

Postfeminism, men, masculinities and work: a research agenda for gender and organization studies scholars

Abstract

This article uses postfeminism as a critical lens to advance a much needed research agenda for studying inclusive masculinities within and across organizational settings. Inclusive masculinity theory is one the latest approaches for theorizing contemporary masculinities as they relate to men within cultures where homophobia is deemed to be in decline. If such masculinities can be evidenced then potential exists to engage men critically in social change for gender equality. However, inclusive masculinity theory has been criticized for its deficit in feminist theory. This article integrates a postfeminist imperative into inclusive masculinity theory so organizational researchers can maintain a focus on gendered power relations when examining the potential for inclusive masculinities to emerge within a postfeminist culture. Such research can enrich an organizational critical masculinity studies literature that has frequently deployed hegemonic masculinity as a conceptual tool to focus on masculinities in terms of dominance and exclusion.

Keywords: Postfeminism, men, inclusive masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, homophobia, work.

Introduction

This article is framed as a research note that deploys inclusive masculinity theory as a lens to examine gay masculinities and work, a territory hitherto largely untrodden by masculinities scholars, especially those interested in work. More familiar and extensively cited is a burgeoning critical masculinity studies literature (Kimmel, 1987; Brod and Kaufman, 1994; Connell, 1995; Whitehead, 2002; Hearn et al. 2012), much of which has examined the dominance of a male norm that associates men in positions of privilege with certain forms of masculinity coded as rational, instrumental and violent. Informed by feminist theories, critical masculinity studies challenges ontological assumptions that masculinity is the fixed property of men, often theorizing masculinity as multiple, provisional and historically patterned (Whitehead, 2002). Drawing on this scholarship, organizational researchers have mobilized key concepts such as hegemonic masculinity and drawn on a variety of theories (e.g. social constructionism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, queer theory) to critically study men, masculinities and work. One aim of this research is to expose men and masculinities where they are so taken-for-granted in the workplace as to appear ‘natural’ and ‘right’, critiquing how men’s behaviors have a material and political actuality. Much of this scholarship problematizes and contests gender inequalities among men and between men and women, without re-centering men and masculinities as sites of patriarchal privilege (Kerfoot and Knights, 1993, 1998; Collinson and Hearn, 1994; Cheng, 1996; Hearn, 2014). Despite the conceptual and

empirical pluralism of this research, several limitations are apparent that establish the rationale for this article.

One drawback concerns the dominance of hegemonic masculinity as a conceptual frame for analysis. Hegemonic masculinity has attracted sustained scholarly criticism about what it is and how it can be conceptualized: for example, whether it refers to a singular and stable mode of being masculine, and its capacity for theorizing masculinities beyond a Gramscian notion of hegemony (Hearn, 2004; Moller, 2007; Anderson, 2009; Beasley, 2012; Johansson and Ottemo, 2015). For the purposes of this article, I am principally concerned with the net effect of hegemonic masculinity as a concept that has maintained a focus on men's positions within organizations largely in terms of masculinities that form the basis of dominance and exclusion (Anderson, 2009; McCormack, 2012). I do not argue that issues of dominance and exclusion as they relate to organizational men and masculinities are irrelevant. Rather I am sympathetic to arguments put forward by masculinity scholars like Moller (2007: 265), that the enduring prominence of hegemonic masculinity has motivated researchers to search for 'particularly nefarious instances of masculinist abuses of power' at the expense of masculinities that are more inclusive. While the examination of how masculine norms can reproduce exclusion, violence and dominance must continue (Hearn et al., 2012), it can be potentially problematic if it is used as the only aperture through which we examine men and masculinities in the workplace. At worst, it can funnel research toward two conceptual cul-de-sacs: first, that all men and masculinities are bound up with domination and have a role in reproducing a dominant male norm that always excludes women and other men; second, we foreclose opportunities to theorize how contemporary changes in masculinities may occasion more socially inclusive masculinities. Focusing on the latter is important, not least in terms of supporting European Union policy and initiatives that recommend the cultivation of inclusive and caring masculinities as an important step toward engaging men in combatting gender inequalities (European Commission, 2006, 2010; Scambor et al., 2014).

Some critical masculinity studies scholars have developed frames for conceptualizing inclusive masculinities (Anderson, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2012; McCormack, 2011, 2012, 2014). From this research, inclusive masculinity theory has emerged. One of its central contentions is that homophobia is declining in American-Anglo cultures and this has conditioned more inclusive heterosexual masculinities, in particular greater social inclusion of those men and masculinities (for example, gay and bisexual men) that were once marginalized by hegemonic heterosexual masculinities. Inclusive masculinity theory serves as an anchor point for this article because it represents one of the latest theoretical developments in critical

masculinity studies to interrogate men and masculinities in terms of inclusion. Furthermore, it has yet to be applied in organizational research on men and masculinities.

