

**Invisible and Unexamined:
The State of Whiteness in Men's Studies Journals**

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Abstract

Existing research tells us that race is prominent in studies of men and masculinities but it doesn't help us to understand *how* race is discussed. We seek to begin a larger conversation on the state of race in studies of men and masculinities by examining how whiteness specifically emerges as a subject in three Men's Studies journals. Is race discussed in the respective research article at all? Is race used as an explanatory variable? And is whiteness

discussed in the writing? In addition to these basic quantitative findings, we also present qualitative interpretations of the overall trends we observed in order to illustrate the trajectory of the state of accounts of whiteness in the field of Men's Studies.

Keywords: masculinity, race, intersectionality, whiteness

1. Introduction

Since the 1980s research on men and masculinity has grappled with a pluralized notion of masculinities – a recognition that masculinity intersects with other axes of identity and power and shifts through time and space (Brod 1987b). Evidence that these intersections are taken seriously can be seen in the work presented at the annual meeting of the American Men's Studies Association. In 2012 the *Journal of Men's Studies* published an analysis of the presentations at the annual meetings of the American Men's Studies Association (AMSA) from 1993 to 2011. The analysis revealed that axes of identity like age, sexuality, class, and race were common subjects of the research presented. But, among these axes of identity, race stood out. Race was one of the most common topics of discussion at AMSA meetings with race being mentioned in the titles of nearly 20% of the presentations in that time period (Cohen and Suen 2012).

While this existing research tells us that race is prominent in studies of men and masculinities, it doesn't help us to understand *how* race is discussed. Given that studies of men and masculinities arose with a political agenda of turning a critical lens on the under-examined position of privilege when it comes to gender (Brod 1987a), it seems appropriate to begin an examination of race in studies of men and masculinities by specifically examining whiteness, another under-examined position of privilege (Cuomo and Hall, 1999; Shome 2000). With this in mind, we seek to begin a larger conversation on the state of race in studies of men and masculinities by examining how whiteness specifically emerges as a subject in three Men's Studies journals.

1.1. Intersectionality, Masculinity, and Whiteness

The rise of multicultural feminism in the 1980s and 1990s challenged gender studies, and by extension the still emerging studies of men and masculinity, to examine the ways in which gender varies along other axes of identity and power (Anzaldúa 1999; Collins 1999; Crenshaw 1991). Scholars of men and masculinity answered this call by theorizing *masculinities*, a pluralization intended to imply that there is not one monolithic masculine gender identity or set of practices, but rather that constellations of race, class, sexual identity, and other axes of identity and power create varied amalgams (Brod 1987b). Perhaps the most well-known theorization of these pluralized masculinities is that of Raewyn Connell who posits not only that multiple masculinities exist, but that they exist in hierarchical relationship with one another (Connell 2005).

The pluralization of masculinities precipitated a boom of research into “masculinity types” (Pascoe 2003, 1435) delineated by countless combinations of race, class, sexual orientation, and other axes of identity. This downward spiral of typologies produced a seemingly endless number of categorical masculinities that often fail to represent the lived experiences of the individuals that occupy them (Leek 2013). This pitfall of masculinities theory leaves researchers with the difficult task of sussing out which masculinity types hold empirical water – that is to say, which categorical delineations yield significant and meaningful insight into lived reality.

As the research on AMSA presentations suggests (Cohen and Suen 2012), some of the most generally accepted and commonly used of these combinations are those at the intersections of race and gender: Black masculinity, Asian masculinity, White masculinity, and so on. White masculinity in particular has taken on significance beyond academia. ‘White masculinity’ is a term commonly used by both activists and academics to reference behaviors and attitudes that arise from the particular constellation of white men’s racial and gender socialization and identities – an intersection of two privileged social locations. Indeed, in 2016 a Google Scholar search of the phrase “white masculinity” results in nearly 8,000 scholarly works.

So, just how and how often is whiteness discussed in men's studies? While men's studies reflect carefully on the privileged social location of masculinity, how does the field treat the similarly privileged social location of whiteness? Do studies of men and masculinities pick up the charge of Whiteness Studies – to challenge the position of whiteness as the assumed norm and, through critical examination, make it visible (Pease 2004)?

