

Inclusive Masculinity Theory: Overview, Reflection and Refinement

In 2010, this journal published an early exposition of inclusive masculinity theory (Anderson and McGuire, 2010). Since then, the theory has been widely adopted within both the sport and masculinities literature. Furthermore, a large number of other scholars not using the theory have also documented and labelled new masculinity types. There has also been refinement of Inclusive Masculinity Theory, alongside theoretical critiques. In this article we provide an overview of the genesis of the theory and its refinement, before considering and responding to published and unpublished critiques of the theory. We then suggest future directions for research.

Introduction

Research on men and masculinities in the 20th century was characterized by a focus on the social problems of masculinity, both in terms of the privilege gained by men through their gender (Lorber 1994) and the social costs; not least related to the oppression, subordination and exclusion of gay men (Connell 1995; Kimmel 1994; Plummer 1999). A key theory to understand the social processes associated with these issues was hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). However, following several studies documenting increasing inclusion of gay men in young men's peer groups (Anderson 2002, 2005, 2008), Anderson (2009) proposed Inclusive Masculinity Theory (IMT) as a way to understand the changing relationship between adolescent males and their masculinities in these cultures, including an article explicating the theory in this journal (Anderson and McGuire 2010).

The theory was developed to explain sport and fraternity settings where the social dynamics were not predicated on homophobia, stoicism or a rejection of the feminine. Finding that hegemonic masculinity could not account for the social dynamics of these male peer groups, Anderson examined the centrality of homophobia to the construction and regulation of masculinities – also examining the impact to men and masculinities of cultures in which homophobia had decreased. He argued that in the absence of homophobia, men's gender came to be founded upon emotional openness, increased peer tactility, softening gender codes, and close friendship based on emotional disclosure.

IMT is an inductive theory, developed through a combination of engagement with the prior literature and grounded analysis of the data from multiple qualitative studies, and it has been refined over the past seven years. For example, McCormack (2012) expanded the theory by conceptualizing the dynamics of friendship and popularity in inclusive educational settings, as well as the changing nature of what he calls homosexually themed language.

Anderson's (2014) monograph argues that the jock of the 21st century has become emblematic of this inclusion in a similar way to how the jock of the 20th century was recognized as homophobic, macho and aggressive.

Simultaneous to this theory development, a number of scholars started to use theory as a way to explain their data (e.g. Adams 2011; Channon & Matthews 2015; Dashper 2012; Gottzen & Kremer-Sedlik 2012), while critiques of the theory have also been published (e.g. de Boise 2015; Ingram and Waller 2014; O'Neill 2014). However, there is less discussion of how the theory relates to other theorizing of masculinities, or its success in explaining a range of social contexts. The purpose of this article is thus to consider the current standing of IMT; to explore its strengths; to engage with published and private critiques; and to highlight important questions for future research.

An Overview of IMT

IMT is a theory that emerged from research finding more inclusive behaviors of heterosexual men and the changing dynamics of male peer group cultures in the US and UK. This body of research has shown that many young straight men: reject homophobia; include gay peers in friendship networks; are more emotionally intimate with friends; are physically tactile with other men; recognize bisexuality as a legitimate sexual orientation; embrace activities and artefacts once coded feminine; and eschew violence and bullying (see McCormack and Anderson 2014a for a summary of these findings).

Given the sustained decline in homophobic attitudes in the US, UK and other western countries (Clements and Field 2014; Smith 2011; Twenge, Sherman and Wells 2016), it is tempting to argue that the change in gendered behaviors is explained by decreasing homophobia. While initially persuasive, it is not sufficient because similar tactile and open expressions of masculinities exist in other cultures where homophobia is present. In order to

account for this, and historically and geographically situate IMT, Anderson (2009) introduced the concept *homohysteria*.

Homohysteria is defined as the fear of being socially perceived as gay. A culture is homohysterical if it meets three conditions: i) the culture maintains antipathy toward gay men; ii) there is mass awareness that gay people exist in significant numbers in that culture; and iii) the belief that gender and sexuality are conflated. When these conditions are met, homophobia is used as a tool to police gender, as people fear the stigma of being socially perceived as gay. A Feminist Forum debate in *Sex Roles* evaluated the concept, also providing a substantive review of the changing nature of masculinities (McCormack and Anderson 2014a, 2014b; Negy 2014; Parent, Batura and Crooks 2014; Plummer 2014; Worthen 2014).

Homohysteria is central to understanding IMT because it is the concept that enables an explanation of social change. It describes the social conditions in which homophobia polices men's behaviors: homophobia only regulates men's behaviors in settings that are homohysterical. The theory contends that in homohysterical cultures, men's behaviors are severely restricted, and archetypes of masculinity are stratified, hierarchically, with one hegemonic form of masculinity being culturally exalted—just as Connell (1995) described happening in the 1980s and early 1990s (see also Floyd 2000; Plummer 1999). As such, IMT values Connell's theorizing regarding the multiplicity of masculinities and their social organization in homohysterical cultures (see also Epstein 1997; Kimmel 1994; Mac an Ghail 1994).

