Degrees of Masculinity: Working and middle class undergraduate students' constructions of masculine identities

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Abstract

This chapter reflects on the current perceived 'crisis of masculinity' and what might be seen as its opposing stance, that society now facilitates more inclusive forms of masculinity. We explore this debate using research with young undergraduate men from working-class and middle-class backgrounds, and argue that the crisis of masculinity is somewhat overstated. Middle-class men in particular can present a veneer of inclusivity attuned to being a modern liberal man but this masks a refashioning not the reforming of traditional male power relations. Meanwhile our study's working-class men demonstrate elements of tension with constructions of masculinity seemingly resolved in the emergence of more positive identifications. We therefore conclude that masculinity is neither in crisis nor radically reformed.

Keywords: *Social-class, masculinities, higher education*

Introduction: Thinking about the crisis of masculinity

Popular discourse has long claimed a crisis of masculinity, both epitomised by and created through social changes since the last quarter of the 20th Century, in particular the decline of 'traditional' heavy industrial jobs and what Giles Fraser (2013) recently called the 'thick' heterogeneous communities founded upon them (see the chapter by Ward in this volume for an example of this). In British popular culture examples of this would include the 1982 Liverpool based TV series *Boys from the Blackstuff*, and later films such as *The Full Monty* (1997)*,* and *Billy Elliot* (2000), set in the silent but once thriving steel works of South Yorkshire and the strike-ridden coal fields of Durham respectively. For instance, Malin (2003: 241) refers to this as the 'gender and identity disruption that characterised the late 1990s', whilst the ideas of reflexive modernity from Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) also resonate here. There is a common perception that masculine identities have been in flux, and this is related to the dismantling of previously bonding social structures such as those linked to employment within former industrialised spaces. The perceived crisis of masculinity

is therefore inextricably linked to unemployment and the consequential challenge to patriarchy or dominance founded upon economic power. The *Lads* of Willis's 1977 iconic *Learning to Labour* study are quite likely to be unemployed now, or certainly their sons will be today if they too left school without a qualification to their name. In a manner akin to an inversion of Willmott and Young's (1973) principal of 'stratified diffusion', this 'crisis' which began with the working class young men has now spread upwards in terms of social hierarchies into more traditionally middle class arenas, notably amongst university graduates now facing higher than ever rates of joblessness and/or under-employment. Shadow Public Health Minister Diane Abbott added to the public debate in May 2013 when she spoke of the recent economic downturn resulting in a 'warping' of modern masculine identities, with hyper-masculinity, misogyny and a desire for excessive consumerism replacing the older values of providing and belonging. Abbott also suggested men fail to discuss their problems, likening the situation to the 1999 American film *Fight Club*, with the first rule of life as a man in contemporary Britain being that you're not allowed to talk about it.

Abbott argues that boys are becoming increasingly isolated from their parents and friends, while adult men are working longer hours, dying of preventable diseases, and taking their own lives. She also refers to young men who cannot follow traditional working roles and now in 'transit' employment in the service sector, unable to afford to live on their own and are experiencing an extended adolescence in their parents' homes, with resentment against family life steadily building. Abbott concludes that 'This generation no longer asks itself what it means to be a man'. Whilst we have some sympathy with Abbot's central argument, we contend that, to have real purchase and offer a useful framework for understanding men's experiences, any account of masculinity must avoid such essentialising and needs to acknowledge wider structural forces, notably for our purposes here the ubiquitous influence of social class.

The debate around the crisis of masculinity continues in the media and wider popular discourse. We are writing this chapter in January 2014 on the eve of a weekend-long festival on London's Southbank entitled Being a Man (BAM), the very purpose of which is to address such issues in a public forum. Festival sessions include discussions of men and violence, fatherhood, men and sex, educating boys, black men and the professions, gay men, men cooking, the history of patriarchy, men and mental health, men and feminism and 'being a bloke'. In the latter session, designer

Wayne Hemingway, musician Billy Bragg and writer Nick Hornby talk of experiences of White, middle class, financially solvent, heterosexual, able-bodied (and we might add, middle-aged) men. In a radio discussion of his key arguments just prior to the event, Hemingway proposed that the feminisation of society arguably means some men lack a proper role any more, or that they are socially marginalised. He cited how 70% of Britain's long term youth unemployed are men, women are a third more likely to go to university than men, 7/10 murder victims are male, 90% of rough sleepers are men, 95% of the prison population are men, and that men are 3 times more likely to commit suicide than women. Again, although this was not explicitly acknowledged by Hemingway when reeling off this list of statistics, the differences are doubtless starker still when class is considered in combination with gender.

