

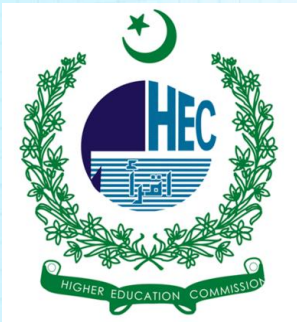
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**Hegemonic Masculinity, Emotional Suppression, and the Crisis of
Male Identity in Ernest Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises:
A Connellian Reading**



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Abstract

This paper examines the construction of hegemonic masculinity, the mechanisms of emotional suppression, and the resultant crisis of male identity in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). Drawing on R.W. Connell's theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity, the study analyzes how the novel's post World War I male protagonists negotiate their sense of selfhood against the backdrop of physical trauma, psychological dislocation, and the dissolution of traditional masculine ideals. The analysis foregrounds Jake Barnes's war inflicted wound as a complex metaphor for masculine inadequacy, Robert Cohn's romantic idealism as a subordinated masculinity, and the expatriate milieu of Paris and Pamplona as a space where normative gender scripts are simultaneously performed and subverted. The paper argues that while Hemingway outwardly valorizes stoic emotional control, the novel's deeper textual layers reveal a profound masculine crisis, one in which hegemonic ideals of strength, potency, and national belonging are irreparably destabilized by the aftermath of modern warfare. This study contributes to Hemingway scholarship and to broader interdisciplinary conversations in gender studies, literary criticism, and cultural history.

Keywords: Hegemonic masculinity, emotional suppression, male identity, Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, R.W. Connell, Lost Generation, postwar trauma, gender studies

Introduction

Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) stands as one of the most enduring literary monuments to the postWorld War I generation's experience of dislocation, disillusionment, and cultural crisis. Published in the immediate aftermath of a conflict that shattered traditional values and social certainties across the Western world, the novel captures the existential malaise of a cohort Gertrude Stein famously designated the "Lost Generation" a group of young men and women who emerged from the trenches and field hospitals of Europe irrevocably changed, bereft of the ideological and emotional scaffolding that had previously organized their lives. At the heart of this generational tragedy lies a profound interrogation of masculinity: what it means

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to be a man in a world that has rendered the traditional masculine ideals of heroism, virility, and national pride not only inadequate but deeply suspect.

The novel's male protagonist, Jake Barnes, embodies this crisis with devastating immediacy. A journalist and American expatriate living in Paris, Jake has sustained a war wound that renders him sexually impotent, a condition Hemingway deploys with characteristic symbolic weight. This physical injury becomes the text's central metaphor for a broader masculine insufficiency: Jake can desire but cannot fulfill; he can feel but cannot openly express; he can inhabit the social rituals of masculinity drinking, fishing, attending bullfights without ever achieving the unimpaired, self-sufficient manhood that hegemonic culture demands. Surrounding Jake is an ensemble of male characters Robert Cohn, Mike Campbell, Bill Gorton, and Pedro Romero each of whom represents a different position within what R.W. Connell (1995) describes as the gender order, a hierarchical structure in which masculinities are ranked according to their proximity to dominant cultural norms.

This paper applies Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity to a close reading of *The Sun Also Rises*, arguing that the novel does not simply celebrate stoic male endurance but rather exposes the profound psychic and social costs of hegemonic masculine norms in a post-traumatic context. The expatriate world Hemingway constructs in Paris and Pamplona is one in which masculine identity is constantly performed, contested, and ultimately destabilized a space where the gap between the hegemonic ideal and the lived reality of postwar manhood becomes painfully visible. By reading the novel through a Connellian lens, this study seeks to illuminate how Hemingway's text both reflects and critiques the dominant masculine ideologies of the early twentieth century, contributing to an interdisciplinary understanding of gender, trauma, and literary representation.

The analysis is organized around three interconnected thematic concerns: first, the function of Jake's wound as a site of masculine crisis; second, the dynamics of emotional suppression and their psychological consequences for the male characters; and third, the novel's treatment of subordinated and marginalized masculinities, particularly as embodied by Robert Cohn. Together, these analytical threads weave a nuanced portrait of a text deeply invested in the tensions, contradictions, and vulnerabilities that lie beneath the surface of hegemonic masculinity in the modern

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age.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze how Hemingway constructs and critiques hegemonic masculinity in *The Sun Also Rises* through the characterization of Jake Barnes and the supporting male cast.
2. To examine the role of emotional suppression as both a hegemonic masculine strategy and a symptom of postwar psychological trauma within the novel.

