

## **Resistance or Complicity? Chinese Canadian Men Negotiating Whiteness and Masculinity in the Canadian Prairies**

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### **Abstract**

In this essay, I critically analyze the practice of masculinity negotiation based on data collected through a qualitative study of hegemonic masculinity. Reflecting some dynamics of the historical subordination of Chinese masculinity in Canada, the Chinese Albertan males who participated in the research framed a somatic white masculinity, via which they discursively displaced themselves from the domain of the masculine. Some of them employed sport-participation to negotiate their masculine statuses. Underscoring whiteness as a material aspect of masculinity that cannot be performatively constructed by Chinese men, I argue that masculinity negotiation does not constitute an equitable means of resistance, as the very practice entrenches an archetypal masculine subject with whiteness at its centre. Through this discussion, I wish to incite conceptualizations of resistance in more critical terms.

**Keywords:** Masculinity, frontier, Chinese Canadians, social justice, whiteness, Alberta, sport

### **Introduction**

From 2016 through 2017, I researched hegemonic masculinity (HM) in a metropolitan area in Alberta; through five in-depth life history interviews with durations from 150 minutes to approximately 240 minutes, I analyzed the social construction of masculinity and some Chinese Albertan males'<sup>1</sup> position in relation to this masculinity. Through a thematic analysis and a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010) that informed one another, I concluded that physical ability signified and realized by a physically strong body was essential to hegemonic masculinity framed within the participants' discourses and their versions of reality (Wetherell, 2003). In accordance with masculinity research within the Asian diaspora (e.g., Francis, 2006; Hoang, 2014; Pon, 1996), physical ability as masculinity par excellence stands as one of the most important mechanisms via which Asian men are emasculated—an aspect of our collective history marked by “gendered racism” (Nash, 2017). In contemporary settings, this is manifested in exclusion of Asian males from sport and physical activities (Nakamura, 2012), and on a discursive level, for Eng (2001) is tantamount to racial castration. The misgivings of the participants in my research over the physicality of their masculinity speaks to the continuity of a HM that emasculates Asian men. Having discursively constructed themselves as subordinate

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<sup>1</sup> Three participants are heterosexual and two gay-identified; all five are cisgender, i.e., “...individuals who have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies, and their personal identity” (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009, p. 461). Cis denotes not trans (Pyne, 2011).

masculine subjects, some participants also discussed the strategies they employed to negotiate their masculinity.

In this paper, I analyze the practice of masculinity negotiation in order to incite ways of thinking about resistance masculinity and counter-hegemonic practices with greater potential for undermining inequalities. After beginning with a concise author's reflexivity, I move into an introduction to aspects of HM theory as they pertain to my argument, focusing on the definition of hegemony and the relationalities between and among multiple masculinities. I then employ M. Jacqui Alexander's (2005) conception of palimpsestic time to underscore the recurrence of the physically-built body and whiteness in configurations of HM created on and around the Canadian "frontier"<sup>2</sup> and in my research data. Finally, pointing out the intersectional nature of HM, I discuss masculinity negotiation from the perspective of some Chinese Albertan males and call on scholars and activists alike to conceptualize resistance in more critical terms.

### Author's Reflexivity

Researching social justice as a queer person of Chinese descent and a foreigner in a white-dominant post-secondary institution, my positionalities, for a long time, have been an object of my contemplation, as I believe such contemplation is essential for us to imagine a better world. Some aspects of my social location are therefore particularly necessary to outline for an essay that brings forth a critical analysis of complicity. As feminist sociologist Dia Da Costa (n.d.) observes, "If conversations on complicity must insist on structural analysis of state violence, they must also confront the ways in which the political articulation of violence is ultimately personal" (Introduction section, para. 13).

Commenting on the politics of race and gender in Canada, Mohanty and Alexander (1996) state: "We were not born women of color but became women of color here" (p. xiv). Similarly, as a Chinese national of the dominant Han ethnicity, I was made a gay man of colour upon entering Canada with the colonial idea that we must obtain an education in the global North to "develop" our own countries in the global South.<sup>3</sup> My arrival thus marked a double process of border-crossing and identity-making, or rather, -imposition; the former speaks to the privilege that I possess which has enabled this mobility and the latter has afforded me an impetus and the empathy to undertake my research with Chinese Canadians. Resonating with feminist standpoint theory, I believe those of us who are situated in the downside of power dynamics tend to critically address these dynamics and that this is a strength of ours (Harding, 1992; Moya, 2011). Lorenz (2020) echoes: "...A researcher's 'ontopistemological and axiological orientation is derived from the culture(s) they are from, the place(s) they live, and their experiences in the world'" (p. 82). Following these insights, it is my hope that this paper can serve as an act of solidarity with Chinese Canadians and minoritized groups in general, in our shared efforts to imagine a better and more just world.

