In this article, I view popular HBO television show *Entourage* through the theoretical lenses of Connell, Sedgwick, Demetriou and McRobbie. I situate Connell’s (2000) theory of hegemonic masculinity and Sedgwick’s (1985) ideas of homosociality in McRobbie’s (2004) post-feminist society. The homosocial relationships in *Entourage* illustrate Demetriou’s notion of a “hybrid bloc of masculinity.” The characters draw on the influences of social change, specifically feminism, to modulate their performances of masculinity, consequently producing a hybrid bloc which perpetuates masculine dominance. McRobbie’s ideas of the cultural space of post-feminism (2004, p. 255) highlight the effort required to perform and maintain hegemonic masculinity, and provide a context for the present analysis. Television’s wide accessibility makes it a valuable site of analysis in which social politics can be critiqued or explored. Connell argues that gender issues have predominantly been regarded as “women’s business” (Connell, 2005, p. 1805), but programs such as *Entourage*, which arguably position men as their target audience, push gender issues
further into the consciousness of male viewers. The popularity of the program and the issues it depicts show that the troping of modern manhood is heavily mainstreamed.

Academic discussion on *Entourage* has been sparse (e.g., Cross, 2008; Faucette, 2008), and the present study aims to establish it as a significant object of study in the field of masculinity research. Below I engage with *Entourage* through specific theoretical strands: post-feminist and post-structuralist. I apply and critique certain ideologies through a close reading of the program and propose that *Entourage* offers new and critical ideas of contemporary masculinities. Connell’s ideas of hegemonic masculinity (2000) are useful in reading *Entourage*; however, these ideas need to be developed through a post-feminist reading. While Connell acknowledges that hegemony is open to challenge (Connell, 2000b, p. 37), I discuss the consequences of contemporary post-feminism in understandings of hegemonic masculinities within *Entourage*. This is to highlight how masculinities have been adapting to a changing social dynamic in order to retain legitimacy.

Dialogue in *Entourage* is analysed through Butler’s ideas of *performance*; in particular, the performative and subjective power of speech. Through Butler’s (1997) *Excitable Speech*, I present an analysis of the ideas of contemporary hegemonic masculinities that are depicted in the program. At its core, *Entourage* is a program about male homosociality. Its depiction of homosocial relationships produces contemporary understandings of masculinities, and what it means to “be a man.” I use Sedgwick’s (1985) work on homosociality to illustrate how homosociality contributes to the reconstruction of our understandings of contemporary masculinity. As well as through post-feminism, I modulate Connell’s ideas of hegemonic masculinity by showing how ideas of hegemony are reinforced and legitimated by homosocial interaction. The men’s friendships on *Entourage* facilitate understandings of what is acceptable masculinity, and produce performances of hegemonic masculinities.

**HEGEMONY, HOMOSOCIALITY AND POST-FEMINISM**

Fallen Hollywood movie star Vincent Chase is hallucinating on “shrooms” (magic mushrooms) in Joshua Tree Park with his lifelong friends—his “entourage”—E, Drama and Turtle. Vince is trying to decide whether he should risk his career-comeback on a G-rated family film, *Benji*, or if he should pursue a more “credible” role as a fire fighter in *Smoke Jumpers*, even though nobody wants to hire him. The men loll about in a daze, when Vince’s brother Drama asks: “Why are you so attached to this Smoke Jumpers thing?”

“Because!” Vince responds. “Because E found the script and it’s good. And I wanna be good. And I want us to be good, to make up for the bad. Everyone must know that E makes Vince good.”

Turtle sighs.

“You and E really have something special, Vin.”

Vince looks directly at his best friend and manager, E, and smiles. E smiles fondly back.
“E’s a true friend.”

The quoted scene from Entourage encapsulates the homosocial bonds forged between four heterosexual men. As Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick argues in her 1985 book Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire, homosociality is the relations between two people of same sex subtexted by a rejection of homosexuality (Sedgwick, 1985, p. 1). Throughout season five of Entourage, Vince struggles to get his once-bright acting career back on track—at the same time defending his masculinity and position within his friends’ “entourage.” Once the leader of the pack, he now must rely on his “boys” to help him financially and emotionally through this difficult time. They, in turn, tread carefully in order to not further bruise his ego. Financial problems and doubts about his artistic credibility plague him as he negotiates his way back into the industry. The dialogue and the characters on the program stage historical, social, and political articulations of masculinity and homosociality. I argue that homosociality is the key to the program, making Entourage a compelling object of study in the field of masculinity.

Language and Gender Performativity

Judith Butler argues that “coherent gender” exists when we recognise certain norms that are present in the body of another (Butler, 2004, p. 58). We understand gender on the surface based on socially assigned “gender order” (Connell, 1992, p.735). To be (hegemonically) masculine is to be dominant, sexually aggressive, and inalterably heterosexual (Connell, 1992; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell argues that common Western social perspectives fabricate a dualism of masculinity and femininity (Connell, 2000b, p.21) such that masculinity and femininity become stereotypes of gender, with nothing much in between. “We ascribe an agency to language,” Butler argues (1997, p. 1). As language is performed by and connected to the body, it exists also to sustain the body (p. 5). Language is connected to what we “do” and the consequences of our “doings” (p. 8). In Excitable Speech, Butler analyses the work of Austin’s 1975 How to do Things with Words. She asks, “Is agency of language the same as agency of the subject?” (p. 7). Dialogue in Entourage is the act—the performance—of internalised social ideals of gender; language perpetuates and is informed by these ideas. If so, it pays to examine how dialogue in Entourage presents the labour and politics of performing contemporary hegemonic masculinity.