Critics of inclusive masculinity theory have rebuked its optimistic account of the decline of homophobia and limited account of gender politics that derives from its patchy engagement with contemporary feminist theory (de Boise, 2014; O'Neill, 2015). Acknowledging this concern, I aim to enrich the study of inclusive masculinities by extending its application into the study of organizational masculinities by using postfeminism as a critical lens. I choose postfeminism as another anchor point for this article because it is a highly influential set of ideas, discourses and theoretical perspectives that have reshaped feminist analyses of contemporary femininities in terms of inclusion *and* exclusion (Tasker and Negra, 2007; Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009; Gill and Scharff, 2011). However, Genz (2006) points out that postfeminism has tended to polarize feminists into two camps: those who read it as a descriptive category in popular culture and a depoliticized feminist backlash or, feminists like Gill (2007) who insist that it is a juncture in feminist theory that addresses formulations of difference at the intersection of postmodernism, poststructuralism and postcolonialism. Subscribing to one definition of postfeminism at the expense of another has been criticized by Genz (2006) as a move that obscures postfeminist plurality as a site of competing and sometimes conflicting perspectives, ideas and theories. I rely on an understanding of postfeminist as a set of cultural discourses to maintain a sense of postfeminist plurality (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009; Ringrose, 2013), which can be integrated into inclusive masculinity theory research

In so doing, this article's contribution is twofold. First, it adds inclusive masculinity theory into the theoretical repertoire of organizational critical masculinity studies scholars, adding a new dimension to a nascent body of organizational research that uses postfeminism as a critical lens to interrogate how female subjectivities are being reconfigured and whether these can form the basis for women's inclusion rather than exclusion in the workplace (Kelan, 2008, 2010; Lewis, 2014). This article supplements this endeavor, advocating research that elongates this line of inquiry to include men and masculinities. Second, mobilizing postfeminism as a critical lens, this article takes steps to address the deficit of contemporary feminist theory in critical masculinity studies more broadly (Berggren, 2014) and inclusive masculinity theory in particular (O'Neill, 2015). In so doing, this article establishes a postfeminist agenda for research on men, inclusive masculinities and work. To begin, I briefly outline feminist debates on what postfeminism means before conceptualizing the approach taken in this article. Next, I review the postfeminist scholarship on men and masculinities

which, compared to that on women and femininities, is small and sporadic. I then introduce inclusive masculinity theory, noting feminist criticism directed at some of its key tenets, before incorporating a postfeminist imperative into a research agenda that focuses on men and masculinities in terms of inclusion as well as dominance and exclusion. This agenda sketches out three trajectories that focus organizational research on shifts in sexual and gender politics within postfeminist culture, the gendered dynamics of the economic crisis and the usefulness of intersectionality as a way of examining how cultural reference points for performing masculinities are changing. I conclude by discussing the main contributions of this article.

Postfeminism, men and masculinities

As Genz rightly points out, there is ‘no original or authentic postfeminism that holds the key to its definition’ (2009: 20, emphasis in original). One understanding of the ‘post’ prefix implies that feminism is moribund, irrelevant and inapplicable to the contemporary lives of women. From this viewpoint, feminism may be said to have achieved or failed to reach its goal, depending on how one feels about the assertion that all the gender inequality battles have been won (Genz, 2009). As such, postfeminism may be articulated as a set of discursive assumptions about the ‘pastness’ of feminism which can be ‘noted, mourned or celebrated’ (Tasker and Negra, 2007: 1). In that sense postfeminism can operate as a discourse that celebrates the passing of feminism, illustrated by examples of typically heterosexual, white, middle-class female achievement in male dominated workplaces, women’s ability to treat men as sexual objects and the freedoms women enjoy in respect to career choice, parenting and domesticity (Negra, 2009). Indeed, postfeminist culture has reconfigured women’s equality and rights in a discourse of individualistic liberal politics that centers on seemingly progressive notions of empowerment and lifestyle choices (Faludi, 1992), but these largely relate to white, heterosexual, middle-class women (Negra, 2009; McRobbie, 2009). Relatedly, a ‘postfeminist sensibility’ then, as Rosalind Gill describes, comprises a number of interrelated themes: the ‘notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline; a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; and a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference’ (2007: 147).

Within the academy, postfeminism is understood as a shift in feminist theorizing located at the intersection of postmodernism, poststructuralism and postcolonialism (Gill, 2007). It can also be read in another way which is closer to the purpose of this article, and in

line with organizational scholars who have engaged with postfeminism (Lewis, 2014), as a discursive phenomenon (Projansky, 2001; Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009; Ringrose, 2013). When postfeminism is read as a set of cultural discourses, it can be understood as competing and overlapping discourses that form a set of cultural responses to feminism, gender and femininity (McRobbie, 2009; Lewis, 2014). For example, McRobbie (2009: 11) argues that postfeminism is a discursive phenomenon by which ‘feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s are actively and relentlessly undermined’ through an array of discursive mechanisms. Within the realm of postfeminist popular culture, postfeminist discourses valorize a conservative and limited sense of female empowerment and choice in regard to sexual gratification, work and leisure that posits women as ‘grateful subjects of modern states and cultures which permit such freedoms’ (2009: 27). In this way, feminism is discursively disarticulated, a process that acknowledges feminism but suggests there is no longer any need for feminist politics, thereby eroding and undoing the cultural purchase of feminism within the contemporary lives of women.

