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**A poststructuralist-informed inclusive masculinity theory (PS-IMT): Developing IMT to account for complexities in masculinities, using learning to dance Latin and ballroom as an example.**

Inclusive Masculinity Theory (IMT) offers an important framework for conceptualising masculinities within cultures characterised by declining homophobia. But the framework faces several challenges when it theorises masculinities as relatively stable sets of attitudes and behaviours in the context of complex and dynamic contemporary gender practices and identifications. Offering a solution through a poststructuralist-informed IMT (PS-IMT), we reconceptualise orthodox and inclusive masculinities as discourses that produce subject positions, which may require individuals to work on themselves (‘technologies of self’) to inhabit. Applying PS-IMT to data from a four-year ethnography with young men in a Latin and ballroom UK university dance society, an analysis of the problematic of ‘stiff hips’ is playfully presented as a set of dance steps. Step one shows stiff-hip movements embodying orthodox masculinity; step two, an entanglement of orthodox and inclusive masculinities as participants work to loosen their hip movement, enabling immersion in inclusive masculinity in step three; while step four evidenced a reframing of fluid hip movements into a new form of orthodox masculinity. Through these steps we chart complex, dynamic shifts across the fault lines of orthodox and inclusive masculinities, illustrating how PS-IMT offers important directions for masculinities research.

**Keywords**

Inclusive masculinity theory Poststructuralism Qualitative Ethnography

Foucauldian discourse analysis Latin and ballroom dance

**Introduction**

Inclusive masculinity theory (IMT) offers an important framework for conceptualising masculinity in post-industrial consumer cultures. The main tenant of IMT is that there are new forms of masculinity – inclusive masculinities – that, contextualised within consumer culture and a cultural acceptance of egalitarian values, are not shored up by homophobia and associated fear of femininity (Anderson, 2009). IMT is highly generative for masculinity scholars, particularly in the USA and UK, with claims that it is now the “most prolific paradigm of theorizing the increasingly liberal nature of contemporary masculinities” (Magrath & Scoats, 2019, p.53).

But the framework is fundamentally challenged by theorising masculinities as relatively stable sets of attitudes and behaviours in the context of complex and dynamic contemporary gender practices and identifications. To address this important issue, we bring together insights from IMT with poststructuralist concepts of subjectivity. Below, we outline IMT and its supporting evidence and critiques, before describing the poststructuralist-informed concepts from which we propose a new poststructuralist-informed IMT (PS-IMT) that recognises the value of the concepts of orthodox and inclusive masculinities, but reconceptualises them as complex and dynamic. We then present data from an in-depth ethnographic study with students in a dance club at a British university, examining how well IMT and PS-IMT can account for the patterns identified.

***Inclusive Masculinity Theory***

Inclusive Masculinity Theory (IMT) emerged from ethnographic work identifying new patterns of behaviour in the social lives of young, heterosexual men at US and UK universities (Anderson, 2009). These behaviours, Anderson argued, represented new forms of ‘inclusive masculinities’, where heterosexual men and boys socially included gay peers and engaged in homosocial emotional intimacy, physical tactility and historically feminised practices. Situated within a consumerist, egalitarian culture characterised by decreased homophobia, the need for many men to distance themselves from homosexuality seemed absent. This led Anderson (2009) to theorise that ‘orthodox’ forms of masculinity (based on homophobia, compulsory heterosexuality and anti-femininity) had lost their hegemony, and rather than one form of masculinity sitting-a-top a masculine hierarchy as originally theorised in Connell’s (1995) hegemonic masculinity theory (HMT), a spectrum of orthodox and inclusive archetypes of masculinity now co-existed.

Although HMT was subsequently updated to account for social change (e.g. Atkinson, 2011, Coles, 2009, Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), IMT received significant support from a range of scholars identifying inclusive masculinities across various sites, and beyond those of the young, white, middle-class, university educated, sports team players of Anderson’s original studies (Magrath & Scoats, 2019; McCormack & Anderson, 2010a; Murray & White, 2017; Ripley, 2018; Roberts, 2018; Rumens, 2018). Such studies also developed IMT by exploring how new practices were emerging that involved homosexually-themed language with no intent to subordinate or marginalise other men (McCormack, 2011a; McCormack & Anderson, 2010b).