Research Questions

1. In what ways do the male characters' practices of emotional suppression both uphold and undermine hegemonic masculine norms within Hemingway's narrative?
2. How does Jake Barnes's physical wound function as a metaphor for the broader crisis of hegemonic masculinity in the post-World War I context of *The Sun Also Rises*?

Significance of the Study

This study makes a critical contribution to the interdisciplinary intersection of literary studies, gender theory, and cultural history by offering a sustained Connellian analysis of what remains one of Hemingway's most studied yet perpetually generative novels. While existing scholarship has widely explored Hemingway's "code hero" and the autobiographical dimensions of his war fiction, comparatively few studies have applied Connell's systematic framework of hegemonic masculinity to *The Sun Also Rises* with the theoretical rigor the text demands. By doing so, this paper moves beyond thematic description to expose the structural mechanisms through which masculine dominance is produced, normalized, and contested in the novel's postwar social world.

Furthermore, the study's focus on emotional suppression as a specifically hegemonic masculine practice addresses a gap in the existing literature, connecting psychological observations about Hemingway's characters to broader theoretical claims about how dominant gender norms shape male interiority and social behavior. At a time when conversations about masculinity, mental health, and the emotional lives of men are of urgent cultural and political relevance, a careful literary theoretical engagement with one of the canonical texts of American modernism offers insights that resonate well beyond the academy. Ultimately, this study enriches our

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understanding of *The Sun Also Rises* as not merely a novel about lost individuals, but as a sustained cultural critique of the hegemonic masculine ideal and the human costs of its enforcement.

Literature Review

R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, first fully articulated in *Masculinities* (1995), remains the most influential theoretical framework for analyzing dominant masculine norms within gender studies and related disciplines. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as the culturally exalted configuration of masculine practice that legitimizes the dominant position of men and the subordination of women and alternative masculinities. Crucially, hegemony in Connell's usage refers not simply to force or coercion but to the cultural consent through which dominant gender norms are internalized and reproduced across social institutions, bodies, and everyday practices. Subsequent scholars, including Messerschmidt (2018) and Beasley (2008), have refined and extended Connell's framework, emphasizing its historical contingency and the multiplicity of masculinities that exist in relation to one another within any given social formation.

Hemingway scholarship has a long and rich engagement with questions of masculinity. Foundational critics such as Baker (1963) and Young (1952) established the archetype of the Hemingway "code hero," whose dignity under pressure and emotional self-mastery define an idealized masculine ethos. More recently, feminist and gender oriented critics have complicated this picture. Comley and Scholes (1994) drew attention to the anxieties and ambivalences surrounding gender in Hemingway's fiction, while Eby (1999) offered a psychoanalytically inflected reading of masculinity and sexuality in his major works. Strychacz (1996) examined the performative dimensions of Hemingway's masculine ideal, arguing that the "code" is less a stable identity than a continuous and anxious performance.

Specific studies of *The Sun Also Rises* have explored Jake's wound as a central symbol of masculine inadequacy and postwar disillusionment. Spilka (1990) read Jake's impotence as an expression of the novel's broader critique of romantic idealism, while Modellmog (1999) examined the complexities of desire and gender identity that the wound activates. Martin (2007) analyzed the novel's treatment of male homosocial bonds and their relation to hegemonic masculine norms, and Fantina

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(2005) explored the intersections of masculinity and national identity in Hemingway's expatriate fiction.

However, a comprehensive Connellian reading of *The Sun Also Rises* that integrates the analysis of hegemonic masculinity, emotional suppression, and male identity crisis into a unified theoretical framework remains underrepresented in the scholarly literature. This paper seeks to address this lacuna by bringing Connell's systematic gender theory into sustained dialogue with close textual analysis of Hemingway's novel, thereby enriching both Hemingway studies and the broader theoretical literature on literary masculinities.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative textual analysis as its primary methodological approach, guided by R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity as the overarching theoretical lens. The primary text under analysis is Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), with close attention to characterization, narrative voice, symbolic patterns, dialogue, and thematic structures as they relate to the construction and contestation of masculine identity.