In the context of this article, the notion of postfeminism as a discursive phenomenon is important for its capacity to problematize shifts in contemporary masculinities. First, it connects with this article’s understanding of masculinity as a wider set of cultural discourses that rejects the notion of a stable, immanent and universal relationship between men and masculinity (Whitehead, 2002). Second, it trains attention to the increasing plurality of masculinities themselves within a postfeminist culture. Postfeminist discourse has helped to constitute the figure of the ‘postfeminist man’ whose lineage can be traced to discursive constructions of the ‘metrosexual’, the ‘new man’, the ‘new father’ and the ‘new lad’, all of whom are cultural responses to feminist gains and economic, political and demographic shifts in Anglo-American contexts since the 1980s (Genz and Brabon, 2009). For example, the ‘new man’ of the 1980s is frequently invoked as the archetype of a man who is anti-sexist, self-reflexive and in tune with the tenets of feminist politics. Yet the new man’s expression of a softer masculinity has been read in reverse: as self-absorbed and narcissistic, embracing the commercialization of white, affluent, middle-class, Western masculinity as a ‘profitable’ site of male grooming, fashion and body-sculpting (Edwards, 2006). From a postfeminist perspective, there is arguably nothing new about the ‘new man’ (Genz and Brabon, 2009) or, later discursive male types such as the ‘metrosexual’ and the ‘new lad’. The latter figure is often read as a ‘nostalgic revival of old patriarchy’ (Whelehan, 2000: 5) because of his defensiveness about fashion, ambivalence toward women and excessive consumption of drugs and alcohol. It is from these rehashed male subjectivities that Genz and Brabon argue

postfeminist man materializes: a heterosexual male who is a 'melting pot of masculinities, blending a variety of subject positions [e.g. the 'new men, the 'new lad'], as well as a chameleon figure still negotiating the ongoing impact of feminism on his identity' (2009: 143).

The emergence of postfeminist man has been shaped by various social conditions under which an array of masculinities has emerged. Postfeminist masculinities are unstable discursive signifiers of men's ambiguous and ambivalent relation not just towards feminism but also to other movements (e.g. anti-racist, pro-LGBT rights) that are concerned with problematizing the normative, white, Western, heterosexual, masculine subject (McRobbie, 2009). The impact of these discourses on men has often been discussed in terms of producing a 'crisis in masculinity' (Whitehead, 2002). Historically, masculinity has been in crisis at various moments in time and in specific contexts such as war, unemployment, economic recession and changes in work such as the Fordist standardization of work practices, the de-industrialization of the late 1970s and 1980s and the increasing presence of women in the labor market (Beynon, 2002; Roberts, 2014). Discourses of masculinity in crisis frequently prophesize men are facing a 'nihilistic future' (Whitehead, 2002: 51).

For example, one intonation of this discourse of crisis, famously articulated by Faludi (1999), suggests that feminist politics has contributed to an undermining of patriarchy to the extent that men have been left in an existential crisis of self, unable to achieve ontological security by recourse to traditional values associated with an idealized type of heterosexual hegemonic masculinity. Put simply, the crisis discourse suggests that men do not know how to be men. Over a decade later, the masculinity in crisis discourse continues to be re-invoked. In May 2013, Diane Abbott, then Labour shadow public health minister, delivered a lecture titled 'Britain's crisis of masculinity'. Abbott's speech, which attracted wide media and print coverage at the time was centered on a number of disturbing observations about British culture and society: 1) fewer men are able to connect the realities of their lives with the archetypes of traditional masculinity; 2) a lack of respect among men for women's autonomy; 3) the pervasive normalization of homophobia; 4) a decline in heavy industry and manufacturing has meant more men feel uncomfortable about employment opportunities in the service sector where large number of people are employed. Abbott's vocalization of a crisis in masculinity has been challenged for its contradictions and inconsistencies which are beyond the scope of this article (see Roberts, 2014). Of more concern here is that discourses of masculinity in crisis continue to circulate ideas about men's loss of power and underachievement, how they have fallen behind women in work, employment and education. This gives rise to questions about how men might engage in constructive adaptations to this perceived crisis or, indeed, if there

really is a crisis in masculinity that has extensively undermined men's power (Whitehead, 2002). Related to this paper is another question: is the emergence of inclusive masculinity another instance of men's responses to feminist achievements and shifts in discourses on contemporary masculinities, and what are the meanings and consequences of this for men in the workplace?

Inclusive masculinity theory

In light of the above question, inclusive masculinity theory is heralded by its proponents as a new way of theorizing contemporary masculinities (Anderson, 2005, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2011, 2012; McCormack, 2012). Inclusive masculinity theory is positioned within the canon of masculinity studies literature at the site of ongoing debate about the need for a revision of the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Hearn, 2004; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Moller, 2007; Beasley, 2012). Developed in a number of seminal works (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 1987, 1995), the notion of hegemonic masculinity has profoundly influenced masculinity studies since the 1980s, not least because it examines how dominant definitions of being masculine are organized hierarchically by social institutions including work organizations. Relying on a reading of Gramsci's notion of hegemony, hegemonic masculinity demonstrates that power does not have to be enforced with direct violence but can be exercised through a complex interplay of consent, acquiescence, and institutional power (Hearn et al., 2012). As such, hegemonic masculinity shows how male dominance is an exercise in gendered power relations, manifest in an idealized set of masculine values that serves to exclude and include other men and women in ways that reproduce gendered inequalities (Carrigan et al. 1985: 179). Yet hegemonic masculinity has come under fire for obscuring alternative ways of theorizing masculinities, especially those masculinities that are not considered hegemonic but may still accrue social capital within specific contexts (Wetherell and Edley, 1999). More pointedly, Moller contends that the concept of hegemonic masculinity 'invites readers to look "out there" for particularly nefarious instances of masculinist abuses of power' (2007: 265). As Anderson insists, inclusive masculinity theory was developed precisely because masculinity scholars were 'increasingly finding little heuristic utility in the emphasis on homophobia, domination and marginalization that exists with hegemonic masculinity theory' (2011: 731).

