worth in relation to how boys perceive, perform, and (re)define their bodies. In addition to the use of legal and illegal supplementations to achieve muscularity and the belief that girls crave a man's muscular body that was apparent in the study, their work also highlights differences between racial groups. In particular, Black and Indian (India) men subscribed to the utmost levels of masculine ideology. According to Martin and Govender (2011), Black men tend to use more steroids compared to White and Indian men to boost their masculine physique. Such a claim seems dubious given the popularity of bodybuilding among some White men and the representation of them in bodybuilding competitions.

That critique aside, de Visser, Smith, and McDonnell's (2009) research focuses on health-related behaviour and masculine capital, and how some men may compensate for their

lack of masculinity by gaining masculine status. For instance, success in sport can be viewed as compensation for potential threats toward an individual's performance of non-masculinity (de Visser & Smith, 2006). The notion of masculine capital here is of particular importance.

According to de Visser et al. (2009), men cannot embody *all* masculine qualities. In my view, then, masculine capital is a type of ranking system that provides both men and women with the ability to compensate for their lack of masculinity. Such compensation means that they examine other domains or qualities in their lives that possess orthodox masculinities and thus, accumulate more masculine esteem (i.e. by using a handgun, especially one of considerable size Katz, 1999). Katz (1999) asserts that bodies have been transformed into symbolic weapons, tools by which muscularity is a prominent feature of masculinity.

de Visser (2009) conducted two in-depth interviews with two men that provided insights into the connection between ideologies and discourses of masculinity. One of the participants, John, identified with having more feminine qualities but still considered himself to be a man, although not, as he put it, a “manly man” (p. 368). The other interviewee, Andy, explained that he lacked manly qualities due to his physical stature of being slightly shorter as well as his appearance; however, of specific prominence was the fact that he was able to compensate for his lack of masculine qualities and accrue masculine capital with other masculine qualities such as his heterosexuality, athleticism, and drinking behaviours. Such research provides insights into the various masculine characteristics one embodies, both refusing masculine norms and compensating for it.

Toxicity

Traversing from de Visser, Smith, and McDonnell (2009) and de Visser (2009), Kalish and Kimmel (2010) reflect on different US school shootings, including Columbine, Virginia

Tech, and Northern Illinois, as well as some suicides that followed. In their analyses, they identified gay-baiting, homosexual slurs, being called a “fag”, bullying, being perceived as “different” than the other boys, and other pejorative rhetoric directed at the perpetrators, as possible reasons for the attacks and subsequent suicides and shootings. Because the perpetrators did not conform to idealized masculine norms such as toughness, athleticism, stoicism, and strength, they lashed out in what the authors note as “aggrieved entitlement” (p. 454); that is, the perpetrators felt obliged to exact their revenge towards the people that contributed to shaping their reality through a loss of connection to society.

Evidently, there is a link between the masculine regime and school shootings (Consalvo, 2003; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Tonso, 2009) by virtue of the way localized culture and larger society has marginalized the shooters. Although the overwhelming majority of men who are gay-baited will not lash out in the form of school shootings, a few men do; in addition to easy access to firearms in the US especially, engaging in mass shootings is a form of violent behaviour that projects a masculine bravado, a characteristic these boys did not previously demonstrate in their school community or in larger society (Kalish & Kimmel, 2010). It is also the case that the overwhelming majority of school shootings in the US have been perpetrated by young White males (Schiele & Stewart, 2001).

In addition to the school shootings that were predominately perpetrated by White men, Michael Kimmel (2008), in his book *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*, writes that young boys who venture off to college are considered almost men without the responsibilities of familial and principled orthodoxy. “Guyland” consists of mainly middle- to upper-class White males who are generally considered to be “good guys.” However, college seems to be a site where masculinities are contested and homosocial relations are ever-present,

meaning that young men are having to continuously prove their masculinities to other men. He further believes that the crisis of masculinity has been fostered by the ideology of boys being socialized into a gender dichotomy that places them in a myopic box of stereotypical traits such as strength, toughness, and aggressiveness.

By contrast, Sommers (2013) diverges from Kimmel's (2008) claims and argues, “boys will be boys” and supports the view that males are in a state of crisis, but not in the way Kimmel describes as the aggressive, violent, rough, tough, and dominant tendencies boys may evoke from their loss of masculinity. Such traits, she further expresses, are inherent in men and should be expressed and validated. Moreover, she states that education systems erase such inherent qualities in men and feminize them in a way that detracts from their manliness. Thus, it seems plausible that she is in contradiction of the opinion that men and boys have been socialized into rigid gender roles. In my view, following gender experts such as Butler (1990, 2004), Kimmel (2008), Messerschmidt (2000), and Mac an Ghail (1994), Sommers does not account for how gender is fluid and diverse rather than a mutually exclusive binary. She also does not take into account people who generally do not conform to stereotypical ideas of gender such as transgender and/or intersexed people.

Messerschmidt (2000) found that based on their family upbringings and school environment, HM and the purportedly inherent heterosexuality and the physically strong bodies attached to it played a critical role in two student participants' lives. Both participants in his study felt as though they experienced a lack of peer relations and continual teasing and bullying at school due to their appearances of being fragile and petite. Such masculine challenges within the school environment redirected their sexuality and bodily performance failure to subsequent hegemonic masculine practices, such as sexually dominating women, to feel in power. Peralta

and Tuttle (2013) echo Messerschmidt (2000) through an intersectional approach to HM and violence. They found that since hegemonic masculine ideals were unattainable due to economic deprivation abreast of orthodox masculinity (i.e., men as breadwinners), intimate partner violence (IPV) became more pronounced as well as how participants internalized the implied meanings associated with such financial disadvantage and orthodox masculinity. Their findings also indicated that IPV, economic deprivation, and need for control were linked with cultural norms of race because being Black also diminishes masculine capital.

Messerschmidt's (2000) and Peralta and Tuttle's (2013) research suggest that some boys desire to reconstruct and divert their subordinate masculinities by performing a more dominant masculinity through available resources, which include violent sexuality and other risky behaviours. The ideologies and discourses at school and home were overt impediments that had a major influence on their decision to conduct sexual violence—and in these delusory moments of such actions—said practices resulted in their perception of being the cool guys, dominant, and “real men.” In my view, such power imbalances need to be discussed in a critical manner.

Another problematic area is drinking to excess and the overall risky behaviour that ensues, which is another arena of competition for men (O'Sullivan, 1995). Similar to Kimmel (2008), O'Sullivan (1995) articulates that men's ability to proverbially “score” objectifies women and thus, earns men masculine credits. This is based on what he notes as sexual conquest, independence, physicality, and pushing women to perform acts they desire not to perform, all part of what it means to “do” masculinity. Rape culture is evident within the college experience through activities such as frat parties. Martin and Hummer (1989) write that fraternities are sociocultural contexts wherein rape culture becomes normative. Such sociocultural contexts, they assert, will not improve unless change occurs within fraternities. In

fact, a survey of 9,284 people who work or study at Quebec’s French-speaking institutions found that 3,400 respondents were sufferers of sexualized violence by people affiliated with the university (Enos, 2017)

Based on the previous claims, men from minoritized groups, as well as White, heterosexual males, seem to foster a façade that creates a perceived hegemonic masculine status. Such fostering has implications for others and for themselves. Despite being a fictional character, Omar Little has demonstrated possibilities for breaking away from the conventional schema of masculinity that may provoke potential alternative and less oppressive ways of being a man. My research is built upon what Omar demonstrated, where I identified probable messages that may be conveyed to viewers in general, and young men and boys in particular, about HM. In the next section, I explore public pedagogy in more detail and afterwards, connect public pedagogy to *The Wire*.

Research on *The Wire*

Bridging from Aletras, Mouzaki, Sagri, and Gerasaki (2017) and the ways in which media helps to shape norms and behaviours, other scholars have explored the moral, ethical, and ethnic ways in which *The Wire* has contributed to dominant discourses in society (see Anderson, 2009; Fraley, 2009; Potter & Marshall, 2009). It seems reasonable to assume, then, that *The Wire* has the potential to impact dominant discourses and ideologies of HMs. For instance, Dhaenens and Bauwel (2012) explore the ways in which *The Wire* engages in and constructs potential resistances to the status quo through queer characters’ subversive articulations.

The Wire can be seen as “a defiance of an essentialist, hierarchical and oppositional way of thinking” wherein “deconstructive practices” unveil how “heteronormative practices” operate, in addition to the ways in which “reconstructive practices” uncover “counter-discourses that

transgress societal assumptions about gender, sexuality and identity” (Dhaenens & Bauwel, 2012, p. 704). Similarly, Robbie (2009) claims that *The Wire* subverts heteronormativity in the sense that it disrupts stereotypes and distinguishes same-sex relationships similar to heterosexual ones. She discusses three characters in particular that are considered sexual renegades, including Kima also known as Greggs, Lieutenant Rawls, a high-ranking officer on the Baltimore police force, and Omar.

Kima’s lesbian performance is described as similar to that of any other normal heterosexual relationship, one that has problems and complications, which is not typically conveyed in cinema between two women, especially two Black women (Robbie, 2009). Rawls’ homosexuality is briefly implied in one particular scene that shows him in a gay bar (Robbie 2009). As a White male in a privileged position as a Lieutenant in the Baltimore police force and not openly gay, his presentation is in contrast to Omar’s gender presentation as masculine but also gay, and loving in a way that sexual machismo is still maintained (Robbie 2009). Omar is described as a rare example of a Black character on film that can maintain both his homosexuality and masculinity. Although Robbie (2009) speaks about Omar’s gender presentation, she lacks significant detail and examples of Omar’s and the others’ representations of sexuality. She focuses her article on merely brief discussions and descriptions about homosexual minoritized relationships that break away from the conventional and are rarely portrayed on screen.

Following Robbie (2009), Deylami (2015) offers an analytical perspective of *The Wire* through the lens of violence. She focuses on the ways in which *The Wire* exposes the intersection of social identities, such as sexuality, race, and gender, in relation to violence. More specifically, Deylami (2015) claims that *The Wire* shows its audience the complexity of masculine and

heteronormative violence present in society. To put it bluntly, “*The Wire* depicts the ways in which the sociocultural demands of masculinity and heterosexuality in a racialized economic order work to (1) differentially expose some to greater violence and injury and (2) thus, produce normative barriers that limit the capacity to mourn and be recognized publicly” (p. 131). For example, Deylami (2015) claims that Omar is limited in expressing grief and being recognized because it seems that all he can do is resort to violence based on “the demands of heteronormativity and masculinity” (p. 138). Although Omar seeks vengeance as a way to cope with his problems, it is ultimately such violence that gets him killed. From my understanding, Deylami’s (2015) delineation of Omar focuses on the fact that because Omar is associated with racial violence and a heteronormative structure that systematically and institutionally oppresses and bars him from climbing the social class ladder, he has no choice but to behave in anger and violence instead of grief and vulnerability.