The analysis proceeds through three main analytical categories derived from Connell's framework: hegemonic masculinity (the dominant cultural ideal against which all male characters are measured), subordinated masculinity (forms of manhood that are devalued and marginalized within the gender order), and complicit masculinity (characters who benefit from the hegemonic order without fully embodying its most exacting demands). Secondary scholarly sources including literary criticism, gender theory, and cultural history are consulted to provide interpretive context and theoretical grounding.

This methodological approach enables a nuanced, multilayered reading of the text that attends both to what the novel explicitly represents and to the ideological tensions and silences that surface in its deeper structural and thematic patterns. By situating the textual analysis within a rigorous theoretical framework, the study aspires to move beyond descriptive literary criticism toward a more analytically precise account of how Hemingway's narrative participates in the cultural negotiation of hegemonic masculine norms.

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Analysis and Discussion

The Wound as Metaphor: Jake Barnes and the Fracture of Hegemonic Masculinity
Jake Barnes's war wound occupies the symbolic center of *The Sun Also Rises*, functioning as a precise and multivalent figure for the crisis of hegemonic masculinity that the novel explores. The wound's nature it renders Jake sexually impotent while leaving his desire intact creates a condition of unbridgeable rupture between the hegemonic masculine ideal and the lived bodily reality of the postwar male subject. In Connell's terms, hegemonic masculinity is intimately bound up with bodily capacities, specifically the physical and sexual potency that culture codes as intrinsically masculine and upon which claims to social dominance in part depend. Jake's wound thus situates him in a profoundly ambivalent position: he occupies many of the social and cultural markers of hegemonic manhood he is knowledgeable, respected, stoic, and emotionally controlled yet his bodily inadequacy places him permanently at a remove from the hegemonic ideal he is simultaneously compelled to perform.

This tension is rendered with extraordinary subtlety in Hemingway's prose. Jake rarely discusses his wound directly; in keeping with the hegemonic masculine norm of emotional suppression, his suffering is expressed obliquely, through ellipsis, through the studied avoidance of certain topics, and through moments of nocturnal anguish that punctuate the novel's otherwise relentless social surface. In the famous scene where Jake examines himself in the mirror, the narrative's refusal to describe what he sees functions as a form of textual enactment of masculine repression: the wound and its implications are unspeakable, literally unrepresentable within the hegemonic masculine discourse that governs the novel's world. As Spilka (1990) observes, Jake's wound makes him a figure of profound existential pathos a man who has internalized the hegemonic imperative to endure without complaint even as the conditions of that endurance are rendered grotesquely impossible by the very injury he has suffered in the service of national and masculine ideals.

The relationship between Jake and Lady Brett Ashley further illuminates this dynamic. Brett, with her androgynous appearance, sexual freedom, and emotional volatility, represents a challenge to the gender norms that Jake's stoicism is designed to uphold. Jake's love for Brett, which he cannot consummate, becomes a site of acute masculine humiliation a recurring reminder of the gap between desire and

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performance that the hegemonic masculine ideal refuses to acknowledge. Yet Jake's response to this situation is telling: rather than expressing grief or vulnerability, he channels his anguish into the performance of competence, expertise, and social mastery that characterizes his interactions with other men. Fishing with Bill Gorton, navigating the rituals of bullfighting in Pamplona, and mediating the interpersonal conflicts of the expatriate group these activities become compensatory performances of masculine adequacy that substitute for the sexual and emotional fulfillment he cannot achieve.

This compensatory structure reveals one of the central insights of a Connellian reading of the novel: hegemonic masculinity is not simply a set of traits that men either possess or lack, but a dynamic and anxious performance that must be continuously reasserted in the face of conditions that perpetually threaten to expose its constructed and precarious nature. Jake's wound makes this precariousness unusually visible, stripping away the naturalized appearance of masculine wholeness and revealing the effort and vulnerability that underlie even the most controlled masculine performance.

Emotional Suppression as Hegemonic Strategy and Psychological Wound

Central to Hemingway's construction of masculinity in *The Sun Also Rises* is the valorization of emotional suppression as both a moral virtue and a social strategy. The novel's male characters, Jake most prominently, habitually subordinate emotional expression to the performance of control, competence, and self-sufficiency. Feelings of grief, longing, jealousy, humiliation are acknowledged only indirectly, displaced into action, drink, or the ironic register of Hemingway's distinctive prose style. This pattern of emotional management aligns precisely with what Connell identifies as a defining feature of hegemonic masculinity: the cultural prescription that real men do not openly express vulnerability or dependency, and that emotional restraint is a mark of masculine strength rather than emotional poverty.