Turning specifically to the 'crisis' of male educational underachievement, particularly for working class young men, some previous studies of gender and education benefit from a more nuanced account of the impact of social class than Willis's. Mac an Ghaill's 1994 study *The Making of Men* for instance identified other social groupings, reflecting the impact of class and ethnicity upon students' masculine identities and dispositions towards learning, whilst Francis (1999) highlighted how 'laddish behaviour' had been appropriated by some middle class boys. Delamont (2000) talked of how (generally middle class, male) sociologists of education have traditionally 'both celebrated and excoriated the anti-school working-class boy', and Lyng (2009:463) suggested that within the literature generally, 'school commitment and masculinities are fundamentally incompatible', even where researchers have arrived at a theory of multiple possible masculinities, e.g. Connolly (1997), Swain (2000), Waller (2006).

Other studies have more recently challenged the idea that the typical working-class boy is educationally disaffected (Ingram 2009; 2011; Roberts 2012) and have sought to show heterogeneity within working-class masculinity. Ingram's work in particular shows how some working-class boys present a softer masculinity than is typically represented in the literature. Perhaps due to a tendency for scholars to emphasise or even valorise the negative forms of masculinity (Delamont, 2000; Abraham, 2001) a theoretical poverty exists in masculinities research, which draws mainly on Connell's (1995; 2000; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity. It does so in ways that reify forms of masculinity (arguably demonstrating a misuse of the original concept) and ignoring its positive aspects. While Ingram has attempted to theorise these complexities using Bourdieu (see Ingram 2014) other researchers

have developed the concept of inclusive masculinity to account for the performance of non-hegemonic masculinity (Adams 2011; Coad 2008; Cashmere and Cleland 2012; Peterson and Anderson 2012). In this chapter we critique inclusive masculinity theory and argue that it does not account for the complex nuances of issues relating to changes in acceptable forms of masculinity. We contend that there is much of value to be found in Connell's theorizing about masculinity which is lost in the corruption to inclusive masculinity theory, although we acknowledge a need to re-theorize masculinities to account for internal processes of ambiguity that allow men to simultaneously inhabit different forms of masculinity. We also maintain that studies of masculinities are weakened because they often gloss over the crucial issue of social class.

Inclusive Masculinity Theory

The forms of masculinity that are expressed, and indeed valued or exalted, within contemporary UK society are undeniably different to the masculine norms or ideals of the 70s or 80s. Eric Anderson identifies a trend towards what he has called a softening of masculinity over time, which involves a decrease in overt sexism or homophobia. In some ways the 21st century man could be considered the product of the so-called crisis of masculinity in the 80s and 90s where traditional forms of masculinity based on machismo were challenged by social changes (not least of all the decline of manufacturing and traditional male jobs based on physical labour, as we highlight above, and as Ward illustrates elsewhere in this book). However, in this chapter we argue that changes in the expression of masculinity or masculine performativity, characterized by a visible 'softening' do not axiomatically entail the sort of inclusivity that Anderson proffers. Instead we contend that the picture is much more complex and that the rose-tinted lens of inclusive masculinity theory cannot account for the ways in which a softened masculinity may also entail an adherence to old forms of gender hierarchy. Specifically, we argue that changes in masculinity may be better considered as a repackaging of forms of domination. We will later draw upon our empirical data to demonstrate this argument.