Understandings of Masculinity in a Post-Feminist Society

This article is written within and for a post-feminist society. I define this era historically as post-UN’s 1975-85 Decade for Women, cited by Connell (2005, p. 1801) as a key occurrence in the feminist movement. Angela McRobbie describes contemporary, post-feminist “feminism” as a movement that “invokes” 1970s feminism but treats it as something “that is no longer needed, it is a spent force”
The modern woman is seen as “empowered”—to the extent that a “forceful non-identity with feminism” becomes outright repudiation. In this context, critique of sexism is discounted as prudish and unnecessary, for women are now empowered enough to “own” their sexuality, perpetuating media attention to their bodies (p. 259). This lack of space for critique is endemic in popular culture (p. 259). Withholding critique of sexism and the evolving gender order, McRobbie laments, “is a condition of her [the modern woman’s] freedom” (p. 260).

Rosalind Gill also looks at the transformation of feminism in media culture and the self-monitoring that is constantly conducted in order to adhere to the social constructs of femininity (Gill, 2007, p. 151). Socially constructed ideals of beauty, sexuality and indeed, gender, are internalised and “made our own” (p. 154). In post-feminist media culture, Gill argues, irony is used as self-referential tool to dismiss sexism, homophobia, and other gender politics (p. 159). As a feminist viewing *Entourage*, it is evident that the program does exactly this: it presents social notions of hegemonic masculinities in hyperbolic, humorous, and far-fetched ways, placing it between default “ironic and humorous quotation marks” (p. 160). The post-feminist context in which *Entourage* has been produced, as well as the energetically ironic and fantastical extremes it portrays, maps out a contemporary understanding of masculinities and media culture’s negotiation of McRobbie’s post-feminism. What does masculinity mean in a society in which women are encouraged to believe they are “empowered,” and how is this masculinity asserted? How is hegemony maintained when young men expect women to “reject patriarchal social relations” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 835)?

*Irony and White Privilege in Entourage*

Set in the vacuous celebrity universe of Hollywood, the program is self-reflexive in its unrealistic portrayal of the everyday life of a movie star through its use of irony. In his article *Pumping Irony*, Tyson Smith (2005) examines the advertising campaign of popular bourbon brand, Jim Beam. Smith analyses the ads in terms of post-feminist discourse and argues that feminism of the 1970s and 80s has produced more critical readings of the media and advertising (para. 3). As a result, irony is popularly used to great effect when “sell[ing] masculinity to today’s young men” (para. 5). While *Entourage* is a television program that primarily sets out to entertain with its humour and fantastical storylines, I argue that *Entourage* subtly asks the audience to question the legitimacy of the norms of hegemonic masculinity by presenting these ideas in each of the characters. Rather than dismissing the ironic humour of *Entourage* as part and parcel of the entertainment factor in television, irony can be considered a self-reflexive aspect of the program. Through irony, the legitimacy of hegemonic masculinity is questioned—a purposeful technique utilised to call attention to different representations of masculinity. Ari Gold, in particular, personifies the extremes of aggressive masculinity (to which I return below).

It can be argued that the study of *Entourage* might limit discussion to issues surrounding White, privileged masculinity because the characters depicted are seem-
ingly privileged White males. Jane Park and Karin Wilkins argue that mass media plays a role in “perpetuating problematic stereotypes” through depictions of race and culture in pop culture (2005, para. 2). Such depictions narrow the discourse surrounding particular cultures and leave no room for engaged discussion (para. 10). They argue that narrowed discourses create common stereotypes which acquire “cultural resonance” (para. 9), which in turn, makes stereotypes easier to use and easier to recognise. Cultural background and race of the Entourage men are mentioned casually and dismissively. While it is never expressly conveyed, the main character of Vince appears to be of Native American heritage.2 E is often referred to as “the leprechaun,” alluding to his Irish Catholic background, and Lloyd ignores Ari’s exaggerated remarks about his Asian background. Ari pokes fun at his own Jewishness almost as much as he utilises Asian stereotypes to needle Lloyd. However, the politics of race are arguably not a primary theme in Entourage. This does not discount the need for considered discussion on race and gender in contemporary media, but I would argue that the strength of the homosocial bonds between the men is not substantially affected by issues of race or cultural background. I would also suggest that rather than being “silenced,” the observation that race is not depicted as an “issue” to be discussed in Entourage speaks to the program’s efforts to be inclusive: Ari’s deep respect for Lloyd is reinforced throughout the series, and the men acknowledge themselves to be equally flawed—a fact not linked explicitly to race or cultural heritage.