2. Methods

To assess whether and how the field of Men's Studies addresses issues of whiteness in its current research trajectory, we analyzed articles in three leading journals of the field of men's studies. More specifically, we conducted a content analysis of all substantive articles published between 2011 and 2015 in the academic journals *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, *Men and Masculinities*, and the *Journal of Men's Studies*. These publications represent the three most highly ranked journals explicitly focusing on the study of men and masculinities. In all, our sample consists of 425 articles across these three journals and our focus of analysis concerned three basic dimensions: Is race discussed in the respective research article at all? Is race used as an explanatory variable? And is whiteness discussed in the writing? In addition to these basic quantitative findings, we also present qualitative interpretations of the overall trends we observed in order to illustrate the trajectory of the state of accounts of whiteness in the field of Men's Studies.

3. Findings

3.1. Absent Whiteness

Overall, our findings about the prevalence of race as a topic of analysis within Men's Studies journals is consistent with Cohen and Suen's (2012) findings about the prevalence of race and masculinities in presentations delivered at conferences of the American Men's Studies Association (AMSA): While Cohen and Suen found that close to 18% of

presentations at AMSA conferences between 1993 and 2011 focused on race as a major theme, we find that 28% of articles in Men’s Studies journals between 2011 and 2015 discuss race in significant ways (tab. 1). We theorize that the apparent increase of race as a topic of inquiry in our sample compared to that of Cohen Suen is in part the result of methodological differences in the respective studies but, more importantly, also reflects an actual increase in the focus on race. The fact that the present study analyzed the full articles – as opposed to conference presentation titles, as done by Cohen and Suen – presumably resulted in finding a higher ratio of discussions of race in the scholarship analyzed. Yet, we also hypothesize that the higher numbers of articles addressing race in our sample reflect a trend towards analyses of race being incorporated into more research programs. In other words, our findings suggest that calls for intersectional analyses of race, class and gender have, in fact, shaped the field of Men’s Studies since its institutionalization in the early 1990s and have resulted in more scholarship addressing the intersections of different axes of inequality, identity and power than ever before. Although this development is clearly an encouraging one for the field of Men’s Studies, it must be pointed out, that our findings also suggest that still more than 70% of articles published in the three leading Men’s Studies journals do not take race into account as a crucial factor in their analysis.

	Number of Manuscripts	Discussing Race	Discussing Whiteness	Race as explanatory	Manuscripts with samples more than 70% White without discussion of whiteness
Men and Masculinities	104	30	17	5	4
		28.85%	16.35%	4.81%	3.85%
Psychology of Men and Masculinity	224	57	8	32	78
		25.45%	3.58%	14.29%	34.82%

Journal of Men's Studies	97	32	15	18	8
		32.99%	15.46%	18.56%	8.25%
Total	425	119	40	55	90
		28%	9.41%	12.94%	21.18%

Tab. 1. Analysis of articles in Men's Studies journals between 2011 and 2015

In addition to this overall trend, the differences between the three journals analyzed here are noteworthy as well: While about one in three articles in the *Journal of Men's Studies* discuss race in meaningful ways, this is only true for about one in four articles in *Psychology of Men and Masculinity* – the most highly ranked journal of the three and the one with the largest article output. As will be discussed in the next chapter, this can be explained, at least in part, with trends in methods and sampling strategies prevalent in this journal. These result in race more generally and whiteness in particular being under-examined, which in turn both reflect and foster a lack of substantive and theoretical concern with both race and whiteness.

When it comes to discussing whiteness specifically, less than 10% of articles published in the three journals between 2011 and 2015 address this topic in a meaningful way (tab. 1). In other words, only about a third of those articles addressing race also engage with whiteness as a concept or topic of analysis. Although this finding is not necessarily surprising, it can be taken to mirror the overall trend in scholarship on race and ethnicity that critical whiteness studies set out to challenge; namely that only non-white populations tend to be treated as racialized while whiteness remains the unmarked norm – as will be discussed more extensively in the next section. Mirroring the findings on race more generally, this absence of whiteness as a topic of inquiry is especially striking in *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, in which less than 4% of articles – 8 out of 224 articles – reflect upon, theorize or investigate whiteness (tab. 1).