However, these developments did not address a set of emerging criticisms of IMT, including, that it paid little attention to men’s relationships with women[[1]](#endnote-1) or femininity (other than associating femininity with male homosexuality) (O’Neill, 2015); and that IMT ignored contemporary reformulations of HMT (De Boise, 2014). Others highlighted a lack of attention to the emergence of more subtle and ambiguous anti-homosexual sentiments (Einarsdottir, Hoel & Lewis, 2015); how the decline of one form of oppression (e.g. homophobia) can sit alongside the maintenance or active production of another (e.g. sexism, racism, effeminaphobia) (O’Neill, 2015; Richardson, 2018); and how research on postfeminism suggested significant complexity in contemporary gender practices and identities (Evans & Riley, 2015, 2018; O’Neill, 2015). We suggest that a poststructuralist reframing of IMT would address many of these concerns by accounting for more complexity in men’s engagement with masculinities.

***A Poststructuralist informed IMT***

Anderson (2009) used the term ‘archetype’ to conceptualise inclusive and orthodox masculinities as distinct types of masculinities produced from relatively stable, internal psychological processes (such as ‘attitudes’ or a ‘true self’) that, in turn, drive identifiable patterns of behaviour. Subsequent work supporting IMT reproduced this idea, identifying individuals or social groups as consistently exemplifying *either* orthodox *or* inclusive masculinity and describing participants as having ‘genuine’ beliefs, ‘true’ attitudes, ‘authentic’ selves and ‘honest’ feelings (e.g. Blanchard et al., 2017; Murray & White, 2017; Ripley, 2018). Similarly, the reliability of research documenting inclusive masculinities was verified through arguments that patterns found were stable and consistent, “not superficial or fleeting” or affected by the presence of researchers (Anderson & McCormack, 2018, p.550; McCormack & Anderson, 2010a; McCormack, 2011b).

In recent developments of IMT this issue of a stable ‘archetype’ was not addressed [[2]](#endnote-2), despite criticisms that it “diminishes the fluidity and diversity of gender as both social and individual practice” (De Boise, 2014, p.326) and that some IMT studies report men and boys partially engaging with, or shifting between manifestations of orthodox *and* inclusive masculinities. For example, Adams, Anderson, and McCormack’s (2010) male semi-professional British footballers enacted orthodox masculinity on the pitch and in front of their coaches, but inclusive masculinities outside this football context. Such findings suggest more complex and shifting engagements with orthodox and inclusive masculinities than theorised by IMT.

Addressing this problem, we propose a poststructuralist-informed IMT (PS-IMT) drawing on Foucauldian concepts of discourse, subject positions, and technologies of the self. In so doing, we innovatively bring together developments from masculinity studies scholars fruitfully employing Foucauldian informed concepts (e.g. Crocket, 2012; Markula & Pringle, 2006; Owen & De Martini Ugolotti, 2019) with work on postfeminist subjectivities emerging from the same consumerist, egalitarian context as IMT (e.g. Evans & Riley, 2015). To date, these insights have not been applied to IMT.

For Foucault (1972, p.49), discourses are “practices which form the objects of which they speak”, they are relatively coherent forms of sense-making that produce particular understandings of, for example, ‘masculinity’. In any given society, multiple discourses circulate, constructing that object differently; these discourses vary in their levels of cultural acceptance and may run alongside or directly contest each other (Riley et al., 2018). People are constituted through discourses, that is, they cannot understand themselves or others without drawing on discourse. Discourses therefore structure how people think and feel (subjectivity) and what they can do (practice). People therefore learn to understand themselves through a discourse, but since there are multiple and contradictory discourses to which people are exposed, they may shift dynamically between different discourses to make sense of themselves or others.

From this perspective, we can theorise inclusive and orthodox masculinities as discourses that construct masculinity in different ways, with different consequences for subjectivity and practice. Understanding oneself through the inclusive masculinity discourse, for example, could allow a man to engage in practices once considered problematically effeminate without concern for his sense of masculinity. But, this man might be aware of the orthodox masculinity discourse, and if the context changed – say a friend ridiculed him - he might shift to viewing himself through an orthodox masculinity discourse, and find himself suddenly embarrassed.

As discourses, inclusive and orthodox masculinities would also produce ‘subject positions’, a term used to describe the types of persons, roles or locations individuals can inhabit or connect with that are enabled by a discourse (Davies & Harré, 1990). Subject positions legitimise or constrain certain actions, feelings, responsibilities and forms of talk. People may be located in multiple subject positions, for long periods of time or fleetingly, as people shift between occupying different positions related to different parts of their lives and the discourses to which they are exposed (Davies & Harré, 1990). Dropping one’s child off at nursery, then going to work, might for example, offer subject positions of ‘engaged father’ and ‘industry leader’.