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<sup>2</sup> I place the word frontier in quotation marks to indicate that it is a colonial construction.

<sup>3</sup> My thanks to Dr. Dia Da Costa for this insight.

## Hegemonic Masculinity and the Palimpsestic Physical Ability

HM has emerged as one of the most adopted terms and theoretical frames within masculinity research. Australian feminist sociologist Raewyn Connell's (1987; 2000; 2005) scholarship has become among the most cited sources (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In her work, the most significant "structuring structure" (Collins, 2017) of gender relations is patriarchy, which her research aims to interrogate. HM, or the "hegemonic pattern of masculinity" (Connell, 2000, p. 30) refers to masculinity configurations that most effectively address the issue of patriarchy-threat. HM can be succinctly defined as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell, 2005, p. 77). Accordingly, the privileges men can secure through HM are termed "patriarchal dividend" (Connell, 2005, p. 79). On a hierarchy of masculinities, besides the hegemonic on the top and the subordinate on the bottom, there is complicit masculinity that occupies a position in-between, which also reaps patriarchal dividend because of its ideological accommodation for the hegemonic.

It is important to bear in mind Connell's (2005) reminder that strategies of HM vary and the fixed character/type approach which often stereotypes HM as violence and volatility must be transcended (Messerschmidt, 2018). Thus, the word hegemony here needs to be understood in a Gramscian sense—an advanced mode of domination in late capitalism that is "characterised by [a] combination of force and consent" (Gramsci, as cited in Chen, 1999, p. 586) and as a state wherein a specific worldview is promulgated to which both the oppressors and the oppressed consent (Chen, 1999). Connell (2005) underscores that a concomitance of institutional and ideological dominance is often necessary to effect a hegemony. These points are worth emphasizing, as they are key to understanding masculinity negotiation. Accordingly, a question can be asked: What are the implications of negotiating masculinity on a hierarchy where greater masculine statuses only come with upward maneuver towards the hegemonic?

### Hegemonic Masculinity as an Intersectional Project

That HM is intersectional is a point compatible with Connell's (1987) argument that HM's strategies of subordination are necessarily a "mix"<sup>4</sup>; this position is also congruent with research into hybrid masculinity (Bridges & Pascoe, 2018) that reflects hegemony in neoliberal times which increasingly assumes chameleon-like capacities with multiple fronts that shift, alternate, and montage to secure a patriarchal dividend. Although not speaking of these concepts, Sociologist Erving Goffman offered a glimpse into the intersectionality of HM through his definition of the only "unblushing American male" in 1963, who was

A young, married, white, urban, northern heterosexual, protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports. Every American male tends to look out upon the world from this perspective. ...

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<sup>4</sup> I believe HM theory can benefit from intersectionality, a critical social theory (Collins, 2019) rooted in Black feminist theory and praxis. As reflected in the definition of HM cited above, experiences of diverse men and women can get flattened within this framework which also does not facilitate reflections on people who do not fall within the gender binary. However, this theoretical intervention per se is beyond the scope of this essay.

Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself ... as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior. (as cited in Kimmel, 2001, p. 31)

Goffman's description speaks to the multi-axis nature of HM, a point essential to understanding masculinity negotiation and resistance. Most pertinent to my argument is that HM is constructed at the intersections of, at least, race (whiteness) and physical ability, and is harnessed to organize a national identity (American). Moreover, alongside analyses of masculinities constructed in diverse contexts traversing history and geography, Goffman's formulation also provides evidence that some aspects of HM are palimpsestic. Examining features of HM that are palimpsestic, as Alexander (2005) does heteronormativity and heterosexualization, requires us to pinpoint their presence in masculinity formations assigned to different historical moments and "plot the routes of ideological traffic and proximity between and among them" (p. 194). Specific to my argument, the contours of physical ability and race in seemingly disparate masculinities assigned to categories of "past" and "present" must be outlined to make evident their persistence, despite their ostensible remaking/reconfiguration. As I demonstrate in the following sections, a conceptualization of HM as palimpsestic whose construction is neither linear nor teleological is instructive in outlining the ideological stickiness (Wetherell & Potter, 1992) of hegemony and in helping us to gain greater insight into masculinity negotiation and counter-hegemonic practice today.

