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DESIRABLE AS A MAN? HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY AND ASIAN AMERICAN GAYNESS

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More than a taxonomic tool, hegemonic masculinity entails a hierarchy of masculinities and manifests itself through its historically embedded negotiations of power within its borders and against its “others” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). In other words, hegemonic masculinity must be unpacked in relation to what it purports to reject. Following R.W. Connell’s study and Judith Butler’s analysis of gender performativity (1990, 1993), this paper seeks to expand our understanding of hegemonic masculinity as a structuring ideal by analyzing recent studies on gay Asian Americans’ experiences within the hierarchy of hegemonic masculinity. I argue that hegemonic masculinity sustains an economy of desire that prizes controlling images of white, middle-class, muscular bodies, causing potential psychological and physical harm to gay Asian Americans who fail to meet this norm (Han 2006). Hegemonic masculinity does the job of covering over, or negating, a vulnerability and communal identity that may resist these unjust distributions of power. The paper ends with a series of potentially fruitful questions for further research.