In attempting to update masculinity theory through a revision of Connell's influential theory of hegemonic masculinity Anderson is in danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. His project reduces the plural forms of masculinity argued by Connell to exist on a hierarchical scale to a postmodern co-existence of multiple male cultures that entail no relationship of power. For Anderson the different forms of masculinity have equal footing in society and none are hegemonic, a stance which

we dispute in common with most other chapters here. In conceptualising masculinity in this way inclusive masculinity theory, while highlighting changes in masculinity, fails to account for or challenge gender inequalities. Anderson (2009) describes

> 'the emergence of an archetype of masculinity that undermines the principles of orthodox (read hegemonic) masculine values, yet one that is also esteemed among male peers' (p.93).

The legitimacy and validation of a form of masculinity that is not based on overt male bravado and machismo is indeed interesting and worth exploring conceptually. It is this validation of a seemingly 'against the grain' expression of masculinity found in male cheerleaders performing 'feminised' masculinity and renouncing homophobia that leads to Anderson's dismissal of the utility of Connell's hegemonic masculinity theory. It is the apparent inability to account for the cultural validation of this form of masculinity that renders Connell's theory unusable to Anderson. He finds an existence of two forms of masculinity, one he describes as 'orthodox' and the other 'inclusive'. He argues that 'two oppositional masculinities, each with equal influence, co-existing within one culture is not consistent with Connell's theorizing'. However, what Anderson's data shows is that the context is highly specific in regulating and determining the forms of masculinity that are sanctioned. Perhaps the reason that hegemonic masculinity theory was deemed unfit for understanding the data on male cheerleaders is because the link between hegemony and context was not realized. Connell's theory is context and time specific, usefully acknowledging that place, space, and time are important factors in the consideration of which forms of masculinity are culturally exalted.

Therefore, with Anderson's study the theory can account for softened forms of masculinity if these are socially and historically situated. Indeed, the male cheerleaders who espouse apparent inclusivity tend to be found within institutional structures more pre-disposed to accepting this non-traditional form of gender expression. Gender is regulated in such a way so as to make homophobic expressions taboo, at least publicly, as with our participants and those in other chapters here. Simply put, 'inclusive masculinity' becomes the hegemonic form within a particular socio-cultural and temporal location, e.g. the 'moshpits' studied by Riches here. However, what hegemonic masculinity theory does not offer, and what inclusive masculinity theory fails to overcome, is an understanding of the multiply located individual. For example, the male cheerleaders are not just positioned within a

context where an inclusive expression of masculinity is fostered and encouraged, they are also positioned within wider structures of gender dominance and subordination. Taking this into account their performance of masculinity may be considered somewhat transgressive if the wider structures privilege and sanction a more 'orthodox' form of masculinity. On the face of it this may seem to contradict our earlier statement about 'inclusive masculinity' being hegemonic within a particular location. However, our point is that the same form of masculinity may be exalted or denigrated within different parts of the same society as Simpson's middle-aged gay men moving through areas of Manchester shows, and so its hegemony is subject to fluctuation, at times supported and at times challenged. This way of conceptualizing masculinity directly challenges Anderson's construction of 'various masculine archetypes coexisting without struggle' (2009 p.95) as it retains the idea of hegemony but also allows for the valorisation of different forms of masculinity according to its context.

In sum, Eric Anderson writes about the ways in which the culturally exalted form of masculinity has changed (and 'softened') over the last decade or more, and has criticised Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, effectively arguing that masculinities are no longer arranged hierarchically in terms of dominance. It is claimed that Connell's theory is no longer relevant and that 'Inclusive Masculinity Theory' is a more appropriate concept for thinking about contemporary masculinity, where men are more likely to demonstrate a liberal view on homophobia and women's rights, and show a more sensitive side. However, we challenge the view that the range of masculinities that exist do so on an equal footing. We pose the following questions and wish to explore them in this chapter by drawing upon our recent research with undergraduate men. Have traditional masculine ideals been disrupted through the development of new masculinities or are they being refashioned in new ways? Can we ignore hegemony when talking about masculinity? Just because masculinity has been somewhat liberalised have we moved beyond forms of masculinity predicated on power and dominance? Or, as Messner (1993) maintains, could these 'softer' or more 'sensitive' styles of masculinity actually work against the emancipation of women, particularly through what Segal (1990) highlighted as a tendency for these 'new men' to seek 'the best of both worlds'?