### **Masculinity, Whiteness, and Chinese Canadians Then and Now**

White men have been deemed pivotal to a Canada that is envisaged to be forever white (Ward, 2002). However, the "frontier" economy that laid the foundation for Canada as a nation relied heavily on early Chinese immigrant labourers (Li, 1998). Mostly males, these Chinese in Canada encountered tremendous hostility and institutional racism, despite their contributions to Canada's nation-building. Their collective history mirrored on the Canadian "frontier" what Said (1979) named Orientalism, as an "effeminate Chinaman" stereotype was discursively constructed of a Chinese population so insignificant in number across political, journalistic, and popular discourses of the time for a larger white population, many of whom imaginably did not encounter a Chinese person outside this discursive domain.

As I demonstrate in this paper, the Chinese labourers' lived experience was marked by gendered racism and spoke to the intersections of gender and race in the organization of Canadian national identity and notions of desirable citizenship. Moreover, their positionality in the "frontier" gender order outlined the institutional and ideological domination of hegemonic white masculinity and pointed to the relationship between masculinities occupying different positions of power: "marginalization/authorization" (Connell, 2005, p. 81). The institutional and political domination of whites over the Chinese led to the latter being discursively constructed as asexual, homosexual (Francis, 2006), and sexually-deviant (Pon, 1996). This hegemony also constitutes one genesis of the emasculation Chinese/Asian males sustained in North America. Its central configurations persist till present day and reoccur in many formulations of masculinity harnessed by various ideological projects to construct their legitimacy.

## The Somatic White Man on the Canadian “Frontier”

As scholarship within feminist sport sociology and masculinity studies indicates, in North America, physical ability and ableism signified by and realized through a physically strong body is central to exalted masculinities (e.g., Atkinson, 2011; Connell, 1990; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Henderson, 2011; Messner, 1992; Robidoux, 2002). Furthermore, articulating to the ideal of whiteness, the somatic man figures prominently in the organization of Canada as a nation. Several examples support the argument: firstly, the crowning of celebrity athletes as national heroes (Jackson & Ponc, 2001); secondly, the political and symbolic significance of the Canadian win against the Soviet Union in hockey games known as the Summit Series during Cold War times (Robidoux, 2002); thirdly, the quest for “authentic” Canadian identity in sport and “frontier” life (Robidoux, 2011); fourthly, the specific type of white men regarded as ideal citizens (Henderson, 2011; Hill, Alook & Hussey, 2017).

Among the latter cases, as Henderson (2011) describes, in an attempt to attract male immigrants with “no money, but muscle and pluck” (p. 17), the government created a series of immigration handbooks around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century advertising Canada as the immigrants’ paradise. The type of masculinity the government sought reflects what Connell (2005) names the “settler-farmer ethos” (p. 29). It epitomizes settler-colonial politics: the imperial masculinity of muscularity takes centre stage, while the dangled award was to answer a “universal yearning” among the classes of “mechanics and workers” in Britain (Canada, as cited in Henderson, 2011, p. 22)—paternalist independence realized through capitalist property ownership. With a household of dependents, this masculinity both instilled and benefitted from heteronormativity and the gender division of labour that confined white women at home while their “breadwinner” white husbands made their marks in the “new” world. As such, in the images provided in the handbooks, females were positioned around homes, “the front porch, or garden” and male settlers “... in the fields, next to barns, or lingering by the forests” (McPherson, as cited in Henderson, 2011, p. 21).

The paternalist masculinity in the handbooks framed the position of the ideal family in constructing normative structures concerning gender, sexuality, race, and nation, an argument Black feminist Patricia Hill Collins (1998) advances in her paper that analyzes the intersections of race, gender, and nation in the United States. The ideal masculinity sought after also resembles aspects of “bush masculinity” that Wamsley and Kossuth (2000) speak of which celebrates physical strength and grit of the often-mythologized fur-trading, *coureurs de bois*, who, according to Robidoux (2011), played an important role in the imaginary of a unique, “manly” Canadian identity. Furthermore, the handbooks, replete with “descriptions of colonization as the penetration of male settlers into virgin territories” (Henderson, 2011, p. 27), illustrated one of the oldest colonial tropes of inseminating virgin lands found in cowboy-themed movies about the “wild west” (Dyer, 1997).