In a similar vein, Waldron and Chambers (2012) explore masculinity and race and how *The Wire* teaches about such social identities. Masculinity was perceived with certain characteristics such as violence and revenge, as well as respect and loyalty. In addition, Black masculinity represented resistance while White masculinity represented control, and guns were symbolized as control and power in conjunction with resistance. With respect to my study, such findings indicate that not only is masculinity a complex term, but also, in regards to Omar Little, they indicate that he challenges such assumptions and uses his gun as a necessary means of control and power, even though he is situated as a minoritized and subordinate position in society.

Like other scholars previously mentioned, Chakraborty (n.d.) explores HM in relation to the intersection of various social identities such as race, class, and ethnicity. In his analysis of

masculinities, he mentions that *The Wire* challenges the notion of HM in the sense that the audience perceives a different masculinity; one that is intersected with various social identities such as race, class, and ethnicity in relation to power. In his critique of Omar Little, however, the author comments on his homosexuality. In contrast to Waldron and Chambers' (2012) gun symbolism as a means of power, he notes that Omar's homosexuality may be more threatening than a gun in regards to scaring drug lords. He further expresses that the drug dealers undermine his masculinity by using language such as “bush-whacker” and “faggot” (p. 17).

In comparison, Wilson (2017) claims that *The Wire*, based on the various masculine representations of diverse characters, deconstructs HM and promotes alternative norms of masculinity in media portrayals. In particular, he discusses McNulty and Omar's representations of masculinity. He asserts that Omar does so by identifying as a homosexual, conveying tenderness and love towards his partners, refusing to use profane language, yet is feared throughout the community. Wilson (2017) also claims that while McNulty complies with conventional White macho masculinity, Omar's masculine presentation contrasts McNulty's masculine presentation and that of traditional and Black masculinities, especially in regards to how such masculinity is portrayed in film.

In line with scholars such as Wilson (2017) and Robbie (2009), Cooper (2012) adds an interesting twist to the traditional notion of HM. He emphasizes a materialist aspect of masculinities, which examines a multidimensional approach to other identities such as gender and race by also examining class identities and structure. Along with gender and race, class plays an important role in how masculinities are interpreted. For instance, he claims that capitalism, in relation to the drug war, underscores its connection to race and class through various characters such as Avon and Stringer; both characters are Black and middle-to-upper class evidenced

through their reputation as high-ranking drug dealers. On one hand, Avon has a more strict HM code that closely resembles gangsterism on the streets, whereas Stringer displays more professionalism and would rather leave behind the gangsterism world to provide a legitimate business model.

From my point of view, Avon’s masculinity closely resembles that of conventional manhood, whereas Stringer’s business model seeks to transcend traditional notions of masculinity. Ultimately, Stringer fails “to forge an inner-city but professional masculinity thus [it] requires seeing gender, race, and class as co-constituted and context dependent (Cooper, 2012, p. 111/112). Evidently such findings demonstrate that it is difficult for those who are marginalized to move up the social mobility ladder. Extrapolating Cooper’s (2012) findings, it seems plausible to assume that Omar Little, even though he performed violence and aggression and love and care in ways that transcend traditional notions of masculinity, perhaps it is the case that, as Cooper (2012) puts it, “the game” itself must be changed in order for those in less privileged positions to have upward mobility (p. 112). Although I acknowledge that not every individual wants or even needs to move upwards on the social mobility ladder, in my view, because of the capitalistic society North Americans live in, there seems to be a perceived level of expectations and standards one must live up to in order to feel a sense of superiority; to not achieve higher social mobility would render an individual inferior.

In their book, *The Wire: Urban Decay and American Television*, Potter and Marshall (2009) offer a collection of essays written by diverse authors that examine various institutions within *The Wire*, such as crime and law enforcement, and describe for readers how the show represents contemporary American society through multiple perspectives. For example, Peterson (2009) explores the representations of urban Black masculinity within *The Wire*, as he mentions

characters known as “corner boys” (p. 108). He emphasizes that the intersections of Black masculinity represented in *The Wire* captures the reality of and engages with identities in some people’s lives.

In his discussion about Omar, Peterson (2009) describes him as “an urban Robin Hood whose sartorial presentation reflects the aesthetics of the wild west” (p. 119). The author also emphasizes Omar’s homosexuality and highlights that, although Omar is not the first gay and/or Black person to be portrayed in film, he is the first character who is Black and gay to use the gun as an empowerment tool and as phallic symbolism. Peterson (2009) further expresses that Omar is part of the corner boy model, considering that other corner boys shout “Omar comin!” when present in the community or on the street corners; Omar’s positionality on the show situates him as a rarity of Black masculinity throughout the history of television.

In a similar vein, Marshall (2009) argues that women in *The Wire* have the potential to teach civic values. Given the fact that Black popular culture about crime generally portrays men more often than women, and that women are often portrayed supporting men, she claims that *The Wire* disrupts such stereotypes and “even embraces some stereotypical roles ascribed to Black mothers and uses them to transform the horizons of the audience’s expectations” (p. 161). Apropos of audience expectations, LeBesco (2009) studied audience responses using the website HBO.com surrounding social justice issues in *The Wire*. More specifically, centred on Omar Little as the main focus of the social justice issues in *The Wire*, LeBesco (2009) examined audiences’ attitudes towards crime and how such attitudes are integrated and perceived across diverse perspectives. She found that audience responses to Omar Little, through a social justice lens, primarily focused on his sexuality and moral code as well as how Omar inspires a call to action towards social justice. Though most fans loved and admired Omar regardless of his

homosexuality, it seemed as though it was because he made up for it in other areas. For example, one fan wrote about how Omar’s presentation is acceptable because his gangster masculine appeal mitigates his homosexuality. However, others spoke about how they were sickened by his sexuality.

According to LeBesco (2009), the show also prompted some people to engage in socio-political and economic change, whereas others, based on the realism of the show, disregarded any obligation to promote social justice changes because they merely could not see how things could change or be different. Although it seems as though the wide-ranging responses beget varied opinions and perspectives, especially in reaction to Omar’s complex identities, such as a homosexual, churchgoer, Christian, and possessing moral values, LeBesco (2009) claims that the show is effective in raising consciousness towards socio-political and economic issues. She further expresses that the show undoubtedly left an impact on those who watched it.

Based on the aforementioned claims, it is apparent that *The Wire* is an educative force that has the potential to impact people’s lives. More specifically, *The Wire*, as a vehicle for social change, has the potential to influence the ways in which people view social justice issues, especially through the example of Omar Little. Because film reinforces and sometimes challenges ideologies and discourses that proliferate in society, it would be useful to think of film as having the potential to convey messages about HMs. Extrapolating from scholars such as LeBesco (2009), Peterson (2009), Chakraborty (n.d.), Dhaenens and Bauwel (2012), Robbie (2009), and Giroux (2011), I argue that Omar Little conveys HMs and nonHMs that help to shape men and boys’ perspectives about HMs, so as to have the potential to develop alternative and less oppressive ways of being a man and enhance the clarity and understanding of the language that is being used in HMs studies today.

Conclusion

Hegemonic masculinities, as a concept, has evolved over time. Such evolution has developed into diverse views and opinions of what constitutes HMs. In this chapter, I drew from theorists who problematize HMs and described the evolution of the concept by delineating gender, masculinities, and hegemonic masculinity, as well as the critiques that ensued. Some scholars have identified a relationship among multiple dominant masculinities such as Coles (2009), hybrid hegemonic masculinity such as Arxer (2011), and philogynous masculinities such as Groes-Green (2012). I have also illustrated through the literature how people who are subordinated and marginalized, such as gay and Black men, may portray elements of both HM and nonHMs. Moreover, I explained how an intersectionality approach adds nuance and complexity to theorizing HMs. However, I also illustrated the toxicity effect HMs may produce such as violence and steroid usage, to name two.

With the above claims in mind, it is my belief that the character of Omar Little can implicitly inform young men and boys, as well as others, about the concepts of HMs and nonHMs and how they are distinguished from each other. An analysis of *The Wire* in this way can illuminate educative potential. Moreover, my research: a) unravels the notions of HMs and nonHMs; and b) examines positive masculinities, which may be less oppressive towards themselves, other men, and women.

Chapter Three: Designing Research to Investigate Hegemonic Masculinity

Chapter One provided a rationale for my research that analyzes *The Wire*, focusing especially on the character of Omar Little. Chapter Two offered a review of the literature on HM and described how my study fits into the theoretical terrain pertaining to HMs. This chapter describes the methodological approach that I employed to carry out my research through critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Breeze, 2011; Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1993b; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Qualitative research allows researchers to delve into understanding the meaning of a social phenomenon, typically with the use of inductive reasoning (i.e., examining specifics to make generalizations), and providing a voice for participants (Creswell, 2014). In this particular case, I analyzed, through a CDA approach, hegemonic masculine discourse in the gender presentation of Omar Little as depicted in *The Wire*. Below, I describe the steps I took in analyzing the data.

Inquiry into Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA is a contested term that has flourished into diverse agendas and usages by experts in the field of CDA (Breeze, 2011). CDA first emerged through the professional expertise of Teun van Dijk and other colleagues, such as Norman Fairclough, in the 1990s (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). More recently, CDA has evolved into a multidisciplinary field, a sophisticated discipline that is perceived by many as a school rather than a theory or methodology itself. As Breeze (2011) notes, some experts have even proposed that CDA has become a canon and/or paradigm in its own right. As a sub-area of discourse analysis, its methodological impetus is manifested in discourse and its relationship to power and society (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). In what follows, I provide a description and background information regarding the notion of discourse,

discourse analysis, ideology, and afterwards, conceptualize CDA and present important facets as well as limitations.

Hegemony, and more specifically HM, can be analyzed through discourse, because, as van Dijk (1998a) suggests, ideology is produced and replicated through discourse. Examining discourse means studying text, talk, and visuals and other modes of communication to develop a better understanding of the relationship between discourse and social practices (Taylor, 2013). Because ideology is constructed through discourse, I analyzed *The Wire* through a CDA framework to help identify HM and counter-HM, using Omar Little as the focus of my analysis.

Discourse analysis encompasses the meaning-making of language in the sense that language is meaningless outside of shared usage of a given language that provides its significance (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Discourse is comprised of not only language but also action (van Dijk, 1997). Fairclough (1989) conceptualized a three-dimensional model of discourse that *describes, interprets, and explains* the texts in relation to social practices. He proposes that language and society are dialectical. Viewing social practices and discourses through language enables researchers to not just analyze texts, but also to analyze “the relationship between texts, processes and their social conditions”, both the immediate and remote conditions of context, institutions, and social structures (p. 26).