Degrees of masculinity
Methods

The data used here comes from a three year study of the impact of students' backgrounds upon their experiences studying the same undergraduate courses at the two universities in Bristol, the *Paired Peers* project. Although gender was not the wider study's primary focus, it was an aspect explored extensively during the project. In addition to the repeated one-to-one interviews across the three year period, there were a small number of male student focus groups undertaken, facilitated by the authors here, and most of the data presented come from those. All participants in the wider study were assigned either working or middle class status on the basis of their responses to a number of questions, including parental occupations, type of school attended, whether they were in the first generation of their family to go to university, and whether most of their peers from school had gone (for more detail on how we assigned class see: Bradley and Ingram 2012; Bathmaker et al 2013). Those involved in both the working- and middle class men's focus groups were asked to bring some images of men they felt best represented idealised contemporary masculinities. They were not asked to bring photographs of role models, though that is how some of the participants apparently interpreted the task. The images were then used as prompts in a discussion of masculinity for the 19-21 year old male participants. The usual ethical protocols including confidentiality and anonymity were observed, and all names used here are pseudonyms.

Working-class men

In terms of aspirational or idealised figures embodying contemporary masculinity, the working class young men generally opted for fairly traditional masculine traits of physical prowess, self-reliance and the ability to provide for others, particularly their families. The figures chosen were certainly 'tough', but they were not aggressive or violent, physically or intellectually, in slight contrast to some of those of the middle class focus group participants. Marcus, who is himself a rower, identified Olympic kayak champion Tim Brabants, whom he had actually met through his sport, and was full of admiration for. He suggested Brabant epitomised masculinity not just through his supreme fitness and sporting prowess, but also due to his other achievements, combining being a world class sportsman with qualifying as a medical doctor, an achievement 'beyond contemplation'. Characterising the type of masculinity Tim Brabants represents, Marcus suggested 'he's not an 'alpha male'', he's not arrogant, but more 'modern' and 'reflective'. Brabants is someone Marcus considered the 'epitome of masculinity', and someone he aspired to emulate, unlike his other choice, David Beckham, who he thought was likely to appeal to a wider constituency due to not just his athleticism and sporting or physical prowess, but his attitude to other

people. Marcus considered Beckham, like Brabants as 'humble', and, in a manner clearly designed to avoid any 'accusations' of homosexuality within the focus group setting, suggested 'And yeah, apparently he looks quite nice as well…'.

These identifications with men are more positive than the ones identified by Cann in her chapter. Cann talks about 'aspirational masculinity' with reference to her participants who valorise Chuck Norris without actually behaving like him, claiming that hegemonic masculinity cannot account for this process. It is argued that this ambivalence 'complicates the linearity of hegemonic masculinity'. However, her account of the boys' orientations to masculinity is in fact consistent with Connell's framework in that it could be considered as 'complicit masculinity' i.e. a form of masculinity that while not hegemonic is complicit in valorising the hegemonic form. Our working-class participants in contrast simply aspire to a hegemonic form, albeit one that dissociates with aggressive masculinities. This is similar to what Ward here calls 'the re-traditionalising of older working class masculinities', but one distinction being that whilst it retained the 'caring' or 'provider' role it downplays the excessive machismo or hyper-masculinity of the 'meatheads' in Cann's study here, or, for example, the Australian elite high school rugby players in Light and Kirk's (2000) work.