Together, the sources discussed here outline the centrality of physical ability in masculinity exemplars constructed on and around the “frontier” (Connell, 2005), pointing to the ideological proximity and traffic between and among them. They also intertextually mark a system of discursive dispersion (Foucault, 1972) wherein the same construct finds different loci of enunciation, in which the stereotype “the effeminate Chinaman” was necessarily included.

## The “Effeminate Chinaman” Stereotype in “Frontier” Gender Order

The somatic white male also figured prominently in racism against the “effeminate Chinaman” that percolated diverse discourses and the fabrics of Canadian society, which fleshes out Connell’s (2000; 2005) relational approach to multiple masculinities. In this sense, hegemonic white masculinity was positioned deliberately against other forms, and the latter’s subordination shored up the former’s authorization. This power dynamic can be seen in numerous institutional configurations, from the exploitation of the Chinese as “living machines” (Canada, 1885) to solve the “erratic labour supply” characteristic of the “frontier” economy (Li, 1998, p. 28); to the imposed head tax,<sup>5</sup> to the widespread hostility from whites and institutional racism that forced the Chinese into service-oriented sectors of economy deemed only appropriate for women (see Appendix A), and as I demonstrate, to the concurrent construction of their masculinity as opposite of whites.

In the Report of The Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration (RRCCI, 1885), which examined the hostilities of whites towards the Chinese, a commissioner stated: “[I]t is something strange to hear the strong, broad-shouldered superior race, superior physically and mentally, sprung from the highest types of old and new world, expressing a fear of competition with a small, inferior, and comparatively speaking, feminine race” (Canada, 1885, p. LXIX). Here, whites and the Chinese are counter-posed against each another; the former is characterized as the “height of civilization” with a superior physical constitution against the latter’s supposed inferior body portrayed as small and symbolically subsumed into femininity, which is often socially constructed as antithetical and subordinate to masculinity (Connell, 2000).

Such an account of the Chinese male body as small and thus unmasculine also permeated the journalistic language. In the *Cariboo Sentinel* (a newspaper of the time), the blatant violence against Chinese workers from law enforcement officers was depicted as exploits of whites. The Chinese men were consistently portrayed as “comical and amusing”—“Capt. Todd placed his men, all well-armed with first-class revolvers in battle array, and this caused the anti-taxers<sup>6</sup> to weaken, and becoming *docile again* [;] they paid their taxes like ‘*little men*’” (as cited in Francis, 2006, p. 181, emphasis added).

Furthermore, some legal discourses also encapsulated the gender hierarchy of the time, outlining the celebration of white masculinity against the vilification of Chinese men. According to K. J. Anderson (1991), in 1887, an amendment was made to the 1885 Act to Restrict and Regulate Chinese Immigration which divided potential immigrants into Canada into two categories—non-Chinese and Chinese; a head tax was imposed on the latter. The amendment was to accommodate the conundrum a Mr. Moore was faced with. “An Englishman of standing,” Moore was surprised that a head tax was required of his Chinese wife and their children upon entering Canada. Unsurprisingly, the definition of Chinese was officially altered into: “a person

<sup>5</sup> Between 1905 and 1914 alone, the head tax levied amounted to 14 percent of the national defense budget and eight percent of all excise duties collected (Li, 1998), whereas the Chinese population accounted for merely 0.39 percent in 1911 and 0.45 in 1921 (Roy, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> This report refers to a delegation consisting of eight constables who attempted to collect school tax from the Chinese railway labourers in 1881 (Francis, 2006). They were resisting, initially, as the constables were collecting tax for a service the Chinese labourers could not access. The workers’ offspring were banned from attending white Canadian schools (Francis, 2006). Besides, workers who had children were rare (Li, 1998), and thus the tax was entirely arbitrary.

born of a Chinese father irrespective of nationality of the mother” (p. 58). This of course mirrors, once again, the transformative capacity the white male body was imagined to possess— inseminating civilization so that a head tax would not be necessary for the progeny of white men.