Bridging from Fairclough (1989), Gee (2011) developed theoretical thinking tools as a seemingly more clear-cut method of CDA and a guide for CDA researchers to better understand discourse and CDA. For Gee, the first tool, Discourse (with a capital “D”), also known as big “D” Discourse, signifies language and how it is used in relation to cultural and social meanings such as beliefs and values (Gee, 2004). *Social languages* refer to how language is used to embody a social identity of an individual. For instance, the identity of “man” is used to refer to a

human being with certain physical characteristics such as a penis, facial hair, and deep voice, as well as social characteristics such as strength, breadwinning, and dominance—at least in the conventional sense of the word. *Situated meanings* imply how, dependent on the context, words have multiple meanings. *Figured worlds* are the mundane practices that pertain to how we, as a society, perceive things that are “normal”. In addition, figured worlds allow researchers to delve into the everyday practices, including values, attitudes, and beliefs, in relation to how social institutions help shape normalcy in society.

On the other hand, from a linguistics perspective and irrespective of discourse analysis or "critical" discourse analysis, Gee (2011) makes a differentiation between utterance-type meaning versus utterance-token meaning, or what he names as “situated meaning task” (p. 24). The utterance-type meaning task concerns the general meanings of language between the form and function. Form, in this particular case, is the elements of language such as words and/or morphemes whereas function describes the “communicative purpose” that a form brings about (p. 24). Conversely, the situated meaning task refers to the form of language in relation to how it is used in a particular context. For example, Gee (2011) explains that the word “cat,” in general, refers to a feline; however, in a different context and syntax, the word “cat” can signify other animals in the wild such as lions.

Discourse, whether through written text, talk, visuals, or other means of communication, varies. In particular, multiple discourses are represented in society through diverse social locations, such as race and class, which intersect to form an individual identity (Robinson, 1999). However, Monk, Winslade, Crocket, and Epston (1997) assert that dominant discourses create ranking systems in society based on identities. Robinson (1999) reaffirms Monk’s statement by arguing that forms of prejudice, such as racism and classism, are produced, reproduced, and

legitimated through dominant discourses. Van Sterkenburg and Knoppers (2014) suggest that dominant discourses are ways in which others view people in relation to the status quo. As applied to my research context, Omar Little transcends normative constructions of masculinity and challenges dominant discourses and ideologies even while a superficial reading of him as a text might suggest otherwise.

Since dominant discourses are learned and, I would add, taught, in the various social contexts within any given society, it seems reasonable to assume that racist, feminist, sexist, and other forms of discriminatory practices are linked to how power is situated in society. For example, van Dijk (1993a) emphasizes that media corporations, predominately owned and governed by White, and I would add male elites, project racist discourses onto the masses by expelling statements such as “‘floods’ or ‘massive invasions’ of refugees...immigrants lacking motivation to work...threats of Muslim fundamentalists” (p. 3), which contribute to the instilment of racist ideologies not only among the general population but also other elite groups such as academics. Relevant to my study, such hegemonic masculine normalcy that is perpetuated in society through dominant discourses plays a prominent role in the construction of HM.

However, it is also the case that discourse can be used for resistance to those in power as evidenced through social movements such as Black Lives Matter, gay rights, and Indigenous resistance against European colonialism. For instance, Foucault (1976/1978) avers that not all discourses capitulate to power. He mentions that discourse can be used as a tool for power, “but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (p. 101). In *The Wire*, Omar Little both adheres to and defies the status quo, a counter-hegemonic position that defies HM norms in society. It seems reasonable to assume, then, that such defiance of hegemonic masculine norms is an example of public pedagogy and is both taught and learned,

but neither in formal ways. This means that I was hyper-alert for Omar’s gender presentation of HMs and nonHMs, and discerned specific messages that viewers may potentially receive, which may aid in disrupting HMs among boys and young men in society.

Another important facet of CDA is the notion of ideology. Ideology is a system of beliefs and ideas that are generally shared by people of a particular social group that may help impact their thinking, discourses, and social practices (van Dijk, 2011). Such shared understandings are from a specific group of people, and as van Dijk (2011) articulates, are utilized to dominate others, though people can also resist them. However, to challenge a dominant ideology may be an arduous and troublesome effort towards liberation. Wodak and Meyer (2009) reaffirm the fact that neutrality is a common facet of dominant ideologies that often remain unopposed. More specifically, dominant ideologies reflect common assumptions and shared beliefs between groups of people, which emerge as the norm and are generally unchallenged (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). They further express that social institutions help govern and influence ideologies in order for a society to think similarly. Similar views, thoughts, and opinions are structured by virtue of what van Dijk (1993b) proposes as power through means of control: proselytizing ideas to people through manipulative tactics by persuasion of the mind. One example involved in power through means of control is biased and non-factual data or withholding important evidence about situations through scholarly or news reports (van Dijk, 1993c).

CDA scholars have the capability to break through the ideological persuasion, created specifically to govern norms, values, and beliefs, and educate people to what Corson (2001) claims as discovering power relations, inequalities, and other forms of discrimination and oppression by exploring the relationship between discourse and wider socio-political contexts. By uncovering the relationship between HM and Omar Little using CDA, HM and non-HM

behaviours emerged from my findings (discussed in the next chapter) where plausible messages viewers may receive about HM are realized.

With respect to the above claims, CDA is an effective tool by which to dissect hegemonic masculinities portrayed in media and differentiates itself from discourse analysis by virtue of the way scholars analyze language in relation to power and social structures. Another distinguishing factor of CDA is the diversity of investigative methods of research. Such research strategies involve a complex and multimodality approach in order to study not only linguistic structures, but also social phenomenon related to social practices (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). According to Stubbs (1997), CDA researchers study the relationship between language and social structures; that is, the connection between “language, power and ideology” and the representation of texts and the way people view the world (p. 2). Even more encouraging, Fairclough (1989), the CDA pundit, stresses that CDA involves analyzing language and power through “existing conventions” as a result of “power relations and power struggles” (p. 2).

Power and CDA. Fairclough (1995) complements his previous definition and articulates that CDA researchers study power and how it plays out in social and discursive practices and texts influenced by wider social relations in society. Consistent with scholars such as Fairclough (1989, 1995) and Stubbs (1997), another interpretation of CDA suggests that CDA involves the “critical” study of language in the sense that dominance, control, power, ideologies, and discourses are opaquely and/or transparently manifested in linguistic structures (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Such power relations seem to be subtly imbedded in language and discourse predicated on the means in which social institutions have influenced a particular culture. Van Dijk (1993b) wrote that studying power abuse—the way people in power exploit others through the

advantages they hold by laws and rules—is a main goal of CDA. From these theorists, it seems evident that CDA can be conceptualized as investigating the ideologies covertly inherent in language structures which privilege the dominant group and marginalize, scrutinize, and oppress minoritized groups simultaneously while producing power relations in society. Thus, CDA researchers attempt to unveil and rupture the dominant ideologies and discourses that are perpetuated in society through language and discourse by systematic investigational methods of linguistics (Wodak & Meyer, 2009) as well as other communication modes such as images (van Leeuwen, 2006). Such expansion has led to a more interdisciplinary and multimodality approach to CDA (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

In sum, CDA provided me with an effective tool to analyze the often-subtle ways in which *The Wire*, and more specifically Omar Little, portrays HM. Omar Little is emphasized in my analysis because of the diverse social locations in which he is situated, such as being Black, gay, and underclass, as well as embodying a respected, vigilant, and cogent position in society. Analyzing HM with respect to Omar Little has evoked how and in which ways Omar Little conforms to the conventional, but also ruptures it. My belief is that it was certainly worth the investigation to offer insights on how young men and boys might consider non-hegemonic, alternative, and less oppressive ways of being a man (Knuttila, 2016).

Limitations of Critical Discourse Analysis

Like any other methodology, critical discourse analysis comes with advantages and limitations (Mogashoa, 2014; Tenorio, 2011; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Breeze (2011) notes that the interpretation of texts is perhaps one of the most widely argued criticisms. Stubbs (1997) affirms this view by articulating that one of the criticisms of critical linguists is that the interpretation of texts is politically as opposed to linguistically motivated. To put it more simply,

Widdowson (1995) argues that CDA lacks the analysis portion of research because it places more emphasis on interpretation. My reading of Fairclough's (1996) work is that he responds to Widdowson's criticism of CDA by arguing that CDA *is* analysis because it is a process that uses analytical skills. In rebuttal to such criticisms of CDA and textual interpretations, I agree with Fairclough and maintain that my discernment is rooted in the theoretical constructions of HM and the data was drawn and analyzed accordingly.

The word “critical” in CDA is also under scrutiny. Hammersley (1997) argues that the word “critical” and CDA's “philosophical foundations are simply taken for granted, as if they are unproblematic” (p. 244). Breeze (2011) responds by emphasizing that this does not rule out that a more sensible way of using CDA can be applied. Hammersley (1997) also takes into account that CDA is overly ambitious in its views in the sense that it attempts to analyze society as a whole and find solutions to its problems. He further states that such over ambition can lead to over-interpreting the data. From my perspective, the term “critical” in CDA may foster an awareness of oppressive forces and power relations in society, and allow for multiple perspectives that perhaps people were unaware of. Thus, CDA appears to be an effective tool to utilize in research. With respect to CDA and despite its limitations, one needs to look beyond the disadvantages and follow scholars such as Wodak and Meyer (2009) who think of CDA as an ever-expanding field of study.

Methods

My use of CDA identifies hegemonic masculine discourses through Omar Little in *The Wire* that have potential to mimic a social script of HM standards that some young men may follow, since CDA examines the relations of power and language reinforced through social institutions, knowledge, and interactions (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, &

Joseph, 2005). CDA provided me with the tools to analyze the gender presentation of Omar as text. More specifically, I analyzed how Omar Little in *The Wire* portrays HMs and nonHMs and, drawing from my analysis, I draw implications for considering masculinity beyond current practices that are often considered as rigid and confining, if not toxic. CDA goes beyond solely language and involves visuals, which means I analyzed both visuals and language of Omar’s portrayal of HM or, in other words, Omar as text. As text, Omar’s speech and behaviours can be read as signifying meaning relevant to HMs and nonHMs.

Data Collection

I viewed all five seasons of *The Wire*, which amounted to 60, one-hour episodes. Omar appeared in each of the five seasons, resulting in 41 episodes and approximately two hours and twenty minutes of screen time. During each episode, I paid close attention to Omar Little’s performance of masculinities. I developed an “*Omar Text*” *Data Collection Table* (see Table 1) predicated on Messerschmidt’s (2016) conceptualizations of HMs and dominant, dominating, and positive masculinities, to examine specific instances that reflect Omar’s presentation of them. I offer an example below of an instance of unequal gender relations in visuals or text and labelled the scene as presenting HMs and placed it under the column “HMs – description”. If a scene, text, or visual, resulted in a “dominating” masculinity, such as being the shot-caller, I labelled it as such and placed it under the column “dominating masculinities – description.”

I recorded the data I collected in the *Omar Text* table, making note of body language, vocal tone, key examples of speech, and other behavioural patterns. Through my analysis, I categorized various instances where Omar projects HMs and nonHMs. As a quick summary, I noticed five instances where Omar projects HMs. Shifting to nonHMs in his gender presentation, I discerned eight instances of dominant masculinities, 38 instances of dominating masculinities,

18 instances of positive masculinities. Finally, I identified five instances of overlap. Collectively, these instances and descriptions resulted in my raw data set that amassed approximately 100 pages of transcribed text.