For a variety of reasons, individuals may be interpellated by a discourse, finding its associated subject positions attractive in ways that make them want to work on themselves in order to be able to understand themselves, or be understood by others, as legitimately located in a subject position. Foucault (1988) called such work ‘technologies of the self’, these:

“permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (p.18).

Technologies of self involve agency, but this agency is always constrained, since:

“practices of the self …are nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself [sic]. They are patterns that he finds in this culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group” (Foucault, 1987, p.122).

Foucauldian scholars have interpreted and developed technologies of the self in diverse ways (Crocket, 2017). Here we build on the work of feminist scholars using technologies of self to consider how discourses create contexts within which people engage in creative, purposeful or self-reflexive work on themselves to be located in culturally valued subject positions (Evans & Riley, 2015; Gill & Orgad, 2015).

Through these concepts of discourse, subject positions, and technologies of the self, our proposed PS-IMT conceptualises inclusive and orthodox masculinities as contrasting but entangled discourses of masculinity. Discourses that offer a range of subject positions which men and boys - in complex and dynamic ways - may negotiate across time and context. For example, a man may undertake a fitness regime as a technology of self to inhabit the subject position of ‘a guy who takes care of himself’, a subject position representing a complex entanglement of orthodox masculinity that celebrates a muscular masculinity contrasted against femininity, and inclusive masculinity that does not problematise appearance concerns as feminine. Below, we argue that such complex and dynamic engagement with inclusive and orthodox masculinities is evident in our empirical analysis of young British men learning Latin dance.

***Latin and ballroom dance classes.***

In the UK, dancing in general - and Latin and ballroom dancing in particular - was a feminised activity (Burt, 1995; Richardson, 2018). This association occurred throughout the 20th Century even though dancing was a normal social activity for young people of both sexes and television shows of dancing were popular (Abra, 2017). The cultural link between femininity and homosexuality meant that presumptions about the effeminacy of professional male dancers were widespread and few men chose to participate in dance classes in this homophobic context (Adams, 2005; Burt, 1995). But in the early 21st Century, Latin and ballroom dancing became a major feature in UK mainstream media, spear-headed by the prime-time BBC television program *Strictly Come Danci*ng which now, in its seventeenth season, continues with high viewing figures (Richardson, 2018).

On *Strictly Come Dancing* a range of masculinities are presented. Traditional gender roles, gender delineated styles of dress, and the choreographing of heterosexual courtship rituals are evident. These occur alongside male dancers’ metrosexual practices of attending to their appearance and appraising gazes of female show hosts and openly gay judges. A range of different styles of masculinity are also performed, from constrained upper-class English masculinities to hyper-machismo posturing and camp flamboyancy (McMains, 2006; Richardson, 2018). In this wider mediated context, young men participating in contemporary Latin and ballroom dance classes may draw from a range of possible masculinities. How they do this therefore offers a valuable site for analysis of contemporary masculinities, producing our research question, ‘how do young male British dancers articulate and perform masculinities when learning to dance?’

**Method**

An in-depth, four year ethnography charted the processes of learning to dance in Latin and ballroom dance[[3]](#endnote-3) classes. A measure of rigour in ethnography is time spent embedding into the culture under study, and four years represents a particularly long ethnography. This allowed both for an in-depth investigation of the subject but also for a longitudinal analysis of how orthodox and inclusive masculinities were negotiated over time.

The research site was a Latin and ballroom club at a university in England. The dance classes were held in large halls on campus, with two male and two female teachers. The lessons were split into ability streams based on university DanceSport competitions, where couples from university dance clubs competed against one another. At the start of each academic year there was an intake of approximately 100 beginners, with 30-45 dancers typically moving to the novice class the following year, and 20-30 dancers moving to the intermediate and/or advanced classes the year after. The majority of the dancers were 18-25 years old. The ethnic make-up of the classes was 60-70% white British and 30-40% a range of other nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. The ratio of male to females was 35:65. While socioeconomic status was not measured, the university was high in the league tables, in a wealthy area, and middle class norms tended to prevail. The sexuality of dancers was not actively identified, but when the topic came up in conversation or was made obvious through participants’ actions in class (e.g. identifying their sexuality or bringing their partner to class) the research (and first author) of this paper (Craig) made a mental note of this. Approximately 5% of male dancers were identified as gay, 35% as heterosexual, and the remaining 60% unknown.

