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Age, sexuality and hegemonic masculinity: Exploring older gay men's masculinity practices at work

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This article examines how older gay men practice masculinity in heteronormative organizational settings. Our analysis of in-depth interview data yields two key masculinity practices: *maintaining heteronormativity* and *embodying change*. Older gay men's masculinity practices that conform to the ideals of hegemonic masculinity have the effect of maintaining heteronormativity. Embodying change refers to older gay men's masculinity practices that leverage accumulated life experiences to negotiate heteronormativity for change, although such agency is constrained by individuals' material and symbolic commitments to heteronormativity. By delineating these two clusters of practices and exploring the dynamic relationality between individual action and organizational order from a practice-based perspective, we extend the conceptual scope of hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, by investigating how older gay men navigate ageing and sexuality in organizations, we show the constraining and enabling effects of ageing as a social and embodied process on gay men's masculinity practices.

KEYWORDS

age, body, hegemonic masculinity, organization masculinities, practice, sexuality

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1 | INTRODUCTION

This article addresses the paucity of scholarly knowledge on how age and sexuality shape how individuals practice masculinity in organizations. Currently, age is largely absent from scholarly accounts of sexuality at work, even when organizational research on lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) workers examines how sexuality interconnects with other identity categories such as class, gender and race (e.g., Ragins, Comwell, & Miller, 2003; Rumens, 2010). The shortage of research that explores the relationship between age and sexuality at work is concerning because age is understood to be a significant site of social control (Gilleard & Higgs, 2014). For example, age-related norms can require workers to conform to heteronormative expectations of monogamous partnership and child rearing (Riach, Rumens, & Tyler, 2014), an outcome of which may be the marginalization of non-normative ways of living age in and outside of work. Neglecting the organizational salience of age and sexuality can sustain organizational heteronormativity by ignoring older LGBT workers' embodied experiences of sexuality and ageing in the workplace (Riach et al., 2014; Rumens, 2018).

Although there is a mature literature that analyses how organizations are gendered, the question of how masculinities are related to age and sexuality remains largely unaddressed (e.g., Barrett, 1996; Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Kerfoot & Knights, 1993; Knights & Tullberg, 2014). Some research focuses on the importance of ageing in the context of work and organization. For example, Riach and Cutcher (2014) find that ageing is an accumulation process during which workers manage the experience of growing older to elicit productive career outcomes. Similarly, Foweraker and Cutcher (2015) show that ageing poses a challenge to masculinity, which older male workers counter by drawing on successful ageing narratives and by distancing themselves from hegemonic masculinity. These studies indicate how ageing is a dynamic social process. While the organization masculinities literature is age-blind (Riach & Cutcher, 2014), the neglect of sexuality in organization masculinities scholarship is even more profound (Rumens, 2014). Research claims older men and gay men tend to practice masculinities from a subordinated position (Slevin & Linneman, 2010; Yeung, Stomblor, & Wharton, 2006), but this is by no means the only way that they may practice masculinities. Thus, exploring older gay men's masculinity practices in the workplace can provide welcome insights into how age, gender and sexuality are interconnected and contextually contingent.

In this article, we mobilize the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) to explore the question: how do older gay men practice masculinity in organizations? Our research focuses on older gay men specifically, rather than older LGBT workers generally, because gay men's sexuality has long connoted and continues to be related to sexual deviance (e.g., promiscuity, paedophilia, etc.), and gay men pose a disruptive threat to the heteronormative social order (Eribon, 2004). Older gay men still face stereotypes that frame them as sexual predators and perverts (Jones & Pugh, 2005), which may mean they are especially vigilant about how they manage the relationship between sexuality, age and masculinity (Rumens, 2018). As well, conceptually, the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity hinges on the subordination of some men, in particular gay men, by other men through the policing of heterosexuality (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Understanding how older gay men negotiate hegemonic masculinity in heteronormative organizational settings holds significant theoretical and empirical value. In particular, our study highlights the conceptual utility of hegemonic masculinity in examining the dynamic relationality between the agency of older gay men and organizational heteronormativity, where older gay men's practices of masculinity are the key drivers of continuity and change regarding inequalities of age, gender and sexuality. Empirically, our analysis yields two clusters of masculinity practices: maintaining heteronormativity and embodying change. In the data, maintaining heteronormativity emerges as masculinity practices that align with hegemonic masculinity. When maintaining heteronormativity, older gay men can protect their status and capacity to exercise power as managers and professionals. Additionally, our data also points to masculinity practices marked by the embodiment of change that signal older gay men's agency to negotiate heteronormativity to argue for change. Nonetheless, embodying change represents a constrained agency because of older gay men's existing material and symbolic commitments to organizational heteronormativity.

In our study, ageing operates as a social and embodied process, which exerts enabling and constraining effects on gay men's masculinity practices. On the one hand, ageing is linked to how older gay men manage sexuality in ways that render them unthreatening to their heterosexual male colleagues, affording them opportunities to practice masculinities that challenge their organizations. Indeed, older gay men draw on practical competencies accumulated from their history of change-seeking activity. On the other hand, ageing can make older gay men vulnerable to age-specific heteronormative stereotypes, but our data reveals how they can counter these through specific masculinity practices. As well, we show that ageing can generate anxieties about conforming to the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, which can lead older gay men to practice an embodied managerial masculinity that maintains gender and sexuality hierarchies at work.