Season/Episode / Scene	HMs – Description	Dominant Masculinities - Description	Dominating Masculinities - Description	Positive Masculinities - Description	Overlap - Description
<p>Example: S5/E6/Omar seeks information from an individual (Rick) about Marlo’s whereabouts</p>	<p>(Rick and Omar dialogue). <i>Using terminology such as “bitch” is associated with patriarchy (unequal gender relations between men and women).</i></p>		<p>Omar asserts power and control via a fake gun disguised as a bottle and afterwards, steals Rick’s gun.</p>		<p>This scene is considered “overlap” because it not only depicts nonHMs (dominating masculinities), but he does so while using the terminology “bitch”. Thus, a dominating masculinity is perpetuating patriarchy and is considered HMs.</p>
<p>S4/E6/While Omar is incarcerated</p>		<p>Initially, Omar perceives the</p>			

two men approach his cell.		two men as threats. He stands up to fight and projects a tough-guy image.			
S1/E4/Omar is sitting on a set of stairs with his partner Brandon after robbing a drug house.				(Brandon and Omar dialogue). - Omar kiss Brandon’s forehead and expresses that he is concerned for his safety.	
S1E5/Omar is drawing a plan to rob a set of drug dealers.			Omar is the leader in this situation considering he is the one designing the plan on how to execute the job of robbing a drug dealer. He is the shot-caller.		

Table 1: *Omar Text Data Collection Table*

Data Analysis and Analytical Framework

I listed and described the categories of Omar Little’s presentation of HMs and nonHMs with examples in the findings chapter. The process of collecting and analyzing data was ongoing throughout my viewing and discerning, and recording in the *Omar Text Data Collection Table*. Conducting both collection and analysis concurrently is advantageous because “the process of

data collection and analysis is recursive and dynamic” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 195) in the sense that one is continually refining, changing, and creating further inquiries. The first step was to transcribe discourses of HMs and nonHMs through Omar Little verbatim and afterwards, I hand-coded the data. Although data analysis software is available for coding data, it is generally for large amounts of data. Since I did not have overly large quantities of data to analyze, coding it manually was sufficient. I also believe that I would have achieved equivalent results regardless of the method of coding I selected.

Coding is a process of data analysis that involves categorizing data into sub-divided parts (Dey, 1993). Seidel and Kelle (1995) emphasize that coding involves noticing phenomena that are relevant; collecting occurrences of such phenomena; and analyzing the phenomena to identify commonalities and patterns in the data. To expound, noticing relevant phenomena refers to the system of identifying phenomena that are significant to the specific data collection technique utilized such as interviews and/or observations. Collecting examples of phenomena that are relevant signifies the approach used in breaking the newfound codes into parts and afterwards, reassembling them according to the topic-oriented codes. Analyzing relevant phenomena suggests that researchers inspect the data with a proverbial fine-toothed comb in order to examine the codes in detail from the textual data, while comparing them to pinpoint commonalities and patterns; that is, previously unknown facets of the original data set become privy to the researcher predicated on meticulous examination and analysis.

During the recording of data (i.e., speech and visuals) from Omar’s portrayals of HMs and nonHMs, I designated the appropriate gender presentation to their respective codes using the *Omar Text Data Collection Table*. In addition, I used phrases, notes, and words that also helped in identifying codes to particular texts and visuals. Afterwards, I pinpointed each code and

placed it under each theme. Employing Messerschmidt’s framework, below are the codes I used to discern where each piece of data would correspond to the appropriate column. Messerschmidt (2016) states that researchers must facilitate a better understanding of not only dominant and dominating masculinities in general, but also positive masculinities in particular. Thus, I extrapolated the meanings of positive masculinities to illustrate my interpretation of the concept.

HMs

- Legitimizing unequal gender relations
- Pejorative language against women and minoritized men

Dominant Masculinities

- Tough
- Fearless
- Popular
- Confident
- Dependent on social setting: celebrated, common, or current form of masculinity

Dominating Masculinities

- Shot-caller
- “Running the show”
- Leader
- Commander
- Controlling specific situations
- Powerful

Positive Masculinities

- Egalitarian relations

- Emotional
- Nurturing
- Caring

Overlap

- Powerful but does legitimate unequal gender relations
- In addition to HMs: dominant, dominating, positive masculinities

Watching the series and taking account of each scene where Omar is present resulted in being able to accumulate data on Omar and link each item within the corresponding column in the *Omar Text Data Collection Table*.

The steps I took reflect recommendations of methodologists. For instance, Basit (2003) views the role of coding as a way for researchers to interconnect with the data in order to develop emerging themes and generate theory. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), themes, synonymous with categories, are answers or findings that are developed from the data set by means of analysis. After coding the data, the researcher re-examines the set codes (i.e., notes, comments, words, and/or phrases) and begins to link the codes that seem to connect with one another. Such groupings are emergent themes derived from recurring patterns and commonalities found across the data. In addition, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stress that categories that emerge are not the data itself; rather, categories are abstractions captured from the coded corpus. Subsequently, all evidence, including but not limited to codes, lines, and numbers, that connect with each category are placed accordingly to ensure that the original documentation can be reviewed effortlessly.

Such analysis is considered to be an inductive approach to coding the data. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) emphasize that inductive research involves the building of “concepts, hypotheses,

or theories” from the data as opposed to moving from the general to the specific as in deductive reasoning (p. 17). Using inductive reasoning, I identified instances of each theme that were developed from my research question: *How might an analysis of Omar Little’s presentation of masculinity help to unravel hegemonic masculinities from nonhegemonic masculinities?*

Conclusion

This chapter described the methodological framework that I employed known as critical discourse analysis. The use of CDA was appropriate by virtue of the connections between social practices and language. In addition, I delineated my method that I used in order to analyze the gender presentation of Omar Little. My utilization of CDA and the *Omar Text Data Collection Table* I developed for data collection was also discussed. Afterwards, I explained my analytical framework that I used to analyze and code the data, so that they corresponded with the themes from the *Omar Text Data Collection Table*. In the following chapter, I discuss my findings, which include various scenes via texts and visuals, to illustrate Omar’s presentation of HMs and nonHMs.

Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of Omar Little’s representations of HMs and nonHMs in *The Wire*, which I discerned utilizing the *Omar Text Data Collection Table*. Based on my research question, *How might an analysis of Omar Little’s presentation of masculinity help to unravel hegemonic masculinities from nonhegemonic masculinities?* I identified scenes in which Omar depicts HMs and nonHMs through Messerschmidt’s framework. As anticipated, Omar’s complex and multifaceted constructions of masculinity involved both conforming to the conventional forms of masculinity as well as deviating from them.

To aid in unraveling the concepts of HMs and nonHMs, I provided examples from Omar that will enhance clarity and understanding: (1) Examples of nonHMs; and (2) Examples of HMs and Overlap. Overall, the examples that I have identified via texts and visuals (see Appendix 1) were a result of my analysis of Omar’s constructions of HMs and nonHMs through CDA.

Examples of NonHegemonic Masculinities

In numerous scenes and in general, Omar is projected as a man who is fearless, confident, and tough, as well as a man who possesses leadership qualities. His street-wise acumen is evident as he swaggers in the projects of Baltimore. With a shotgun in one hand and oftentimes a bullet-proof vest, Omar is frequently on-the-hunt for robbing stash houses for money and/or drugs and seeking people who desire to harm and/or kill him. Without hesitation, Omar repeatedly appears trekking through the streets of Baltimore without concern for his own life or others. He seems to perceive himself as untouchable, especially given his criminal reputation of violence, aggression, and intimidation throughout the streets of Baltimore’s Black communities.

Dominant Masculinities. Although anyone can unexpectedly shoot him and/or kill him, he portrays a phlegmatic persona, impervious to other’s attacks and/or intimidation, as well as

seemingly overly confident; he displays a convincingly “cocky” attitude, appearing untouchable. Season 1, episode 8 (Time (T) – 38:13) depicts Omar’s apparent fearlessness characterized through a scene where he seeks revenge for his partner Brandon’s murder. As he emerges from the shadows, he shoots and kills Aton Artis, alias Stinkum, a Barksdale crewmember that is involved in the selling of illegal narcotics for the organization. Afterwards, Omar is shown shooting Roland Brice, alias Wee-Bey, while also being fired at by Wee-Bey (T – 38: 18). What is interesting about this scene is that Omar appears to be impervious to the bullets. He presents himself as tough and fearless. Omar continuously shoots Wee-Bey without any regard for his own safety.

Although he does not kill Wee-Bey, he appears to shoot him in the foot (T – 38:22). Afterwards, Wee-Bey conceals himself behind a vehicle to avoid additional injuries or potential death. Omar whistles his famous nursery rhyme “The Farmer in The Dell”, which I conjecture was used allegorically to convey the socially constructed hierarchy of power that is situated in society, representing those at the bottom of the hierarchy to be perceived as less significant, important, or non-conforming.

In season 1, episode 6, detective Greggs from the Baltimore police force is speaking with Omar about a murder which Marquis Hilton, alias Bird, committed. Again, seeking vengeance for the murder of his romantic partner, Brandon, Omar is willing to testify in court against Bird. Greggs explains that in order for Bird to become incarcerated, more evidence needs to be presented than merely a gun; more specifically, Greggs explains that an eyewitness must also be used as evidence in court. Without hesitation, Omar deceitfully clarifies to Greggs that he witnessed the murder Bird committed and states that he is not afraid.

Although Omar wholeheartedly understands the consequence of testifying against a Barksdale member, which is likely death, he makes a bold statement: “Omar don’t scare” (Omar – Season (S)1 Episode (E)6 – T – 53:00 – 53:36). Evidently, Omar claims that he is not frightened by anyone nor is he petrified of the potential implications of his testimony in court. Omar perceives himself as an individual who is audacious and lacks concern for his own safety because of his reputation and respected status in the Baltimore criminality scene.

In season 4, episode 6, one of Marlo’s men murders an individual and frames Omar as the suspect. As Omar inevitably winds up incarcerated, two men approach his cell (Omar Stands His Ground – S4 E6 – T – 52:40).

With the sight of a man holding an object in one hand and the other man guarding the cell door, Omar, without hesitation, stands up and raises his fists and is ready to fight. Unbeknownst to Omar, the two men are friends of Butchie, Omar’s friend, mentor, and banker, and directed by him to protect and help Omar. In addition, one of the men provided Omar with a type of weapon that resembles a blade. However, the point is that Omar is, again, unafraid of the potential dangers of incarceration. Although there may be other factors associated with Omar’s ready-to-fight mentality, such as Omar’s preparedness for the possible consequences, I contend that this particular example epitomizes Omar’s tough guy image as one of the most prominent factors related to Omar’s dominant masculinities. Moreover, though some men in the prison may be Marlo’s men, a high-end drug dealer, and Marlo may have placed a bounty on him, Omar is willing to fight back, regardless of the cost.

