Gender still at work: Interrogating Identity in Discourses and Practices of Masculinity

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Abstract

Apart from a few paragraphs reminiscing on how, in response to a publisher contacting us, Jill, Marilyn and I founded *Gender, Work and Organization* combined with a few comments on its evolution as a leading journal in our field, this article largely summarises and seeks to develop my lifelong interests in discourses and practices of masculinity. It pays tribute to my doctoral students and/or research colleagues with whom many of these ideas concerning masculinities were shaped. The article then surveys the literature on discourses and practices of masculinities through the three waves: the unitarist, the pluralist and, finally the performativist approach to discourses and practices of masculinity. A central argument of the article is that although each wave has contributed something of importance to the critical examination of masculinities, none of them fully interrogate identity to theorise how our attachment to the security that it promises is illusory. Posthumanist feminists come closest to realizing this and seeking an alternative embodied and ethical engagement with, rather than a competitive elevation of self over, the other. In the conclusion, there is a brief comment on how the global backlash from the political right has made struggles against dominant masculinities all the more urgent.

Key words: masculinities, identity, feminism, performativity, posthumanism.

Introduction

Although this article is partly a nostalgic rumination on a long period of my involvement with *Gender, Work and Organization*, I am also using this occasion of the 25th anniversary of the journal as an opportunity to reflect on the gender issues that have most inspired me during a lengthy academic career. Although having an interest in a broad range of topics that lie beyond the field of gender studies, a good proportion of my research has focused extensively on equal opportunity, sex discrimination, sex inequality as well as other forms of diversity discrimination. However, my strongest focus in this field has been on discourses and practices

of masculinity. Theoretically this focus has revolved around poststructuralist and posthumanist feminism (Knights, 2000; 2006; Knights and Kerfoot, 2004), first through theorizing identity and power (Knights and Roberts, 1982; Knights and Willmott, 1985) and then developing critical discourses of masculinity. In particular, a target has been the limited degree of interrogation around notions of identity (Knights and Clarke, 2017) and especially in relation to discourses and practices of masculinity (Knights and Collinson, 1987; Collinson et al., 1990; Knights and Murray, 1994; Knights and Tullberg, 2012; Knights, 2015; Clarke and Knights, 2018b).

As a co-founder and co-editor for most of the 25 years that this special issue now celebrates, I feel obliged to begin the article with a brief history of the journal, although clearly my colleagues may offer different interpretations. After this, the article turns to the topic within gender studies that has most occupied my attention – discourses and practices of masculinity. In this section I begin by providing a selective account of the masculinity literature in what are generally recognized as its 3 stages or waves, and where each focus a great deal of attention on identity. In the final section of the article, attention is drawn to the limited interrogation of identity that these 3 waves accomplish and I make some attempt to make up for the shortfall through developing the embryonic, posthumanist elements of performative theory and their relevance for reflecting on masculine identities. Before discussing masculine discourses and practices, however, I turn to my recollections, of the early formation and development of the journal, Gender, Work and Organization. I realize that it may seem self-contradictory if not self-indulgent writing an article about my experience editing the journal and interests in masculinities when I am also seeking to challenge our preoccupation with, and attachment to, identity. Having been asked by a new and exciting editorial team to make such a contribution, however, I felt it would have been churlish to refuse. At the same time, I am always aware that what we write about is usually a reflection of contradictions we identify more readily in others than in ourselves but I need to admit that my preoccupation with masculinities and with interrogating the attachment to identity does not render me free from falling into their traps.

Recollections of the genesis of GWO.

In 1993 Marilyn Davidson, Jill Rubery and I were approached by Basil Blackwell to see if we were interested in establishing a new personnel/ human resource management journal relating to women in employment. The Blackwell representatives wanted a journal that could secure a

readership not just from academics but also among practising personnel managers. Marilyn took a back seat in the negotiations largely because she was already editing another journal in this field so felt there would have been a conflict of interest. I felt that a journal of the kind they proposed would end up being much like *Personnel Review* but with a focus on women. Since that journal never attained an academic reputation, we argued that our interest would only be in establishing a fully refereed, international academic journal.