The rest of the article is structured as follows. First, we unpack the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Then, we review the research that has examined the dynamics between sexuality and age before outlining the study's methodology. The findings section presents older gay men's practices of masculinity, organized around the themes of 'maintaining heteronormativity' and 'embodying change'. Finally, we outline the contributions this article makes to extant research before concluding.

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

The concept of hegemonic masculinity hinges on the idea that gender is a social construction (Connell, 1987, 1995). Rejecting an essentialist view of gender is important in understanding masculinity as a practice, not a set of sex roles or traits, but embodied performativity. Connell (1995) defines practice as body-reflexive social action — a multifaceted phenomenon incorporating both material and symbolic elements, where the body is at once the object and subject of practice, and where practice has a constitutive effect on the social order. The centrality of practice to Connell's (1987, 1995) hegemonic masculinity highlights agency as a significant component in theorizing masculinity.

Connell (1987) contends that practising masculinity, as exemplified by socially idealized notions of being a 'man', generates a hierarchy between groups of men, and between men and women across various social settings. Thus, we know hegemonic masculinity when we encounter it because it constitutes an ideal-type masculinity, against which all other masculinities are evaluated. Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity takes on a social significance that goes beyond any specific practice of masculinity, because it serves as the cultural logic that legitimates and sustains the subordination of particular groups of people. A form of masculinity (or femininity) arises from practising what is agreed socially to be masculine (or feminine) in a particular context, which then facilitates men and women to occupy a certain recognizable position in a hierarchical gender system (Connell, 1987). Both men and women are able to practice masculinities and femininities, but women and some men cannot fulfil the ideals of hegemonic masculinity in their practices of masculinity. Additionally, forms of femininity and their practitioners are always located in a relational and subordinate position. The long-term survival of the hierarchical gender system stems from the consent and compliance of all agents operating under hegemony. Although practising masculinity can be an unreflective process, individuals can enact their social identities strategically, as they need to read the social world in which they operate to survive and thrive (Connell, 1995). While some men may internalize hegemonic masculinity more unwittingly and unwillingly, other men may interiorize it strategically and valorize it as the most legitimate form of masculinity and align their actions in order to fit in socially (Bird, 1996).

In our reading of hegemonic masculinity, agency operates in dynamic relationality with structure, which parallels Reed's (2003) relationist account of the agency–structure interplay. According to Reed (2003), individuals have significant capacity for creative action, which can effectively reshape social orders in which they are situated. However, creative agency is constrained by the relationships and effects of the social orders, which individuals have to negotiate. Both agency and structure have analytically distinct influences on the constitution of social reality (Reed, 1985). The very ingenuity of individual action is what facilitates the plurality of the concept of masculinity. Masculinity can come in various instantiations as specific individuals enact patterns of practices in particular social settings. The

strong and enduring norms, rules and scripts of conduct in a social setting can constrain individuals' change-oriented actions. Still, agentic breakthroughs are possible when individuals with knowledge of the social order in which they are acculturated operate reflexively and creatively to contest that social order from within.

In making sense of agency in relation to hegemonic masculinity, we grappled with Connell's counterhegemonic view of gay men's masculinities. For Connell (1992), gay men's masculinity is relegated to a subordinate position vis-à-vis hegemonic masculinity. Patriarchal culture views gay men as lacking masculinity and even when they do not appear feminine they are denigrated as being feminine (Connell, 1995). By embodying subordinated masculinities, gay men can experience disadvantage when compared with heterosexual men (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985; Connell, 1992). Tangibly, this is exemplified in incidents of homophobic bullying in schools (Plummer, 1995), employment discrimination (Drydakis, 2015; Ozturk, 2011; Ozturk & Rumens, 2015) and hate crimes against gay men (Herek, 2009). At the same time, feminist literature implicates gay men in upholding unequal gender norms and gaining a patriarchal dividend through forms of sexism (Ward, 2000). Messner (1997) views gay men as willing collaborators with patriarchy because gay male culture largely trades on, and draws from, the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Similarly, Yeung et al. (2006) note gay men's ambivalent relationship to hegemonic masculinity. In their study of gay male fraternities, members could celebrate being gay, but also closed ranks to exclude women from the fraternal order by referencing gender differences.