In a similar matter in season 1, episode 6, McNulty and Greggs, both detectives for the Baltimore Police department, interrogate Omar about Brandon’s death. As they investigate Brandon’s death, McNulty explores the crux of the matter and attempts to connect the murder of

Brandon to the Barksdale crew. Near the end of the conversation, Omar makes a smart remark to McNulty’s comment: “Look. In my game, you take some kid, you play it the safest way you can...Frankly, you been in it as long as me you do the thing on your name” (Omar – S1 E6 – T – 57:58 – 59:05).

McNulty’s comment that people who are endeavouring to kill Omar will potentially be the ones hunted, since Omar will pursue any individual who is willing to go after him, evokes a spark in Omar. Immediately, Omar reacts to the statement and responds with the utmost intensity in his eyes: “Oh, indeed” (Omar – S1 E6 – T – 57:58 – 59:05). This statement, along with Omar’s facial expressions and tone of voice suggest that Omar *will* pursue anyone who attempts to go after him. Omar’s confidence is quite evident in this scenario. There seems to be no doubt in Omar’s mind that, regardless of the circumstances, he will, “indeed”, go after those who endeavour to go after him. This is shown through the previous examples as well as further examples below.

Subsequently, season 1, episode 5 (T – 6:32), presents Omar walking down the street with his shotgun, trench coat, bulletproof vest, and tough-guy appeal, and whistling his notorious *The Farmer in The Dell* nursery rhyme while citizens run away and shout something along the lines of “Hey, yo! Omar comin” (S1 E5 – 6:25 – 6:40), as they swiftly scatter and run in the opposite direction to him. Evidently, most people on the streets of Baltimore’s projects know who Omar is, representing a popular individual (Omar Trekking – S1 E5 – T – 6:32).

Dominating Masculinities. In addition to his fearlessness and tough guy image, his own perceived imperviousness stems from his dominance in certain positions and situations in society. In many instances, Omar portrays a dominating individual who is not afraid to challenge authority and take control of the situation at hand. As a masculine presence, Omar takes up social

space. Whether Omar is strutting through Baltimore, speaking to lawyers and/or police, or in a violent situation, he does not let others intimidate him nor does he become vulnerable to the situation at hand. Power relations in society do not appear to faze Omar. He seems de-sensitized to people in power or in higher positions and depicts a dominating persona towards them, even challenging them at certain instances. For example, in season 2, episode 6, Omar testifies in court against Bird. While he is testifying, a lawyer challenges Omar and highlights that he is “amoral... You are feeding off the violence and the despair of the drug trade... You are a parasite who leeches off...” (Maury – S2 E6 – T – 11:50 – 14:36). In response, Omar states, “I got the shotgun. You got the briefcase. It’s all in the game, though, right?” (Omar – S2 E6 – T – 11:50 – 14:36).

It seems as though Maury, a defense attorney, is “toying” with Omar and attempting to overthrow his confidence by expressing his own interpretation of Omar’s actions and life course. Maury uses, to some extent, a puppetry-like deception to persuade Omar into believing his opinion and perception of him. Without restraint, Omar immediately reacts to Maury’s comment about his amorality. He responds with the utmost confidence. Maury is perceived to be in a position of power in relation to Omar’s fettered situation in society, from a lower socio-economic status and lacking a legitimate occupation; however, Omar does not hesitate to express and challenge Maury’s claims about him. Omar’s comment suggests that Maury is also a “parasite” who profits from those who are affiliated with criminality.

Similarly, in season 1, episode 8, after he shoots Wee-Bey in the foot, Wee-Bey hides behind a vehicle. Omar whistles his famous nursery rhyme “*The Farmer in The Dell*”. He then makes a compelling statement: “Listen here, Bey. You come at the king, you best not miss” (Omar – S1 E8 – T – 38:52 - 39:00).

It is noteworthy to analyze such a statement regarding Omar and his presentation of HMs. Firstly, “come at the king” is suggestive evidence that Omar perceives himself as superior, an HM individual who rules over others. Such a perceived superiority between himself and others, especially given the circumstances encompassing his life, such as violence, guns, aggression, and death, suggests that regardless of the situation, Omar identifies himself as “king” and seeks to find revenge for his fallen romantic partners at all costs. Such a dominating image of himself as ruler or “king” is indicative of a perceived leadership position that he perceives himself as.

In season 2, episode 11, Omar walks into a bar and speaks with Stringer Bell. As Omar approaches the doorway, one of the bouncers attempts to pat down Omar to check for harmful weapons or any type of arms that may be a potential danger. Omar responds to the pat down by stating that the pat down will not be necessary for him (S2 E11 – T – 16:04 – 18:30).

In this instance, Omar takes immediate control of the situation revealing to the audience that no one has the right to pat him down without his permission, regardless of the situation or the person undertaking the act. Even Stringer Bell, one of the higher-end drug lords in the Barksdale organization, claims that it is acceptable for the bouncer not to pat down Omar. What makes this particular scene interesting is the fact that several men are surrounding Omar and can potentially kill him if necessary. As an alternative to the pat down and potential death or wounds, Omar stands his ground and confidently responds by emphasizing that touching him without his approval is unnecessary and will not transpire. He perceives himself as untouchable: an individual who dominates, controls situations, and challenges authority or rules.

In addition to Omar’s way of controlling certain situations, he also portrays leadership. In many instances, Omar is portrayed as the leader of his crew or organization. He is also portrayed

as the leader in his relationships; people seem to admire Omar. For example, in season 1, episode 5, demonstrates that Omar is leading his team into battle (Omar The Leader – S1 E5 – T – 4:33).

Omar is shown drawing a plan of action on the ground using a stick that examines a particular scenario to rob a few drug dealers on the street. He negotiates and suggests certain positions where it would be most beneficial to rob the drug dealers. Omar seems to be the character in the series who demonstrates street-wise acumen and leadership. His analyses and astute observations in certain situations portray him as a leader among men and a man of action. In most events, if not all, Omar devises the plans and executes them *his way*.

To provide another example of Omar’s leadership, in season 3, episode 3, Omar observes and analyzes a potential Barksdale stash house to rob. Tosha and Kimmy, two of Omar’s female associates, along with Dante, Omar’s new partner, discuss a plan to rob another Barksdale stash house. Tosha asks why they continue to rob Barksdale houses. In response, Omar simply replies, “Because” (S3 E3 – T – 5:02 – 6:04).

In this particular scene, Omar is portrayed as the shot caller; in other words, a person who is in a higher position who communicates to others tasks that will be fulfilled. Omar is the only individual in the group who observes, spies on, and oversees the operations for robbing this particular Barksdale stash house. He explains to Dante the potential action the subsequent day so that they can rob the house. Based on the nature of events and the fact that Omar’s ex-partner died from the wrath of the Barksdale crew, there seems to be an ulterior motive for Omar to pursue Barksdale stash houses. Although he does not divulge such information, it is implied through the continuous robbing of specific Barksdale crews and houses. Without Omar’s permission, it is apparent that others in Omar’s group do not have much of a voice in certain

situations. He simply provides the order; it is evident that he portrays a dominating stance in a given situation.

In season 4, episode 11, Omar and Renaldo, his new partner, are sitting in a taxicab anticipating Stanfield’s crew will appear. However, Renaldo is frustrated and wishes to leave the premises. Omar replies by stating, “Lo siento, baby. Lo siento. Hey, now. There she blow” (Omar snaps fingers to follow Stanfield crewmembers in a vehicle) (S4 E11 – T – 07:15 – 8:01).

Again, Omar is represented as a leader in several ways. Firstly, Renaldo is driving the taxicab. In fact, in most driving scenes, Omar’s group members are typically the ones driving, which situates Omar in a position of power. Secondly, Renaldo seems aggravated at Omar and suggests alternative scenarios in hunting the Barksdale crewmembers. Omar discredits Renaldo’s comment and makes a clever remark. Subsequently, Omar thinks twice about Renaldo’s idea and agrees with it, although with a sense of sarcasm. As Renaldo explains to Omar that he is tired of observing others for long hours, Omar apologizes, but then immediately snaps his fingers to make Renaldo follow the Stanfield crewmembers.

Drawing from Omar’s dominating image, he distinguishes himself in public as a person who successfully demonstrates dominant and dominating masculinities. The fearless tough guy who struts through the streets, gun in one hand and bulletproof vest surrounding his chest, abdominals, and back region portrays a sense of dominance. His dominating personality also shines through his ability to call the shots, challenge authority, and speak and live up to what he believes in. His ability to lead his group members provides him with a sense of authority and control over those he leads.

Other instances of Omar’s presentation of dominating masculinities were characterized through visual cues such as holding guns, intimidation, and violence as well as discourses of

dominating masculinities articulated by Omar. In a variety of scenes, Omar’s portrayals of dominating masculinities were extensively expressed and depicted as producing power over others. In particular, Omar’s prevalent use of a shotgun was often illustrated as a form of intimidation, violence, and ultimately power over others. (See: Omar Robs Stash House – S1 E3 – T – 44:00; Omar Shoots –S1 E3 – T – 44:04; Omar Robs Another – S1 E5 – T – 7:03; Omar’s Power – S1 E9 – T – 23:13; Omar Demands – S3 E3 – T – 17:52).

Season 1, episode 3 (T – 44:00), portrays Omar robbing a “stash” house (i.e., a house used to conceal drugs and/or money). In order to effectively execute such a task, Omar designs a plan of action with his boyfriend and another man. Afterwards, they are depicted either using weapons to assert dominance over their victims by striking them with their weapons and/or hands. For those who do not comply with Omar’s demands, he does not hesitate to use his weapon of choice, a shotgun, and shoot people. However, in most instances he would rather wound as opposed to kill an individual. Such brute force and power is illustrated in season 1, episode 3, (T – 44:04), where he asks a young Black man where the money is hidden. Without hesitancy, Omar shoots the young Black man after his refusal to divulge the covert location of the money. In response, the man screamed in agony as he shed blood from his bullet-holed knee.

In season 1, episode 5 (T – 7:03), after designing an appropriate plan to rob two drug dealers on the street, Omar and his crew employ their strategically orchestrated scheme by blocking the two men in an alleyway and pointing their guns towards them. Again, Omar and his two partners-in-crime use their guns to assert dominance over the two Black drug dealers in the on-going battle over the drug war. Although physical force was not performed by Omar and his partners, just the mere presence of the guns seem to exemplify dominance that emphasized a sense of power and supremacy.

Similarly, season 1, episode 9 (T – 23:13) represents Omar trekking through a Black community wearing a bulletproof vest and trench coat while holding his infamous shotgun and smoking a cigarette. Parallel to other scenes, citizens seem to be in awe as he walks towards them; the citizens evade and shriek that Omar is in the area. His objective was to obtain drugs so that he could provide a proposal for Proposition Joe, a higher-end drug dealer, which was to provide free drugs to Proposition Joe in exchange for Avon Barksdale’s contact information. To achieve his objective he uses his sheer presence combined with his shotgun to demand drugs. A conversation between Omar and a drug dealer from a building efficiently sums up Omar’s demeanour and the fear he creates in others. Omar expresses, “You all need to open this door, man...” “I will put a bullet in all y’all behind, what happen right now, you heard?” (S1 E9 – T – 23:04 – 24:37).