After several negotiations, Blackwell conceded that a journal called *Gender, Work and Organization* had potential for them. We had some discussions around the title and especially using the singular term organization rather than organizations, which commonsensically might have seemed more appropriate. I wanted the singular term to convey the dynamic and processual nature of organizing rather than the concrete sense of our topic being the finite entities known as organizations. Jill as a labour economist and I as an organization theorist sought to focus on these two fields and this transpired, with we as joint editors-in-chief. After Jill resigned 10 years after its inception, and Deborah Kerfoot was recruited to replace her, the focus became more organization and gender theory although it has sought to retain some of its earlier multi-disciplinary credentials. In the early days, finding enough copy to run 4 issues per year was a challenge but later, partly because of its growing reputation in the journal rankings but also due to us organizing a biennial conference, selection and rejection became the major task for the editors. While the journal had been based in Manchester University where Jill and I both worked, in 2004 it was moved to Keele University where, by this time, both Deborah and I worked and it remained there until the recent editorial changes. A majority of the conferences were also held in Keele where Deborah and Nicola Nixon, the assistant to the editors, were largely responsible for their organization but in 2018 the conference moved to Macquarie University in Sydney where it was organized by Alison Pullen. Unfortunately, due to a variety of circumstances, not least of which was recent major heart surgery, I was unable to attend but all reports suggest it was a roaring success in the new venue.

Turning back to these earlier developments, in order to accommodate the growing volume of submissions, the journal moved to 5 issues per year in 2002 and then to 6 issues per year in 2004 and added a third editor in chief – Ida Sabelis in 2011. Most recently, we have seen a radical overhaul of the journal under three new editors – Patricia Lewis, Alison Pullen and Banu Ozkazanc-Pan – respectively replacing Deborah, myself and Ida. While the journal has always supported empirical research, it has expected authors to present their work not merely in descriptive terms but to be strongly theoretically informed so that data advances thinking

either conceptually, epistemologically or methodologically and preferably in all three ways. While multi-disciplinary, a majority of contributions have drawn principally on sociological and gender/ feminist theory, but since the journal and its biennial conference were founded in a management school, associated subdisciplines such as human resource management, industrial relations, labour economics and organization studies have been heavily represented. It has also engaged with a broad body of international scholarship that seeks to extend beyond traditional binaries, whether in relation to gender or other aspects of inequality as long as they were broadly within the field of work and organization.

While there were serendipitous conditions leading to my interest in gender due not least to a request by the equal opportunity commission inviting me to bid for a grant to study sex discrimination in recruitment (EOC, 1983), the achievement of which funded my doctoral student David Collinson as a research assistant, eventually resulting in the book *Managing to Discriminate* (Collinson et al., 1990). Prior to this, I had focused on all aspects of social inequality in my teaching and had co-led a research project on racial discrimination in employment (Department of Employment, 1979; Torrington et al., 1982). However, an interest in issues of masculinity had already begun before the research grant largely through David Collinson who had focused on this in his masters research (Knights and Collinson, 1987; Collinson, 1992) but also sustained through collaboration with my doctoral students Andrew Sturdy (Knights and Sturdy, 1987) and Deborah Kerfoot (Kerfoot and Knights, 1992; 1993; 1994). This concern to investigate and theorize discourses and practices of masculinity continued to a lesser degree with research assistants Fergus Murray (Knights and Murray, 1994) and Darren McCabe (2001; 2015), and then contemporarily with my colleagues Torkild Thanem (Knights and Thanem, 2011; Thanem and Knights, 2012), Maria Tullberg (Knights and Tullberg, 2012), Caroline Clarke (Clarke and Knights, 2014; 2018a; 2018b; Knights and Clarke, 2017; 2018) and Alison Pullen (Pullen and Knights, 2007; Knights and Pullen, 2019).

Masculine literatures

It could be argued that few literatures are devoid of masculine sensibilities since gender is as old as human existence itself and therefore all discourses are gendered in one way or another. Indeed, there have been several books written on the masculine aspects of medieval life and literature (Vaught, 2008) but, in general, they remain descriptive of their subject matter. Moving much nearer to our own day, analyses of 19th century middle class life have suggested

that the Victorian domestic family was as great a benefit to men as to women (Tosh, 2002) because it provided an orderly, moral, religious and stable space or platform from which men were able to pursue their masculine activities whether in the field of adventure, commerce, manufacture or sexual exploits. But while the idea of manliness was to 'maintain the family' and 'provide for dependents', men often 'depended on the capital, labour and contacts of their wives' (Davidoff and Hall, 2002: xv). However, this was as much a class as gender mode of organizing since it was a life opposed to what was seen to be 'an indolent and dissolute aristocracy, and a potentially subversive working class' (ibid. xviii). In the modern era, by contrast, there has been a considered attempt to examine and analyse concepts, theories and practices of masculinity but these have a comparatively short history beginning in the 1970s, although some (e.g. Roper and Tosh, 1991; Roper, 1994) have taken their analyses of masculinity back as far as 1800. I now provide a very brief synopsis on the three waves of this analytical literature on masculinity but focus more intensively on the 3rd poststructuralist wave where, within the performative turn, I see some potential to interrogate masculine identity more fully.