Garry had also chosen David Beckham, about whom he thought people wanted the 'whole image' of his physique, his sporting prowess and his looks. Garry also highlighted Beckham's role as a family man who he thought was 'grounded' and who had 'avoided scandal' and wanted to be out of the limelight. He considered Beckham to be 'modest' and 'a provider', looking after his family and living a life 'that is not all about himself'. Rather than sportsmen, Leo chose characters he thought epitomised another aspect of traditional masculine values, 'toughness': 'I have quite a lot of respect for survivalists, like people you know like Ray Mears and Sir Ranulph Fiennes, and just yeah people like that who can just go into like absolute like harsh environments and just get on with it'. For Leo these men demonstrated another characteristic, 'just toughness really, just being able to be sort of tough and to take on so much. Because yeah, they don't squirm, they don't moan about anything, they have no complaints and they can just take care of themselves…'. These were men who could 'make a fire from flint and all that…', men who were 'proper independent, which is something I would like to aspire to…'.

Leo's is an example of the traditional hegemonic working class masculinity challenged by participants in the studies by Ward and Gough et al in this book, and one of the masculine identities that Marcus highlighted and differentiated himself from. He distinguished between what he termed 'the very traditional perception of man, you know, like the rugged sort of outdoor man, the self-sufficient guy who can take care of himself' whilst '…someone like David Beckham maybe embodies a newer sort of concept of masculinity, or at least society shows masculinity as being, because he's quite well groomed and, you know, takes care of himself in that sense. So I think it's interesting that there's that sort of divide almost…'

The notion of taking responsibility, taking decisions, and leading others, even in a subtle manner were important masculine traits for Marcus. He also considered pride to be the most important virtue, though he acknowledged one that could escalate in some situations into something that drives violence. He also talked of how men need 'to get the status thing out of the way' before they could work together properly. Garry too identified how women were generally more cooperative than men, and also more comfortable with physicality and demonstrations of affection between themselves than men are.

Each of the young working class men hoped to be independent and generally self-reliant, but to be a provider for their families too. This harks back to a traditional male 'breadwinner' role, even if the anticipated career goal may vary from those of previous generations of men. They generally wanted to be 'fit', though neither strong nor hard. Dependability seemed to lie at the heart of this desire. Marcus suggested, to general agreement within the group, that the masculine traits he had prioritised came from his own experience, and that friends of his from a wealthier background would 'possibly go for more cultural people'. In another acknowledgement of the importance of class in locating appropriate masculine behavioural traits, the working class young men in our focus group acknowledged the term 'lad' (with which they tended to identify positively) as having a 'roguish' element to it. When asked how they would use the term, Garry suggested that ''lads' go to the pub *during* a lecture but they wouldn't go *to* the lecture'. However, and perhaps chiming with Abbott's *Fight Club* comparison, none of the young men could imagine discussing such issues with their friends down the pub, since there would be 'piss-taking' and 'banter' aimed at putting one another down. This activity itself involves the establishment of hierarchies amongst men, albeit ones based upon culturally valued traits such as quick-wittedness and verbal expressiveness rather than physical prowess. However,

though they were apparently comfortable with doing so in the focus group of peers who were relative strangers to them.

Middle-class men

The following section explores the ways in which the middle-class young men presented their own masculinity and how they perceived contemporary masculinities. We consider traditional forms of masculinity to have been refashioned and rebranded through liberalizing processes. We agree with Anderson's observation of the apparent 'softening' of masculinity, particularly in relation to middle-class men for whom a wider range of masculinities may be available. However, we conceptualize this shift in masculine behaviour and attitudes as a successful reconstitution of an entitlement to exert dominance, one that manifests in a less explicit and less macho way.

An example of the middle-class men's maintenance of a hegemonic position within the social hierarchy is through their privileging of the intellectual in terms of presenting a valid and valued form of masculine identity. On the face of it this may be seen as a 'feminized' identity form and many have argued that intellectual work is not in line with culturally exalted forms of masculinity. Rather the clever intellectual is 'othered' as a geek or swot, whilst the performance of a 'natural', almost inherent cleverness or intelligence is the real aspiration, as it was with the securely middle class 'Real Englishmen' in Mac an Ghaill's (1994) study of a socially diverse secondary school, who sneered at the studious and socially aspirant working- and lower middle class 'Academic Achievers' as much as the anti-intellectual 'Macho Men' did. This links to notions of 'entitlement', and are founded upon membership of dominant class positions and, in particular, the access to educational opportunities and experiences which both develop and maintain this form of cultural capital. However, the form of intellectual masculinity presented by our students was not devoid of status or an entitlement to exert dominance. These men are not positioned low down the masculinity scale. This is illustrated particularly well by one of our students' discussion of why he saw Christopher Hitchens as a good example of contemporary masculinity.