Understanding Hegemony Through Homosociality

Connell’s Masculinities provides the foundation for my discussion of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemony is negotiable and is not a static concept (Connell, 2000b, p. 37). Hegemony, Connell explains, is negotiated from within and has the capacity to “disrupt itself” (p. 37). Hegemonic masculinity is defined via an understanding of patriarchy—that is, through a belief in the “universal” dominance of men over women—which Connell describes as the “main axis of power” (p. 74). Connell simplifies hegemonic masculinity somewhat as being an “ideologically legitimated” subordination of women by men (2005, p. 832). If hegemony is normative, everything else is shaped around it, ensuring a continued patriarchy. Hegemony exists through complicit consent (2000b, p. 77), and thus is legitimated. Connell refers to contemporary men’s issues as a “modernisation of patriarchy” (p. 41), in which men still reap the benefits of a patriarchal system. As a result, Connell repositions the role of men in a post-feminist society. In such a society, the concept of patriarchy is continuously questioned and criticised—as ahistorical, for example—by feminism (1992, p. 736) and as a result, the reproduction of hegemony in patriarchy is plagued by ideological negotiation between power and equality. As Connell argues, the most fruitful analysis will come from looking at “social dynamics generated within gender relations” (1992, p. 735, emphasis in original). The fractured

2 Adrian Grenier’s (the actor who plays Vince) IMDB (imdb.com) profile states that he is of Irish and Native American parentage.
understanding of masculinities, then, is achieved through attempts to understand the tensions in negotiating patriarchy.

Relationships between men are built on historical assumptions of masculinity (Sedgwick, 1985, p. 2). I view *Entourage* through the lens of Sedgwick’s work on homosociality as I argue that the hierarchy of friendships in the program are facilitated by homosocial relations. In her discussion of homosocial bonds, Sedgwick (1985, p. 21) discusses René Girard’s (1961) theory of the erotic triangle, in which women act as a “conduit” for homosocial bonds. While there are numerous heterosexual interactions with women, the homosocial spaces between the main characters on *Entourage* are enduring. Tensions within these spaces are key to understanding the constructions of noticeable power dynamics in this group of friends: homosocial bonds between the men facilitate contemporary understandings of the norms of hegemonic masculinity.

**THE PURSUIT OF HEGEMONY**

Ari Gold bursts into the women-only luncheon for *Variety* magazine’s most successful women rich list, on which his business partner, Barbara Miller, is featured for the first time. Earlier that day, he and Barbara had a falling out over the inclusion of Ari’s old college friend, Andrew, in their talent agency, Miller Gold. Ari is incensed that she will not give his friend a chance because he believes strongly in Andrew’s abilities as an agent. Barbara is not convinced.

“Attention, everyone! I’d like to make a toast, ladies—to Barbara Miller, number thirty three on your prestigious list. And you know what, it’s actually amazing to me, that at her advanced age, this is the first time she’s made the list! She probably thought, ‘This is never gonna happen.’”

The room is awkwardly quiet as the women are unsure how to react. Barbara is embarrassed, but does not try to stop him.

“But this little lady is sharp. She went out, and she found herself a man to partner up with—and look what she was able to accomplish, huh?”

Barbara hastily interjects.

“Ari, you’re making an ass of yourself!”

Ari ignores her and continues.

“It’s gonna be interesting though, once she’s lost that man, to see how she claws her way back into this banquet room.”

The women at the luncheon start to murmur in disbelief.

“But anyway, cheers to you, Babs, and to all of you out there who have saddled up next to powerful men, just so that you can stand in our way. But remember this: just because you can stand in our way, you will never keep us down. Thank you.”


Ari’s speech is delivered in the context of a post-feminist, women-only environment, at a function celebrating successful women in business. Subsequently, we can see that the “main axis of power” (Connell, 2000b, p. 74), namely hegemonic male power, exists in the social fabric of *Entourage*. In contemporary times, such an
outburst could and should be seen as deplorably misogynistic and out of touch, but the historical power of patriarchy remains in some respects. This section examines how the “ideologically legitimated” subordination of women to men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832) can be linked to the negotiation and performance of hegemony by the characters of Entourage, particularly Ari Gold.

Hegemonic masculinity is always contestable because it is always relational (Connell, 2000b, p. 76) Connell argues that discussing the relations between kinds of masculinity will facilitate understanding (p. 76), because it allows for methods of domination to be seen in relief. Hegemony is shown as constantly in flux throughout Entourage, as the different characters negotiate the power structure of their relations. Masculinity is understood through performances of masculine behaviour (p. 68) which I argue are in turn based on a historical and social understanding of the concept. Hegemonic masculinity arises from the figure of a “universal ‘deep masculine’” (Connell, 2000a, p. 5), and is constructed through the cultural belief that men dominate women (2000b, p. 77). Connell and Demetriou elaborate this concept by proposing hegemonic structure within masculinity, where certain groups of men dominate other groups of men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 835; Demetriou, 2001, p. 337).

“Where Can a Man Be a Man?”

In Entourage, the figure with the most critical understanding of the constructed nature of hegemonic masculinity is Ari Gold. In the episode “Seth Green Day,” we learn that Ari and Andrew are old college friends who were once extremely close: “Andy and I were once brothers. A twist of fate turned one of us into gold and one of us into, well, a broke, desperate, begging-for-money-cocksucker!” (“Pie”). Ari soon realises that Andrew is a very successful but little-known literary agent who would make a valuable contribution to the Miller Gold Agency, but comes up against a wall when proposing the idea to Barbara. He takes his anger out on his daughter one morning in the family kitchen.