The three waves of masculinity

It is well known that the literature on masculinity has passed through different phases or waves[ii], the first of which drew largely on role theory and was functionalist in approach, arguing that the decline of manufacturing had created a crisis of masculinity as male manual workers began to suffer increasing levels of unemployment. Potentially they lost the sense of being in the commanding heights of the household as breadwinners[iii], but also began to feel alienated from other men and from the natural world which, some of this literature argues, had traditionally been the location for manifesting their manly instincts for survival through hunting, fishing and shooting.

This early literature concentrated on a unitary conception of men as suffering a crisis in having lost the sense of what it was to be a man – tough, physical, and independent – that modernity, combined with feminist liberation movements, were seen to have eroded (Farrell, 1993). Within this phase there was a handwringing, men's movement that often self-pityingly drew attention to the impossibility of living up to the expectations of the 20[th.] century and a yearning to return to a mythical past of "Wild Man" basic living through bonding with other men and nature (Bly, 1990; Keen, 1991). Most authors, however, did not participate in this movement

but subscribed to an approach where men's masculinity was seen as a one-dimensional product of socialization that although, socially privileged over femininities, involved expectations of competence in all spheres of personal and public activity. While still experiencing expectations of maintaining the household, fulfilling demands of economic provision, and displaying rational decisiveness and 'strength', they felt encroachments or even erosions of their authority as a result of feminist threats. The demands of masculinity were not just limiting and negative for men in the sense of being often unattainable but also for women in legitimating and reproducing the existing system of gender inequality (Goldberg, 1976; Tolson, 1977). Not fully in control, men nonetheless were depicted as incapable of expressing their feelings and emotions until this wave of masculine discourse provided them with a platform or some legitimacy to release, or even wallow in, their pent-up anxieties. However, whatever version of this literature was subscribed to, there seemed to be some yearning for a past masculine identity of hierarchical supremacy where men were men and women were women or at least when there were fewer conflicting expectations about their respective roles in society. This overall concern to maintain or return to an established, 'status quo' order meant that while identity was of central focus, it remained taken for granted rather than interrogated.

Criticising this universal and unitary account as mythical, the 2nd wave described the situation as one where a multiplicity of divergent masculinities (Brittan, 1989; Connell, 1995) coincided to generate a diverse range of experiences across class, racial and ethnic lines (Mercer and Julien, 1988) or in relation to diverse circumstances. In the 1st wave, for example, there had been little consideration of how men experienced and lived their masculinity at different stages of their life (Calassanti, 2004) or in different geographical regions (Gilmore, 1990). This recognition of diverse and multiple masculinities became the distinctive mark of the 2nd wave and it resonated with views that the failure to recognize the complexities and differences amongst men had generated a skewed analysis of social relations and a politics of gender in which all men were pitted against all women. Nonetheless, it still needed to be recognized that despite the variability, there remained some shared cultural and historical characteristics that were distinctive to discourses and practices of masculinity (Knights and Kerfoot, 2004).

So, for example, regardless of their differences, masculinities tend to be identified with reason (Seidler, 1989) and this often results in emotional estrangement, leaving men as subjects with minimal resources for expressing feelings and often unable to acknowledge weakness or failure. This means that they are inescapably caught up in their own power to demonstrate

competence in conquering and controlling a multiplicity of tasks with which they are confronted (Kerfoot and Knights, 1992; 1993). Although here acknowledging some of the anxieties around masculinity within the 1st wave, this literature differs in regard to how these problems might be resolved. Refraining from the self-obsessed nature of the earlier research or seeking to retrieve for men a past in which their sense of self was tied to physical relations with nature and bonding with other men, much of the 2nd wave sought to transform men in ways more appropriate to the sensibilities and understandings demanded of a rapidly developing feminist reality. Men's awareness groups sprang up where the objective was to raise self-consciousness to realize the sub-conscious propensity for sexist and homophobic attitudes and behaviour to occur even when fully familiar with and sympathetic to the feminist and gay cause (Schein, 1977; Pease, 2000). While believing it necessary to interrogate masculine subjectivity, this literature rarely extends beyond examining how men's so-called needs and desires contradict their newfound ethics, grounded in pro-feminist or pro-gay sensibilities.