Craig (a white British, heterosexual, male in his early thirties) joined the club as a beginner, thus the ethnography functioned as a socio-cultural apprenticeship. Over the course of the fieldwork, he attended as a student in weekly dance classes; participated in and observed a number of DanceSport competitions, local dance festivals, tea dances and annual balls; and interacted with dancers on the club’s Facebook group. In total, the fieldwork amounted to approximately 425 hours.

Throughout the four years, Craig participated in class events in order to develop discursive and embodied knowledge of the activities the dancers engaged in and how they made sense of them, reflecting on these activities by writing up field notes. In the first year of fieldwork, the emphasis was also on building rapport and collaborative relationships with other dancers. Once immersed in the field, Craig employed purposeful sampling to select 15 dancers (11 male and 4 female with varying levels of experience) for a formal interview, these lasted between 40-70 minutes. In transcription, normal punctuation was used with the addition of capitals to indicate loud speech, colons to indicate elongated speech and (brackets) to indicate actions. Recognising the crucial role the visual played in the dance practices, digital photography was also employed as a research method.

Ethical issues included gaining written consent from the dance club committee (annually) and interviewees. Verbal informed consent from individual members of the club was through informal conversations, ongoing throughout the entire course of the fieldwork. Participants were invited to choose a pseudonym. Consent for photography in class was gained from the club committee and teachers; gaining consent for photography at public dance events was not required since dancers expected to be photographed there. However, at these events, Craig made every effort to explain his role as a researcher. Written consent was gained from dancers for any images used in publication.

Throughout the fieldwork, two experienced academics took the role of ‘critical friends’, providing a “theoretical sound board to encourage reflection on, and exploration of, alternative explanations and interpretations” (Sparkes, Brown, & Partington, 2010, p.336). In addition to peer review and reflexivity, other conventional qualitative quality criteria were upheld, including iterative cycles of separate and collective data analysis by the authors, which enabled further analytical development.

The first stage of analysis drew on Foucault’s (1984) notion of ‘problematization’ which requires researchers to focus on analysing problematic practices or actively making taken-for-granted practices problematic. Here, we took the former approach, focusing on what male dancers regularly identified as the most problematic activity they experienced when learning to dance, which was their ‘stiff hips’ - an inability to move their hips in the controlled, sensual and flexible ways required for Latin dances.

To analyse male dancers’ ‘stiff hips’, we employed a Foucauldian informed poststructuralist approach (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008; Riley & Wiggins, 2019; Willig, 2013), first, identifying the various discourses constructing the movement of men’s hips; second, the subject positions made available by these discourses; and third, the implications for subjectivity and practice, including technologies of the self. By including experiential practice written into field-notes and photographs, the analysis sought to incorporate embodied practices such as movement and clothing alongside meaning-making produced in talk during the dance events and interviews. With attention paid to embodied practice as well as talk, this method significantly extends Foucauldian discourse analysis that focuses almost exclusively on the analysis of language (e.g. Willig, 2013). The study thus represents a rigorous, in-depth analysis using an innovative combination of poststructuralist informed concepts performed on a complex data set, collected over a significant period of emersion.

**Analysis**

The following analysis is playfully presented as four dance-steps. Each step represents an exemplifying moment in the journey of becoming an amateur competitive Latin and ballroom dancer. Step one describes how the stiff-hipped dancing of the young white British male dance-club beginners represented an embodied orthodox masculinity. Step two happens when participants articulate an entanglement of orthodox and inclusive masculinities as they work to loosen their hip movement in a dance class. Step three represents immersion in inclusive masculinity, seen in the example of practice with a mirror to develop flowing hip movements; while step four highlights a reframing of these fluid hip movements as a new form of orthodox masculinity. Through these steps, we chart a set of complex, dynamic shifts across the fault lines of orthodox and inclusive masculinities.

***Problematizing ‘Stiff Hips’***

Step one: Skilled hip movements are central to Latin dances and the participant observations showed male beginner dancers consistently struggling to execute these compared to their female counterparts. When asked, participants associated these differences with profoundly gendered past experiences. Female beginners described learning other forms of dance, while male beginners usually had experience only in traditionally masculine sports or martial arts. From these gender delineated starting points, the majority of British male beginners came to class with little or no previous experience of purposefully or creatively moving their hips in dance. Consequently, when they first tried the steps they had inflexible ‘stiff hips’.