Anderson's (2009) argument for the current relevance of inclusive masculinity theory is that hegemonic masculinity is conceptually redundant within contemporary cultural contexts marked by a decrease in 'homophobia', a term used by Anderson to refer to the fear among

men of 'being homosexualized' or being socially perceived as gay (2009: 7). Homophobia is conceptualized as different from homophobia insofar as cultural homophobia is concerned with the public representation of sexuality, while homophobia relates to societal levels at which boys and men fear being perceived as gay (see also McCormack, 2011: 338). Homophobia functions as an organizing principle in how masculinities are stratified and is integral to the production of 'orthodox masculinity', that fluid form of traditional, conservative masculinity that reproduces patriarchal structures and practices. Inclusive masculinity theory suggests that in cultural landscapes colored by low homophobia, orthodox masculinity is present but not 'culturally hegemonic', allowing more inclusive forms of masculinity to emerge. Striking then about Anderson's research, which is largely confined to sports/educational settings, is that inclusive masculinities are said to occur within sporting contexts that have traditionally been hotbeds for enacting competitive heterosexual masculinity through behaving aggressively and expressing homophobia (Anderson, 2002), supporting Kimmel's (1994) well-cited assertion that homophobia *is* masculinity. Anderson documents evidence of orthodox masculinities existing alongside inclusive masculinities, in particular among heterosexual men.

Taking Anderson's (2011) US study of soccer players as an example, he describes sporting cultures of diminished homophobia, in which there was increased emotionality and physical tactility among and between men. The soccer players seemed to engage in a wider display of once-taboo gendered behaviors such as displaying tender acts of physical intimacy and expressing emotional intimacy, without being perceived as gay. In fact, one notable theme to emerge from Anderson's research more generally is heterosexual men's tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality. As Anderson writes, in an 'Anglo-American culture of diminished homophobia, homophobic discourse is almost entirely lost, or the meanings associated with it no longer maintain homosexualizing utility' (2009: 8). As a result, there will be social inclusion of those masculinities that were once marginalized by orthodox masculinity, suggesting that different masculinities can flourish without being organized hierarchically. In light of these empirical insights, Anderson (2011: 732) reasons that 'hegemonic masculinity is incapable of capturing multiple masculinities of equal cultural value, simply because it is predicated upon one dominating (hegemonic) archetype, which is replaced by yet another hegemonic archetype'. As noted above, inclusive masculinity has been applied almost exclusively to sporting contexts, so little is known about its wider applicability within the world of work.

Yet within the context of work organizations, inclusive masculinity theory holds relevance for exposing organizational masculinities as inclusive. However, in pursuing this line

of inquiry we must progenitors Parent Progenitor consider the feminist criticism of inclusive masculinity theory, in particular from a postfeminist perspective. O'Neill (2015) articulates a postfeminist critique of inclusive masculinity theory which claims this scholarship de-emphasizes key issues of sexual and gender politics. Singling out Anderson (2009), O'Neill (2015) challenges his patchy engagement with feminist theory to problematize an emerging theme within inclusive masculinity theory: that gender inequalities are 'presented as *already settled*, or *in the process of being settled*' (2015: 109, emphasis in original). In that respect, inclusive masculinity is seen to reproduce postfeminist logics of the irrelevance of feminism in contemporary men's and women's lives (Negra, 2009; McRobbie, 2009). From one perspective, inclusive masculinity theory may be understood as a response to a postfeminist culture that casually submits gender and sexual inequality battles have been won.

For O'Neill (2015), this is conspicuous in inclusive masculinity theory's assertion that homophobia in Anglo-American contexts is in decline, albeit unevenly. This view has some validity but inclusive masculinity theory does not account fully of the variations and complexities of contemporary homophobia in many social contexts. Research suggests that homophobia has changed and finds expression in 'gay-friendly' forms of heteronormativity that permit 'tolerable differences', enabling some LGBT people to participate visibly in society but only if they adhere to and embody heteronormative values of monogamy, professionalism, family and patriotism (O'Brien, 2008). Forgoing any substantial engagement with this kind of research, inclusive masculinity theory struggles to theorize how the heterosexual/homosexual binary is variously reproduced in postfeminist culture. On this matter and also in regard to inclusive masculinity's upbeat optimism about how some heterosexual men have changed, O'Neill (2015) is dissatisfied with inclusive masculinity theory's limited application of feminist theory. Citing McCormack (2012), who appears to suggest that feminism is already in the past, needing to be 'historically located' (2012: xxix), O'Neill (2015) argues this represents a process of disarticulation described by McRobbie (2009) in which feminism is articulated before being relegated to the past, without any effort to engage with contemporary feminist thought.

Following O'Neill (2015), I am interested in how postfeminism can be an imperative of inclusive masculinity theory, not least because we might seal ourselves off from the variations and ambiguities in contemporary organizational masculinities that are inclusive if we dismiss inclusive masculinity theory too quickly. I want to sharpen and thus maintain inclusive masculinity theory's critical edge which, as I see it, ought to illuminate and problematize men's privileged positions in regard to masculinity. As such, I use postfeminist

theory to advance organizational research that can help us to think through signs of progressive change in contemporary men and masculinities *alongside* analyses of the reproduction and re-entrenchment of gender and sexual inequalities.