Besides acknowledging how masculinities are multiple and shifting depending on different contexts, authors also sought to develop a more political and pro-feminist stance (Kimmel, Hearn and Connell, 2004). So, in contrast to the 1st wave that was threatened by feminism, here there was political support for radical change and often attempts to challenge not only the explicit, but also the implicit subconscious, assumptions of misogyny, sexism and homophobia. While continuing to share with the 1st wave the elements of crisis within masculine senses of subjectivity, the literature here is much more scholarly in seeing the ascription of masculine as only one condition in living up to the image of what it is to be 'a man'. However, it does focus on the ongoing struggles to appear competent, competitive and in control of situations where feelings of doubt and vulnerability prevail regardless, or because, of asserting a claim to masculinity (Seidler, 1989). Moreover, as with the 1st wave, there was always a danger of men self-indulgently wallowing in their own anguish and distress while neglecting to acknowledge the continuing gender advantages of being male and that although the old industrial order had declined, it had facilitated numerous service sector opportunities where men as well as women benefited (Edwards, 2006).

Despite the general critique of the unitary conception of masculinity in earlier writings, with limited exceptions (Pease, 2000; Connell, 2005), the 2nd wave has tended also to be restricted by its concentration on a white, heterosexual model of masculinity that could have been

avoided had it not ignored the work accomplished within 'cultural, literary and media-driven studies' (Edwards, 2006: 3). Other criticisms directed at the 2nd wave was that again with few exceptions (e.g. Pease, 2000; Connell, 1995), there was no significant contribution to *empirical* research of the field and although much of the literature recognised the *performative* nature of masculinity, rarely was this theorized (Edwards, 2006: 107). As a consequence, while clearly the conception of identity subscribed to was much more complex, diverse and nuanced than in the 1st wave, and certainly it acknowledged the multiplicity of masculinities and differences between men (Pease, 2000), theory still drew on structural arguments that relied on universal and totalizing concepts such as patriarchy or hegemony, the construction and variation of which were often left unchallenged resulting in the 'reification of masculinity' (Edwards, 2006: 107). More importantly for my purposes, identity was continually taken for granted as a substantive, albeit symbolic, reality rather than interrogated so as to challenge its potential to be oppressive.

Paralleling the 3rd phase of feminism, drawing on the philosophical strains of post-structuralism, postmodernism, and cultural analysis, a third wave then followed that sought to advance more theoretical understandings of masculinities through an examination of power and subjectivity. More particularly, it has sought to engage with feminist advocacies of queer theory and theories of performativity, where the prevalence of heterosexual discourses that reflect and reinforce dominant heteronormative values are challenged (Butler, 1990). This broader, more multi-disciplinary approach combined with the queering of conventional sexual binaries, challenges the heterosexual presuppositions of gender discourse (Butler, 1990), thus giving more attention to trans, gay and androgynous norms and practices. Here, masculinities are understood as identity performances or more correctly performative occasions that have a series of effects in that actions such as walking, working, and playing or speaking and other communications and interactions all are conducted 'in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man' (Butler, 2011)iv. Consequently, masculinity is seen not as a property of any person(s) for it is recognized as a performative phenomenon that has continually to be produced and reproduced in processes where social relations are accomplished in organized situations. Nonetheless, these performatives have a series of effects that sustain some sense of a gender order but equally can be disrupted when, for example, the performance breaches binary norms of masculinity and femininity. However, as in all good dramas, sincere performances transform norms, such that disruptions of convention are readily accommodated, routinely becoming normalized and legitimized.