When asked to reflect on problematic aspects of Latin and ballroom dancing, nearly all interviewees commented on men’s problems with moving their hips, see Flash’s extract below as an example:

*Flash - a white British intermediate male Latin and ballroom dancer*

‘Traditionally guys don’t dance with their hips. They do all this kind of stuff (Flash waves his arms repetitively). And girls do dance with their hips. If you go to nightclubs and stuff, you see it all the time. And when you ask guys to dance with their hips for the first time in Latin they can’t do it because they can’t coordinate their muscles properly because they’ve hardly ever used them before.’

In Flash’s nightclub example we see evidence of orthodox masculinity, men do not dance the way women do. And, in so (not) doing, men differentiate and distance themselves from femininity - and its associations with homosexuality - which while not made explicit in the above extract were evident elsewhere (see the extract below as an example). Dancing without moving ones hips can thus be theorised as a technology of the self, in this case a kind of active not working on the self, that allows men to inhabit subject positions associated with orthodox masculinity.

Step two: In class, the men were invited to work on their hip movements. The extract below is taken from a conversation between white British male beginner and novice dancers as they moved up and down the hall attempting to copy a male teacher performing the Cuban Cross step which twisted the hips.

Bryan: ‘I feel like a right mincer doing this (laughter)

Andy: We look so: gay (laughter)

Teacher: You need to practice this walking down the street (laughter)

John: What! Like here come the fashion police (laughter)

Ted: I’m never gonna walk down the street like this (laughter)

Craig: I always walk down the street like this’ (laughter)

A ‘mincer’ is a colloquial term for a man who walks with effeminate, exaggerated hip movements. The term is appropriated from queer culture and, within an orthodox masculinity discourse, would be deployed in a derogatory manner since it problematizes a man who appears feminine/gay. Copying the teacher’s hip movement, Bryan proclaims he feels ‘like a right mincer’, its homosexual connotations made further explicit by Andy’s response ‘we look so: gay’. This talk articulates orthodox masculinity, problematizing the dance steps through their association with homosexuality (a ‘right mincer’ ‘so: gay’).

Research has documented how boys and men use humour, especially ‘banter’, to regulate acceptable forms of heterosexual masculinity, reproduce traditional gender-sexual hierarchies, and (re)position themselves within orthodox masculinity (McCormack & Anderson, 2010a, 2010b). The above extract could be such an example. The young men appear to articulate orthodox masculinity, distancing themselves from the effeminate subject position of ‘mincer’ and in their rejection of the teacher’s normalising of the movement ‘practice this walking down the street’ (see John’s ‘What!’ and Ted’s ‘I’m never gonna walk down the street like this’). These statements, and the laughter throughout, evidence orthodox masculinity, showing how problematic the effeminate hip-moving walk was, and how ludicrous it was for these young men to imagine walking like that in public.

But this talk and laughter may be analysed as more complex than simply articulating orthodox masculinities. The young men continued to do the movements, so in this instance the laughter and banter did not prohibit participation. Thus, the talk might be orthodox but the practice represents a move into inclusive masculinities, evidenced in the participation in effeminate activities that are taboo within orthodox discourses.

Their talk can also be read as more complex. Bryan was a popular member of the class with ambiguous sexuality, making it unlikely that the group would interpret his ‘mincer’ statement as purely homophobic. Within this university middle-class norms prevailed, so explicit homophobic comments without troubling or irony would normally be considered problematically discriminatory and unlikely to elicit so much laughter (McCormack & Anderson, 2010b). And Craig’s participation (‘I always walk down the street like this’), that both joins in with the rejection while opening up the possibility for acceptance, elicits the same laughter as the talk that went before. We therefore read the participants in this extract as articulating both a shared homophobic (orthodox) discourse *and* publicly problematizing this orthodox discourse through humour, because the humour works to trouble both the hip-movement (orthodox masculinity) and trouble their potentially homophobic troubling of the hip-movement (inclusive masculinity). There were many times where laughter apparently signalled complex tensions between orthodox and inclusive masculinities[[4]](#endnote-4), in line with McCormack and Anderson’s (2010a) notion of recuperation, where heterosexual young men engage in inclusive masculinity activities (e.g. hugging another man), but then recuperate orthodox masculinity to demonstrate their heterosexuality (e.g. making an ironic joke about being gay). IMT as underpinned by a stable, archetype framework however, cannot really account for this ‘doubled entanglement’ with orthodox and inclusive masculinities, which we argue, suggests a complexity more aligned with a PS-IMT that conceptualises subjectivity and practices as dynamically located in contrasting discourses of orthodox and inclusive masculinities.