We agree with Connell that in one sense gay men are counterhegemonic, because their practice of sexuality can destabilize the institution of heterosexuality or, in the context of our study, what we refer to as heteronormativity, a normative regime that privileges heterosexuality. Nevertheless, we submit that gay men can also subscribe to hegemonic masculinity (Whitehead, 1999), and ageing introduces further tensions into this picture. Research shows that older men are routinely viewed as invisible and asexual, reshaping expectations surrounding their masculinity practices (Thompson, 2006). Older bodies often connote diminishing vigour, which in turn implies a loss of ground in negotiating masculinity (Meadows & Davidson, 2006). As otherwise privileged men get older, they come to occupy a subordinate position vis-à-vis hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). Being an older gay man is sometimes seen as a double de-masculinization, although the social effects of gay men's ageing are complex and context-dependent (Slevin & Linneman, 2010). Yet, older gay men may have the strategic capacity to negotiate the negative implications of ageing, having weathered exclusionary pressures surrounding masculinity all their lives (Wahler & Gabbay, 1997). Older gay men have agency and we argue understanding their masculinity practices promises to generate a fuller account of continuity and change of organizational heteronormativity.

Despite the achievements of the organization masculinities literature to 'name men as men' (Collinson & Hearn, 1994), extant scholarship has tended to overlook LGBT sexualities (Rumens, 2014) and, with notable exceptions (e.g., Foweraker & Cutcher, 2015; Riach & Cutcher, 2014), ageing masculinities are also neglected. Although it is crucial to interrogate the advantages dominant masculinities can carry in organizations, hegemonic masculinity scholarship risks privileging white, heterosexual, middle-class and middle-aged men, owing to its predominant focus on this group (Ashcraft & Flores, 2003). In this light, studying older gay men's masculinity practices is a corrective step against this tendency. Men in management roles tend to enjoy considerable agency in organizations (Knights & Tullberg, 2014), although this cannot be presumed when they are older and identify or are believed to be gay. Studying how older gay men may seek to negotiate their agency through particular practices of masculinity can both expand the range of organization masculinities we currently understand, and sustain the relevance of hegemonic masculinity in research on organizations, sexuality and age.

3 | SEXUALITY, AGE AND MASCULINITY AT WORK

Despite the growth of 'gay-friendly' organizations, LGBT employees continue to experience the harmful effects of working in heteronormative organizations (Giuffrè, Dellinger, & Williams, 2008; Priola, Lasio, De Simone, & Serri, 2014). From one perspective, organizations are increasingly developing LGBT-friendly initiatives such as

supportive workplace policies to address the needs of LGBT workers (Cook & Glass, 2016). From another perspective, research reveals that heteronormativity persists and has a negative impact on LGBT workers (Benozzo, Pizzorno, Bell, & Koro-Ljungberg, 2015; Rennstam & Sullivan, 2018). In recruitment, lesbian and gay job applicants can receive fewer interview invites, lower pay deals and exclusion remains particularly strong in male-dominated occupations that require competencies associated with hegemonic masculinity (Drydakis, 2015). On the job, bullying and harassment of gay men endures (Hoel, Lewis, & Einarsdóttir, 2014), while gay men who identify as or are perceived to be overly feminine can experience homophobia (Rumens & Broomfield, 2012). Understanding gay men as failures in masculinity can jeopardize whether they are seen as 'professional' (Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009) and limit the types of workplace relationships they are able to develop (Rumens, 2010).

Research shows that in those work contexts where hegemonic masculinity is valorized, openly gay men are able to practice masculinities that retrench hegemonic masculinity (Ozturk & Rumens, 2014; Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009; Ward & Winstanley, 2006). Additionally, anxiety and fear of deviating from organizationally desirable norms of masculinity continues to trouble gay men at work (Stenger & Roulet, 2018). Some gay men feel obliged to accommodate masculinity norms by understating their sexuality through a range of identity management strategies such as passing as straight, avoiding discussions about their sexuality and non-disclosure (Woods & Lucas, 1993). Homophobia, which is a key feature of hegemonic masculinity, shapes how organization masculinities are enacted (Barrett, 1996), making gay men's relationship with masculinity problematic.

As noted above, the interplay between gay men's sexualities, age and masculinity has largely been overlooked by organization studies scholars (Harley & Teaster, 2016), although recent research has started to explore LGBT sexualities and ageing. Riach et al. (2014) show how age can enable and constrain the performative constitution of LGBT subject positions that facilitate and foreclose opportunities for LGBT workers to be recognized as viable organizational subjects. Similarly, Rumens (2018) examines how age shapes older gay men's capacity to negotiate inclusive masculinities characterized by more caring and supportive qualities (Anderson, 2009). Yet, in practising such masculinities, some older gay men struggled to avoid being stereotyped as too feminine (e.g., as 'old gay queens') and thus being seen as 'unfit' and 'unprofessional' for work. Missing from this strand of research is how older gay men can practice masculinities in ways that enable them to survive and even challenge organizational heteronormativity. Therefore, in this research, we address the question of how older gay men practice masculinities in organizations.

4 | RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data underpinning this research came from 12 in-depth interviews. The choice for the limited sample size was intentional, in order to cultivate a deep and intensive engagement with the participants (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Small-N interview research is a well-accepted feature of LGBT organizational scholarship, not least because these minority groups are difficult to access (e.g., Ozturk & Rumens, 2014; Riach et al., 2014). By limiting the sample size, we were able to spend more time probing interviewees to generate in-depth data and reach data saturation. We set the eligibility criteria as management-level older gay men involved in professional work, such as accounting, banking and finance, law and consulting. These criteria yielded not only the most useful data for our purposes, but also facilitated a more vivid, and fuller, understanding of a specific population of interest.