By adopting Butler's theory of performativity and Foucauldian analytics, the 3rd wave has tended to eschew grand narratives and totalizing universals. In the context of work and organization, it advances an understanding of power as a social process that classifies, distinguishes and divides individuals from one another (Foucault, 1982), and reconstitutes masculine subjects through their attachment to a particular manner of rendering the world controllable and ordered. But this power is seen to exist in its exercise, operating through the production of particular knowledges - around discourses of gender and sexuality, pleasure and morality, sanity and madness, and the law and ethics, for example. From this perspective, power is neither one-directional, nor does it flow from a single source to shape, direct, or constrain subjects. Rather, power is in reciprocal relation to a subjectivity that can be defined as individual self-consciousness inscribed in particular ideals of behaviour surrounding categories of persons, objects, practices or institutions. Subjectivity is then constituted through the exercise of power within which conceptions of identity, gender and sexuality come to be generated. This is not a determinate process, for individuals actively exercise power in positioning themselves within, or of finding their own location amongst, competing discourses, rather than merely being `positioned by' them (Knights and Kerfoot, 2004). However, rather than theorize performativity, much of the 3rd wave literature has merely sought to demonstrate it through metrosexual examples of consumption, dress, fashion and lifestyle, or in terms of their gender sensibility in analyses of that relic of gender history – the 'New Man' (Woodruffe-Burton, 1998), described by Giles Coren in 2014, as now a 'cartoon-like figure of fun'[v].

These examinations of masculine performances have tended, however, to neglect the 'material, economic and physical foundations of identity and identity politics and indeed power itself' (Edwards, 2006: 103). While not explicitly showing how these foundations can be explored other than through an extension of the sociology of the body to incorporate the analysis of masculinity (ibid.: 151), Edwards' own analysis of the body is restrained by a fear of sliding into biological essentialism should any credence be given to bodily agency. However, ascribing agency to bodies involves a biological determinism *only* if there is an assumption of a separation between mind and body whereas drawing on Spinozian philosophy, a unitary ontology avoids this problem since body and mind are one and the same (Spinoza, 1985). Human agency cannot then be other than material and symbolic action that reflects, and reproduces, embodied cognition, which is a combined effect of deconstructing epistemological, and dissolving ontological, binaries (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988; Knights, 2015). Consequently, the material and economic foundations of identity in relation to masculinities

still remain under-researched but the contemporary backlash against the neo-liberal consensus in global politics suggests a link between material and economic deprivation and an aggressive masculine, intolerance of difference. Moreover, this straddles the genders since women are as likely as men to embrace a 'hard line' masculine aggression towards outsiders in the new right politics of identity surrounding nationalism and economic protectionism.

While these examinations of masculinities in terms of consumption, style and the body or in relation to a politics of identity are important in providing examples of masculine performances, they do not interrogate identity in ways that would provide an analysis of what *drives* the desire to perform. Even when books are devoted exclusively to the subject matter of identity (Fukuyama, 2018), they still have a tendency to treat it as a resource rather than a topic to interrogate. So, for example, Fukuyama (2018: iii) argues that the 'demand for recognition of one's identity is a master concept that unifies much of what is going on in world politics today', including the shift on the part of many white American, British and European populations to demand anti-immigration, nationalist and protectionist policies through supporting political leaders from the 'extreme right' who often appear to be authoritarian demagogues. Although sometimes as crude as the politics this analysis is explaining, it is not without credibility. However, it remains at the level of describing, rather than interrogating identity and its performative foundations and, thereby, it adds little to developing an understanding of masculine discourses and practices.

Finally, while identity is a central focus of all three of these waves, none of them interrogate it so as to theorize ways of transforming its mesmeric grip on subjects and release them (us)vi from the oppression of identity politics.

Interrogating identity

One particular value of performativity theory is that it escapes from the essentialism underlying a 'metaphysics of substance', where the self is seen as a coherent entity that acts independently of the social relations through which it is formed, sustained and transformed. In modern western societies, and increasingly beyond them, this notion of the self being substantial is commonplace and one result is that identity is often an overwhelming preoccupation. However, despite a rejection of the metaphysics of substance, theory does not often interrogate how the preoccupation with identity is foundational to performativity. For, the attachment to,