“Jesus Christ, is it too much to ask for a God-damned egg in the kitchen? If a man can’t have breakfast cooked for him, is it too much to expect a trip to the store so he can cook it for himself?”

Ari’s daughter Sarah retorts, “Mom cooks us breakfast every morning; you’re always at work.”

Ari scoffs.

“Let me get this straight: all women defend each other blindly?”

This scene shows that a historical understanding of hegemonic masculinity is deeply embedded in the social conscience of Entourage: women are expected to manage domestic duties. The scene, however, also engages a post-feminist analysis of underlying assumptions:

Sarah asks her father what it is that is really bothering him.
“You wouldn’t understand,” Ari tells her. “You are a delightful, unspoiled little girl.” Sarah presses him, and he explains: “Okay, Little Miss Adult. My problem is that I can’t run my business the way I want to, not with that woman as my partner. Your mother controls me at home; she [Barbara] controls me at work. Where can a man be a man?”

Ari’s question reflects the fractured masculinity that exists in contemporary Western society. While hegemonic masculinity has been historically constructed as the idealised norm (Connell, 2000b, p. 70), it cannot always be embodied. Masculine dominance has negative connotations in McRobbie’s post-feminist society but in spite of this, Ari remains in “pursuit of hegemony” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 834). Connell argues that conflict between masculinities can arise because of “unmanageable” expectations of masculinity, rather than any kind of repression (Connell, 2000b, p. 23). Unrealistic expectations, then, are the foundations for negotiating the politics of gender relations.

_The Erotic Triangle_

For a television show that exalts male friendships and men in general, _Entourage_ has no shortage of powerful women. Dana Gordon is a smart and bold studio executive with whom Ari has had a romantic relationship.

When Ari is offered the role of studio head (“Gotta Look Up To Get Down”), Dana calls him on the phone, determined to be his second-in-charge. “Am I gonna be your number two or not, Ari?”

“You’ll always be my number one whore, Dana,” Dana rolls her eyes. “Oh, thank you.”

“Just not sure it’s gonna be at the studio,”

“You piece of shit. You know I can do that job!”

“Just relax. I’m struggling with the decision, but I think I’m not gonna take the job.” Lloyd is eavesdropping and whoops in delight.

“Don’t worry, Dana,” Ari continues, “I’m sure you’ll be able to grease the balls of the next guy in line and get yourself under him,”

“There is no next guy—there’s a next girl. Amanda Daniels,” Dana announces smugly. “Doesn’t she hate you? That should work out well for you and yours,”


Dana smirks.

“I’ll second that.”

Ari asserts his power over Dana through sexual innuendo: referring to her as a whore and suggesting that she should have to “get under” the next man in order to succeed. Dana, in turn, flippantly accepts Ari’s demeaning comments and plays along, despite her dislike of the dynamic. Ari makes the assumption that the next person in line for this high-profile, high-pressure position is another man. He is well aware of Dana’s abilities; yet, ideals of hegemonic masculinity are manifested.
in his language and position him as the person with power. In order to avoid being trapped in a position of gross disadvantage in the industry, Ari suggests Dana for the role of studio head in lieu of Amanda Daniels, an agent with whom Ari and his star client Vince have a bad history. Ari’s influence wins out and Dana secures the position. The way these events play out undermine Dana’s professional ability: Ari’s constant, demeaning jibes imply she was never in consideration for the role, and that it was singularly his influence that secured the job for her.

The “force” of the performative comes from social power, which is constructed by established social contexts (Bourdieu cited in Butler, 1997, p. 141). Ari’s words not only demonstrate his own belief that he holds power over Dana, but that historically, because he is a man, this power pre-exists. Sharon Bird differentiates between gender role and gender identity as static assumptions and continual process—gender identity is constructed from an individual’s understanding of how to represent and perform gender (Bird, 1996, p. 122) Ari embodies, perhaps as a caricature, extreme representations of a socially perpetuated understanding of hegemonic masculinity. Ari is the “accumulation of meanings” (p. 122) of hegemonic masculinities, and demonstrates the struggle and effort required to achieve hegemonic form.

The Hybrid Bloc

Demetriou critiques Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity, claiming it oversimplifies the politics of masculinities by defining masculinity as hegemonic or non-hegemonic (Demetriou, 2001, p. 335). Far from condensing masculinity into two categories, Connell’s work frequently acknowledges the changing dynamics of gender politics and their part in producing different understandings and performances of masculinities (Connell, 1992, p. 735; 2000b, pp. 38, 77). Connell makes explicit his argument that masculinity, like the generic concept of gender, is relational and reconstituted according to changing politics (2000b, p. 81; 2000a, p. 13). Demetriou prefers a “hybrid bloc” perspective of masculinities (p. 337), considering that the practices of different masculinities unite or resonate in order to reproduce patriarchy (p. 337).

In Entourage, power structures are negotiated between the men, producing a hybrid bloc as the men explicitly acknowledge their positions within a hierarchy. Their contributions to the bloc are marked in the dialogue. The men of Entourage reflect different aspects of masculinity as it is socially understood; this, along with their homosocial bonds, reinforces and reproduces a successful hybrid bloc. The strong homosocial bonds between the men are what facilitates and reinforces the power structure of masculinities in Entourage.