The extract above shows how banter allowed the male dancers to articulate orthodox masculinity, whilst moving their bodies in ways that went beyond the confines of practices associated with orthodox masculinity. Participating in dance class exercises thus acted as technologies of the self, allowing participants to develop new ways of moving, which, as we show below, then opened up possibilities for drawing on different discourses to understand themselves.

***Mastering the Hips***

Step three: If dancers wanted to compete at DanceSport competitions and take up the subject position of ‘competition level dancer’, they needed to create sinuous and flowing waves of motion through the body. A precondition for performing such movement was for male dancers to have gained greater control of their hips. This was only achieved through hours of practice, often in front of a mirror. Each year five to six more advanced dancers would stay after class to practice their Latin body movement in front of the hall window, which at night acted as a mirror.

These mirror-work exercises worked as technologies of the self, since the dancers purposefully and creatively used them to transform themselves and become better Latin dancers.Dancing alone, and watching themselves in the mirror, these male dancers repeatedly practiced moving their hips to create a sinewy effect while on-looking experienced male and female dancers gave advice about the appearance and technical execution of their movements. Unlike in beginners’ practice, humour was not part of this mirror-work, despite it involving several practices typically located beyond the confines of orthodox masculinity, including dancing with one’s hips, taking oneself seriously and having appearance concerns (Gill, Henwood, & McLean, 2005).

*Field notes - Sunday night free practice*

‘For about 20 minutes Bryan and Nick practiced their Rumba movement, dancing side by side, looking at themselves in the window reflection. Very slowly performing the basic side step in the opening out in Rumba, they focused on connecting the accentuation of their hip movement to the movement and rotation of their shoulder in order to create smooth motion up the side of their body. Every few minutes one stopped to take a break and give verbal feedback, visual illustrations and physical tweaks to the other, such as “sit on your hip more”, “are you pushing through the ball of your foot?” and “that looks better”’.

In the above extract, there is no troubling of men focusing on self and appearance, performing mirror work in public, being the object of an appraising gaze, and using hips to create sinuous movement. An ability to do a range of practices without expressing concern when once they might have triggered homophobic banter therefore suggests a full immersion, not just in the movement, but in inclusive masculinities since behaviours once troubled as feminine/gay are engaged in without being problematised. IMT might account for this shift as a move from one relatively fixed archetype to another, produced by participating in a new cultural practice. But such an interpretation is undermined by the complexity of participants’ sense making around hip movements. For example, a fourth step existed in which dancers at all stages from beginners to advanced offered interpretations of fluid hip movements using both orthodox and inclusive masculinity discourses. Below is an example from a male beginner who describes Latin hip movements as both problematically feminine *and* admirably masculine.

*Barry - a white British beginner male Latin and ballroom dancer*

‘I’d say the hip movements are quite feminine, even when the guys are doing them. I’d say they are they’re quite feminine movement but then once you get really good you do see like, I suppose almost the masculinity behind it because they kinda make it, make it their own. Sounds a bit weird’.

Barry reiterates the view that hip movements are feminine, as seen in Flash’s earlier extract. Here sex and gender are distinct, so that despite it being men moving their hips, the movement looks feminine. But, Barry also notes that once the dance move is mastered (one assumes through the kinds of technologies of the self described above) there is ‘masculinity behind it’. This talk points to dancers’ skill level being crucial for altering the gendered and sexualised meanings associated with the movement of their hips. Here, we suggest that Barry draws upon a common discourse that legitimates male participation in dance through the demonstration of masterful and virtuous performance (Gard, 2001). Mastery as masculine fits within an orthodox masculinity discourse, but Barry is talking about hip movements that are feminine. This complex, and relatively contradictory bringing together of orthodox and inclusive masculinities appears to be partially unaccountable, evidenced in Barry’s summing up as ‘sounds a bit weird’, an unintelligibility we explore further below.