and concern with securing, identity stimulates subjects to be productively performative. Indeed, this fixation on rendering the self, stable and secure can be seen as significant to its cathexis drive to achieve competent performances and, as has been argued, particularly intense around masculine discourses and practices. All identities can be seen as driven by the pursuit of competent performances as the vehicle for gaining social recognition and as the means of attaining some stability and security for the self. However, the demand for order and control seems even more forceful for those seeking to secure their masculine identities and it has been argued that this 'avoidance of impermanence' and 'the tendency to conform, to normalize, to secure and control' is the pathway to a destructive technocratic 'nihilism' (Levin, 1985:74). Yet 'transfixed by cognitively, masculine disembodied rationality', [this nihilism] 'goes comparatively unchallenged in modern society' (Knights and Clarke, 2017: 340). It is nihilistic insofar as it reflects and reproduces the self-defeating myths that fail to see how, regardless of the performance, securing the self through identity is impossible because it is dependent on others' evaluations and judgements that are by definition fragile, precarious and unpredictable. However, this does not deter masculine discourses and practices from embracing the pursuit of 'control, conquest, competitive success' and self-mastery through a 'compulsive preoccupation' with an identity that always remains beyond reach (Knights and Kerfoot, 2004: 439).

For some men, the feminine 'other' is seen as a source of mystery and unknowability, and for that reason rather troublesome (Butler, 1990), not least in so far as it intensifies the world as precarious, uncertain and uncontrollable, thus exposing the masculine subject's autonomy and self-mastery as illusory. Yet autonomy remains central to ideas of masculinity, especially where this is reinforced by liberal Enlightenment beliefs that cultivate humanistic ideologies of individualism and human potential (Costea et al., 2012). Moreover, this threat to autonomy reflects and reinforces an *attachment* to masculine identities that makes even more performative, if self-defeating, demands upon subjects to conform to strategies involving self-discipline as a means of securing meaning and reality (Knights and Clarke, 2017). Fears of the loss of autonomy are often displaced on to other `objects' in the world and, in particular, machines, hierarchical subordinates, women, and animals that it would appear can be dominated and made controllable. However, precariousness leads to the masculine body becoming self-estranged in its all-encompassing desire for conquest in response to threats that are as much self-induced as produced by others. In this sense, the drive to dominate the other

reflects a fear of both internal and external contingencies, which threaten masculine autonomy (Frank, 1990).

Interestingly, feminists have for some time questioned autonomy and the Enlightenment philosophy to which it owes its allegiance (Jagger, 1983), even to the point of rejecting it as a masculine concept premised on a mind-body, intellect-affect, will-nature dualism (Fraser, 1996)vii. They have also criticised the Enlightenment more generally as reflecting dualistic epistemologies, ontologies and methodologies, which treat femininity as the emotional 'other', contrasted with the cognitively rational masculinity that is in control of both the social and the natural world (Braidotti, 1991).

It is not difficult to see this as part of a masculine preoccupation with securing the self through constructing an orderly and unfragmented world – a process that involves us seeing the world in our own image (Game, 1991; Clough, 1992). By providing 'grand' exhaustive accounts of reality, we fulfil this desire for order while simultaneously sustaining the security of our identities. The humanistic belief in the pre-eminence of autonomy and rationality is seen by posthumanist feminists as the foundation of this masculine preoccupation with order and control (Hekman, 1999; Braidotti, 2011; 2013).

However, some feminists did resist a rejection of humanism and the Enlightenment on the grounds that it eradicates the very 'object' (i.e. women), the emancipation of which is the feminist project (Benhabib, 1992). While endorsing poststructuralist critiques of the Enlightenment belief in an 'episteme of representation', Benhabib refuses to deny a space for an active subject as the agent and recipient of feminist demands for emancipation. For, she argues, this would undermine the reason for, and the content of, a feminist politics. Her solution is to resurrect the autonomous Subject from the postmodern grave in which it has been exhumed by Foucault and pro-Foucauldian feminists (e.g. Hekman, 1999).

Briefly summarising the debate between feminist who were against and those that supported Foucault (Hekman, 1996; Knights, 2000; Knights and Kerfoot, 2004), the former were critical of his anti-humanist denial of a normative and/or agential base from which feminists are able to struggle for women's emancipation (Benhabib, 1992; Hartsock, 1990; 1996). Others focused their critique on Foucault's refusal to give attention to gender as well as sexuality resulting in his insensitivity to masculine domination and feminist struggles against it (Moi, 1985; Bartky,

1988; Braidotti, 1991). In a more nuanced critique, Fraser (1996) argues that some resort to humanism is necessary if we are to resist the discipline targeted upon our bodies and souls (Foucault, 1977). Foucault's treatment of the body as passive and docile has also been criticised by Bartky (1988) who sees this as gendered in so far as it reflects the masculine exploitation of women as mere accessories for men and McNay (1992) argues that this neglect of gender differentiation silences women, thus leaving feminist resistance with little agency. Nonetheless, neither are unsympathetic to his relevance for feminism since McNay recognises how the operation of power relations through the body can be drawn upon to show how gender inequality is constructed out of 'anatomical difference' (1992: 46). Bartky also sees the later Foucault as overcoming the limits of passivity when he argues that we have to refuse the subjectivity that we have become through the 'kind of political "double bind", which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures' (Foucault, 1982:216 quoted in Knights, 2002: 175).