Language such as “I will put a bullet in all y’all behind” suggests that Omar, as a man, will do what he requires to keep control of, and power over, any given situation—by instilling fear in others, especially those who deceive him. It seems as though the men he is directing such a comment to would rather provide him with what he desires rather than face the wrath of Omar. Moreover, season 3, episode 3 (T – 17:52), echoes such an assertion since Omar is emphasizing his masculinity through domination and control via his shotgun. As he points the shotgun towards one of the Black men guarding the money in the house, the man refuses to tell him where the money is. Again, Omar points the gun towards his kneecaps and the man capitulates to Omar and proceeds to nod his head towards the stash.

In season 4, episode 4, Omar is portrayed using guns to rob a high-end drug dealer named Marlo. He steals a large amount of cash and forces Marlo to give him his diamond ring: “All

right, everybody, Let me see them hands...I don't know about cards, but, I think these 45s beat a full house... Boy, you got me confused with a man repeats himself” (Omar – T – 54:40 – 55:58).

In this particular scene, Omar exerts power over others. By placing emphasis on his guns and flashing them towards the men at the card table, Omar mentions that “45s beat a full house” meaning that his guns are more powerful than a mere card game. He implies that such power is a result of knowing that he can kill any single person in the room if he does not achieve his objective: money. In addition, Omar's statement, “Boy, you got me confused with a man repeats himself,” suggests that Omar *will* kill him if he refuses to listen to his commands. By forcing a gun towards his chin, Omar asserts dominance, a trait of HM that reflects control and authority over others. To demand things and achieve one's objectives means that placing a gun towards an individual will determine the outcome, accomplishing one's tasks no matter the cost.

Omar also mentions that he can find them easier than they can find him. Such a statement indicates that if need be, Omar can seek out the men at any time and use brute force or guns to wound or kill them. In this instance, Omar “calls the shots”, and is an authoritative figure who imposes rules and restrictions to direct the path that he desires others to take. To be an authoritative figure means that Omar has the potential to dictate, instruct, and instil fear in order to efficaciously achieve his goals, which may be seen as insidious in nature. Because of his power position in this situation, Omar is able to embody HM without concern for himself or others around him.

Through the photos and texts, nonHMs discourse is palpable. Omar presents himself as unafraid of the various situations he encounters, utilizes his gun, and confidently struts through the poverty and violence-ridden streets. However, such toughness begets violence, aggression, intimidation, power, control, and ultimately death. Such masculine power is associated with

unbecoming qualities that provoke violent behaviour. Though positive qualities seem to be difficult to contrive in situations that are situated in a world of violence, bloodshed, and bestiality, possessing qualities of compassion, care, and kindness may help such situations, especially in escaping the criminal underworld. In what follows, I expose Omar's positive masculinities and provide examples via text and visuals.

Positive Masculinities. In the previous two sections, I emphasized how Omar's performances of violence and aggression, compounded by his use of guns, generated dominant and dominating masculinities; the kind of man that Katz (1999) describes as the “tough guise”; the man who illustrates toughness as a means to project power onto others. However, it is also the case that Omar portrayed a softer, gentler side that I would argue had several presentations of positive masculinities. Harkening back to Messerschmidt (2016), positive masculinities are those that might promote egalitarianism between men and women, and other men, and challenge dominance channelled through patriarchy. In this section, I focus solely on how Omar depicts positive masculinities by providing examples from his language, actions, and cues.

Omar is often seen physically caressing his romantic partners. In fact, he publicly displays affection to his partners in some scenes as well. For example, subsequent to robbing a Barksdale stash house, Omar is depicted with a friend accompanied by Omar's boyfriend at the time, Brandon. In this particular scene, Omar is placing his arm around Brandon (Omar Kisses Brandon's Forehead – S1 E4 – T –18:32) and caressing him by rubbing his forehead. Although Brandon made the mistake of saying Omar's name out-loud while robbing the stash house, Omar forgives Brandon.

This particular scene is a perfect example of how Omar displays love and affection towards his partner, Brandon. Without regard to his own homosexuality or the potential

consequences of his actions in public, he is fearless of any adversity that may pose a challenge. Moreover, this scene is in stark contrast to the recent robbery of the stash house. Recall in the stash house scene, Omar is seen portraying dominance and shortly afterward in the scene, he is shown caressing his partner and embodying characteristics such as love and affection. Afterwards, Omar is shown kissing Brandon’s forehead, an intimate display of love towards his partner.

Correspondingly, in season 1, episode 5, Omar and Brandon seem to be arranging to rob another drug dealer by attiring in weapons and bulletproof vests. During this scene, Omar is perturbed by Brandon’s vulgar language: “Don’t nobody wanna hear them dirty words, man. Especially coming from such a beautiful mouth” (Omar – S1 E5 – T – 43:24 – 44:39). This is followed by a kiss, meant to acknowledge the aforementioned beauty (Omar Kisses Brandon – S1 E5: 44:04).

In addition to expressing care and compassion towards others, Omar expresses his pain and frustration as opposed to suppressing such feelings. In season 1, episode 10, Omar discusses the relations between him and the Barksdale crew to McNulty and Greggs. Despite Greggs’ and McNulty’s suggestion to abandon the idea of seeking revenge, Omar decided to attempt the murder of Avon Barksdale. Although Omar nearly succeeded, one of Avon’s henchmen came to the rescue and shot Omar near the shoulder region. Subsequently, Omar reveals to McNulty and Greggs his gunshot wound as well as expresses his pain to them and asks for their assistance in finding a doctor. In this scene, depicts Omar expresses agony and pain (Omar’s Bullet-Holed Shoulder – S1 E10 – T – 15:13).

In a similar instance, Omar asks McNulty if he could view Brandon’s body. Previously, Brandon was found murdered with cuts and cigarette burns on his body. McNulty agrees to bring

Omar; however, Omar is in disbelief and evidently in pain. In season 1, episode 6 (Brandon’s Death – T – 45:11) and season 1, episode 6 (Omar Cries – T – 44:57), Omar is shown crying as well as kissing Brandon’s forehead.

Such emotional pain and suffering is evident in many situations with Omar where loved ones, either romantic partners or friends, have died. After observing the body, Omar begins to hit himself in the head with his hands in addition to screaming in agony as depicted in season 1, episode 6 (Omar Hits Himself – T – 45:25). Omar’s self-affliction represents the anguish he feels from Brandon’s death. Omar seems to understand that the reason why Brandon has cigarette burns and marks over his body is because he did not reveal Omar’s location to the Barksdale crew. As a result, Brandon was tortured to death.

Emotional expressiveness via self-affliction is apparent in a subsequent episode. In season 3, episode 3, Omar is lying on his bed smoking a cigarette. He seems saddened by the loss of Tosha described in a section above. He places a lit cigarette in the palm of his hand, clenches his fist, and shrivels in pain; he begins to cry. Omar walks into a room with Dante and Kimmy and apologizes for the loss of Tosha, explaining to them that it was his fault (S3 E3 – 35:30 – 35:52).

What is intriguing about this scene in particular is the fact that it reveals a softer side to Omar. Although a feeling of melancholy encompasses Omar, he feels the urge to self-afflict pain. Although I contend that I do not fully comprehend why Omar chooses to self-afflict pain, from these actions it seems as though Omar yearns for a sense of feeling, palpable through the cigarette burn; a type of pain that can help redirect and potentially dampen the agony he feels from the death of his friend. Season 3, episode 3 (Omar Inflicts Pain 1 – T – 35:54) and season 3, episode 3 (Omar Inflicts Pain 2 – T – 36:04) depict such anguish and despair.

In addition to revealing his pain and frustrations and love and affection, Omar also projects a protector image. While “the protector” might be considered a facet of patriarchy, my readings of Omar’s protective behaviours are examples of positive masculinities because they are not part of his role or identity but, rather, actions that attempt to quell violence. His heroism is exemplified in season 3, episode 3 (Omar The Protector – T – 19:17), where Omar and his crew attempt to rob a stash house. During the raid, Omar’s crew become engrossed in a flood of bullets from Barksdale crewmembers. As a result, Omar places his body in front of the others and begins to fire his gun while allowing his crew to run while he protects them. It seems as though he would rather get shot than allow them to get wounded or killed.

Omar’s heroism is also exemplified through the act of saving his grandmother. As Omar and his grandmother get into a taxi in order to attend Sunday morning mass, two people begin to shoot at Omar and his grandmother. With complete disregard for his own safety, he jumps behind his grandmother, and grabs and protects her with his body. Such portrayals of heroism project Omar embodying emotions of care, compassion, and sympathy towards others.

Another act of emotionality that Omar portrays is related to the moral code by which he abides. In some scenes, the audience becomes privy to Omar’s moral code of *never* involving a citizen who is not involved in the world of criminality and the areas associated with it such as police and drug dealers. In other words, Omar abides by the rule of not performing any physical assaults, violent activities, or malicious threats to citizens who are not associated with criminal enterprises or activities. For instance, Omar divulges such information to Bunk, a Baltimore police detective, in season 4 episode 7 (T – 11:43 – 13:59), by stating that, “A man got to have a code.”

In season 3, episode 11 (T – 54:13 – 54:33), Omar displays his “moral code.” For example, Brother Mouzone and Omar attempt to kill Stringer Bell. After planning their attack, Omar barges into the building in which Stringer Bell and others are negotiating business. Omar shoots one of the members, while Stringer Bell flees from the scene. In this instance, Omar points the gun at a “citizen” potentially involved in criminality; however, Omar lets him live. Such a scene displays Omar’s emotionality towards those who are not involved or, at least, not associated with criminality and how he lives up to such a mantra.

Examples of HMs and Overlap

Omar projects various instances where HMs are apparent. Guided by Messerschmidt’s conceptualization of HMs and nonHMs, Omar performs masculinity in certain situations that reflects an unequal patriarchal and/or gender relations based on sexist and racist discourse. However, it is important to note that in scenes where Omar projects HMs, he also depicts a dominating masculinity. For example, in season 3, episode 9 (T – 8:45 – 9:08), after the attack on Omar and his grandmother, he complains that the Barksdale organization has no respect for Sundays (S3 E9 – T – 14:12 – 15:29). What he means is that on Sunday mornings, people, regardless of criminal endeavours, should respect those who are attending Church, at least in this case.