Yet the novel's textual dynamics consistently undercut this valorization, revealing emotional suppression not as a sign of psychological health or masculine achievement but as a symptom of unresolved trauma and a mechanism of self-damage. The pervasive alcoholism of the expatriate community functions as perhaps the most visible sign of this dynamic: drinking provides a socially sanctioned means of

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temporary emotional release that simultaneously preserves the surface performance of masculine control. Jake and his companions drink not in celebration but in a kind of ritualized numbing, using alcohol to modulate the affective intensities desire, grief, boredom, despair that their hegemonic masculine codes forbid them from directly acknowledging or articulating. Messerschmidt (2018) has argued that substance use frequently accompanies crises of hegemonic masculinity, providing a means of managing the emotional costs of performing an ideal that is constitutively unattainable. The expatriate drinking culture of *The Sun Also Rises* exemplifies this phenomenon with striking precision.

The novel's treatment of Jake's inner life further illuminates the psychological costs of hegemonic emotional suppression. In the rare moments when the narrative's ironic surface is briefly lowered most notably in the nocturnal scenes where Jake lies awake, unable to stop thinking about Brett the reader glimpses the depth of anguish that his public performance of stoic composure conceals. These moments are significant not only for what they reveal about Jake's individual psychology but for what they suggest about the broader human consequences of a cultural system that demands the repression of emotional life as the price of masculine legitimacy. The hegemonic masculine ideal, as Connell's framework insists, is not merely a social role but a bodily and psychic formation one that shapes and distorts the inner life of the men who are subjected to its demands, often at enormous psychological cost.

Bill Gorton's joking, irony laden relationship with Jake during the fishing interlude at Burguete offers an instructive counterpoint. In this episode, temporarily removed from the social pressures of Paris and Pamplona, the two men achieve a degree of genuine emotional connection and playful affection that contrasts sharply with the competitive, status conscious masculine performances that dominate the rest of the novel. Significantly, this connection is mediated through humor and indirection rather than direct emotional disclosure the hegemonic prohibition on vulnerability remains formally intact even as its spirit is quietly subverted. This episode suggests that Hemingway's critique of hegemonic masculine emotional norms is not a programmatic rejection but a subtle and ambivalent negotiation, acknowledging both the psychic costs of emotional suppression and the genuine bonds that male companionship, even within its hegemonic constraints, can produce.

Subordinated Masculinities: Robert Cohn and the Gender Hierarchy

If Jake Barnes represents hegemonic masculinity in crisis a figure who embodies the dominant ideal even as he is structurally excluded from its most basic requirements Robert Cohn represents what Connell designates as subordinated masculinity: a form of manhood that is actively devalued and marginalized within the gender order of the novel's social world. Cohn's subordination is multidimensional, encompassing his Jewish identity, his romantic idealism, his emotional expressiveness, and his failure to observe the codes of stoic detachment that the hegemonic masculine culture of the novel demands.

Throughout the narrative, Cohn is consistently marked as an outsider to the hegemonic masculine community that Jake and his circle constitute. His open expression of romantic feeling for Brett, his inability to conceal jealousy and hurt, his tendency to lingering attachment in the face of others' studied indifference all of these behaviors transgress the hegemonic masculine norms of emotional control and social composure that the other male characters, however imperfectly, observe. The contempt with which Jake, Mike Campbell, and Bill Gorton treat Cohn is explicitly gendered: his emotional expressiveness is repeatedly coded as weakness, his romantic attachment as sentimentality, his persistence in Pamplona as an embarrassing failure of masculine self-mastery.

Connell's framework is particularly illuminating here, as it draws attention to the ways in which the devaluation of subordinated masculinities serves to consolidate the cultural authority of the hegemonic norm. By positioning Cohn as the object of collective masculine contempt, the novel's male community constitutes its own hegemonic solidarity through exclusion defining what counts as legitimate manhood by reference to what falls below it. Cohn's Jewishness adds a further dimension to his subordination, implicating the novel's gender dynamics in the broader structures of ethnic and racial hierarchy that characterized the American and European social worlds of the 1920s. As Martin (2007) observes, anti-Semitism and masculine contempt are intertwined in the treatment of Cohn, revealing how multiple axes of social hierarchy converge in the production of hegemonic masculine authority.