HOMOSOCIALITY IN ENTOURAGE

Ari has just spoken on the phone with Dana, who has informed him that Amanda Daniels is next in line for the position of studio head, should Ari not accept the offer. Amanda was Vince’s agent after Vince and Ari experienced a professional (and consequently personal) rift. Amanda and Vince also had a secret romantic affair which turned
sour when Vince decided to go back to Ari. Amanda holds a bitter grudge against the pair and could potentially stall Vince’s career if she were in a position of higher power in the film industry.

Lloyd hurries into the office overjoyed upon overhearing that Ari is not planning to accept the offer of studio head and will stay at the agency instead.

“T’m so happy, Ari. You’ve made me very happy,” Lloyd claps. “I hope you’re happy too!” He is oblivious to Ari’s reeling shock.

“DO I LOOK HAPPY?” Ari rages.

Lloyd is taken aback.

“What’s wrong?” he asks in confusion.

“Has so much cum been squirted in your eyes that you can’t see what’s right in front of your face?” Ari bellows. “Amanda Daniels takes that job—Vince is fucked and I’m fucked. We’re all fucked. And we’re fucked in the way you like to get fucked, not fucked in the way that normal people like to get [Ari makes a thrusting motion with his middle and forefinger] fucked.”


I shift my focus to the relationship between Ari and Lloyd, and will discuss how hegemonic masculinity is melded with “marginalised masculinity” (Connell, 2000b, pp. 26, 75) to produce hybrid masculinity. I do not seek to provide an extensive mapping of homosocial relations in the program; rather, I analyse the homosocial dynamics of specific moments in Entourage using Sedgwick’s work to further an understanding of the ways masculinities are presented in the program. The exchange quoted at the start of this section is a snapshot of Ari and Lloyd’s relationship dynamic. I argue that it is Ari’s surface homophobic treatment of Lloyd, performed through his dialogue, which builds and strengthens their bond, simultaneously marking out their political positions within the hierarchy of masculinities in Entourage.

**Homophobic Distancing**

Connell and Demetriou both discuss the significance of multiple masculinities and the ways in which such diversity affects gender relations (Connell, 2000b, p. 81; Demetriou, 2001, p. 338). In Masculinities, Connell analyses the dominance of heterosexual men and the subordination of homosexual men (Connell, 2000b, p. 78). Homosexual men are positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy of men—“gayness,” Connell argues, is a rejection of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2000b, p. 78). Connell defines homophobia as not just an attitude but as a layered social practice (Connell, 2000b, p. 40). The term homophobia was first used in 1967 by George Weinberg and described as an “irrational revulsion” (Britton, 1990, p. 423). In contrast, as homosexuality is taken to be a negation of heterosexuality, then “antagonism” towards homosexual men occupies a strategic, situational, and definitional relation to masculinity (Connell, 1992, p. 736).

While the homosocial bonds between the men in Entourage are strong, the occa-
sional homophobic taunt serves to maintain distance and clarify their heterosexuality. Their language is flippant and performs a dismissive attitude towards, and at times distaste for, homosexuality. Homophobia, however casually it is expressed, is used as a tool to keep boundaries in place and to reinforce the importance of hegemonic masculinity. Yet while instances of homophobic utterances are commonplace in *Entourage*, any deep homophobia harboured by the men is never made explicit. Connell argues that homophobia causes “structurally induced conflicts” within masculinities (Connell, 1992, p. 737). In *Entourage*, homophobia is simply another tool reinforcing the hybrid bloc. In her 1990 research, Dana Britton argues that “homosociality directly affects homophobia,” serving as “a boundary between social and sexual interaction in a homosocially stratified society” (Britton, 1990, p. 437). This occurs throughout *Entourage* and is demonstrated in the dialogue between the men.

In “First Class Jerk,” Ari is distracted by indecision about the studio head position. Lloyd attempts to discuss the consequences of the options with him, but Ari is frustrated and becomes short with Lloyd.

“Lloyd! I’m on the phone!” he seethes when Lloyd knocks on the door.

“I know!” Lloyd snaps. “I put the call through! I’ve been putting your calls through for three years now and I haven’t interrupted or given you my opinion even when I know I can steer your twisted mind onto greener pastures. But I can’t keep my mouth shut anymore,”

“That’s because it’s filled with –” Ari interjects.

“Shut it, Ari!” Lloyd spits. Ari raises his eyebrows.

“I know you’re going to make some rude, inconsiderate, nasty comment about my sexual orientation,” Lloyd continues. “And I know that you always do that to deflect from your own insecurities and I’ve lived with it because I wanna learn, and I believed that someday you would promote me.”

“Lloyd,” Ari begins in a placating tone, “This is gonna be good for you, as well,”

“If you think working for some conglomerate is going to fulfil you, then fine,” retorts Lloyd. “But please don’t think I’d ever make myself a corporate bitch,”

Ari gapes at Lloyd as he leaves the room. Lloyd turns around.

“And by the way, even if I did, your little gay quips would not be tolerated in a publicly traded company. People need you here, Ari. I’ll leave you with that,” Lloyd walks out of the office with his nose in the air.

Ari leans back on his desk and shakes his head.

“You throw a lot of Jew guilt for a Chinaman,” he calls out the door.