Supporters of Foucault argue that in retrieving an autonomous subject and subscribing a politics of emancipation, critics simply reproduce the gender binary that is fundamental to the development of dominant heterosexual masculinities – the master narrative and principal target of feminist critique. They simply sustain the Cartesian dualism between mind and body that perpetuates the privileging of cognition, 'blind[ing] us to the power of normalisation' to prevent women engaging in 'self-transformative practices' (McWhorter, 1999: 210). It is precisely this self-transformation that is important for the feminist project and is facilitated by Foucault's validation of subjugated knowledge as a means of disrupting prevailing power relations (Hekman, 1999). In addition, Foucault's analysis disrupts taken for granted understandings of sexuality in ways that are entirely consistent with the feminist project (Sawacki, 1991). There is also good reason why Foucault neglects gender because his analysis is implicitly gendered in so far as sexuality is seen as predominantly a male attribute (De Lauretis, 1987) and the discourse is dominantly heterosexual and thus constructed through, and in ways that reproduce, the gender binary (McCallum, 1996). Moreover, as binary oppositions are inescapably hierarchical - elevating, for example, men over women, masculinity over femininity, as well as heterosexual over homosexual, mind over body, and rationality over emotion (Irigaray, 1980), disrupting them has to be a necessary part of any feminist political struggle. Since gender analysis has sometimes been a condition and consequence of a dominant heterosexuality and homosociality, it is something that you would not expect a homosexual such as Foucault to support. But, to some extent, this is making excuses for him as part of the reason for his neglect

of gender could well be an opposition to phenomenology such that he did not interrogate identity to realise that our attachment to order and stability might be an obstacle for us in refusing what we have become (Foucault, 1982: 216; Knights, 1990: 329).

Whether or not we take sides in this debate or simply seek to learn from thinking differently, we can agree with Foucault 'that discourses of heterosexuality keep in place the binary differences[viii] that help to sustain the dominance of masculinity', yet we do need to interrogate masculine identities if we are to disrupt them (Knights and Kerfoot, 2004: 443). But this interrogation need not necessarily reflect and reinforce dominant heterosexualities or gender binaries (Knights, 2015). In response to the kind of masculine domination that 'others' the feminine, feminists (e.g. de Beauvoir, 1972) have suggested two strategies – the first simply seeks to eradicate the differences between men and women, and the second to do the opposite by emphasising the differences and displacing men by women in the hierarchy[ix]. While de Beauvoir favoured the first strategy, Hekman (1999: 92) challenges both on the basis that they remain locked into an Enlightenment epistemology that sustains a belief that there is one single standard of truth from which deviations are inferior. The first sees women becoming an equal member whereas the second seeks a rebellion in which women displace men as the guardians of the truth. Both, however, leave unchallenged the unitary standard of truth that sustain rational instrumental, disembodied and identity-seeking masculine identities. This posthuman challenge to unitary standards of truth is just as important as the rejection of notions of the autonomous subject since both reflect and reproduce masculine identities that thrive on ambition, greed, prejudice, discrimination, political manipulation, social inequality, animal cruelty and environmental destruction.

It is worth noting here, however, that posthumanists are not anti-humanist in the sense of rejecting the treatment of one another humanely (Braidotti, 2013) or of denying the importance of an appeal to human rights in resisting domination (Foucault, 2004). Emphasising this ambivalence, Foucault argued that we must free ourselves from the intellectual blackmail of "*being for or against the Enlightenment*", although equally we should avoid confusing or conflating 'the theme of humanism with the Enlightenment' (1997: 314, orig. emphasis). However, posthumanists are opposed to essentialist reasoning or Enlightenment conceptions of the autonomous subject and therefore agree with Foucault when he argues that, 'the individual is one of power's first effects' even though power is then relayed within society through precisely the subjectivity 'it has constituted' (2004: 30)[x]. In this sense, for Foucault,

'subjects and power relations are imbricated and co-constitutive' (Golder, 2015: 8) and therefore are historically forever in transition, and not a reflection of some essential human nature or obdurate social structure.