The contribution of IMT is that it connects men's gendered behaviors with the social trend of decreasing homophobia, explaining variance between cultures and generations. The theory contends that a profound change in masculinities will occur when homohysteria decreases. It argues that the stratifications of men become less hierarchical, and that more

diverse forms of masculinity become more evenly esteemed (Anderson 2009). In this context, femininity in men becomes less stigmatized, and the narrow set of behaviors and activities that are valued by men expand. Non-conforming masculinities also experience less regulation.

These changes have seen heterosexuality expand as well (Anderson 2014; McCormack, in press). Kinsey et al.'s (1956) recognition of sexuality as a continuum is now being adopted by young people, with increasing numbers recognizing they are not exclusively straight or exclusively gay (Savin-Williams and Vrangalova 2013; Savin-Williams, in press). Using General Social Survey data, Twenge, Sherman and Wells (2016) show that the number of U.S. adults who had at least one same-sex partner since age 18 doubled between the early 1990s and early 2010s (from 3.6 to 8.7% for women and from 4.5 to 8.2% for men). Qualitative and quantitative studies of heterosexual male undergraduates show an increased openness to broader sexual practices, including their own anal stimulation (Branfman, Stiritz and Anderson in press) and increased openness to exploring same-sex desire (Scoats, Joseph and Anderson in press). Scholars using IMT have also examined friendship dynamics and the social construction of popularity in inclusive settings (McCormack 2011; Ripley in press; Scoats 2015), more inclusive fatherhood practices (Gottzen and Kremer-Sadlik 2012), and changing attitudes to education and work (Roberts 2013).

IMT contends that the driver for decreasing homophobia is improving attitudes toward homosexuality in broader society. However, while the new dynamics and behaviors are founded upon the condemnation and rejection of overt forms of homophobia, this is not just the result of changing attitudes: Structural changes that include shifts in the law and greater access and prominence for sexual minorities in a range of social institutions are important (Weeks 2007), as well as social shifts in the organization of society from away

from industrial economies, the growth of the internet, and processes of individualization where social institutions have less influence on moral values (Beck 2002; Giddens 1992). These broader changes appear to support decreasing homophobia, as same-sex desire and sex are framed as forms of love that individuals have a right to engage in (Twenge 2014).

These shifts in gendered behavior have occurred primarily among young men. Much of the scholarship adopting IMT has focused on the millennial cohort, and has recognized the importance of generation in attitudes and behaviors (see also Loftus 2001). Anderson and McCormack (2016) used a generational cohort analysis to demonstrate the importance of age and the period of one's adolescence for bisexual men—the younger men whose adolescence was in the more inclusive 2000s had markedly improved experiences of being bisexual, which was attributed to the decline in homophobia during that period.

While issues such as class, location, ethnicity, religion and other factors influence the dynamics of masculinities, central to IMT is the notion that the changes evident in men's gendered behaviors are not superficial or fleeting, but represent a fundamental shift in the practices of masculinities. The changing nature of masculinities has been documented across many studies in different geographical regions of the US and the UK, as well as other Western countries. As such, we contend that these specific, local cultures are influenced by a larger phenomenon—decreasing homophobia that is the result of improving attitudes toward LGB people alongside other legal, social and cultural changes (e.g. Cleland 2016; Twenge 2014). In addition to having staying power, these new masculinities are posited as a central challenge to the past systems of inequality of sexuality from which they emerged.

However, while the behaviors of men are more open and less damaging—more inclusive—this does not mean these contexts are inclusive of all forms of social difference. The inclusivity refers primarily to inclusivity of gay men and same-sex sexual desire more broadly. Recognizing this, it is important to note that it is the reduction of *overt* homophobia

that is important in changing masculinities documented through IMT. Even so, and importantly, IMT also recognizes that covert homophobia and heteronormativity persist, with continued negative effects (see McCormack and Anderson 2010). In this sense, IMT recognizes both that homophobia has significantly decreased with positive effects *and* that the privileging of heterosexuality, both socially and structurally, continue to be serious social issues. Scholarship on IMT thus far has focused more on the benefits of eroding overt homophobia than the problems of continued heteronormativity, and the negative effects of these social issues remain ripe for further study.

Refining Inclusive Masculinity Theory

Anderson (2009) emphasized the inductive nature of IMT in his original formulation, describing it as an open theory and inviting others to refine it. Much of the development of IMT has been through productive engagement with critiques encountered at conferences, through peer review, and in published forums. As such, part of the theory advancement of IMT has been through the standard academic practice of proposition, debate and refinement.