We set the minimum participant age at 50, a common cut-off point used in qualitative studies involving older workers (e.g., Moore, 2009; Tomlinson & Colgan, 2014). The eventual age range of the participants was 51–65. We used author networks purposively, coupled with snowball sampling strategy – a common feature of explorative research involving stigmatized, hard-to-reach populations (Creed, DeJordy, & Lok, 2010). We recruited older gay men who shared commonalities in terms of organizational seniority and professional identity to be able to make meaningful observations of this group's particular practices of masculinity. Our sampling strategy had the

unintended consequence of generating an all-white sample of older gay men. We acknowledge that the masculinity practices we analyse may have different saliences for older gay men who hail from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Older gay men vary along numerous social identities (King, 2016; Spedale, 2019), but we prioritized the requirement for study participants to have similar characteristics, as exemplified by recent studies of hegemonic masculinity that set a clear empirical scope to ensure the specificity of social agents and their context (e.g., Knights & Tullberg, 2014; Sang, Dainty, & Ison, 2014).

Through in-depth interviewing, we constructed a non-threatening conversational space in which to converse with participants (Johnson, 2001). This mode of data collection is useful in explorative research, where the topic area and the research population are understudied (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). We developed an interview schedule based on our review of the literature, but we used this sensitively in order to ensure that interviewees had a participative role in steering the dialogue. The interviews included a broad range of questions that probed participants' experiences as older gay men in professional work contexts and how they variously practised masculinities at work. The interviews also incorporated elements of life history, in common with other studies of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Conducted in locations chosen by the participants, the interviews ranged from one to two hours in length and were digitally recorded and fully transcribed. We assigned participants pseudonyms to safeguard their anonymity.

At the outset, as a middle-aged, middle-class, gay male academic, the first author anticipated being relatively comfortable interviewing other gay men. Yet, once the interviews began, he experienced feelings of awkwardness and inadequacy when interacting with some of the interviewees – powerfully placed corporate men who spoke with authority, which sometimes made the interviewer feel out of place. In post-interview reflections, it became clear that the first author initially felt daunted and under pressure to manage his own behaviour to leave a good impression while interacting with the interviewees. This included adopting the corporate vocabulary of the interviewees (e.g., best practice, buy-in, scalable, win-win, etc.) and embodying the corporate appearance of hegemonic masculinity some interviewees embodied also when being interviewed (e.g., wearing a blazer, shirt and tie). Such adjustments speak to the potency of the norms of the social world inhabited by the interviewees. Even as a transient interlocutor, the first author found it difficult not to engage with the norms of organizational masculinities.

As critical scholars, we interrogate what study participants say instead of simply taking their statements at face value. While analysing the data we found ourselves at times becoming overcritical of the men who seemed to uphold hegemonic masculinity or who we thought only challenged it in the margins. Our sustained discussions alerted us to our own pre-conceptions, which led us to judge the participants harshly at first. On deeper reflection, we realized that there was pain and suffering interwoven in some participants' accounts, observable in how they negotiated hegemonic masculinity. This sensitized us to the need to perform critique from a position of care and compassion.

We undertook a thematic analysis to interpret the interview texts (Boyatzis, 1998). Thematic analysis requires superimposing a coding structure on the participants' words. From the outset, we shared Harding, Ford, and Lee's (2017) concerns regarding the difficulty of transforming complex, textured participant accounts into systematically broken up categories, and this sensitivity guided many of the subsequent choices we made. We took the decision to opt for manual coding, which helped us guard against the detaching and depersonalizing effects of computerized sorting, labelling and enumeration (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). Understanding masculinity practices hinges upon the identification of ambivalences, contradictions and shades of meaning within the interviews, which software packages could fail to capture because of their quantizing effect when analysing text (Basil, 2003).

We started the analysis process by sensitizing ourselves to the nuances in the interview content through repeated readings, during which we manually assigned initial codes. We mutually interrogated the codes we developed by trying to assess the similarities and differences in our approaches to the data, and by carefully considering the impact of our own emotions, preconceptions and identities on the coding process (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2018). Our experiences with the coding of the interviews yielded frank and robust discussions involving the suitability of

the codes we developed. These discussions helped us merge overlapping codes, produce additional codes where necessary, and enabled us to revise and delete some initial codes. Where we had coding disagreements, we resolved them by iteratively going between theory and data to refine our analysis (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018).

Two sets of codes comprised the final list of codes. The first set included codes such as 'anxiety', 'authority', 'competition', 'drive', 'enforcing', 'insecurity', 'legitimacy', 'overseeing', 'power', 'status', 'self-presentation', 'subordination', which led us to the theme 'maintaining heteronormativity'. The second set included codes such as 'accumulation', 'change', 'compromise', 'instrumentality', 'personal history', 'pragmatism', 'political acumen', 'risk', 'toughness', which led us to the theme 'embodying change'. 'Body' appeared across both sets of codes, indicating its central importance to both themes.