Pedro Romero, the young Spanish bullfighter, represents a significant counterpoint to both Jake and Cohn. Romero embodies an almost archetypal version of hegemonic

masculinity physically powerful, sexually successful, emotionally controlled, and supremely competent in his artistry. His mastery in the bullring, a quintessentially masculine arena of grace under pressure, makes him a figure of intense masculine admiration and, for Jake, a complex object of both identification and vicarious satisfaction. Yet even Romero's hegemonic masculine wholeness is, by the novel's end, implicitly qualified: Brett's decision to leave him before he is "spoiled" suggests that even the most complete masculine ideal is vulnerable to the disruptions and dependencies of desire. No masculinity in the novel's world is truly secure.

The Expatriate Milieu and the Performance of Masculine Identity

The Paris and Pamplona settings of *The Sun Also Rises* are not merely geographical backdrops but active social environments that shape and condition the masculine performances the novel depicts. The expatriate community of Paris, with its cafes, bars, and transient social networks, constitutes what Connell might describe as a "gender regime" a structured social space with its own specific configurations of masculine and feminine practice, its own hierarchies and exclusions, and its own norms of appropriate masculine behavior. Within this regime, the performance of hegemonic masculinity takes on a particularly self-conscious and often theatrical quality, as characters stripped of the conventional social anchors of home, profession, and national community are thrown back on cultural scripts whose authority is increasingly difficult to take for granted.

The Pamplona fiesta sequences are particularly rich in this regard. The bullfight, as Hemingway presents it, functions as a ritualized theater of masculine virtue a space in which the hegemonic masculine values of physical courage, grace under pressure, and mastery of violence are enacted with a purity and completeness unavailable to the novel's psychologically damaged and socially dislocated expatriate protagonists. Jake's deep appreciation of bullfighting, and his meticulous attention to the technical details of its performance, reflect his investment in a vision of masculine wholeness that his own wounded condition denies him. The bullring becomes, in this reading, a compensatory fantasy space a site where hegemonic masculinity achieves the coherence and completeness that the postwar world has rendered unattainable in everyday social life.

The collective masculine performances of the fiesta drinking, watching the bulls,

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arguing, fighting also reveal the homosocial dimensions of hegemonic masculine culture. The male bonds of the expatriate group, however fractious and competitive, provide the primary social medium through which masculine identity is performed, evaluated, and reinforced. Brett's presence among the men functions as a further structuring element: as the object of multiple masculine desires and as a woman who ostentatiously transgresses conventional feminine norms, she both activates and destabilizes the hegemonic masculine order, serving as the occasion for competitions, humiliations, and rivalries that expose the fragility of masculine solidarity.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that a Connellian reading of *The Sun Also Rises* yields a richly textured and theoretically grounded account of the novel's engagement with hegemonic masculinity, emotional suppression, and male identity crisis. Far from being a straightforward celebration of stoic heroism, Hemingway's text reveals, with considerable subtlety and psychological acuity, the profound human costs of the hegemonic masculine ideal in a postwar cultural context. Jake Barnes's wound stands as the novel's most resonant symbol of this cost: a bodily inscription of the gap between hegemonic aspiration and lived masculine reality that no amount of stoic performance can fully close.

The novel's treatment of emotional suppression illuminates the psychic mechanisms through which hegemonic masculine norms are internalized and enforced, producing not strength but a form of managed suffering whose consequences surface in the alcoholism, restlessness, and nocturnal anguish of its male characters. The hierarchical treatment of Robert Cohn exposes the exclusionary dynamics through which hegemonic masculine communities constitute themselves, revealing how the devaluation of subordinated masculinities serves to reinforce the authority of the dominant norm. Together, these analytical threads produce a reading of *The Sun Also Rises* that situates it as a complex and critical literary engagement with the gender ideologies of its time one that remains profoundly relevant to contemporary conversations about masculinity, emotional wellbeing, and the cultural costs of gender norms that demand self-suppression as the price of belonging.

Future research might extend this Connellian analysis to other Hemingway novels, or situate *The Sun Also Rises* within a broader comparative framework alongside the

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works of other modernist writers grappling with postwar masculine crisis. Such work would further illuminate the ways in which literature serves as both a mirror and a critical intervention in the ongoing cultural negotiation of gender norms and their human consequences.

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