One example of this is the development of a class analysis. Early IMT research focused on middle-class youth with little consideration given to the impact of class (see Ingram and Waller 2014; McCormack and Anderson 2010). Since then, a class analysis has developed. For example, Roberts (2013) shifted attention to working class heterosexual men in the service industry and found a softer version of masculinity being performed. He argued this was the key driver for profoundly changed attitudes toward employment, deemed by earlier research as too feminine and incongruent with manliness, as well as changed idealizations in respect of the division of domestic labor.

McCormack (2014) used Bourdieu's conceptualization of a symbolic economy of class to examine the dynamics of a working class high school in the south of England. He

demonstrated how class acts as a dampening but not prohibitive factor on the emergence of inclusive masculinities, arguing that parameters of privilege impeded some working class youth from engaging in particular inclusive behaviors. Blanchard, McCormack and Peterson (2015) found support for this model in their ethnography of a working class high school in the north east of England. The issue of how inclusive attitudes are circumscribed in particular settings has also been examined in elite soccer clubs, where competition intersects with friendship in regulated environments that result in distinct forms of inclusive masculinities (Magrath, Anderson and Roberts, 2015; Nagle 2015).

In addition to the theory being used to explain empirical results, published critiques of the theory have drawn attention to key areas of concern. While we have used this academic debate to influence our thinking and research directions, we use this opportunity to engage with these debates.

Is homophobia declining?

One question raised by some scholars is the extent to which homophobia is declining, or whether this attitudinal trend masks the continued presence of virulent homophobia. de Boise (2015) argues that homophobia has not declined, stating that “homophobia is still prevalent” (p. 331) and that claims otherwise are “actively dangerous” (p. 334). This is a central issue for IMT, as decreasing overt homophobia, in attitudes, behaviors and laws, has been the mechanism by which homophobia has decreased in the West, and thus the process by which the lessening of the regulation of masculinities occurs.

In order to address this, we first turn to quantitative data from the United States that use the same measure across decades. Here, there is strong evidence for decreasing attitudinal homophobia. Statistical analysis of General Social Survey (GSS) data shows that the proportion of the population condemning homosexuality has steadily declined since 1987

(Twenge et al. 2015, 2016). In another analysis of that data, Keleher and Smith (2012: 1232) contend that “willingness to accept gays and lesbians has grown enormously since 1990.” High-quality opinion polls also support this trend. For example, when Gallup asked in 1986, “Do you think gay and lesbian relations between consenting adults should or should not be legal?”, 57 percent indicated it should not. In 2015, that number had reduced to 28 percent. Gallup (2015) also found 60 percent of Americans support gay marriage, while Pew (2013) research found 70 percent of Americans born after 1980 support same-sex marriage, and 74 percent think that “homosexuality should be accepted by society.”

These changes are more advanced in other Western countries. Quantitative analysis of similar surveys in the UK show similar improvement, but from a more progressive starting point (Clements and Field 2014), and Pew (2013) shows Spain, Germany, France, Canada, Australia and the Czech Republic have more progressive social attitudes than the US. Furthermore, there is no large-scale quantitative data that shows homophobic attitudes increasing in the US or UK. Indeed, Smith (2011) highlights that while trends in homophobia occur in both directions, the global trend is “towards greater approval of homosexual behavior with 87% of countries moving in that direction and with the gains in approval also being larger than the declines.”

Importantly, it is not just attitudinal data that evidences progressive change. Significant legal change has occurred over the past 30 years with no anti-gay discrimination remaining in UK law, although trans issues remain a serious concern. Furthermore, qualitative research into the lives of sexual minorities in the West finds improved experiences in a number of ways (e.g. Coleman-Fountain, 2014; McCormack, Anderson and Adams 2014; Savin-Williams, 2005). Weeks (2007, 3), a social historian of sexuality, described the change for sexual minorities as part of “the world we have won,” and called it an “unfinished but profound revolution that has transformed the possibilities of living our sexual diversity

and creating intimate lives.” Savin-Williams (2005) discussed the “new gay teenager”, where sexual identity was less a marker of difference than found in prior research and sexual minority youth had positive social experiences.

In addition to this, a new body of research now takes the contention that homophobia has declined as its starting point. In Ghaziani’s (2014: 9) book on the changing nature of gay social spaces, he uses the concept “post-gay” to highlight “a new gay paradigm... characterized by a dramatic acceptance of homosexuality and a corresponding assimilation of gays and lesbians into the mainstream.” Similarly, in his examination on the social construction of heterosexual identities, Dean (2014: 2) comments that the increasing visibility and inclusivity of gays and lesbians is found in “everyday life and across the nation’s major social institutions.” Our multi-city qualitative research with 90 bisexual men also took decreasing homophobia as an established trend in order to examine for generational differences in life experiences, and we found increased inclusivity and acceptance among the youngest cohort (Anderson and McCormack, 2016).