In season 3, episode 9 (T – 14:13 – 16:12), Omar uses the word “niggers” which is a derogatory and racist remark towards Black people, as spoken by others. The political strategy among marginalized groups of “reclaiming” slurs for their use in a positive way is source of ongoing debate (Gaucher, Hunt, & Sinclair, 2015). However, any use of such a word could be, and is often, read as perpetuating patriarchy in the form of a demeaning remark towards “othered” men, specifically Black people. A common claim of such terms is that, despite himself

being Black, discourse such as “nigger” is ultimately rooted in racism and places Omar in a position where unequal patriarchal relations are prevalent.

In another scene, Omar emerges out of the shadows and shoots Marlo’s henchman without hesitation. He states: “Tell that boy he ain't man enough to come down to the street with Omar. You tell him that!” (Omar – S5 E6 – T – 40:26 – 41:58).

Omar proclaims that Marlo “ain’t man enough to come down to the street with Omar,” implying that Marlo is not a “man,” because, according to Omar, he is afraid to go up against him. Such a statement projects a patriarchal imbalance and sets Omar as a more “manly” individual because of his fearlessness and toughness towards the situation. In addition, this scene depicts overlap between HMs and non-HMs because of the power and control Omar has over the situation via utilizing a gun.

In season 5, episode 6 (T – 30:24 – 31:25), Omar attempts to find Marlo in order to kill him. He finds an individual named Rick, who might know Marlo’s whereabouts. In this scene, Omar employs sexist language such as “bitch” in his attempt to assert power and control over the situation via a gun in order to find Marlo. In fact, Omar first uses a bottle to disguise it as a gun in order to assert power over Rick. Because Rick is turned around facing a wall, Rick suspects that the bottle is therefore a gun. However, Omar snatches Rick’s gun and afterwards, attempts to persuade Rick to express Marlo’s whereabouts. Thus, such a scene depicts an overlap between HMs and nonHMs due to the unequal gender relations, viz. the word “bitch”, and the assertion of power to control the situation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined Omar’s character that has exhibited various presentations of HMs and nonHMs. Such presentations were portrayed by Omar and were grouped into two

categories that were guided by Messerschmidt’s (2016) framework of HMs and nonHMs, including dominant, dominating, and positive masculinities. I also provided examples of instances where Omar projected HMs with an overlap of dominating masculinities. Such examples supported my findings through portrayals of HMs and nonHMs via visuals and texts. Evidently, Omar portrayed both HM and nonHMs, but seemed to perform more dominating masculinities. In what follows, I discuss my findings in relation to my research question: *How might an analysis of Omar Little’s presentation of masculinity help to unravel hegemonic masculinities from nonhegemonic masculinities?*

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

In this section, I contextualize my findings and describe their importance to my research question. As evidenced through my analysis of Omar, presentation of HMs and nonHMs are prominent in his gender presentation. Guided by Messerschmidt's (2016) framework of HMs and nonHMs, Omar's presentation of masculinity provides an unraveling of sorts that can better determine what constitutes HMs; that is, Omar's presentation of masculinity create a better understanding of what legitimates unequal gender relations. In addition, portrayals of Omar's HMs and nonHMs may inform young men and boys, and others in general, about HMs. In what follows, I discuss the findings. Afterwards, I offer a personal reflection and add recommendations for future research directions.

Unraveling HMs and NonHMs

Omar portrayed a multifaceted approach to masculinity in the sense that he was able to depict both HMs and nonHMs. For instance, in most scenes, Omar uses a dominating masculinity by using force via a shotgun to assert power over others in order to control a given situation. In other instances, Omar embodied various positive masculinities that deviate from traditional notions of masculinity and that suggest a more egalitarian relation between men and women, and other men. However, the few presentations of HMs were through an overlap of dominating masculinities. These categorizations enhance clarity to the usage of the terms HMs and nonHMs so as to understand gender relations.

From a Messerschmidtian lens, Omar's gender presentation was in the realm of dominating masculinities; that is, Omar projected a type of masculinity that predominately provided Omar with power and control over situations in particular social settings. This means that Omar's presentation of masculinities were mainly projected as *not* demonstrating HMs,

signifying that the majority of his dominating masculinities did *not* depict unequal patriarchal relations.

For instance, in most scenes, violence played a key role in his controlling of situations. Omar frequently performed violent and aggressive behaviour, instilled fear, and intimidated others. Such violence was typically associated with robbing stash houses and/or demanding his wants, needs, or desires, typically through revenge. The most significant aspect of achieving his objectives was his use of a shotgun, which involved numerous scenes of violence and aggression. Omar’s stylization is similar to that of cowboy mythology portrayed in television and film (Greig, personal communication, June 11, 2018). More specifically, Omar chose to either: a) point his shotgun towards others; b) shoot people when demands were not met; or c) strut throughout the streets with a gun in hand. In other words, the shotgun was the symbol of dominating masculinities for Omar. Without his shotgun, he would be deemed weak and unsuitable for the conditions of robbing or intimidating others. As Alphonse Capone, an Italian-American mobster boss during the Prohibition era, once said, “You can get much farther with a kind word and a gun than you can with a kind word alone” (Scarface, n.d.). However, such violent behaviour is consistent with Messerschmidt’s conceptualization of dominating masculinities, not representing HMs.

Katz (1999) describes how, in movies, the gun has evolved and changed over time through historical periods to become larger in size. In essence, the use of weapons, such as guns or swords, are associated with phallic symbolism and correlated with violent masculinity, and reinforced through social institutions such as entertainment industries. Weapons as a tool and/or symbol that can be used against other people or masculinities, are a form of violent masculinity that frequently becomes hegemonic (Myrttinen, 2003). In fact, Brubaker and Johnson (2008)

found that erectile enhancements ads foster a type of discourse that perceives a crisis of masculinity, but also provides the panacea to the problem of men lacking power and control that make them masculine. By presenting erectile enhancements to achieve masculinity through power and size of the penis, it falsely offers the ideology that penis size is associated with masculinity that dominates women and competes with other men as a measure of their manhood. In addition, Brubaker and Johnson (2008) express the fact that men need alternative ways of being men and more recognition for who they *actually* are as opposed to achieving idealized versions. Drawing from the above claims, such scenes do *not* constitute a patriarchal relation based on Messerschmidt's (2016) framework on dominating masculinities. Instead, they constitute nonHMs.

Omar's dominant masculinities were also apparent, albeit less frequent than his dominating masculinities. During scenes that projected dominant masculinities, Omar was typically projecting a tough-guy image or walking the streets confidently. Scenes that depicted a tough-guy image were not depicting unequal gender relations, but rather presented Omar with a confident and tough man appeal. His popularity also shone via the Black communities' shrieks of his name as he strutted the streets. Again, all presentations of dominant masculinities did not result in unequal gender relations.

Drawing from Omar's dominant and dominating masculinities, according to Messerschmidt (2000) and Peralta and Tuttle (2013), some boys may yearn to redirect their subordinate masculinities and behave in dominant masculine ways. Thus, Omar would be diverting his subordinate masculinities, such as being Black, gay, and poor, and acting in ways that are culturally and socially acceptable by men; meaning that he exhibits nonHMs that would be considered dominant and dominating in certain circumstances. I agree with the authors' claim

and such a suggestion is reinforced and depicted through Omar’s portrayal of a man who has limitations via institutionalized barriers such as systemic oppression. As Deylami (2015) put it, Omar did not seem to have a choice of whether to act violently, predicated on the socio-political world that privileges some and oppresses others.

Based on the notion of “choice”, Connell (1995) discusses how such marginalization via, for example poverty, may increase coercion and violence. She states that “violence is part of a system of domination, but it is at the same time a measure of its imperfection. A thoroughly legitimate hierarchy would have less need to intimidate.” (p. 84) Given Omar’s situational and life circumstances, it appears as though he utilized survival tactics predicated on systemic oppression. For instance, it may be the case that he was unable to find a legitimate or stable career (the series does not delve into such an assumption; however, it can be assumed that he could not find work due to his life circumstances) and therefore, had a lower socio-economic status.

Consistent with Cooper (2012), who transcended the notion of HMs to embody a more materialistic multidimensional approach that focuses on class structure, Omar was influenced by the broader social structures that prohibited him from achieving a so-called “normal” life, such as a stable job or career and working class, middle class, or upper class existence, and was influenced to redirect such lack of masculine qualities, such as breadwinner and middle-to-upper class reality, and perform criminality, violence, and aggression, as well as portraying a fearless character. To achieve stability means to perform nonHMs of violence and aggression to attain financial gain or to enact revenge for those who have killed his friends and partners.

From an intersectional approach, despite being a male and privileged in the gendered sense, Omar is less privileged due to the intersection of class, race, and sexuality. To remove

such privilege in other areas, as Coston and Kimmel (2012) argue, would assume emasculation. More specifically, removing certain social locations (i.e. class, race, and sexuality) from a man would deem him as unmanly. Thus, “such benefits are less visible, since marginalized men are less likely to see a reduced masculinity dividend as much compensation for their marginalization” (Coston & Kimmel, 2012, p. 98). To act out in violent or destructive ways, then, would suggest “protest” masculinity may be a more accurate representation of Omar’s presentation of dominating masculinities (nonHMs) and would support the notion that such masculinities are not considered to be HMs. Thus, most of Omar’s gender presentation would not be in the realm of oppressive, but only when he projects HMs and dominating collectively.

Ford (2011) echoes such an assertion through the various interviews he had with Black men by uncovering that many of the men’s idealized form of masculinity, is through qualities such as toughness, heterosexuality, and strength. Omar evidently challenges authority, calls the shots, and uses violence, intimidation, and power. And it is typically through a shotgun that Omar presents his depictions of nonHMs towards others, typically Black men in Baltimore’s projects characterized by degradation and poverty. Such a tough guy image, or tough guise as Katz (1999) highlights, projects to viewers that Black, gay men are seeking a hegemonic masculine state by performing what Majors’ (1998/2017) underscores as the “cool pose”, meaning that some men in society may transgress repressive circumstances to attempt to attain a dominant masculine image (p. 17)--compensatory tactic utilized by some men that lack hegemonic masculine qualities similar to Omar.

Drawing from Atkinson’s (2011) pastiche hegemony, which emphasizes the way in which men can potentially gain power by exhibiting various masculine presentations through diverse localized social arenas such as within the home versus in a work setting, Omar was able

to perform dominating masculinities, allowing him to develop into a person who adapts to their environment. Such adaptation is axiomatic in varied social contexts and situations. Depending on the social environment, Omar projects dominating (and dominant) masculinities when in an undesirable and precarious situation such as a gunfight, as opposed to positive masculinities when accompanied by one of his romantic partners.

Given Omar’s presentation of nonHMs, I argue that, according to Messerschmidt’s (2016) conception of HMs and nonHMs, most of his presentations do not constitute unequal gender relation since they predominately do not legitimate patriarchal relations. The few instances that Omar’s performances of HMs were also coupled with nonHMs, specifically dominating masculinities, which legitimates an unequal gender relation. In this sense, Omar’s gender presentation predominately a product of his lack of masculine capital, which ultimately leads to his presentations of nonHMs, specifically dominant and dominating masculinities. Such masculinities are then produced and lashed out as a compensatory tactic due to a lack of political and economic power, which is conceptualized as a form of protest masculinities (Messerschmidt & Messner, 2018); all considered to be nonHMs.