Other male dancers also drew on the value of masterful and virtuous performance to negotiate and deflect associations between femininity and hip movement. Sometimes this masterful discourse was used alone. Sometimes it was linked to other characteristics associated with orthodox masculinity such as the ability to fight. In the extract below, for example, Grant responds to a question Craig posed to actively probe the problematic association between femininity and the Latin dances that had been highlighted in previous interviews, asking, ‘do you ever feel feminine when you’re dancing Latin?’.

*Grant - a white/mixed race male advanced Latin and ballroom dancer*

Grant: ‘When I started dancing, I never felt feminine but when I would watch a video of myself I’d think OH GOD that looks feminine. And then I’d strive to correct that and, dance like a man, as I pictured he should be. Yeah. I never FELT feminine. No. No I don’t know.

Craig: Like where did you get your, you said you wanted to correct it. To what standard? Where did you get your view of what the way a man should dance?

Grant: Ah watching videos that I’d downloaded or YouTube that kind of thing. You know the really good amateurs and pros doing it, yeah.

Craig: So you were like ‘I wanna dance like that’

Grant: Yeah EXACTLY. That guy doesn’t look feminine (smirks). That guy could kick my ass (both chuckle) and then do two spins (both chuckle)’.

Above, Grant orients to the question about feeling feminine when dancing, which he rejects, distinguishing between feeling and looking feminine. But he constructs the familiar association between dancing Latin and femininity, a problem he would ‘strive to correct’. This talk suggests a need to employ technologies of the self in the form of purposeful and reflexive work on the body, to make his embodied practice appropriately gendered and ‘dance like a man’. At this point in the discussion there is no joking. Instead he articulates a horror of seeing himself look feminine (‘I’d think OH GOD’), a distancing from femininity that points to orthodox masculinity. This distinction between men and femininity is maintained when Grant describes how the dancers he admires dance without looking feminine. But unlike earlier in the extract, when he described femininity in purely problematic terms, here humour sneaks in. Grant smirks, an ironic kind of smile that visually troubles what he says (‘that guy doesn’t look feminine’). This is followed by an account that draws on both orthodox and inclusive masculinities, since the man he admires is imagined fighting well (‘that guy could kick my ass’) and finishing the fight with an incongruous but technically skilled dance move (‘and then do two spins’); an outcome that both men find amusing.

Humour can be used to regulate masculinity, but it also allows people to say the unsayable or what is difficult to say (McCormack & Anderson, 2010a, 2010b). The smirking and chuckling, themselves ‘masked’ forms of laughter, suggests that wanting to look like a man who ‘kicks ass’ is problematic, as is being one who ‘looks feminine’. The management of these two incompatible subject positions – ‘macho man’ (orthodox) or ‘effeminate man’ (inclusive) – is negotiated by Grant with some kind of merger – a man who kicks ass and dances. But again, the shared chuckle suggests that this is not an untroubled subject position. We suggest this represents a new form of masculinity to the participants that is not fully intelligible within the Anglo-American discourses of orthodox and inclusive masculinities with which they are more familiar (also see Barry’s ‘weird’) - an Anglicised appropriation of an expressive form of heterosexual ‘Latin’ masculinity that constructs embodied artistic expression and movement as manly (McMains, 2006).



Figure 1: A male Latin dancer performing sinuous hips movements

The ultimate stage for the performances of this ‘Latin’ masculinity were DanceSport competitions at intermediate and advanced levels. Figure 1 provides a visual insight into the embodied practices performed there. The distinct curve down the side of the male dancer’s body demonstrates work done to loosen, strengthen and control his hips, allowing him to perform sinuous movements with his body. This curve is visible because he is wearing clothing designed to show off his body shape. The materials of his trousers and top are tight but stretchy, fitting around his hips and buttocks and showing the shape of his upper body, while the two inch Cuban heels push his weight further forward enhancing his hip movements. Combined, the whole effect called attention to his sinuous hip movements. Yet these movements formed a series of heterosexual erotic, flirtatious, seductive, passionate and lustful co-performances with a female partner, who wore far less clothing, and who was led by him through a series of highly choreographed heterosexual positions and actions. These experienced male dancers thus performed a range of sensual, seductive and flowing body movements that – with their cultural associations of femininity and/or homosexuality – would imply immersion in inclusive masculinity discourses. Yet, these performances were framed by a fundamental principle of orthodox masculinity, that of the compulsory, institutionalised and choreographed enactment of heterosexuality and heterosexual prowess. Such complexity can be accounted for by PS-IMT but not IMT’s relatively fixed archetype framework.