This is not to say that homophobia no longer exists, nor that it has decreased evenly in all contexts. Anderson (2009) argued that decreasing homophobia is an *uneven* social process, but that it is the expression of overt homophobia that is most effective in gender policing—a central tenet of important research on men and masculinities from the 1990s (e.g. Connell 1995; Nayak and Kehily 1996; Plummer 1999). It is this contextual specificity that makes homophobia an important concept—recognizing that levels of homophobia can differ between countries, institutions, organizations and peer groups.

Recent research examining heterosexuals’ attitudes toward legal equality demonstrates that overt homophobia can decrease at the same time as heteronormativity and heterosexism persist.¹ Exemplifying this, in their national survey of just over 1000 people, Doan, Loehr and Miller (2014) reported that almost 100% of heterosexuals supported legal

equality for gays and lesbians. However, they also found that only 55% supported same-sex marriage and 55% approved of gay couples kissing in public. Ghaziani (2014: 252) calls this “performative progressiveness” as some heterosexuals proclaim values of equality without practicing them in their lives. It is an important corrective to any argument that no inequality exists for gays and lesbians, but it is also evidence of the profound change—a clear majority support gay marriage *and* public displays of affection.

In summary, we maintain that the contention that homophobia has decreased in the US and UK is strongly supported by a wide range of empirical evidence, and that this has profoundly affected the expression of gender among males. Still, decreasing homophobia is neither homogenous nor universal, and heterosexism and heteronormativity remain significant social issues. There is important scholarship to be undertaken that examines the damaging consequences of them, but it will best do this when it recognizes the changing social context. It is our contention that this enhances our understanding of the broader trend of decreasing homophobia—recognizing both the improvement related to decreasing homophobia and the continued problems associated with heterosexism and heteronormativity.

Are heterosexism and heteronormativity as bad as homophobia?

A related critique of IMT is that the erosion of homophobia is not significant because heterosexism and heteronormativity are equally damaging (de Boise 2015; Simpson 2014). We agree that the negative effects of heterosexism are multiple, complex, institutionalized and frequently hidden, yet they are different to those of overt homophobia. Plummer (2014: 128) articulates this powerfully, writing: “reference to a homophobic murder seems disturbingly meaningful, whereas I am yet to hear anybody describe a murder as heterosexual.”

Research on men and masculinities in the 1980s and 1990s argued that it was *homophobia* that policed men's behaviors, not heterosexism (Floyd 2000; Mac an Ghail 1994; Plummer 1999). The rationale for focusing on homophobia is thus not related to a dismissal of the problems of heterosexism and heteronormativity, but because they have traditionally had less relevance to the social dynamics of men and their gendered behaviors (Kimmel 1994). It was the fear of being socially perceived as gay – homophobia – that resulted in the damaging masculinities discussed by Connell (1995), Epstein (1997), Plummer (1999) and others, not the structural and implicit privileging of heterosexuality. This is the category error of de Boise's (2015) contention that homophobia fails because it does not account for the structural or institutionalization of heterosexual privilege—they are different concepts that examine different aspects of the social world.

We do not argue against the problem and existence of heteronormativity (e.g. Epstein and Johnson 1998). Understanding the privileging of heterosexuality is important sociological work, including among pro-gay straight men (Ripley et al. 2012), and we called for scholars to shift the lens of analysis from homophobia to heteronormativity in 2010 (McCormack and Anderson 2010a). But heterosexism and heteronormativity can be studied more clearly if an evidence-based approach is taken regarding attitudinal change more generally. Recognizing social progress does not prevent challenging continued inequality—our contention is that such recognition enhances the ability to challenge the inequalities that persist. As such, we support further research on heterosexism and heteronormativity related to inclusive masculinities.

What about language like 'that's so gay'?

Another critique relates to the prevalence of homophobic language, particularly around phrases like “that's so gay” (Bridges and Pascoe 2014). Research in the 1980s and 1990s

documented the centrality of homophobic language in the regulation of masculinities, and “that’s so gay” was undoubtedly homophobic in this context (Plummer 1999; Thorne and Luria 1986). Yet as attitudinal homophobia decreased, and young straight men increasingly espoused beliefs that were supportive of gay people, an interesting paradox occurred: many young straight men had gay friends and supported gay rights, yet they would say phrases that can be interpreted as homophobic.

One response is to argue that these men were homophobic by virtue of their language use. Here, it is argued their speech acts belie their true beliefs; and their proclaimed attitudes are statements to guard against accusations of homophobia—that “intention is a specious argument which obfuscates the myriad causes of gender inequalities and which perpetrators can often hide behind, even when confronted by the implications of their actions” (de Boise 2015: 332). While it is important to critically evaluate the implications and effects of such language, this critique is not an accurate representation of our arguments, and engaging with the narratives of participants is important in order to attain the most nuanced arguments.