Toward a postfeminist research agenda on men, inclusive masculinities and work

This postfeminist research agenda proceeds on the footing that the deployment of inclusive masculinity theory to examine organizational men and masculinities must consider the variations, contradictions and ambiguities in contemporary shifts in sexual and gender politics as well as gendered economic changes in the labor market. These first two themes are discussed before underlining the importance of incorporating intersectionality into inclusive masculinity theory to reveal emerging nuances in inclusive organizational masculinities that intersect with class and age.

Declining homophobia in Anglo-American workplaces?

As discussed above, one of the founding premises of inclusive masculinity theory is that low levels of ‘homophobia’ provide the social conditions under which inclusive masculinities may emerge alongside orthodox masculinities (Anderson, 2009). This assertion requires scrutiny if inclusive masculinity theory is to be applied to organizational settings. I contend that using a postfeminist critical lens is invaluable because it allows us to examine the contradictions and ambiguities in changing gender politics under which inclusive masculinities may emerge in the workplace. Specifically, it may be that inclusive masculinities are problematic in how they might operate as the latest turn of emphasis in how heterosexual, white, middle-class men legitimately maintain power in the wake of LGBT equality gains within a culture that is labelled ‘postfeminist’. Seen in this way, organizational scholars must be sensitive to the possibility that inclusive masculinities can serve as a ‘gay-friendly’ discursive phenomenon by which heteronormativity is maintained in the wake of LGBT rights (de Boise, 2014).

Pursuing this, organizational scholars must weigh up the evidence. It is undeniable that attitudes towards homosexuality in Anglo-American social contexts have softened (Loftus, 2001; Hicks and Lee, 2006). In the UK, for instance, Jeffrey Weeks (2007) indexes the shifts in sexual politics in Britain since the Second World War, celebrating the gains made by LGBT people in all walks of life and the explosion in the expression of sexual and gender identities that were improbable or impossible decades earlier. Furthermore, a raft of legal reform in the

UK (e.g. Employment Equality [Sexual Orientation] Regulations 2003; Gender Recognition Act 2004; The Civil Partnership Act 2004; The Equality Act 2010; The Marriage [Same Sex Couples] Act 2013) has widened the freedoms for LGBT people to live their lives openly and with legal protection from discrimination in and outside the workplace.

Research in the UK and US indicates that LGBT employees can use the workplace as a context for generating positive identities and selves and forming intimate relationships with colleagues (Orzechowicz, 2010; Rumens, 2010). Even in places of work traditionally hostile toward LGBT employees such as the police, in which policing cultures have been slated for sustaining gendered power relations that privilege a mode of hegemonic masculinity characterized by homophobia, aggression and control, some gay men appear able to be open about their sexuality with heterosexual male colleagues who seem more accepting of male homosexuality (Broomfield, 2014). Still, this is by no means the whole picture. Broomfield (2014) highlights how organizational forms of gender politics can reproduce subtle forms of gendered homophobia that regulate how gay male policing subjectivities are constituted in the workplace and what basis for inclusion they form. For instance, some gay male police officers who described themselves as 'effeminate' found they were subject to forms of homophobia that positioned gay men as being closer to femininity than masculinity, even in police work cultures that had embraced diversity initiatives around sexual orientation. Some of these male officers found themselves shunted into areas of policing such as domestic abuse that were seen to be inclusive of gay men because of their perceived intrinsic ability at performing softer types of masculinity that were more caring, sensitive and communicative. In this study, the gendered reproduction of male homophobia continues to regulate gay masculinities in such a way that sustains a heterosexual/homosexual binary, even if they are deemed to have a useful role to play in police work.

Examining organizational inclusive masculinities through a postfeminist lens cautions us to be wary of claims that homophobia and sexism are in decline because they can underplay how dynamic and adaptable discourses of homophobia and sexism are with and across different social milieu (McRobbie, 2009). Research involving LGBT people is crucial for providing multi-faceted insights into how homophobia is subject to change, especially as much although not all the research in this area involves heterosexual men (Anderson, 2009). Equally, it is important to foreground heteronormativity in organizational studies on inclusive masculinities, examining its relationship with homophobia. This focal point of analysis is based on an understanding that homophobia is conditioned within wider cultures of heteronormativity that are themselves replete with unpredictable contradictions and ambiguities in terms of their

effects on heterosexuals and LGBT people (O'Brien, 2008). Indeed, inclusive masculinity theory has yet to take into full account how lesbian, bisexual and trans people fit into a cultural schema of declining homophobia. As de Boise (2014: 16) notes, when inclusive masculinity theory asserts the decline of homophobia and low homophobia, there is an almost 'exclusive focus on how their [heterosexual] respondents perceive largely white, middle-class, gay men and boys'. Thus while inclusive masculinity theory directs attention to the potentially inclusive possibilities for heterosexual men to do masculinity in and outside work, what it tends to elaborate as the declining significance of homophobia is the apparent acceptability of some gay men in very localized contexts. This limitation can be overcome by introducing inclusive masculinity theory into wider fields of study. For organizational scholars, important work is to be undertaken in refining the language of inclusive masculinity theory, moving away from theorizing homophobia in 'levels' (McCormack, 2011a) which suggests that gradations of homophobia are amenable to measurement. By submitting to this proposition, we risk ironing out the contradictions and ambiguities in how homophobia is manifest in a postfeminist heteronormative culture, and how it may be reconstituted in new 'gay-friendly' guises within a wider configuration of heteronormative power relations that establish heterosexuality as 'natural' and 'right'.