Connell argues that homosexual masculinity experiences the same social influences as hegemonic masculinity, but that the construction of gender is shaped by a number of relationship dynamics and cultural processes (Connell, 1992, p. 742). Perhaps it is problematic to assume that men are universally affected by ideas of hegemonic masculinity, however it is useful in assessing what is regarded as the “norm.” Lloyd displays assertiveness in his remonstration of Ari, generally a characteristic of hegemonic masculinity (Bird, 1996, p. 125). Ari continues with his ho-
mophobia, a choice seen by Lloyd as a way to bolster Ari’s self-conceptualisation of masculinity.

Connell argues that the social identity of “gayness” is different from sexuality—the latter is a gradual construction from social influences. I argue that there is an inherent agency in embodying the idea of “gayness,” while the former is a socially necessary and static “category” that can be imposed on people (Connell, 1992, p. 743). As such, the assignment of “gayness” from Ari onto Lloyd works to subordinate Lloyd, but the men reach an impasse because Lloyd has already accepted his gayness and clearly finds much pleasure in it. By presenting the assertiveness of Lloyd in reaction to Ari’s dominating masculinity, Entourage clearly demonstrates that gay masculinities have much to contribute to a hybrid understanding of masculinities. Whether by virtue of Ari’s hegemonic masculinity demanding acceptance or simply the long amount of time spent together, Lloyd thinks more of Ari than Ari deserves. Lloyd’s comfort with his sexuality is contrasted with Ari’s constant need to assert his power, whether through homophobic comments or declarations of his success in general. Ari constructs homophobia as a conduit through which an erotic triangle is formed (Sedgwick, 1985, p. 21).

**Discursive Hegemony**

Michel Foucault argues that theory cannot be constructed without a “field of discourse” (Foucault, 1972, p. 26). I argue that the discourse that surrounds theory builds on existing social discourse. I view Entourage within the field of discourse provided by contemporary researchers of masculinity and propose that it extends the discursive understanding we have regarding post-feminist ideals of masculinity. Post-feminist hegemonic masculinity is a constantly negotiated performance based on internalised historical ideas. Butler argues that the listener (analogous to the viewer in the case of Entourage) occupies a social position, and it is from this social position that they understand language (Butler, 1997, p. 18). I argue that the context of post-feminism casts the dialogue of Entourage in a particular light: Entourage portrays a hyper-hegemonic understanding of masculinity that strives to maintain a social relevancy in contemporary times. Entourage traces and dramatizes hegemonic masculinity in Demetriou’s hybrid bloc in order to perpetuate its existence.

Louis Althusser claims that “ideas” have their “existence ... inscribed in the actions of practices governed by rituals” (cited in Butler, 1997, p. 25). The rituals of hegemonic masculinity are reflected and clarified through language. We are “formed” in the language we use (Butler, 1997, p. 28), and so are the concepts by which we live. The dialogue in Entourage cannot be considered as informing some ultimate definition of masculinity, nor can it be read as representative of a general or global understanding of masculinity. However, the program is a persuasive and engaging reading of contemporary masculinity, and this is largely due to the dialogue between characters. Entourage is a small but useful snapshot of the social understanding of masculinity, constructed in the context of a contemporary, Western, heterosexual gender order. The discourse of Entourage, through its conflicted
characters and strong writing, “isolates small islands of coherence” within masculinities and subsequently reveals the “internal structure” of modern masculinity (Foucault, 1972, p. 37).

**Performing Hegemony**

In “Unlike a Virgin,” Vince has decided to come out of hiding post-Medellin and is going into the office to see Ari. Lloyd is running around excitedly at the prospect of seeing their young charge after many months.

“He’s here! He’s here! Vince is here!” Lloyd shouts excitedly.

Ari scrunches up his eyebrows in mild anxiety, also nervous about seeing Vince again. “What are you, speed ball and fairy dust?” he admonishes. “Go out and greet him like a man.”

Vince walks in soon after and Ari grins broadly. “Vinnie! There he is!” he calls, arms outstretched. “How you doin’, baby?”

I will not attempt to link my own reading to the intentions of Doug Ellin, the creator of *Entourage*. I believe the television series speaks for itself through the characters depicted. Butler develops the concept of the “sovereign power” of speech: in which power lies with the person from where the voice emanates, and “to utter is to create the effect uttered” (Butler, 1997, p. 32). In *Entourage*, saying it is as good as being it: speech acts produce masculinity. Ari dismisses Lloyd’s fretting as unmasculine and thinks that his own boisterous greeting (including the diminutive “baby” reference to Vince) is a more “manly” way to act. The power performed in speech acts is located in the subject; however, in *Entourage*, such power is disseminated between the men, through their language of homosociality, in order to maintain the power order of the group. As Butler argues, language does not merely serve to describe, it “produces its social contours in space and time” (Butler, 1997, p. 34). The ways the men speak to each other reflect their understandings of masculinity and illustrate how these understandings operate politically within the group. Speech constructs boundaries that allow their masculinities and friendships to exist.

Lloyd is becoming suspicious of constant phone calls from a high profile studio trying to woo Ari (“Gotta Look Up to Get Down”). One day he walks into the office as Ari hangs up the phone, rubbing his hands together with glee.

Lloyd peers at Ari and asks, “Are you hiding something from me, Ari?” Ari smirks mischievously.