### **The Somatic Man in Contemporary Alberta**

Masculinity research in contemporary Canada continues to underscore the centrality of the physically built body (e.g., Greig & Holloway, 2012; Miller, 2004). As Miller’s (2004) study of female engineers in the oil industry in Calgary demonstrates, the somatic white man looms large in a masculinity framed within “frontier” narratives and cowboy mythologies. Recently, Hill, Alook, and Hussey (2017) also point out that a “frontier mentality” continues to prevail in Alberta, where a “frontier masculinity” is constructed against “the feminine, urban, and non-white” (Shaughnessy & Dogu, as cited in Hill et al., 2017, para. 7). As a result, those who do not fit in the white masculine ideal are marginalized and placed in precarious conditions. Some studies of the Chinese/Asian diaspora in day to day settings resonate and outline the difficulties Chinese/Asian males must negotiate in spaces of sport/physical activities (e.g., Nakamura, 2012) and in romantic and other relational contexts because of the continuing stigmatization of their masculinity (Han, 2010; Kwan-Lafond, 2011). It is thus clear that the palimpsestic physical ability, ableism, and whiteness that were employed to subjugate early Chinese labourers persist to the present day and liaise between and among diverse ideological projects.

The centrality of physical ability figured prominently in my research regarding some Chinese Albertan males’ discursive construction of HM. The young men were all Canadian-born, university/graduate students, belonging to generation Y (millennials). They had received either all or the vast majority of their K-12 education in Alberta. These factors were particularly conducive to my research project because the participants provided ideologically rich data about their engagement with, and/or, shared perspectives concerning sports and masculinity, because they had experienced their school lives where sports were institutionalized (See Appendix B).

Two themes regarding the centrality of physical ability in masculinity construction emerged from the data, namely: the importance of a physically strong body and the celebration of male athletes on campus. The former was concretized in such terms as well-built, tall, and muscular, while the latter speaks to the role sport plays in empire (Connell, 2005), colonization in Canada (Norman, Hart & Petherick, 2019), and Canadian nationalism (Adams, 2006) owing to its purported masculinizing capacity (Sabo & Panepinto, 2001). One research participant, Xavier commented that being an ideal<sup>7</sup> man in Alberta was a “physical job”:

It’s a physical job, I guess. You have to engage in very manly sports, activities. Playing contact sports doesn’t hurt. [Umm],<sup>8</sup> [...] Being good-, having good nature skills, or outdoor skills, making stuff and [umm] being able to do renos at home that sort of stuff. But outdoor skills like knowing the wilderness, having experience of that, because fishing, hunting, these are very traditional manly activities in Alberta.

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<sup>7</sup> I did not use the term hegemonic masculinity in the interviews.

<sup>8</sup> Transcribing notation: Pauses and non-verbal/paralinguistic codes are indicated in square brackets. One point indicates that the participant had a short pause; two points mean they had a long pause up to 5 seconds. When the delivery of a word was cut off, the incompleteness is marked with a dash. “I” refers to investigator, and “P” means research participant.

The simultaneity of “contact sports” and “traditional manly activities” in this excerpt reveals the ideological proximity between sport masculinity and bush masculinity, which also speaks to the position of men of the “frontier”—the fur-trading *coureurs de bois*—and sport in the organization of Canadian national identity (Robidoux, 2011). Another participant, Jack, describes characteristics of ideal man in the following way:

**P:** I feel like height. It is [uh], is important.

**I:** Okay. Anything else?

**P:** Hmmm, [...] probably you- I mean if you don't have muscle mass, it doesn't make you like feminine. But I think [uh], if you do have a large, like, muscle mass, it definitely works for the masculinity.

Not only does Jack's response stress the importance of muscularity, it also indicates a gender bifurcation: masculinity is not femininity. The distinction is an important feature of HM which is often constructed as contrary to femininity and homosexuality (Kimmel, 2001). The somatic man was also writ large in the exemplars of ideal masculinity the participants cited, including cowboy, lumberjack, hockey players, and muscular PE teachers.

### Masculinity Negotiation and Social Justice

Three of the participants also explicitly expressed misgivings over their bodies. In many cases, they employed strategies to resist the subordination of their masculinity and negotiated their masculine statuses. This struggle echoes Chen's (1999) research wherein Chinese males, seen as less or not masculine, resort to various tactics to “bargain” with HM for masculine statuses through their otherwise privileged positionality in society, such as socio-economic status and heterosexuality. Chen commends the Chinese men for their courage to resist the subjugation of their masculinity, yet, argues that the mechanism of bargaining “... is hegemonic because it draws on and reinforces a worldview that regards Chinese American men as inadequate and incomplete” (p. 604). This point is conspicuous in my research, as I have indicated previously, all participants constructed a type of somatic masculinity clearly linked to “frontier” personae; however, except for Xavier, who was the captain of the football team in high school, all participants did not qualify for the somatic standards they described. Chen concludes that in their struggles to counter stereotypes concerning Asian masculinity, the Chinese males may have inadvertently reproduced “certain views on masculinity that made those racial stereotypes possible” (p. 605). I agree with Chen's argument, which I further substantiate through analyzing whiteness in my data.