For example, research on workplace friendships between gay and heterosexual men reveal that in work cultures marked by varying instances of homophobia, gay-friendly forms of male intimacy are entirely possible to develop and sustain (Rumens, 2010). In specific homophobic work contexts, some of the gay men in Rumens's study commented on how inclusive their heterosexual male friends were in terms of accepting their homosexuality and how they appeared to value opportunities to relax into softer types of masculinity. Their heterosexual male friends seemed to value their work friendships because they allowed them to be more open emotionally and discuss what they felt were feminized topics of conversation such as fashion and cosmetics. The types of male intimacy generated in some of these friendships such as same-sex kissing and touching, sometimes in front of other work colleagues, were seen by some gay men to undermine heterosexual male norms around which some work cultures and relations were organized. Nonetheless, evidence of masculinities becoming more inclusive demand closer inspection because they are not reliable signs of progressive changes in how sexuality and gender is understood. Some of the gay men interviewed by Rumens also experienced moments of being Othered when their heterosexual male friends switched into performances of heterosexual hegemonic masculinity, in order to align with the dominant identifications associated with their work roles. This research bears

testimony to the argument that masculinity has been historically characterized by its dialectical and internal contradictions that require masculinity study scholars to consider very carefully what ‘inclusive’ might mean when it relates to masculinity.

Inclusive masculinities in the context of economic crisis

Applying inclusive masculinity theory in organizational scholarship on men and masculinities might usefully concern itself with gendered economic changes in the labor market. Here a postfeminist critical lens is crucial because it draws attention to the centrality of discourses of masculinity against a wider economic landscape that has been reshaped by economic recession (Negra and Tasker, 2014). As such, it is of particular interest for organizational scholars to investigate if and how organizations in the context of economic crisis are conducive to inclusive masculinities. Inclusive masculinity theory has yet to be reformulated in the context of wider economic changes which have influenced the conditions under which such masculinities may spring forth. For example, the assumed decline in homophobia in Anglo-American contexts is likely to be mediated by many factors including wider economic shifts. Research shows that tolerance towards homosexuality tends to decline as national income inequality rises (Andersen and Fetner, 2008). These findings have political implications, underscoring the importance of government policy on economic growth that considers the potential for economic inequalities that may contribute to intolerant social and political values. In the UK context, public sector organizations have fared badly following a rapidly introduced ‘modernization agenda’ and ‘culture of austerity’, suffering savage funding cuts that have curtailed their ability to advance equality agendas centered on sexual orientation (Colgan and Wright, 2011). Whether we might witness a rise or change to workplace homophobia under such circumstances is open to investigation. The impact of the annihilation of resources in the public sector on how inclusive masculinities are manifest is hard to prejudge, but it is an important area for research because recession culture in an age of austerity can animate postfeminist discourses that suggest ‘equality is a concern to be reserved for times of plenty’ (Negra and Tasker, 2014: 2).

Postfeminist discourses on men and masculinities during the economic recession are revealing of how men are embroiled in another instantiation of the crisis of masculinity discourse. For example, Leonard’s (2014) research on discursive representations of men and masculinities in US recession popular culture finds that men are routinely depicted as being left out or left behind women. Images in advertising, film and TV appear to mournfully suggest

that men have been hit the hardest by the economic recession, facing joblessness, and an uncertain future as traditional enclaves of male employment such as construction and the automobile industries collapse. In recession culture male subjectivities are being placed under pressure to reconfigure so men can adapt to sectors of employment where employment opportunities exist such as in the service sector. This has given rise to anxieties in the US and in the UK about men's adaptability in that respect (Roberts, 2014). In contrast, women are constructed as resourceful, adaptive and in economic ascendancy, creating a false dichotomy of women's gains being intrinsically linked to men's losses (Leonard, 2014). Indeed, postfeminist popular culture's construction of the recession in this way glazes over the persistent exclusion of women from top positions within key political, executive and economic realms of employment. Negra and Tasker (2014) note also that women in recession culture generally have more tenuous and contingent financial arrangements than men, more dependent obligations and have been disproportionately affected by cuts to welfare benefits, economic incentives and initiatives. Inspired by analyses of postfeminist masculinities in recession culture, organizational researchers may focus on emerging inclusive masculinities under austere economic conditions.

From one perspective, the role of hypercompetitive masculine values and behaviors in the economic crisis might occasion opportunities for more inclusive masculinities. Knights and Tullberg (2012) investigate the link between managing masculinity and mismanaging the corporation which resulted in government bailouts for the banks and a near collapse of Western economies. Cultivating a sociological form of analysis steeped in the critical literature on men and masculinities, Knights and Tullberg explore how self-interest, often represented as an influencing factor in the mismanagement of corporations, is not just a reflection of the neo-liberal economic consensus, but also of masculine discourses within the business class elite that make the pursuit of ever spiraling remuneration almost obligatory. This represents another opening for organizational researchers. That hypercompetitive masculine behaviors will no longer be welcome in post-recession economies may allow inclusive masculinities to flourish, although nothing can be taken-for-granted.