In early ethnographic research with male student elite athletes (McCormack and Anderson 2010b), we found that they had positive attitudes toward gay people, but their language use had not changed as quickly as their attitudes (Rasmussen 2004), theorizing this through cultural lag. However, we did not focus in this article on how language was evolving, and how young people increasingly have two distinct meanings for the word gay, and they do not understand them as connected (McCormack 2012). This is supported by linguistic research from Australia that demonstrated markedly different understandings of language between generations (Lalor and Rendle-Short 2007). Here, young people in their study were able to differentiate meanings in usage of the word gay based on intent *and* context in a way that older people could not do (see also Michael 2013; Rasmussen 2004).

This argument has been developed in recent empirical studies on young straight men (e.g. Anderson 2014; Blanchard, McCormack and Peterson 2015; Sexton 2016). Importantly, McCormack, Wignall and Morris (2016) interviewed 35 young gay men about their perceptions of this language. The majority did not find such phrases like “that’s so gay” homophobic, and some participants used the phrases themselves. McCormack et al. conceptualized an intent-context-effect matrix because the terms were used interchangeably by participants to explain how they interpreted phrases like “that’s so gay.” Vital to this matrix is the presence of shared norms, with participants arguing that they judged the phrases as acceptable because they knew the person who was saying them.

Of course, a qualitative study of 35 gay youth from across the UK does not disprove the presence of homophobic language in other contexts, nor does it preclude the possibility that the polysemy of the word gay can have negative effects. Kimmel (2008) makes this point when he highlights that objects described as “gay” in US high schools tend to be ones that are coded feminine, and as such is a subtle form of gender policing. Yet recognizing both options as possibilities means that the phrase cannot be used as *prima facie* evidence of homophobic bullying, and socially liberal people can use the phrase within friendship groups without perpetuating homophobia. So when Bridges and Pascoe (2014: 254) contend that “McCormack argues that homophobic jokes – when not directed at gay boys – have been stripped of their discriminatory meanings,” they assume what they seek to prove—to define the “jokes” as homophobic is to apply a particular framework of homophobia without paying attention to the dynamics and social context in which the language is used, as well as the straight and gay young people’s understandings of what this language means.

It is clear that language changes quickly; that there are generational perspectives of such language use; and scholars engaging in this debate need to do so with an appreciation of the changing ways in which young people discuss sex and sexuality more generally. As

contemporary research shows, not only is it possible for some straight men to use phrases like “that’s so gay” while genuinely supporting gay rights (Sexton 2016), some gay youth agree with their perspective (McCormack et al. in press).

Is IMT generalizable?

An issue for qualitative research in general is that of generalizability. As such, an important focus has been whether the empirical findings of IMT are over-generalized (e.g. Ingram and Waller 2014; Simpson 2014). This argument maintains that because IMT is based on qualitative research, it cannot speak to broader social trends. As with all emerging social trends, these concerns are valid as not all change will consolidate into sustained trends (Leege 1992). Yet there is virtually no quantitative research on masculinities for comparison, and a significant and growing body of research using the theory, in a range of institutions and locations, and using a diversity of methods. The question, then, is not whether IMT is generalizable, but the extent to which changing masculinities in a range of contexts are explained by IMT.

One way to evaluate this is to consider the amount of research that uses the theory. First, our own research extends beyond a few qualitative studies. Anderson has published articles on straight men’s peer group cultures that draw on over forty distinct research sites. Similarly, while McCormack’s original research was based on three high schools, two of these were strategically selected because high levels of homophobia could be expected there, according to old models. He has also collected data in other settings (e.g. Blanchard, McCormack and Peterson 2015; McCormack and Anderson 2010b; McCormack, Wignall and Morris 2016). We have also, together and separately, undertaken interview research on a diverse range of participants—including 90 bisexual men (Anderson and McCormack in

press), 35 men with non-exclusive sexual orientations (McCormack and Wignall 2016), and 24 openly gay athletes (Anderson 2011).

The adoption of IMT in other international research by other scholars is also indicative of its broader applicability (e.g. Channon and Matthews 2015; Dashper 2012; Haltom and Worthen 2014). This includes work based on large on-line surveys, discussion boards, and analysis of print media (Cashmore and Cleland 2012; Cleland 2013; Kian and Anderson 2009; Kian, Anderson and Shipka 2015). We do not detail them all here, and instead refer to our review of homophobia which cites a significant number of these studies (McCormack and Anderson 2014a).

Studies using IMT have also improved generalizability by including elements of quantitative methods, such as selecting respondents at random for small, in-depth interview projects (see Small 2009). In their work on rates of heterosexual men kissing each other, for example, Anderson's research teams in the US, UK, and Australia approached every third male student to emerge from a common area within the 13 universities studied (Anderson, 2014; Anderson, Adams and Rivers 2012; Drummond et al. 2015). While still limited in scope, these studies on prevalence of kissing extend IMT beyond the limitations of generalizability faced by purely qualitative studies. Thus, while broad claims about "all men" or similar cannot be made, IMT has been evidenced in a range of settings and international contexts.