One primary strategy of negotiation the participants adopted was sport/physical activities-participation with the impetus of squaring with the “somatic compliance” (Connell, 1990, p. 89) of HM. The strategy is ostensibly reasonable, given the ideological traction of the physically built body in a province so enmeshed in the “frontier” imaginary. To critically examine this strategy, I ask: had the participants qualified for the somatic standards of HM, would they have embodied HM, or occupied a masculine position closer to it?

Feminist philosopher Judith Butler (1993) argues that gender identity is performatively constituted through discursive practices. Lu and Wong (2013) offer some empirical evidence of

aspects of this theory and assert that masculinity is comprised of a series of roles or scripts; successful executions thereof increase men's self-esteem, which in turn lubricates future performances. Thus, self-esteem and performance feed into one another. These perspectives speak to the social construction of masculinity i.e., masculinity is not manifestations of intrinsic biological essence (Connell, 2000; 2005). I argue that sport-participation and the potential gaining of muscularity constitute a type of masculinity performativity. However, this performativity hinges upon the neglect of an important material aspect of HM—whiteness.

### **Whiteness and Hegemonic Masculinity**

Operating from an ontology of co-construction between the social and the material, Connell (2000; 2005) argues that some discursive approaches to masculinity are inadequate, as they can neglect the materiality of masculinity i.e., the body. Connell (2005) further explains that to reduce body to a canvas is erroneous, as “the surface on which cultural meanings are inscribed is not featureless” (p. 51). Therefore, “the limits of discursive flexibility must be acknowledged” (Connell & Messerschmidt, p. 829). I agree that the recalcitrance of the body (Connell, 2000) must be taken into account to understand HM, which is necessary for reimagining counter-hegemonic practices in substantive terms.<sup>9</sup> To substantiate this point, I return to my research project.

Peter presented the captain of the football team in junior high, a regular gym-goer, as an example of the most popular person on campus and outlined his role as a student leader. According to Peter, he was also “the most charismatic guy there”:

**I:** Could you describe him? Charismatic in what sense?

**P:** [Umm], he was considered the popular kid like everyone would go to talk to him, and like if there was something on the announcement related to you, like [uh] they always did happy birthday announcements, like happy birthday to XYZ depend on the day. He would come up to you like “Oh happy birthday man” [tap on his shoulder], like that kind of stuff.

Within a frame of masculinity as prescribed scripts discussed previously, what we see is a skillful performance, including the choice of the occasion (someone's birthday), the proper homosocial tactility (a tap on the shoulder), and the collective camaraderie signified by the “buddying and manning” behaviours. Insofar as Peter validated the captain's entire act as representing “charisma,” this is an example of male bonding and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) invested and accrued simultaneously. It is tempting to imagine, therefore, mastery of such performances by Chinese males can also translate into masculine capital. I believe that it could to an extent, but the discursive limits must be underscored against the materiality of this masculinity—the body. I probed further:

**I:** So, what were some of the things that made him popular?

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<sup>9</sup> A clarification must be made. Although Judith Butler is often pigeonholed as a poststructuralist or postmodernist—a label deemed not appropriate by herself (Salih, 2004)—I believe she is also critical of approaches to gender that uphold a discourse determinism. This position and its manifestations can be found throughout her work (e.g., Butler, 1988; 1997; 2015).

**P:** Fair face; he had dirty-ish short blonde hair with green eyes. So, I assume those are attractive traits. No glasses. No acne breakout. That's probably a good thing.

Looming large here, “charisma” is a racialized concept. It cannot be severed from whiteness. Peter’s response highlights key somatic white features that are proffered as an explanation of social capital (popularity) and cannot be performatively constituted. The data also provides some evidence for the difficulties Asian men encounter in terms of romantic relationships owing to the racist stigma surrounding Asian masculinity, which relationally shores up white males’ superiority and their supposed assertiveness, confidence, and “charisma.” The following quote is from Peter when I queried him about white men’s popularity in dating, as it emerged as a theme:

...Probably because they’re more likely to be proactive and to reach out and to be like charismatic and to talk [snapped his fingers] to people... And just like talk to people randomly...and go up to a girl or whatever, make conversation.