One major concern for Leonard (2014) is that recession culture in the US has been dubbed as a 'mancession' and branded as a challenge to traditional values of US masculinity by circulating tropes of male injury alongside female empowerment. In this vein, it is quite possible that such gendered constructions may inspire antagonism and misogyny towards women in a corrective effort to 'right the perceived wrongs directed at men (2014: 54). Indeed, they may vaporize the conditions of possibility for masculinities to become more socially

inclusive and, instead, resuscitate discourses of hegemonic masculinities, as Banet-Weiser's (2014) analysis of Levi's 'Go Forth' 2010-11 advertising campaign reveals. In a series of adverts and videos featuring the inhabitants of a steel mill town in Pennsylvania ravaged by the economic recession, Levi's set out to tell 'stories of the new American worker' who wants to make real change in the face of economic crisis. Banet-Weiser's analysis exposes how the advertising campaign promulgates a message that 'rebuilding the nation after economic crisis is a man's job' in which masculine work activities are organized around a 'hegemonic set of normative values, such as competitiveness, adventurousness, stoicism, willpower, independence, honor, authenticity, and persistence' (2014: 91). In this instance, the male blue-collar worker is constructed as a recuperative hero through a nostalgic re-invocation of heterosexual hegemonic masculinity. However, as I discuss below, at a time when manufacturing and construction is in decline, working class men may be more amenable to constructive adaptations to new forms of work and more inclusive ways of doing masculinity than postfeminist popular culture discourse suggests.

Intersectionality

To recap briefly, 'postfeminist man' is said to be a heterosexual male who is a 'melting pot of masculinities, blending a variety of subject positions, as well as a chameleon figure still negotiating the ongoing impact of feminism on his identity' (Genz and Brabon, 2009: 143). I use this as a point of inspiration and departure for encouraging organizational scholarship that examines how different men might respond to the demands of a postfeminist culture that has placed pressure on them to adapt amid discourses of female empowerment and gains in and outside work. In so doing, I do not advocate adding to existing taxonomies of men and masculinities in distinct 'types' (Beasley, 2012). Rather, organizational scholars might look to reformulate inclusive masculinity theory through analyses of intersectionality and multiple dimensions of power to improve its capacity for theorizing change and complexity in masculinities and men.

As a discursive strategy that responds to feminism, some postfeminism discourses have rejected gender as an isolated theoretical construct by situating it within the political, economic and cultural contexts from it is constituted, with particular attention to the influence of other formations of difference (Gill, 2007). Organizational researchers have not always been attentive to the idea that gender rarely operates alone. As Ashcraft (2009) observes, we are frequently compelled to work as *particular* kinds of men and women – for example, white,

heterosexual working class men are traditionally expected to embody the physical requirements to undertake the performance of manual labor (Nixon, 2009). Yet it is unwise to prejudge how these organizational expectations might be manifest and how men and women might respond to them in specific work contexts. As I discuss below, actual instances of this are far more complicated and provisional. While inclusive masculinity theory offers a way into studying this variation and contextual contingency, presently it is largely based on research involving middle-class men at university (Anderson, 2009). Research that examines how inclusive masculinities may intersect with formations of difference such as class and age is in short supply. I draw on Roberts's (2013) research on young working class men employed in the retail sector in that regard to signal the possibilities for organizational scholars.

Drawing on qualitative interviews with 24 young men employed in the retail sector, Roberts (2013) found that, contrary to much prior research on masculinities, young working-class men are able to resist dominant and hegemonic cultural ideals. Indeed, employed in the service sector, a sphere of employment often seen to be incongruous with traditional notions of working class masculinity (Nixon, 2009), the young men in Roberts's (2013) study appeared to accentuate the pleasures of performing shop-floor customer interaction. Extended, personalized shop floor interactions with customers were favored over short transactions based at the till/check out, suggesting that front-line service sector jobs may provide occasions for young working class men to do softer forms of working class masculinity. It is of particular relevance to this article that the working class men in Robert's study did not feel that their retail sector based performances of working class masculinity were inferior to traditional notions of embodied working class masculinity associated with manual labor. Having a permanent job seemed to instill a sense of masculinity that resonated with an old fashioned working class values of security, self-reliance and providing for a family. Furthermore, many of the men Roberts interviewed were scornful of sexist attitudes toward women and excessive alcohol consumption, deriding them as flawed strategies for crafting working class masculinities in and outside work. For Roberts, his study findings correspond more closely to inclusive masculinity research (McCormack and Anderson, 2010), rather than theories of hegemonic masculinity because the negotiation of masculinities through and because of service sector work can lead to more socially inclusive forms of working class masculinity.

Notably, this study problematizes a discourse of masculinity in crisis mobilized by political figures such as Diane Abbott, mentioned earlier, to sound a pessimistic warning about the employment futures of young men within a culture that may be understood as postfeminist. Of course we cannot blithely accept that instances of more inclusive working class

masculinities are always indicative of progressive shifts in gender politics, as men have long adopted strategies to ensure their masculinity is not compromised in feminized work contexts with the effect of sustaining gender binaries (Simpson, 2004; Lupton, 2006). But at a time of transition in how youth and class are understood and experienced in the workplace, striking then about Roberts's (2013) study is a sense of how men might be more adaptive and creative at responding to a perceived crisis in masculinity than postfeminist popular culture gives credit for (Negra and Tasker, 2014). As Roberts (2013) argues, cultural reference points for what is deemed to be an 'acceptable' masculine identity are changing and underscore the importance of further research into shifting contemporary masculinities. Inclusive masculinity theory is a valuable resource to that end, but it requires reformulating in the light of scholarship that interrogates the variations and contradictions that arise from studying new male demographics. If not, inclusive masculinity theory risks reproducing postfeminist logics that underplay or dismiss the relevance of how contemporary gender politics continues to mediate the conditions from which masculinities emerge.