5 | OLDER GAY MEN'S PRACTICES OF MASCULINITY

In this section, we present the study findings on older gay men's practices of masculinity in organizations around two major themes: maintaining heteronormativity and embodying change. The social and embodied process of ageing variously appears as a constraint or opportunity across both clusters of practice.

5.1 | Maintaining heteronormativity

In the interviews, some participants' practices of masculinity maintained heteronormativity, in particular its restrictive norms about age, gender and sexuality. In general, our participants routinely recognized themselves at risk of failure in meeting gendered expectations about being managers. Anxieties about the negative social implications of ageing as gay men appeared to reinforce their vulnerabilities as managers. Accordingly, some participants, such as William, a managing director, emphasized practising hegemonic masculinity in order to fit into an aggressive and competitive work environment:

We are a leading investment bank, so I think there's just no question, we just need to occupy that special zone, own the leading edge in everything we do. So you can't escape the power, the aggression, the competition, the intensity. I live it, I mean, every day there's something to test you ... I've got to fit in with what I do ... lead a testosterone-driven place. (William, banking and finance, 62)

Workplace expectations surrounding the masculine body and its practical potential (e.g., explicit referencing of testosterone, as above) are linked to the demands of power play and competition in William's workplace. Older gay men often judged their success as managers by virtue of their embodied competence to lead effectively in a highly masculinized work environment. They managed work and people in line with the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, which helped them exercise managerial power.

I'm close to retirement, so people may very well think I don't care as much anymore ... Obviously, I've got to project a certain dog-eat-dog masculinity in my behaviour, that's a given. I still mean business. (William, banking and finance, 62)

Some of the participants consciously sought to burnish their management credentials by outperforming others to achieve a sense of managerial supremacy. These participants managed negative co-worker or client perceptions surrounding their age by adopting a fiercely competitive management style that confirmed their embodied capacity for confronting challenges. In this way, participants connected managerial legitimacy to contributing to the bottom line proactively and securing new business victories.

Some of the participants pursued status in their organizations by seeking recognition from more privileged heterosexual men. They sought to achieve influence within organizational power hierarchies by strategizing to be more like the 'high-flyers'. A partner in an accountancy practice explained:

It's not about being alpha male or type A personality, it's something a bit more nuanced than that ... it's how I compete, it's knowing where to push and where to let go, just understanding the puzzle, how the pieces fit really, understanding who and what matters in the office ... well, also about winning big ..., at least some of the time to remain in the magic circle. (Michael, accounting, 61)

Participants appeared to hone in on acts of winning as a means of achieving pre-eminence within a select group of privileged men (e.g., striking deals, completing high-profile projects, securing key client accounts). Older gay men could exercise power and attain prestige by conforming to the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, although ageing continually created anxieties and insecurities about the long-term sustainability of their position in the organizational hierarchy.

Ageing is a black mark against you, and it's a much bigger challenge if you're gay. Having to prove you can do this job is like quicksand, it's quite scary to imagine what would happen if I'm too old to pull in new business ... too old to remain at the top of my game. (Michael, accounting, 61)

Hegemonic masculinity triggered anxieties about measuring up, which sometimes led participants to intensify their focus on business development and commercial relevance to demonstrate desirable managerial masculinity. While some suggested that their struggle against ageing was a 'losing game', they continued to signal an implacable commitment to sustaining their workplace privilege. In particular, they perpetuated an organizational culture that emphasized competition and winning, which excluded women and some gay men.

Performing embodied managerial masculinity hinged on endorsing gender and sexuality hierarchies. Some of the participants tended to marginalize gay men's practices of femininity (i.e., calibration of gait, voice and behaviours in ways that are normatively associated with women). They considered feminine gay men as organizational outsiders and characterized their gay masculinities as a hindrance to managerial effectiveness. As Thomas, a relationship manager, worried:

... when I'm laughing a little much, and talking more, and my voice goes up a little ... I don't like that ... why are women rather than men? Nothing against women, but what's so special about women that us gay men should feel we need to mimic them? (Thomas, banking and finance, 57)

Other participants who deemed feminine gay men as failures in masculinity spoke about how they would be reluctant to employ them in work contexts that valorized hegemonic masculinity. A director in the fixed income trade division of an investment bank explained:

I don't have a problem with gay men who are shall we say softer, but what can be cute at the pub will not play well at work. Would I promote someone like that? I would expect it's quite unlikely he will do well, because the kind of people he'll deal with, you know, the typical traders, they won't respect him. Ultimately, I have to prioritize the success of the team, so I'm not sure I'd be willing to gamble. (James, banking and finance, 58)

For most participants, it was okay to be older and gay so long as one was not 'acting gay', which the participants dismissed as 'unprofessional' (Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009). These participants justified their masculinity practices based

on differences in occupational norms and generational preferences. A supply chain consultant employed by a business and technology consulting firm rationalized:

I've seen gay men wearing makeup in Soho. A full beard and makeup! I'm not sure what they do for work, probably arts and culture, but that's really, for my generation of gay men, that's bonkers. For a younger generation, it might be fine. (Anthony, consulting, 64)

In the above, Anthony reads the embodiment of masculinity and femininity on a gay male body as disrupting gender norms. Notably, Anthony stereotypes an older and younger generation as less and more willing to experiment with the embodiment of gender, which creates a restrictive binary in how older and younger gay men can be understood as gendered and (un)fit for the world of work. Some participants also expressed fear and anxiety that their own mannerisms, speech and appearance could appear feminine. Here, ageing emerged as a problematic social process, where participants shaped their masculinity practices to avoid embodying age-specific, gay-negative stereotypes.