Across the data, aligning with Peter’s account, the participants framed whiteness as a necessary factor contributing to masculinity status in Alberta. Disrupting consistently in the background, whiteness ensures the hegemonic nature of these discourses. As such, whiteness as a necessity for HM undermines the potential to bring about equality imagined in physical ability and performativity. Yet, by and large, it is not problematized by the participants and its efficacy relies on this. As Ahmed (2012) observes, whiteness must always recede from sight so that it remains “... the absent center against which others appear as points of deviation...” (p. 35). Regarding HM configurations, as in the last excerpt from Peter’s interview, race must be fetishized altogether so that the capital whiteness carries becomes naturalized, characterized by the participants as some innate property exuding from the white male body in the form of personal initiative and agency.

### **Masculinity Negotiation—Resistance or Complicity?**

Alongside research exploring masculinity in Alberta and Canada, the participants’ discourses intertextually frame HM at this historical moment in Alberta as an intersectional project with whiteness and physical ability at its centre. These constructs are hegemonic because they ensure racialized people are not deemed ideal citizens of Canada (Bannerji, 2000) and are marginalized in the narratives of Canada as a nation (Adams, 2006). These constructs also assume a palimpsestic nature when viewed together with my discussion earlier, of HM, in historical Canada. They were adopted to subjugate Chinese men and were constructed on the back of such subjugation. This analysis resonates with Lu and Wong’s (2013) finding that racist ideologies foreclose Asian males’ performative potential.

Reflecting on Goffman’s “unblushing American male” through intersectionality, I believe it is important to rethink Chen’s (1999) argument that masculinity negotiation is “... hegemonic because it draws on and reinforces a worldview that regards Chinese American men as inadequate and incomplete” (p. 604). It is not so much that such negotiation should come with a caveat regarding one racial category than that the very practice entrenches an intersectional oppressive regime with whiteness and physical ability at its centre.

Xavier, a participant in my research project we heard from earlier, had been the captain of his high school’s football team. His experience, as a Chinese male, playing a confrontational sport is laden with racist stereotypes used by coaches and players alike to mark his trespass into a field where he was deemed not to belong. Yet, he acquiesced to this racism, and explained:

... Instead of the initial feeling of being singled out and just individually criticized, I realized that it might just be a part of the sport... where maybe you don't have to take it so personally... Being targeted is just... a kind of tough love, I guess.

The sentence "it might just be a part of the sport" reflects research findings in feminist sport sociology that shaming and being scolded in emasculating ways are standard coaching strategies to deprive male players of agency (E. Anderson, 2010). As Messner (1992) observes, "An objectified, "sexualized female body part is the point of reference for the ultimate insult" among male players and coaches (p. 73). However, as is evident in the interview, the language used was not only misogynist but also racially tailored and, yet, was interpreted by the research participant as love! In acquiescing to such love, the participant traded in his privilege of having a physically built body and the athleticism that comes with it to ameliorate the stigma surrounding his racial background. The very logic celebrates privilege, rather than interrogates it, while at the same time shoring up the white body as the athletic norm. Furthermore, within the gender order where HM dominates, the practice of masculinity negotiation is unjust, for it represents a move towards the top of or higher positions (complicit masculinity) on the masculinity hierarchy; the problem is of course, that to occupy the top means becoming part of the hegemony, not its annihilation.

### **Conclusion: Rethinking Resistance**

Throughout this essay, I have argued that masculinity negotiation does not constitute resistance that generates substantive potential for social justice, for the very practice requires privileges that solidify instead of demolishing hegemony. In Canada and North America, this practice also entrenches an archetypal masculine subject with whiteness at its centre. As long-standing studies of Chinese Canadians indicate, it is important and necessary to research and publish the contributions Chinese people have made to Canada (e.g., K. J. Anderson, 1991; Li, 1998), and to celebrate the strength and valour they summoned to survive in a tremendously hostile world (e.g., Fernando, 2006; Stanley, 2011). However, social justice also requires greater reflexivity and attention to racist, heteronormative structures. Masculinity research needs to extend beyond examining hegemonic masculinity as a self-contained project.