What about intersectionality?

Intersectionality brings to the fore the vital importance of local context and specific cultural dynamics, and is a welcome addition to the men and masculinities literature. Yet intersectionality with other social variables has also been used to argue against the broader trend of more inclusive masculinities. Here, studies that find damaging masculinities for one

group are then used to discount the broader trend, be it related to location, age, religion, race or other factors (e.g. Ingram and Waller 2014). The problem we have encountered is that the empirical examples sometimes *remain in* this local context. They are not related back to broader sociological debates that recognize legal change, decreasing attitudinal homophobia, individualization, the rise of the internet, and greater visibility of sexual minorities. In other words, finding orthodox aspects of masculinity among one group of people does not disprove the theory (see Magrath 2015). Demonstrating that inclusive masculinities do not exist in particular groups is important, necessary work and further work that examines the limitations of homophobia as a heuristic would remain valuable. But if particular examples of homophobia, homophobia or machismo are used to argue against the existence of a broader trend, the more interesting sociological work of how these two phenomena can co-exist remains under-developed.

How does IMT relate to women and the reproduction of patriarchy?

IMT has also been critiqued for not accounting for the position of women in society (O'Neill 2014). We concur with O'Neill and value this critique. Our own research has not taken the relationship between men and women as a focal point, although several of our studies have highlighted the absence of overt misogyny in the male peer group cultures studied (e.g. Anderson 2008a; Blanchard, McCormack and Peterson 2015). The focus on the relations between men and women is an important area of future study, and this should include issues related to attitudes about women, cross-gender friendships, sexual relationships and the reproduction of gender inequality, among other areas of gender scholarship.

However, the absence of theoretical claims related to the experiences of women should not discredit the changes that have occurred among men (see Borkowska 2016). Such an argument is predicated on the notion that gender is always relational—that the dynamics

of men's behaviors are *necessarily* closely related to the dynamics of women's behaviors. Connell (1995) privileged the relational nature of gender in her theorizing. She wrote that gender relationality comprises "...one of the major structures of all documented societies" (p. 72). However, we doubt that gender is necessarily relational, not least because it relies on a binary categorization that does not pay due regard to the historical specificity of gender norms and the ways in which non-binary gender relations exist in some cultures (Fausto-Sterling 2000; Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2012).

More significantly, the necessity of gender relationality does not account for the different ways men and women have related historically in the US. Cancian (1987) documented the separation and integration of gendered spheres in different periods of time; particularly in reference to the gendering of emotions. She argues there was overlap between men's and women's emotional expressionism until the second industrial revolution, at which time gender bifurcated and became relational. The gendered behaviors of men and women are not necessarily oppositional, and the separation of gendered spheres, while still apparent in many areas, can overlap.

Furthermore, Deustch (2007) convincingly argued that gender scholarship can sometimes present inequality as fixed, underplaying the potential for positive social change, and the necessity of gender as relational would seem to be one of these ways. We thus suspect that gender is predominantly relational during homohysterical periods when orthodox masculinities are dominant, but that expressions of gender need not be relational in other times. It may be that masculinity as a concept becomes less significant in more inclusive times (Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2012).

A related critique is that IMT does not contribute to understanding how patriarchy is reproduced (Bridges and Pascoe 2014; O'Neill 2014). This is accurate, but we contend that this is not a failing of the theory because patriarchy is more complex than the social ordering

of masculinity. In order to explain this, it is necessary to first recognize that much academic study of masculinities is driven by a pro-feminist desire to understand and contest patriarchy. We support such an endeavor and seek the eradication of gender inequality in all its forms. Masculinities scholarship has had a positive impact on society in this regard (Connell 1995; Kimmel 2008), and it has also likely helped promote more inclusive forms of masculinity (e.g. Salisbury and Jackson 1996).

However, we are not convinced by Connell's (1995) central claim that dynamics of masculinity are the process by which patriarchy is reproduced. Connell's argument is centered on the presence of a discursive framework in which the language of gender is systematically unequal, and that hierarchies of masculinities are predicated on homophobic language that is simultaneously sexist because of the conflation of femininity and male homosexuality. Masculinity capital is then attributed through closeness to ideal types of masculinity, and these notions are all predicated upon an unequal relationship between men and women. This argument is a serious one, but we are not convinced that it has been substantiated empirically. As such, we consider Connell's contention that hegemonic masculinity is the "gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy" (p. 77) to be more an aspiration than an empirically validated theory.