**Conclusion**

The young British men in this study engaged with orthodox and inclusive masculinities in complex and dynamic ways, including drawing on appropriations of other cultural constructions of masculinities through exposure to these in their dance class. Through a longitudinal, multi-data-set ethnography, four possible ‘dance steps’ were identified: step one, an orthodox masculinity expressed through ‘stiff hip’ dancing; step two, a complex entanglement between orthodox and inclusive masculinities in which homophobic aspects of orthodox masculinities were simultaneously articulated and troubled in ways that enabled the participants to move through orthodox interpretations of fluid hip movements and; in step three, take up subject positions fully located within inclusive masculinity. Yet, this was not a clear linear shift from relatively fixed orthodox to inclusive positions, since step four was performed by both beginner, intermediate and advanced dancers as they either saw or participated in a new form of masculinity that, from an Anglo-American perspective, contradictorily employed movements which were both considered feminine *and* understood to be aligned with orthodox masculinities by association with skill, mastery, fighting and the heterosexual conquest of women.

That these shifts and entanglements were focused on the hips is central because hip movements symbolised femininity (and homosexuality within a wider discursive context of orthodox masculinities produced through homophobia). The findings thus offer support for IMT in terms of the usefulness of distinctions between masculinities that orient towards or away from homophobia. But, the complex and dynamic engagement with masculinities evidenced in our empirical work aligned with the theorising of the proposed PS-IMT, and sat at odds with understanding masculinities as relatively stable set of ‘attitudes’ or ‘true selves’ conceptualised in IMT.

This paper therefore seeks to open up a conversation with IMT work that moves away from the static theorising of orthodox and inclusive masculinities and demonstrates the value of harnessing poststructuralist concepts that have been used elsewhere to develop gender research, yet are widely neglected and/or actively resisted by IMT researchers (e.g. Anderson & McCormack, 2018).

As well as offering PS-IMT as a new theoretical development, this paper showcases developments in Foucauldian discourse analysis to include embodied practice as well as discourse. While the longitudinal approach facilitated the analysis of shifting practices of masculinities over time. This paper thus offers a novel and important methodological approach for future masculinities research that focuses on practices of discourse and embodiment over time.

The findings suggest that future research would benefit from similar attention to the ‘micro-analysis’ of complex in-situ shifts, entanglements and negotiations of orthodox and inclusive masculinities, as well as considering the conditions of possibility that allow these local activities to occur. For example, the consistent pattern of troubling orthodox masculinities even when drawing on them to make sense of oneself and others (seen in steps two and four) points to the complex ways that men may negotiate being constituted through contrasting discourses of masculinity, including both orthodox masculinity discourse and those that problematise orthodox masculinities as homophobic.

IMT has made a major contribution to masculinities scholarship, but has met with several important criticisms. Addressing some of these critiques, Anderson and McCormack (2018) refined IMT, acknowledging a number of its limitations and pointing to areas for future work and development. This did not include the issue of archetypes, and associated lack of complexity theorising. Addressing this important gap, our paper offers a significant new direction for masculinity research by theorising a poststructuralist informed inclusive masculinity theory (PS-IMT), supported by empirical analysis from a longitudinal study that evidences complex and dynamic engagement with inclusive and orthodox masculinities.

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1. See for example, McCormack and Anderson’s (2010a) focus on how men talked to other men about women. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. In Anderson and McCormack’s (2018) refinement of IMT, they critiqued the argument that IM merely represents ‘stylistic’ change in masculinities, they acknowledged the need to broaden the focus of IMT to address the continued problems of heteronormativity, how homophobia intersects with sexism, how heterosexual women’s lives are influenced by IM, and to test the utility of IMT in a wider range of cultures. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Within the UK, Latin and ballroom dancing typically consists of five Latin (short for Latin American) dances: the Jive, Cha cha cha, Rumba, Samba and Paso Doble; and five ballroom dances: the Waltz, Quickstep, Foxtrot, Ballroom Tango and Viennese Waltz. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Humour is a complex issue in masculinities research, shown to allow challenges to orthodox masculinity, as in the way Adams, Anderson & McCormack (2010) showed how football players laughed in their group at the coaches’ orthodox masculinity, but also that it can shore up orthodox masculinity, such as in McCormack & Anderson’s (2010b) identification of ‘ironic recuperation’, where school-aged young men use humour to trouble their inclusive masculinity practices by playing up the homosexual aspect (e.g. shouting ‘I’m turned on’ during a hug).

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