Conclusion

In contemporary social, economic and political life, masculine discourses and practices, and even their openly macho celebration, have come to dominate organizations and institutions and despite, or maybe because of, the impact of the feminist movement, a reactionary backlash has now seemingly surfaced. In the US, this was vividly reflected in the 2016 US Presidential election where 53% of white women voted for Trump[xi]. While class, race and education were perhaps more instrumental than gender in accounting for this voting behaviour, it does also suggest that feminists cannot presume homogeneity among women in support of their cause. But perhaps it also demonstrates that masculine culture has not been disrupted much by feminist progress and that it has been given a new lease of life by the global shift in the political spectrum toward the extreme right. One way to disrupt masculine discourses and practices is to see them as a condition and consequence of a preoccupation with securing the self and identity through perpetrating attempts to control that which is 'other'. Consequently, an interrogation of identity is a necessary complement to investigations of power relations and for any critical analysis that claims to contribute to the transformation of social relations as a means of undermining not only gender, but all other, social inequalities. This is not then about rejecting identity, since this is almost as significant for humans as the air we breathe, but it may mean challenging its power to possess us in ways that have potentially atrocious consequences – from mental illness and suicide to hate crimes against those who are stereotyped as different from oneself and one's in-group.

The question that always needs to be asked is why are we so attached to our identities? Now, apart from what has already been argued regarding the belief that identity is the passport to order, security and stability, there is also the humanistic mantra that drives individuals to strive to fulfil their (our) potential, as part of what it is to be a self-respecting human in contemporary society. Consequently, it is a concern for order, security and stability combined with the force of normative demands to realise some essentialist potential that leads us to be attached to a present and/or future identity. While such pursuits are unrealizable and thereby self-defeating, they reflect taken for granted assumptions about identity within intensified demands to perform that are difficult to detect let alone resist. However, an aspect of posthumanist feminism calls

for a rejection of identity politics through a celebration of difference and embodied, ethical engagement with the other (Pullen and Rhodes, 2010; 2014). Such a refusal to be preoccupied with identity so as to render the self 'open', both in mind and body to alterity, is wholly in the spirit of intellectual and scholarly endeavour where alternative ideas and ways of being in the world should be more important than seeking fame and fortune in celebrity. Since masculine regimes either intentionally or unintentionally promote the latter, we need to find new ways of resisting them whilst preserving the values of community as an embodied, communal and ethical way of life. If this limited resistance can be mobilised in the direction of building embodied, ethically engaged communities as articulated by posthumanist feminists, future generations might see current masculine preoccupations as merely an historical blip on the landscape.

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Notes

i Writing about nostalgia (Gabriel, 1993) claims that, although initially it meant an intense homesickness, it currently is primarily a feeling of love for a past to which one cannot return. I am not really using the term in these senses but rather just to record how the journal evolved.

ii In constructing this brief review and in some of my other analyses, I draw extensively on Edwards (2006) extremely erudite review of the masculinity literature.

iii Despite this they often did remain supreme in exercising household power.

iv Performativity, of course, operates across and within the genders to establish one or other identity preference. See https://my.vanderbilt.edu/criticaltheoryfall13/2013/11/judith-butler-on-gender-as-performed-or-performative/ consulted 29.9.18

v https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-25943326

vi I readily switch from the impersonal to the personal pronoun throughout this article since, as academics we ourselves are as much the subject matter as are the participants in our empirical research.

vii This section draws on but seeks to develop Knights (2000).

viii Or should we say 'differance' (Derrida) in the sense that the difference between the genders is also one in which there is both deference of women to men and a continuous deferral of confronting the relationship for fear of undermining the power on which it rests.

ix Interestingly, in empirical research among academics and veterinary surgeons, we have found resignation to be the most dominant strategy although emulating men or dismantling gender difference did occur (Clarke and Knights, 2018b; Knights and Clarke, 2018).

x For a detailed analysis of Foucault's ambivalence towards human rights in the sense of both critiquing its humanist promotion of the autonomous subject while subversively making them serve the interests of critique see Golder (2015).

xi https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/10/white-women-donald-trump-victory consulted 17.11.18