“Only my cock and my asshole, Lloyd!” he calls as he bounces out of the office.

In *Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification*, Butler describes gender as “a kind of melancholy” and argues that heterosexuality is formed through “prohibitions” (Butler, 1995, pp. 21, 25). Through speech, Ari asserts his heteronormativity and prohibits notions of homosexuality through snide, disparaging comments. In his exchange with Lloyd, Ari responds with the action of “hiding” something from
Lloyd. Of course, Lloyd was referring to the goings on with the studio executive with whom Ari had been speaking, but Ari yet again brings sexuality into the conversation. This act seems to have the intention of asserting Ari’s power and heterosexuality, but also reflects his insecurity in himself.

Homophobia and Power

The characters of Entourage collectively reflect the tentativeness of contemporary hegemonic masculinity. McRobbie discusses the dynamics of social change in gender order as “reflexive modernisation” (Beck, Giddens & Lash cited in McRobbie, 2004). Entourage questions the necessity of hegemonic masculinity in McRobbie’s post-feminist society. Ari’s robust assertions of heterosexuality—used as a method of maintaining his power over homosexual Lloyd—also jar somewhat in the context of progressive society. The male characters are rarely portrayed as explicitly chauvinistic, but the dialogue hints at an acknowledgement of dominant masculinities. A criterion for acceptance into dominant masculinity is heterosexuality.

Ari is in a meeting with actor Jeffrey Tambor (“Gotta Look Up to Get Down”). Jeffrey is keen to secure the role of Marcel Proust in a possible feature film. Ari is trying to dissuade him.

“You don’t think I have the acting chops to play Marcel Proust?”

“What I’m saying is,” explains Ari, “I don’t think anyone is going to buy you as a gay Frenchman.”

“Well, you know, I speak French,” huffs Jeffrey.

“I meant it as a compliment,” Ari says, frustrated.

Jeffrey looks at his agent darkly.

“Well, it didn’t feel like one.”

Ari’s homophobic defence of his client’s heterosexuality indicates the ubiquitousness of heterosexuality in the discourse of hegemonic masculinity. Ari sits on the border of hegemonic and marginalised masculinities, as a Jewish man with insecurities about his own masculinity. He guards the ideal of heterosexuality fiercely. Homophobic language is an illocutionary tool that enforces heteronormativity in Entourage. Hegemonic masculinities rely on heteronormativity. The speech acts in Entourage serve to perform and assert these ideals. In certain moments of Entourage, the consequences of some speech acts lead to (and stem from) recognition of wider stereotypes and social, historical ideas of masculinities. David Van Leer suggests that clichés are powerful “if only in their linguistic compactness; even when they are introduced as fallacious, that power tends to linger” (Van Leer, 1989, p. 589). The deployment of stereotypes and norms in Entourage is indicative of the social understanding of hegemonic, normative masculinities.

Ari is about to reveal to Lloyd a secret about his rival Adam Davies as part of revenge for [Adam Davies] sending male strippers (“The All Out Fall Out”). He leans in and gestures for Lloyd to do the same.
“I know you don’t know the man code,” he begins, as Lloyd frowns in disapproval, “so I want you to swear on Tom [Lloyd’s boyfriend] getting gangrene on his cock that you will say nothing.”

Lloyd glances at Ari and rolls his eyes.

“I won’t utter a word.”

Ari differentiates his idea of heteronormative hegemonic masculinity from Lloyd’s sexual and gender identity. Ari emphasises the body and, specifically, the penis. By doing this, Ari cites the symbol of masculinity as an explicit signal of the importance of hegemonic masculinity. In his use of the term “man code,” he links an idea of universal hegemony to the use of the penis in a homosexual context. As Butler argues, language brings the body into being by interpolating it within the terms of language. This is how the “social existence” of the body becomes possible; yet, if language can “sustain the body, it can also threaten its existence” (Butler, 1997, p. 5). This can also be applied to masculinities. Masculinity is a concept around which discourse can construct a space to be understood (Foucault, 1972, p. 56). It follows that language is a core part of understanding masculinities.

How to Draw Lines with Words

In Entourage, homosocial bonds between men do not allow them to engage in honest emotional exchanges about their personal experiences of sexuality. Rather, the men participate in shallow discussions about women during discrete homosocial moments. The men are close enough in friendship for homophobic utterances to be made. Their heterosexuality and homosocial relationships are confirmed through homophobic wisecracks. In certain moments of Entourage, the men maintain their homosocial relationships by drawing discursive boundaries through homophobic language: they can only be “best friends” as long as they occasionally question each other’s sexuality. Calling sexuality into question, however dismissively, requires the other to state his sexuality—in this case heterosexuality—a statement that allows the friendship to progress. In Entourage, questioning friends by teasing them and generally giving them a hard time creates space for heteronormativity to be reiterated. Each time a homophobic jibe is made is also an opportunity for the men of Entourage to reassure themselves, and each other, that they are aware of their role in the hierarchy of masculinities. Through speech acts, they are able to maintain their sense of masculinity and subsequently their roles within the group. Language in Entourage is an explicit acknowledgement of gender—it is a tool of gender performance. The subject connected to the words spoken also speaks for the subjectivity of gender: words express the internalised ideals of gender and these are produced by the subject. Entourage uses the power of words to maintain power among men.