My worst nightmare is if people saw me as an old queen. We're in a different world now ... but just like a straight man wouldn't wish to be known as a dirty old man, I wouldn't wish to be seen as that old queen irritating everyone ... (Anthony, consulting, 64)

The fear of being labelled as an 'old queen' exposed the precariousness of managerial status gains by older gay men who reproduced hegemonic masculinity. The participants sometimes justified their worries about being stereotyped in this way by referring to older straight men who were anxious about similar age-stereotyping (e.g., the dirty old man). Yet unlike the 'dirty old man' label, which may reference unacceptable sexual behaviour (e.g., sexual harassment), the 'old queen' label is drawn from sexist stereotypes to penalize allegedly hysterical older gay men.

Some of our participants tried to avoid drawing attention to their perceived disadvantaged position as older gay men by distancing themselves from workplace gender issues. In particular, participants considered openly arguing for change, such as discussing and challenging LGBT and gender inequality issues, might incur costly career repercussions.

Ageing isn't particularly impressive ... and if you're away with the fairies, talking about social issues like gender pay gap or something, rather than doing a good job earning money for the company, you're toast, the year-end bonus is gone. (Thomas, banking and finance, 57)

In many ways, the participants not only maintained the dominance of heteronormativity in their organizations, but also used it to shore up their own power. However, it was not the case that all study participants understood change-oriented action as detrimental to their careers, as the next section reveals.

5.2 | Embodying change

In the data, some older gay men's masculinity practices entailed embodying change. The practice of embodying change refers to agentic efforts to leverage a lifetime of accumulated experiences as gay men to negotiate heteronormativity in ways that facilitate change, although such agency is constrained by individuals' material and symbolic commitments to heteronormativity. The participants' desire to defend their power and privilege in the workplace undermined their capacity to seek transformative change.

Some participants believed that embodying change involved making hard choices, because a direct challenge against organizational heteronormativity seemed untenable in their work contexts. In particular, some practised a

cautious and calculative masculinity, which prioritized reconciling competing interests in lieu of openly questioning unfair organizational practices. Participants' embodied agency was shaped by the social implications of ageing and sexuality, which fostered a cautious and defensive approach to change. As a finance manager working for a commercial bank averred:

What I bring to the table is an exceptionally analytical approach. I go into meetings super well-prepared, armed with facts and figures, to protect myself from those who'd like to take me down a peg or two, whether it's because of their prejudices or our competitive culture ... When it comes to diversity, with ageism and homophobia, I could be emotional about it, but that's the easy way out. It's better to win people over with carefully presented evidence which I think beats all the emotional speechifying and posturing. (John, banking and finance, 58)

Some participants indicated that they took care to interact with older straight men at work, many of whom were positioned as the traditional power brokers in their organizations. They preferred to change their organizations from within and slowly by being measured, strategic and political. As a structured finance senior associate working for a global accountancy firm suggested:

... it's about making the right steps, being considered and sure when you approach the difficult issues, it takes a lot of minute politicking to create the right culture. (Alistair, accounting, 53)

Some participants also thought being 'older and wiser' meant that they gained a degree of credibility, which countered some of the stigma attached to being older and gay. They considered ageing as an asset that facilitated them to engage with organizational leaders more persuasively. For example, some of the participants suggested that they utilized their age and experience as a track record to claim leadership roles in high-profile initiatives that championed LGBT workplace issues. Sometimes, participants seemed to negotiate ageing as a competitive strength instead of a liability. As a managing partner employed at a legal firm put it:

I don't see age as a problem at all. If anything, it gives you credibility. Gay men actually gain credibility as they get older. It's easier to persuade people that I know what I'm talking about, that I've been there and done that, and when I say this is a worthwhile action, they can trust that I've looked at the costs, and weighed the risks, and that it's experience speaking, and that they can rely on what I say. (Benjamin, law, 65)

As well, participants' embodiment of change was shaped by the resources available to them in their organizations. Despite pressures to conform to hegemonic masculinity, as men in senior managerial and professional roles, the participants exercised organizational power by using levers of influence to push for change.