> Oscar: You know, just the way in which he kind of throws his weight around intellectually, but the way in which he does it is very masculine. You know, for better or for worse it's undeniably that, in terms of how he kind of compounds the points that he makes in debate, or in tabloid or otherwise by the way in

which he delivers them, in that kind of authoritative, masculine way. And the way that he talks with female panellists on, you know, quiz… on like question panels and that kind of thing, you know, it's just very old-fashioned and has kind of throw backs in it in that sense, but kind of so embodies that sense of masculinity, kind of intellectual masculinity.

The idea of 'throwing weight around' intellectually provides a neat metaphor for understanding the apparent contradictions in the valorizing of a less physically dominating or traditionally macho form of masculinity. The form of masculinity proffered by Oscar involves resonances of masculine domination through an intellectual authority that is not necessarily about knowledge but about using the physical body to compound points, assert authority, and put women in their place. Therefore, while we find evidence that masculinity has undoubtedly softened, our discussions with our participants highlight that this does not equate to inclusivity.

Further support for our argument that old forms of masculinity have been refashioned can be found in a consideration of the celebration of masculine physicality. Unlike traditional forms of masculinity that emphasize the importance of machismo, our middle-class men successfully combined intellectual masculinity with a physicality that presented in the well-groomed, well-defined gym body. This is an interesting contrast to the working-class men whose physicality was less individualised and embedded in ideas about being strong, being independent, and also providing for others, as we highlight above. The well-groomed middle-class man that has emerged in the 21st century is concerned with his appearance, but the strong muscular body has less to do with physical work and more to with the individualized project of the self. The ideal body is therefore developed in the gym and is symbolic of leisure, health and privilege. There has been a shift in the view of the meaning of men's attention to their physical appearance and the metrosexual man is arguably no longer feminized. Indeed, in their chapter in this book Gough et al argue that "in the pursuit of manly bodies, the potentially feminizing orientation to appearance is recuperated as a legitimate masculine concern"; this has resonance with our findings. In our focus groups Ryan Renolds was offered as the pinnacle of this masculine physicality with his body described as being 'chiselled out of rock'. This remodelling of masculinity while focusing on 'feminized' concerns with bodily appearance regains masculine composure through dominating physicality, and the offering of Renolds as some sort of Adonis-like ancient Greek statue.

However, Renolds as a representation of masculinity was not enough on his own. He was combined with Christopher Hitchens (as discussed above) and 'quirky' actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt as a kind of 'pick 'n' mix' masculinity. It was suggested that 'if you kind of combine the three of them then, I don't know, maybe you get somewhere'. Interestingly these are three very different forms of masculinity but our participant did not present them as conflicting or in tension with one another. It would appear that combining different forms of identity was unproblematic. Trying to find ways of forging together different types of masculinity lies at the heart of what has in the past (and even recently) been termed 'the crisis of masculinity'. Our men show not such evidence of this struggle and are perhaps the result of the resolution of the apparent crisis in the 90s. These young men were born in the 90s and perhaps have only encountered fluid forms of masculinity in their direct experiences. They have internalised this fluidity and feel at liberty to 'choose' their masculinity or indeed 'adopt' different forms. In particular we found that for these middle-class young men encompassing a range of masculinities was possible without any tension or contradiction. Indeed some of the particularly sporty middle-class men had an interesting way of accounting for 'laddish' behaviour when they claimed to have a liberal outlook on homosexuality and attitudes to women. They described bad behaviour as 'ironic laddishness' giving them a free-pass to be any type of man. This resonates with Simpson's discussion of ironic homophobia amongst men in the work place and the difficulty of challenging this without being seen to being overly sensitive to political correctness. Like ironic homophobia, ironic laddishness indicates a form of boundary drawing that defies challenge yet enables unacceptable practices, and one that has been represented in popular culture through 1990s TV shows like *Men Behaving Badly* and the likes of Loaded magazine (launched in 1994), which claims to be aimed at men who were '50% Guardian Readers and 50% Sun readers' (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loaded_%28magazine%29). This milieu proved popular with later imitators including *Zoo* and *Nuts*. More recently the darker side of 'laddism' on campus has been highlighted by the recent National Union of Students (2013) report on women student's experiences of 'lad' culture at university. On the one hand our liberal men were comfortable with playing with identity, which contrasts with the experiences of their working-class peers and their female counterparts (see Bradley and Abrahams (2013)), yet this easiness with being different kinds of men all at once suggests that new men do indeed seek the best of both worlds (Segal 1990).