We might ask, for example, in what ways does settler-colonialism play out in men of colour's masculinity negotiation and how does this impact the lived experience of Indigenous peoples? Since race is a salient factor in masculinity configurations, in what ways does said negotiation hinge upon, reflect, and assist in the construction of race politics in Canada? Specifically, regarding anti-Black racism, what are the implications of negotiating for physicality, taking into account the racist stereotype of Black masculinity as physically excessive (Dyer, 1997; Hall, 1997)? To answer these questions, we need to take seriously the "race to innocence" (Fellows & Razack, 1998) in some feminist politics and in horizontal relations among minoritized groups and begin to build first steps towards decolonizing antiracism (Lawrence & Dua, 2005). Moreover, as settlers of colour who are non-Indigenous and non-Black, we also need to interrogate our participation in "colonial settlerhood" (Phung, 2011, p. 295). Finally, I concur with Dummitt's (2007) challenge that when acts of supposed resistance have as their objective a larger share of power in an oppressive regime, more often than not, such resistance arises only from "...being excluded from power, not from the problems of power in its own right" (p. 7).

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## Appendix A

### The “Effeminate Chinaman” Stereotype

The “effeminate Chinaman” stereotype reflected the collective location of the Chinese in colonial economy in North America. As Connell (2000; 2005) contends, masculinities often gain ascendancy to hegemonic positions qua concomitant institutional and ideological dominance such that they are “exalted by churches, narrated by mass media, or celebrated by the state” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 838). From an Althusserian perspective, her contention speaks to the complementary mechanisms of the State Apparatus and ideological State apparatuses (Althusser, 1971). Butler (1997) also argues that sexual and gender stigmatizations are as material as they are cultural. I must provide a reminder of the institutional subjugation that the Chinese labourers experienced. More detailed discussions can be found in Sun (2018).

The whites’ institutional dominance was germane to the production of Chinese masculinity as inferior and subordinate. The Chinese’ experience in the colonial economy provides telling evidence and many of them worked as unfree, such as indentured labourers (Li, 1998). They played a vital role and sacrificed significantly in building the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Cariboo Wagon Road and in agriculture in British Columbia. After a barrage of legislations that prohibited them from virtually any skilled job, they retreated to service-oriented work that was considered beneath white men, including restaurants, hand laundries (Hoe, 2003; Li, 1998) and domestic work (Pon, 1996). In Canada and the United States alike, these conditions persisted well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, according to Light (as cited in Espiritu, 2010), in the 1920s United States, approximately 50 percent of the Chinese population occupied the position of domestic servants. The specific location of Chinese men in the colonial economy thus offered institutional underpinning and ideological justification for their feminization, as they worked in “feminine” industries.

The stigmatization of Chinese men’s masculinity, to an extent, was to ensure the reproduction of whiteness (Sun, 2018). As Backhouse (1996) indicates, a Saskatchewan statute enacted in 1912 prohibited Chinese men from hiring white women. Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the trope of the innocent white girl and white woman who were allegedly lured and morally tainted by the “yellow peril” percolated journalism in Canada. This discourse also contributed to the racist effeminate stereotype. Firstly, racial minorities’ purported fecundity and uncontrollable sex drive was by no means a new invention in the colonial-racist repertoire (Dyre, 1997). Secondly, the cunning “Chinaman” image dovetailed with racist tropes of the yellow race being hyper-intelligent (Dyer, 1997). In collusion with other mechanisms, it worked well to strip the Chinese of their masculinity, since the exalted masculinity at the time—hard-working and physically strong—contradicted the excessive brainwork and dishonesty assumed in such “luring.”

Similarly, there were policies that curtailed miscegenation in Canada, such as the Naturalization Act of 1914, which stipulated that any married female take the citizenship status of her husband. This, coupled with the fact that most Chinese men were not allowed to enter Canada with their wife and the difficulty for them to naturalize as citizens, created their bachelorhood (K. J. Anderson, 1991; Li, 1998), which was, again, manipulated as evidence of their supposed sexual deviancy.

Finally, I thank the anonymous reviewer for pointing out the importance of this discussion and for pointing me to the work of Constance Backhouse.

## **Appendix B**

### **Research Participants, Chinese Masculinity Construction: A Research Note**

Ontoepistemologically, in the study, I considered masculinity construction ideological. In line with important tenets of critical discourse research, my task was to reveal the workings of ideologies as they were constructed as commonsensical in research participants' interview talks. As such, aiming to collect rich data for analysis, life history interview was chosen as the method of collection. A recruitment text was sent to potential participants which outlined that the length of the interview was to be two to three hours. One semi-structured interview, with open-ended questions, was conducted with each participant in my office on the campus of University of Alberta. Follow-ups were conducted via e-mail.

Details of the study, such as the rationale and objectives, recruitment procedures, research methods in the field, analyses of all five participants' responses, analyses of findings, limitations, and so forth are included in my dissertation (Sun, 2018).