I use my power to seek sensible solutions. It's not in anyone's interest to demotivate people or let them waste their talent, so I build bridges to explain that. It's the most effective route. When there are more LGBT people in senior leadership, then the organization will change anyway, so that's job done ... So I seek indirect change, but it's real change, and I am doing it without having to compromise my own power base. (John, banking and finance, 58)

John suggests that change is an incremental process that must be pursued prudently. His idea of change relies on a critical mass of LGBT people in senior positions being able to dismantle the heteronormativity of his workplace, aided by his relationship building with key figures in the organization. However, his notion of and strategy for change assumes that greater representation of LGBT individuals in senior positions will inevitably alter the organization,

which fails to consider how LGBT managers and professionals may have no interest in contesting organizational heteronormativity, especially if they wish to protect their status and capacity to exercise power.

For some older gay men, the practice of embodying change involved negotiating ageing by way of their political competence, shaped by an intimate knowledge of the wider social and cultural landscape. These participants came of age during the gay liberation movement (from the late 1960s to mid-1980s) and some of them referred to a notion of social progress as linear, which infused their life histories and offered them skills to practice their masculinities differently. A partner in a boutique management consultancy firm recounted:

I'm an older gay man who's got some genuine pride based on years of struggle ... At the beginning of my career, I couldn't have imagined one day I'd bring my partner to company functions, ... we've achieved a lot, and when it's a particularly bad day, I just think of all that we've overcome in this society, and it keeps me focused, and that does come with age, with all that experience of life. (Henry, consulting, 63)

Still, some participants felt constrained by the weight of memory and experienced change fatigue owing to a long history of engagement with LGBT activism outside work. As a senior consultant in a generalist management consultancy firm put it:

I fully understand that as a gay man I am supposed to be the force of change ... Let's just put it this way. I do what I can, but there are very real limits to my reserves of energy too. I've done the culture warrior thing, and at my age some modicum of stability in my career and personal life is a non-negotiable. (Martin, consulting, 60)

In some of the participants' accounts, references to physical toughness and robustness featured prominently, and were emblematic of masculinity practices to counter the constraining effects of ageing. These participants often tried to project a mix of physical might and experiential knowledge, which allowed them to fit in with the hegemonic masculine ideals of their organizations, even as they attempted to challenge them.

Look, don't get me wrong, I'm not a spent force. I'm still the same man I was ten years ago. I can still work like a machine, and I do work like a maniac sometimes, but it's not a physical energy issue, it's about my sanity ... I push the gender agenda ... but I wouldn't go round telling male colleagues how to behave. I know what works, and that wouldn't work. (Martin, consulting, 60)

Some participants made use of their political know-how to contest inequalities via their organizational acumen, which led them to favour compromise, engagement and persuasion. They channelled their political competency to change hearts and minds, practising masculinity by trying to change the silhouette of hegemonic masculinity, while actively minimizing confrontation.

6 | DISCUSSION

Deploying Connell's (1995) concept of practice as body-reflexive social action, our research demonstrates how older gay men practice masculinities by utilizing their bodies as a site for reproducing heteronormativity, as well as negotiating heteronormativity to argue for change. Prior research shows that social expectations surrounding masculinity can generate multiple disadvantages that hamper LGBT workers' careers (e.g., Drydakis, 2015; Stenger & Roulet, 2018), and burden their workplace social relations (e.g., Hoel et al., 2014; Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009), continually marking them as the unsuitable other (e.g., Benozzo et al., 2015; Rennstam & Sullivan, 2018). Yet, this literature neglects the imbrications of masculinity and embodiment, as if ageing or other social processes involving

the body have no significant bearing on masculinity. As we show, masculinity as a bodily practice (re)shapes the contours of exclusion and marginalization in organizations.

In this article, ageing is a social and embodied process with enabling and constraining effects on how older gay men operate in heteronormative work contexts. In particular, ageing can shape how older gay men practice masculinity to evade negative age-related, heterosexist stereotypes (Rumens, 2018). Yet, in so doing, they can sustain the heteronormative *status quo* that subjugates them. Our findings suggest that some gay men vie for and achieve authority in their organizations by embodying hegemonic masculinity, which is characterized by marginalization and exclusion towards femininities (see also Barrett, 1996; Kerfoot & Knights, 1993, 1998). For example, older gay men reproduce a gender hierarchy within the sexual category of 'gay man' to assume a position of legitimacy and superior status by actively marginalizing gay femininities as undesirable in the context of professional work. This is a meaningful elaboration of the concept of hegemonic masculinity because it allows us to account for the continuing resonance of organizational heteronormativity in a seemingly more hospitable, 'gay-friendly' culture towards LGBT people (Giuffre et al., 2008; Rumens, 2018).

Our participants draw significant utility from experiences, skills and acumen acquired through a long personal history of LGBT activism, signifying ageing as an accumulation process (Riach & Cutcher, 2014). Using their accumulated, embodied hegemony and power, which is a legacy of their age, older gay men argue for change that improves the position and experience of LGBT workers, although they do so without fully undermining heteronormativity. On the one hand, their age and accumulated power in organizations affords them the ability to exercise change-oriented agency in ways that younger gay men may find difficult to perform. On the other hand, ageing can also attune some older gay men to a preference for compromise, risk aversion and preserving power and status. One potential outcome here is that the type of change favoured by older gay men tends to accommodate the interests and needs of LGBT workers (e.g., developing LGBT-supportive policies, sponsoring LGBT events, etc.), falling short of change that seeks to transform the organizational structure of heteronormativity. Advocating the latter, which entails practising masculinity to expose power relations and individuals who uphold hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity in the workplace, may jeopardize the status and privilege some older gay men have accumulated.