The link between the hierarchies of masculinity developed by Connell and the reproduction of patriarchy still requires empirical validation (Messerschmidt 2013). Given the complexity of patriarchy (Tutchell and Edmonds 2015; Walby 1990), we are skeptical that it is so easily explained by the social organization of men and masculinities (see New 2000). For example, patriarchy includes economic inequality related to the devaluing of part-time work and work in the caring industries (Deustch 2007; Walby 1990). There are serious arguments that patriarchy is reproduced through capitalism (Hearn 1992), religion (Hunter

1992) and the structural organization of sport (McDonagh and Pappano 2007). Thus, the notion that the theory that captured the male hierarchies of the homohysteria 1980s *also* explains inter-gender inequalities of the present day seems too neat a solution to what is a vastly complex social problem. Our concern is that this claim obscures social change related to sexuality and the damaging behaviors between men.

As such, IMT does not claim to connect the social dynamics of men with the reproduction of inequality between men and women at a cultural level. While gender inequality is clearly consolidated and supported by men in particular contexts, not least related to domestic and sexual violence (Westmarland 2015), the hierarchical stratifications of masculinity are not dependent upon the unequal social positions of men and women. Thus, while gender inequality will be linked to hierarchies of masculinity in particular areas, these hierarchies are not synonymous with patriarchy.

In this context, O'Neill (2014) usefully explores how IMT may be a post-feminist theory of masculinities. She argues that it represents a radical shift away from the foundational scholars of the sociology of masculinities—a trend of contemporary masculinities research (Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2012; Hearn et al. 2012). She is right to the extent that the focus is not on patriarchy, but this also obscures the similar focus on male peer group dynamics shared by Kimmel, Connell and others. It may even be possible that decreasing homophobia is not particularly a feminist trend, if feminism is understood as a politics to contest patriarchy. O'Neill also highlights the need for research to examine how homophobia intersects with sexism, and how heterosexual women's lives have changed with inclusive masculinities. We support this call. We suspect such empirical research would highlight more positive trends than speculated in O'Neill's (2014) article (see Bullingham and Anderson 2013; Worthen 2014), but value the call for work that critically interrogates this area.

Contemporary Theorizing of Masculinity and Future Directions

The large and growing group of scholars using IMT is only part of a broader expansion in the ways in which masculinities are theorized in the new millennium (Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2012). Emerging from the more uniform take up of hegemonic masculinity theory in the 1980s and 1990s, Hearn et al. (2012) frame this new diversification as a “third phase” of research on men and masculinities, that they state is characterized by “diversity and critique, which includes work by a new generation of scholars not embedded in the frameworks of the 1980s” (p. 37).

Part of this diversity includes those continuing to use hegemonic masculinity (e.g. Duncanson 2015). Duncanson (2015: 244) seeks to rehabilitate the connection between male hierarchies and patriarchy, arguing that by examining how the “softer” man reproduces patriarchy, it is possible to “expose its contradictions and to push for those relations of equality.” Similarly, Messerschmidt (2012) calls for scholars to focus on the reproduction of patriarchy, disentangling the men that contest gender inequality from those that support its reproduction. In doing so, both draw on Schippers’ (2007) call for a recognition of the role women play in gender inequality and their adoption of damaging masculine behaviors.

As part of this development of hegemonic masculinity, Demetriou (2001) introduced the notion of hybridity. He argued that it was necessary to take account of the ways in which marginalized and subordinated masculinities are appropriated by dominant ones; arguing that men’s practices form a “hybrid bloc that unites practices from diverse masculinities in order to ensure the reproduction of patriarchy” (p. 337). In response, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argued that a hegemonic form of masculinity survives through “incorporation of such [marginalized] masculinities into a functioning gender order rather than by active oppression in the form of discredit or violence” (p. 848).

Some scholars have also adopted the term “hybrid masculinities” ostensibly to develop hegemonic masculinity by more explicitly recognizing the changing nature of masculinities (e.g. Arxer 2011). Bridges (2014: 80) argues that straight men have started to embrace “gay aesthetics,” but contends they do so “without challenging the systems of inequality from which they emerge.” This is contested by Hall (2014) who argues, contrastingly, that metrosexuality is evidence of significant social change.

The notion of hybridity can be attractive because it so openly recognizes both some change and resistance—seemingly a “middle-ground” that incorporates both perspectives. However, we find it problematic because the change it recognizes is still deemed to be merely “stylistic” (Bridges and Pascoe 2014, 256) and that the recent changes in masculinities “not only reproduce contemporary systems of gendered, raced, and sexual inequalities but also obscure this process as it is happening” (p. 247); arguing as well that inclusive masculinities are, in fact, a form of hybrid masculinity.

We have several concerns with this framing. First, claims that inclusive masculinities are not part of broader transformations that challenge inequalities deny the real social change that has occurred. This includes changes in laws related to LGB people (equal marriage, the removal of anti-sodomy laws, increased worker protection in many U.S. States); the increased visibility of straight allies; the improving experiences of sexual minorities; the growing condemnation of overt homophobia; the increased acceptance of gay athletes; and many other social changes—all of which are supported by empirical evidence. It also seems to ignore how individualization is closely associated with decreasing homophobia (Twenge 2014; Twenge et al. 2016). As such, we do not consider inclusive masculinities to be a form of hybrid masculinity.