3.2. Normative Whiteness

The relative absence of investigations of whiteness in scholarship on masculinities is connected to an additional way in which whiteness explicitly or implicitly factors into research in Men's Studies: By not acknowledging whiteness, a number of studies inadvertently reify whiteness as the implicit norm. That is, both qualitative and quantitative studies regularly investigate (implicitly) white subcultures or rely on samples that over-represent white respondents without factoring race into their analysis. As a result, these studies not only fall short of an intersectional account of the respective study population but additionally very little consideration is given to how these limitations in study design, and the failure to account for race ultimately shape what is known about men and masculinities more broadly.

In qualitative research, numerous studies do not reflect on the sample's racial status and the resulting theoretical implications. One genre of qualitative research that exhibits this phenomenon repeatedly is that of ethnographies and interview studies of subcultural groups such as artists, musicians, gamers and others. Articles about alternative and indie rock performers (Houston 2012; Ramirez 2012), members of a hunting and meat-eating subculture (Gelfer 2013), skinheads (Borgeson and Valeri 2015) as well as members of a fantasy role playing group (Martin *et al.* 2015) all fail to acknowledge and engage with the racial background of their study population and the racial composition of the studied subculture in question. This is all despite the authors at times explicitly pointing out that the individuals studied are predominantly or exclusively non-Hispanic white, or the authors' narratives being highly suggestive that the respective subculture under study is one populated and dominated by white men. Similarly, a number of articles examining the representation and tensions of masculinity in novels, movies and other works of art regularly do not account for the whiteness of the characters examined or the whiteness of the authors of the works they are studying (Baiada 2011; Froehlich 2011; Lewis 2012; Poluyko 2011). While all of these qualitative studies are sophisticated accounts of masculinity – often at the intersections of gender, class, sexuality, region, age, or subculture – they fail to provide an analysis that takes whiteness into account, factoring in how racial

status shapes their respondents' experiences, and they ultimately fall short of investigating white privilege. Tellingly, qualitative studies that focus on the lived experiences or artistic representations of men of racial minority status are without exception accounts that put analyses of race and racism front and center (Black and Thompson 2012; Eguchi 2011; Kernicky 2015; Martin 2012; Weese 2014) and regularly include references to and discussions of whiteness and white racism. Conversely, articles that center on an intersectional analysis of masculinity and whiteness and that take seriously the challenge posed by critical whiteness scholars to account for race when analyzing white individuals and communities still seem to remain the exception rather than the rule (Grove 2015; Norman 2011).

Meanwhile, quantitative studies arguably exhibit an even stronger tendency to render whiteness invisible. Articles published in *Psychology of Men and Masculinity* have an especially strong tendency to rely on samples that are overwhelmingly white in composition but rarely reflect upon the implications this may have for their findings. Specifically, about 35% of articles published in *Psychology of Men and Masculinity* between 2011 and 2015 admitted to relying on samples that were more than 70% white non-Hispanic in composition while not accounting for whiteness in their analysis or discussion of findings. More than a few studies were even based on samples that included 85%, 90%, 95% or more white participants. This not only constitutes a serious oversampling of white participants when compared to the overall demographics of the US – where about 64% of the population identify as non-Hispanic white – but also goes to show that whiteness tended to go unexamined and unquestioned in these articles.

These sampling issues, of course, are reflective of experimental studies in the fields of psychology and social psychology more broadly, where self-selection, snowball-sampling, convenience sampling and the reliance on undergraduate student populations as study participants – in which white as well as upper and middle class individuals are overrepresented – are a well-known concern. Nevertheless, these methodological problems coupled with the fact that they oftentimes remain unacknowledged have real and substantive implications for how masculinity is theorized. For instance, the various

measures, such as masculinity scales and gender role conflict scales, developed and utilized in psychological research on men and masculinities, overly rely on samples of white men, which in turn means that definitions and conceptualizations of masculinity itself implicitly tend to be based on the responses, attitudes, and experiences of white men. The combination of the oversampling of white men and the lack of consideration for how whiteness shapes the lived reality of research subjects risks our understandings and definitions of masculinity being utterly distorted and whitewashed. It may even be the case that much of what we think we know about masculinity and men's lives is actually the product of intersections with whiteness.