Conclusion

This article has sought to introduce a postfeminist imperative into inclusive masculinity theory to direct future organizational research toward how masculinities might be understood and experienced as inclusive in the workplace. This involves deploying postfeminism differently to its more frequent use as an object for feminist critique (Tasker and Negra, 2007; Negra, 2009). Postfeminism can be mobilized as a set of cultural discourses that enable organizational scholars to scrutinize the variations, contradictions and complexities in how contemporary femininities and masculinities are understood and experienced. Organized in this way, postfeminism provides a critical lens, one that helps to formulate a contemporary response to ongoing criticism of hegemonic masculinity as a concept that struggles to account for how masculinities can be inclusive in and outside the workplace (Moller, 2007; Anderson, 2009).

As such, this article contributes to organizational research on men and masculinities in two respects. First, it introduces inclusive masculinity theory into the mix of theories used to critically examine how men relate to and perform masculinity within the world of work, in particular within cultural contexts where homophobia is perceived to be in decline. This represents an exciting moment in masculinity studies because if there really is a decline in homophobia that conditions the growth in inclusive masculinities, we must take seriously Anderson's assertion that 'we should see a further reformulation of the rules and

understandings of what it means to be heterosexual, bisexual or gay' (2009: 152). Inclusive masculinity theory has yet to be applied within a diverse range of social milieu, and I am hopeful that reformulations of inclusive masculinity theory will develop as researchers refine its conceptual capacity to focus on the economic, political and social conditions required for inclusive masculinities to emerge, and what the consequences are for men and women. Indeed, how women might relate to inclusive masculinities in the workplace has yet to establish itself as a serious strand of research, and it is a vital one if we are gain further insight into how men *and* women might enact masculinity within the workplace. Incorporating a postfeminist imperative into inclusive masculinity theory holds potential in that respect, potentially enriching extant research on organizational masculinities by challenging a default setting within much organizational scholarship that masculinity typically relates to men and if women perform masculinity, they tend to do so in extreme ways that invite criticism.

The second contribution this article makes concerns how postfeminism can be used critically to make visible the variations and contradictions in masculinities within work contexts. This not only addresses the scarcity of organizational research on men and masculinities that adopts postfeminism as a critical lens, but also the postfeminist literature that has only recently begun to interrogate men and masculinities within postfeminist popular culture (Negra and Tasker, 2014). What we do know is that postfeminist popular culture discourses on masculinity focus on the dark future men face in the light of the gains made by women. Tropes of male injury, loss and crisis continue to circulate, unhelpfully, giving some men (and women) plenty of reasons to take corrective action to reassert their position within a traditional gender order. As I have discussed, organizational research can play an important role in problematizing postfeminist discourses of men in crisis, not least by examining those instances where different types of men are able to make constructive adaptations in how they perform masculinity in response to transformations in the world of work. Integrating intersectionality into inclusive masculinity research is invaluable to that end. In some situations it is likely that values of traditional hegemonic masculinity are being nudged out by more inclusive mode of masculinity. Men who display what are deemed to be extreme traditional masculine behaviors may be disparaged and blamed for their own exclusion from fields of employment where such values are no longer esteemed. The impact of this on different types of men and women remains empirically open and requires urgent attention. Inclusive masculinities are constituted alongside hegemonic masculinities that remain privileged in many work locales, requiring scholarly attention about how they overlap and how inclusive masculinities may inadvertently reinforce hegemonic masculinities.

To close, this article has argued for the deployment of postfeminism as a critical lens and outlined a number of issues that organizational scholars might address when using it to study inclusive masculinities. In so doing, the type of scholarship this research agenda might produce has implications for how men may be co-opted into initiatives that address persistent gender inequalities. For example, Scambor et al. (2014) point out that the European Union (EU) has called for men's engagement as a crucial strategy in achieving gender equality (European Commission 2006, 2010). The European Commission's Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men has espoused the importance of fostering new forms of masculinity that are more socially inclusive and caring. This is because inclusive masculinities are, *potentially*, a critical form of men's engagement in gender equality because they demand that men adopt values and characteristics that are antithetical to familiar configurations of hegemonic masculinity. Inclusive masculinities constitute an important site of empirical inquiry because evidence suggests they can provide more nourishing and satisfying modes of doing masculinity for men (Anderson, 2009). With inclusive masculinities, the costs of hegemonic masculinity may decrease for men in and at the workplace, with benefits for men and women. Men may experience more intimate relationships with other men and women at work, while inclusive masculinities may enrich women's lives in terms of new possibilities to do 'female masculinity' at work in ways that form new feminine subjectivities that permit greater inclusion into organizational life. Exploring this horizon of possibilities however, will require organizational scholars to connect inclusive masculinity theory more deeply with feminist theories, of which postfeminism may serve as a critical lens in that respect.

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