While practice is at the core of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity is a structural effect that operates above the individual level (Connell, 1987, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In this study, to examine hegemonic masculinity through the analysis of older gay men's practices, we engaged with Reed's (2003) relationist perspective on the interplay of agency and structure. From that perspective, we observed that older gay men's masculinity practices had constitutive capacity, as we traced their regenerative effects on heteronormativity. Furthermore, the beliefs, rules and values that inhered in the heteronormative order informed the older gay men's masculinity practices, owing to the participants' material and symbolic embedment within their organizations (see Reed, 1985). In particular, older gay men's change activity hinged on what was normatively imaginable and practicable in their particular social world, and thus dependent on the extent to which the pre-existing instantiation of organizational heteronormativity allowed space for change around LGBT workplace issues.

Although our findings square with Reed's (2003) theorizing on agency and structure, they nonetheless indicate that relationism can benefit from explicitly incorporating embodiment in the process of individual agency. As we showed, older gay men's bodies can play a part in expanding and contracting the scope for practising masculinity, figuring as a dynamic feature of our participants' orientation toward heteronormativity. Our research extends Reed's (2003) relationist theorizing by accounting for the body as key to agentic effects in relation to structure. We emphasize the need for a conceptual shift away from considering the body as a prop that people utilize variously to perform agency, because as we show in this study the body can be the primary social medium of agentic action in organized life.

Our research highlights the need to better account for change-seeking actions of LGBT workers. The organization sexualities literature provides significant insights into how heteronormativity constrains LGBT workers (e.g., Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009; Ward & Winstanley, 2006). Yet, we need more in-depth and body-informed accounts

of how LGBT workers can problematize hegemonic masculinity to undo organizational heteronormativity. Our findings act in a corrective fashion, bringing hegemonic masculinity, age and sexuality to the foreground through an embodied practice perspective to explore their interplay in the context of organizations.

Furthermore, our study underscores the importance of reading ageing and sexuality into the organization in order to fully account for the gendered realities of older gay men's work lives. We submit that organization masculinities scholarship in 'naming men as men' (Collinson & Hearn, 1994) is limited by its patchy attention to ageing (Riach & Cutcher, 2014) and sexuality (Rumens, 2014). Our findings explicitly link organizational gendering processes to older gay men's practices of masculinities. The reproduction of organizational inequalities involves the actions of a wide array of organizational members, encompassing more than middle-aged, heterosexual men that historically constituted the core object of study for organization masculinities literature. As our analysis shows, organizational heteronormativity can strongly (dis-)advantage some older gay men in managerial and professional positions, reinforcing the importance of scholarly accounts of hegemonic masculinities that extend analyses of gendered power and privilege at work to include age and sexuality.

7 | CONCLUSION

We find both rigour and limitation in studying a specific group of older gay men in heteronormative work contexts. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) state, practices of masculinity can only be studied fruitfully by analysing a distinctive group of individuals' social actions in a particular context, because gender and sexuality relations are contextually contingent in how they shape individuals' opportunities for social action. Yet, this also means that our findings must be considered within the work contexts of our participants who have specific characteristics (affluent older white gay men). Our participants' masculinity practices do not represent the experiences of all older gay men, and we emphasize that focusing on racialized older gay men in organizations in future research would further enrich our understanding of ageing and sexuality in organizations.

As we reflect on our research, we consider some of our participants' striking sense of entitlement to power and position as an embodiment of class privilege. In personal interactions, the participants' self-image often appeared unencumbered by doubts about their worth and right to career advantage, as they seemed to suggest that they were special people who possessed top talent, and they deserved exceptional corporate success. A more mixed sample reflecting marginalized classes could surface different perspectives on how well-educated senior professionals and managers view privilege in organizations.

Future research is also needed to explore how hegemonic masculinity is practised by other gay men in more diverse work contexts, especially those organizational settings where the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity *might* be open to contestation such as in public services and the arts. Lesbians, bisexual women and men, trans and queer workers are likely to experience the interplay between ageing, sexuality and masculinity differently. For example, older men transitioning to the identity category of 'woman' may find they abandon practices that comply with hegemonic masculinity at work (Riach et al., 2014). Additionally, older lesbians may practice masculinity and femininity in ways that conform to or contest wider social, heteronormative expectations and ideals about how women should look and behave. This area of scholarship is empirically open and it is our hope that scholars will undertake research that builds upon extant studies of ageing, masculinity and sexuality in organizations. Masculinity as embodied practice contributes to both possible change and continuity in heteronormative orders. As such, it is vital to continue exploring the interplay between various masculinities and the specific instantiations of heteronormativity in different organizational contexts.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

We have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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