Conclusion

Where are we now that we may have moved beyond the crisis of masculinity of the 90s and men have emerged into the 21st century? We discern no crisis in masculinity amongst our middle-class men who seem to have the luxury and confidence to play with their forms of masculinity without losing their position in the socially stratified hierarchy. Perhaps we can say that masculinity has 'mended' with apparently liberal men no longer grappling to remake a coherent sense of masculine self, instead being comfortable with expressing multiple forms of masculinity; perhaps their makeover is complete. The middle-class men in our study maintained dominance whilst adapting to the requirements to assume a veneer of inclusivity or present a liberal attitude on issues such as homophobia and gender inequalities during our focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews. We find Inclusive Masculinity Theory unsatisfactory in accounting for these shifts and apparently liberal expressions of masculinity. We concur with Simpson when he argues that these displays can be viewed as a means to express "contemporary cosmopolitan cool" rather than a genuine engagement in the erosion of inequalities. IMT therefore can be seen as a blunt tool for analyzing masculinities as it fails to excavate power relations and uncover the continuance of gender related inequalities, and doing so requires a more nuanced approach.

Moreover, we stress the importance of not ignoring the impact of class on the negotiation of gendered identities. In our study working-class men struggled more to integrate the different forms of masculinity. It should nonetheless be recognised that this struggle is relative and that these men were already partway along the journey of dis-identifying with the traditional masculinity of their backgrounds, by the very fact of their engagement with HE (for a reflection on the complexities of negotiating educational success and working-class masculinity see Ingram 2011). Ward talks of the 're-traditionalisation of older displays of working-class masculinity'. His young men's assertion of masculinity worked to keep them in their dominated position in the hierarchy. In contrast our working-class young men were holding on to some of the more positive aspects of traditional working-class masculinity whilst attempting to let go of the aspects that might marginalize them. In this way we can see a shift towards a more positive form of masculinity, but it was not entirely unproblematic and some elements such as difficulty in expressing feelings with peers persisted. We caution against wholeheartedly embracing the idea that masculinity is – or ever was – in crisis, or that men have been liberalized to the point where inclusivity is the norm.

Recent work on IMT by McCormack (2014) suggests a more progressive approach amongst some young working class men towards homophobic behaviour, than the 'traditional' position identified by Mac an Ghaill (1994) and other writers. However, we consider this study of just 18 young men in a sixth form setting of only 30 students to also be context specific and, despite his claims to the contrary, probably subject to the positionality of the author. We agree however that it is an area meriting further exploration. Other chapters in this book show a range of ways in which inequalities persist through the experiences and attitudes of men (see Riches; Simpson; Ward and Cann for example). Cann's discussion of boys' taste cultures demonstrates the discursive regulation of masculinity through peer groups embedded within a wider society where traditional forms of masculinity dominate. The 'hopeful' presentations for inclusivity support our thesis that traditional forms of masculinity persist and are at best refashioned. The fact that some softer (or 'feminised') forms of masculinity must be kept secret or engaged in less 'feminised' ways offers a depressing account of the continuation of a devaluation of femininity within youth cultures and society more widely. We therefore conclude that accounting for changes in masculinity requires an nuanced understanding of the intersections of gender and social class. Without this it is easy to fall into the trap of simplistically arguing that men are either inclusive or in crisis.

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