Women, Power, and Masculinity

Historically in Western society, men have never been a minority group (Connell, 1992, p. 736). Academic feminist critique of “patriarchy” assumes universal and unchanging male dominance (Rowbotham cited in Connell, 1992, p. 736), but so-
cially, men have been assigned the enduring, unrealistic gender role of hegemonic masculinity. Contemporary feminism brings this hegemonic masculinity into question. This is not to say that men are now a minority, nor are they disadvantaged, but socially, it is often now acknowledged that men can have unrealistic expectations to which they feel they must rise. This social movement is referenced continuously in *Entourage*. Powerful women in the men’s lives appear in support roles. The women engage in masculine behaviour which earns them respect and attention from the male characters, yet this behaviour also gestures towards the effects of patriarchy—women behave this way, and are accepted to behave this way, in order to succeed. At certain points, these women encourage and necessitate men’s assertions of their masculinities.

McRobbie argues that the concept of “empowerment” leads to “avid” self-monitoring (McRobbie, 2004, p. 260)—she links this to women attempting to reproduce the ideal of the empowered woman and maintaining focus on the body. A parallel can be discerned for the men on *Entourage*. Their self-monitoring is intended to produce hegemonic masculinities in a way they feel is appropriate to their post-feminist context. In order to accomplish this, the characters of *Entourage* turn to their friends for support and guidance. Their diversity and shared understandings of hegemonic masculinities culminate to create a particular hybrid bloc of masculinity, while their strong homosocial bonds reinforce a hierarchy within the group. They may well be uncertain of what it really means to “be a man,” but their enduring friendships—stated continuously in the dialogue—facilitate performances of hegemony.

**CONCLUSION: ENTOURAGE AND CONTEMPORARY MASCULINITY**

“Power is not as easy to identify or to localize as some speech act theory appears to imply” (Butler, 1995, p. 34). In *Entourage*, power is constructed through the dialogue between characters. We are constituted in the language we use (Butler, 1995, p. 28), and as such, power can be dissimulated (p. 36) or weakened through speech acts. My article illustrates the power of discourse within a specific social context. I have augmented Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity, which is based on a historical understanding of patriarchy (Connell, 2000b, p. 21; Demetriou, 2001, p. 339), through my reading of *Entourage* in McRobbie’s post-feminist (McRobbie, 2004, p. 255) society. Hegemonic masculinity is performed with conscious effort in moments of *Entourage*, and the script facilitates this through strong characterisation, and by incorporating historical and social ideals of masculinity in characterisation.

Butler argues that the “power of discourse to produce that which it names is thus essentially linked with the question of performativity” (Butler, 1993a, p. 17). The dialogue on *Entourage* reflects the social impact of performance and illustrates the verbal maintenance of hegemonic masculinity. The intended humour and irony in *Entourage* builds an understanding of contemporary masculinity in a post-feminist Western society. The dialogue is based on historically and socially informed ideals that “accumulate the force of authority through ... repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices” (Butler, 1993a, p. 19). These ideals are tempered by a
contemporary society in which men might respond to feminism by asking (as Ari Gold in “Seth Green Day”), *where can a man be a man?* As Connell argues, it is not that men are repressed by feminism but that the expectations of men have become “unmanageable” (Connell, 2000b, p. 23). *Entourage* communicates this through humour and irony, presenting an extreme character in Ari Gold and varying degrees of hegemonic performance in an entourage of men. The humour employed in the program stages simultaneously the ubiquity of hegemonic forms and their unattainability, a post-feminist mise-en-scène where the validity of such behaviour is incessantly questioned.

**EPISODES**

Farino, J. (Dir.) (2008). *Tree Trippers* [*Entourage* TV series]. USA, HBO.


**REFERENCES**


**APPENDIX 1**

**SUMMARY OF CORE CHARACTERS AND PLOTLINES**

This article covers the story arc of season five of the popular television show *Entourage*. For those unfamiliar with the program, a summary of core characters and plotlines that appear in the article:

**Vincent Chase**: successful young actor and previously “the next big thing” in Hollywood. In earlier seasons Vince’s career was in an upwards trajectory after appearing in edgy “indie flicks,” until hubris and overconfidence lead him to produce *Medellin*, a film that was panned by critics and relegated him into unemployment. Season five explores how a sudden lack of career success undermines Vince’s understanding of hegemonic masculinity.

**Ari Gold**: Vince’s agent. Ari is loud-mouthed, obnoxious and arrogant but fiercely loyal to those important to him. A Jewish man, Ari embodies a “liminal” masculinity; however, his character is the most compelling in portraying the constant negotiation of performance of hegemonic masculinity.

**Lloyd**: assistant to Ari Gold. Lloyd is clearly comfortable with his homosexuality and the constant homophobia exhibited by Ari reinforces their homosocial bond.

**Johnny “Drama” Chase**: Vince’s brother and struggling actor. Drama, through his exaggerated expressions of masculinity, provides the comic relief in the program.

**“Turtle’ and ‘E”**: both childhood friends of Vince’s. Turtle is unofficially Vince’s gofer and driver, and at times suffers much insecurity about his non-hegemonic identity of masculinity. E is Vince’s manager and closest confidante. He is the group’s “sensitive” man, considerate and careful.