In other scenes, Omar is depicted caressing or helping his romantic partners and expressing emotional pain. In situations where Omar was among his partners, it is apparent that he proverbially switched masks to perform positive masculinities. Pointedly, Omar’s positive masculinities are most prominent during situations that did not prove to be malicious, threatening, or violent. Omar caressed and loved all three of his partners. He did not “act” the part of a macho individual; rather, he portrayed an affectionate type of personality, even in some public areas. Captivatingly, Omar refuses to conform to the conventional masculine norms of society in certain instances and projected a softer and gentle side to his persona. Thus, positive

masculinities do not depict unequal gender relations, meaning that such masculinities deviate from the traditional hierarchy of HM and foster a sense of positive relations among men.

Given Omar’s various presentations of masculinities, he mainly embodies dominating masculinities that are consistent with his environment. As previously mentioned, Omar broke away from the stereotypical notions and depictions of men in media and utilizes a more realistic version of masculinity that is, to an extent, representative of various masculinities. Omar’s character is a masculine renegade that archetypically wears various masks dependent on the position of society in which he is situated. Connell (2005) notes that men encompass a variety of subordinated and hegemonic masculinities; however, the juggernaut of, for example, media culture, tends to portray men in stereotypical masculine ways (Katz, 1999), which helps to reinforce and perpetuate dominant masculine ideologies and discourses throughout society. In addition to how my study demonstrates an unraveling of HMs and nonHMs to young men and boys, and people in general, it also expands on the study of HMs to enhance clarity and understanding to Messerschmidt’s framework on HMs and nonHMs. That is, my study provides an expansion on unraveling the notions of HMs and nonHMs in a way that presents them through an analysis of Omar Little.

Personal Reflection

While engaged in this type of research, I have developed a better understanding of how HMs and nonHMs are misrepresented. Specifically, I have become more aware of the ways in which HMs and nonHMs are characterized through the media juggernaut, but only if the proper use of the language to distinguish between and HMs and nonHMs are realized. Upon reflection, it seems surprising that Omar portrays aspects of both HMs and nonHMs, but he predominately portrays dominating masculinities that do not legitimate gender inequality. In instances that he

does portray HMs, it is typically coupled with dominating masculinities. Although Omar portrays some characteristics of HMs, he also projects positive masculinities towards his romantic partners and friends.

The ability to distinguish between HMs and nonHMs is what I had hoped for entering into this research. For young men and boys, understanding masculinity can be confusing and confounding. Examinations through popular culture can help to provide language that works to address such complexities. Without an understanding of how HMs perpetuate patriarchy, some researchers and educators risk the continual distortion and confusion of what constitutes HMs (Messerschmidt, 2016). By analyzing Omar as text through Messerschmidt's HMs / nonHMs framework, Omar has given me a new perspective on how HMs and nonHMs are portrayed and understood. My hope is that new studies continue to provide accurate viewpoints about HMs. Additionally, people in general, and young men and boys in particular, may be more informed about what constitutes HMs and nonHMs and what facilitates positive masculinities.

Limitations and Future Directions

Given the various masculinities Omar portrays, future research can delve into analyzing such messages through, for example, what LeBesco (2009) conducted on websites but geared towards an HMs and nonHMs viewpoint of Omar, and/or interviewing participants after viewing several scenes of *The Wire*. Moreover, analyzing participants' responses after viewing several HMs and nonHMs from various residences, nations, backgrounds, and cultures, and conducting a comparative analysis of the responses thereafter may be beneficial in recognizing the diverse nature *and* similarities of responses about HMs and nonHMs.

Research interests that also go beyond the scope of this study may include a more in-depth investigation of additional media portrayals of men who break away from the conventional

norms of masculinity such as *Modern Family*, *Brokeback Mountain*, and *Will & Grace*. As Giroux (2011) articulates, film can be used effectively in the classroom. Even more encouraging, studies that explore such films in conjunction with critical media literacy (CML) may be beneficial in teaching students about HMs. More specifically, conducting studies that examine teachers' utilization of CML in the classroom in relation to teaching about HMs through Omar Little to students may aid in breaking the stigma associated with masculinities that deviate from the conventional. Teachers, administrators, and policymakers need to create a better effort in constructing curriculum devoted to masculinity studies as well as the pedagogies that can potentially be developed for educators to teach about HMs. In doing so, an enhanced understanding of masculinity in general, and HMs and nonHMs in particular, may come to fruition.

Although there is not a direct correlation between my study's findings and the development of teaching in the classroom dedicated to masculinity studies, it is worth mentioning that my study can be used as a guide to assist teachers in creating pedagogical strategies in the classroom. For instance, the various figures and texts in my study can be used efficaciously as a teaching tool to educate young men and boys in particular, and all students in general, about HMs and nonHMs. Such teaching can potentially break away from the conventional and transcend typical notions of HMs. Future researchers can use my study or other media outlets as a vehicle to investigate students' thoughts and concerns about HMs and nonHMs.

In regards to the professional domain of teaching, Trier (2010) suggests that season four of *The Wire* has pedagogical opportunities for teaching students about education systems. He offers the example of an episode with Rolan Pryzbylewski, a former police officer who

transitions into a teacher in season four, who challenges the *No Child Left Behind Act* and the standardized test scores. Trier explains that providing pre-service teachers a journal to document their experiences with discourses of standardized testing would be beneficial as a teaching strategy. Perhaps motivated by *The Wire*'s complex and multilayered plots, the show has been used as a pedagogical tool in an array of disciplines including philosophy, sociology, and media studies (Dillon & Crummey, 2015; Gaynor, 2014).

Given the benefits of utilizing *The Wire* as a pedagogical tool in schools, I propose that a critical masculine pedagogy that focuses on teaching men about emotionality, oppression, marginalization, and institutionalization, in relation to power and intersectionality should be incorporated in any teaching pedagogy. My study can be used as a proverbial stepping-stone to support studies relating to critical masculine pedagogies and how teachers could potentially utilize it efficaciously in the classroom to teach about HMs and nonHMs.

In pursuing the question: *How might an analysis of Omar Little's presentation of masculinity help to unravel hegemonic masculinities from nonhegemonic masculinities?* I have come to understand the importance of examining HMs and nonHMs through a Messerschmidtian lens. I learned that Omar is a character that is portrayed on entertainment media as a masculine renegade that incorporates various HMs and nonHMs, but predominately portrays nonHMs in the form of *dominating* masculinities. The majority of Omar's portrayals of *dominating* masculinities do *not* legitimate patriarchal gender relations and thus, cannot be classified as HMs.

Omar also exemplifies such characteristics that were appropriate for the environment in which he was situated. In other words, nonHMs, for example, were depicted in situations that led to using power to control the situation and his portrayal of positive masculinities were projected

with various partners and typically located in private arenas. In providing insights into Omar’s portrayals of HMs and nonHMs, he can inform young men and boys, and people in general, pedagogically, ways of being less oppressive towards others, and potentially create alternative forms of masculinity that foster positive qualities. It is reasonable to suggest, then, that the show may demonstrate to young men and boys how they can learn to adjust their HMs and nonHMs presentations, break away from the HMs guise, and develop positive masculinities that are accepted, nurtured, and encouraged in society. In short, Omar Little provides a pathway for being a boy or man in ways that rupture the very hegemony of HMs.

My research challenges the dominant discourses and ideologies of HMs by tackling the juggernaut of media culture that spreads its tentacles and influences values, beliefs, and norms in society: to straitjacket the guise of HMs presentations and imbue positive masculinities that are respected and appreciated to young men and boys. In discussing Omar’s HMs and nonHMs presentation, I am not saying that it is erroneous to depict men through, for example, entertainment media, as violent or aggressive; in fact, I support it because men may receive various messages that reveal to young men and boys about HMs and nonHMs and how media portrayals of some men demonstrate masculine stereotypes.

Omar’s portrayals of positive masculinities add a layer of complexity with respect to masculinity. Presentations of positive masculinities, such as that of Omar, or even displaying sports figures including Gus Kenworthy, Michael Sam, and Jason Collins, as well as former military personnel such as Kristin Beck and Brett Jones, all of whom defy the idealized man, may help to break masculine stereotypes and to transcend traditional ideologies of masculinity. Challenging the media juggernaut and other social institutions, such as religion and family, by presenting multifaceted hegemonic and subordinate masculinities to young men and boys that

depict how most men *truly* are in real life, as opposed to masculine stereotypes, may be beneficial in transgressing masculinity. In transcending such typical notions of masculinity, we, as a society, may begin to appreciate and reveal alternative and less oppressive means of enacting masculinity.

My research contributes to scholarship about HMs. Ultimately, my hope is that the dissemination of my research can add to such scholarship by providing viewers with how to distinguish between HMs and nonHMs, using Omar Little as an example. A more general focus for my research is to provide young men and boys, and people in general, with the education, courage, and opportunity to challenge the social institutions that help to perpetuate dominant discourses and ideologies of HMs. For such change to transpire, my research may be used to shape people's perceptions of HMs and nonHMs by offering the opportunity for young men and boys to adopt alternative and less oppressive ways of being a man. My analysis of Omar Little's portrayals of HMs and nonHMs may signal possibilities for the betterment of young men and boys' masculine presentations and identities.

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Appendix 1

Season	Episode	Text/Dialogue	Visuals	Timeframe
S1	E8		✓	38:13; 38:18; 38:22
S1	E6	✓		53:00 – 53:36
S4	E6		✓	52:40
S1	E6	✓		57:58 – 59:05
S1	E5		✓	6:32
S1	E5	✓		6:25 – 6:40
S1	E5		✓	6:32
S2	E6	✓		11:50 – 14:36
S1	E8	✓		38:52 – 39:00
S2	E11	✓		16:04 – 18:30
S1	E5		✓	4:33
S3	E3	✓		5:02 – 6:04
S4	E11	✓		7:15 – 8:01
S1	E3		✓	44:00
S1	E3		✓	44:04
S1	E5		✓	7:03
S1	E9		✓	23:13
S3	E3		✓	17:52

S1	E9	✓		23:04 – 24:37
S4	E4	✓		54:40 – 55:58
S1	E4		✓	18:32
S1	E5	✓		43:24 – 44:39
S1	E5		✓	44:04
S1	E10		✓	15:13
S1	E6		✓	45:11
S1	E6		✓	44:57
S1	E6		✓	45:25
S3	E3	✓		35:30 – 35:52
S3	E3		✓	35:54
S3	E3		✓	36:04
S3	E3		✓	19:17
S4	E7	✓		11:43 – 13:59
S3	E11		✓	54:13 – 54:33
S3	E9		✓	8:45 – 9:08
S3	E9	✓		14:12 – 15:29
S3	E9	✓		14:13 – 16:12
S5	E6	✓		40:26 – 41:58
S5	E6	✓		30:24 – 31:25