We see value for the concept in explaining particular contexts where the changes in masculinities are evidently shallow—for example, to understand the processes by which

evangelical Christians reconcile their abstinence pledges with problematic views of human sexuality (Diefendorf 2015). This is important scholarship, of a particular context and specific religious group. It does not speak to broader social changes, and to claim that changes in masculinities in other, more progressive contexts have not challenged “the systems of inequality from which they emerge” erases homophobia as a system of inequality. For this reason, we do not find hybrid masculinities to be a useful tool in understanding changes in contemporary masculinities beyond specific local contexts, such as evangelical Christianity.

In addition to hybrid masculinities, a number of other concepts have been used to describe these new types of men empirically examined in the new millennia: personalized masculinities (Swain 2006); soft-boiled masculinities (Heath 2003); cool masculinities (Jackson and Dempster 2009); caring masculinities (Elliot 2016); flexible masculinities (Batnitzky et al. 2009); chameleon masculinities (M. Ward 2015); and saturated masculinities (Mercer forthcoming). These are useful concepts that undoubtedly speak to the diversification and multiplication of forms of masculinities, and support Hearn et al.’s (2012) claim that we are in a third phase of masculinities research. Some clearly fit with IMT, and serve as further archetypes that can be used to understand the expanded range of culturally legitimized masculinities in contemporary society.

Dean (2014) explores the social construction of heterosexual identities in “post-closet culture,” where he argues the societal presumption of heterosexuality has withered. Conceptualizing a range of identity management techniques, he places these practices on a continuum of levels of contact with and social distance from sexual minorities. Dean categorizes these as ‘strongly aversive boundaries’ (including behaviors such as homophobic language and the stigmatization of gender non-conformity), ‘weak boundaries’ (including discussion of opposite-sex partners as ways of recuperating heterosexuality) and ‘blurred

boundaries' (including disavowal of straight privilege and recognition of components of bisexuality). As such, he usefully advances understanding of the diverse ways in which heterosexuals engage with sexual minorities in inclusive cultures. More research that investigates the strategic self-presentation of heterosexuals, potentially with a focus on heteronormativity, will be important work (see Ripley in press).

Other scholars have turned to poststructural frameworks in order to understand changing masculinities in a more fluid and diverse manner (Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2012). We are supportive of their aim to "disengage the 'artificial polarities' that regulate gender" (p. 585). Haywood and Mac an Ghail's call to adopt a "post-masculinity" approach that "severs masculinity as the primary interpretive frame through which to explain gendered subjectivities" (p. 585) is an interesting, radical idea moving forward. Similarly, Beasley (2015) calls for the use of "heterodoxy" to develop a queer reading of heteromasculinities that enables an understanding of the heterogeneity of contemporary masculinities.

We have been critical of poststructural theorizing more generally for its exclusionary writing style, and while Haywood and Mac an Ghail write in an accessible way, we would be concerned with the adoption of poststructural theorizing for this reason. That being said, their ideas grapple with how to understand masculinity in a context where masculinity and femininity are increasingly blurred. The notion of post-masculinity may be useful in the way post-gay has been adopted related to contemporary sexualities (e.g. Ghaziani 2014), and accessible scholarship that explores these issues in the future should be welcomed.

We also highlight that the centrality of the internet is still under-theorized in much masculinities research, as are the effects of deindustrialization and shifting patterns of work and leisure. Research that examines the softening of masculinity and how this intersects with women's attitudes about men, men's attitudes about women, sexual relationships, domestic violence, and other gender-related issues will be important for the field.

Finally, it is important to recognize that there are significant social problems and many inequalities that persist alongside the progressive changes related to sexuality. Ward (2015) has highlighted the isolation that many young men feel in a post-industrial village in the South Wales valleys. There are profound shifts that result from technological and societal changes, not sufficiently addressed by contemporary politics. Research that seeks to understand the combination of these changes would be much valued. We expect individualization will likely play a key role in theorizing this (see Twenge, 2014), but empirical research is needed to examine this hypothesis.

Conclusion

This article has provided an overview of Inclusive Masculinity Theory, highlighted additions to the theory, discussed competing and complementary theories, and engaged in some of the formal and informal critiques of the theory. We hope this article will prove a spur for further engagement and understanding of organization of masculinities in society, and that as our understanding of the positive trends we document continues, our knowledge on how to contest continued inequalities is enhanced. In order to promote the field of masculinities, we encourage scholars concerned with the intersection of masculinity with health, criminology, sport, education, religion, sexualities, business and other relevant disciplines to examine for continuity and change in the relationship both among men and their masculinities and between men and women.

Endnotes

1. We define heterosexism as the structural and implicit privileging of heterosexuality, and heteronormativity as relating to the social norms that govern acceptable forms of heterosexual practice.

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