This shortcoming of quantitative studies in the field of psychology of men and its implications for theory and empirical findings has recently also come to the attention of the scholars engaged in this line of research themselves. A series of articles published in 2015 challenged researchers to acknowledge the fact that samples are overwhelmingly white in composition and called for examinations of both white privilege and the development of more nuanced, intersectional masculinity scales (Kleiman *et al.* 2015; McDermott *et al.* 2015; Schwartz 2015). One article even called out researchers for utilizing racial categories as predictor variables without engaging in analyses of acculturation and experiences of discrimination; in other words, the charge is that the racial category of men of color has regularly been used as a marker of difference rather than being included in a multifaceted analysis of relations of power that also challenges the unmarked norm (McDermott *et al.* 2015). These arguments are substantiated by the findings presented here: Rather than being examined, whiteness in Men's Studies has too often been obscured and thereby been implicitly re-centered as the unquestioned norm. And rather than treating whiteness and white privilege as an explanatory factor, race has often factored in only in terms of explaining the difference and otherness of men of color – as we demonstrate in the following section.

3.3. (Un)Explanatory Whiteness

In Men's Studies journals, race, and thinly veiled euphemisms for racialized culture, are often used as explanatory factors for a number of social phenomenon. Perhaps the most obvious example is the frequent use of the term 'machismo' to explain differences between Mexican, Hispanic, or Latino men (too often uncritically interchangeably) and men in other ethno-racial categories. The term is employed in nearly any scenario in which Mexican, Latino, or Hispanic men display outcomes that vary significantly from their peers in quantitative studies. Machismo, a poorly defined and racially charged stand-in for more complex cultural forces (Arciniega *et al.* 2008), has been used to explain away differences in men's desire to marry (South 1993), men's desire to be involved fathers (Hofferth 2003), and drinking and self-esteem (Neff *et al.* 1991) to name only a few of its applications. Terms like 'urban culture' or 'inner-city' are similarly used to explain when black men's outcomes vary from their peers (Kelley 2001).

We found this use of racially coded language to explain differences in outcomes among research subjects to be fairly common practice in the Men's Studies journals examined here. 55 of the manuscripts considered in this study, nearly 13%, used race, or coded racial language, to explain differences between men (tab. 1). Scholars of race and ethnicity caution against the tendency to use race to explain phenomenon, arguing that it is not race, but rather social forces that align with race, that often drive the differences we see (Allen *et al.* 2008; Holland 2008; Zuberi 2001).

In addition to frequency of the usage of race and racially coded language to explain differences, we also found that usage to be one-sided. While terms like 'machismo' and 'urban culture' are commonly used to explain variation along racial lines, scholars rarely implemented comparable language to signal white culture as potentially explanatory. We were only able to identify a small handful of instances in which white culture or white men's experiences of privilege were used to explain differences between research subjects (Kleiman *et al.* 2015; Levant *et al.* 2015; Norman 2011). These examples are important because they are the rare challenges in Men's Studies scholarship to the invisible yet normative social location of whiteness.

5. Conclusions

As we have demonstrated here, too often the pluralization of masculinity to masculinities has only led to a recognition that gender identity intersects with the *subordinated* and marginalized categories of other axes of identity – but that it intersects with other *superordinated* identities is neglected. Leek and Kimmel (2014) call for scholars of masculinity and whiteness to move toward a new way of thinking, superordinate studies, in which we take seriously the reality that masculinity often intersects with, and is mutually constituted with, other social locations of power and privilege. We echo that call here. A concerted effort to theorize and research superordination is not only a promising and called-for research agenda that will illuminate how privilege operates and is intertwined with inequality and structures of oppression; but it also calls on – and may well offer an avenue for – researchers in superordinated positions to contribute to critical scholarship. Just as race and gender have traditionally been only topics of inquiry with respect to racialized and gendered others – people of color, women, etc. – as opposed to being applied as heuristic lenses to superordinate social groups, so has work focusing on these topics typically been delegated to and expected of scholars from non-hegemonic social groups, such as female scholars and scholars of color. Superordinate studies thus takes seriously the challenge to incorporate intersectional perspectives in all social-scientific research and directs this call especially to those scholars in superordinate positions. And it is by engaging in intersectional research of the ways in which privilege and superordination operates in society that those scholars inhabiting superordinate positions – such as the authors of this article themselves, who identify as white, hetero, cisgender men – may contribute to a critical and transformative research agenda aimed at eradicating inequality, subordination and superordination.

While the work we have presented may seem like harsh criticism, we engage in this research because we believe in the potential of Men's Studies to draw a critical gaze to unseen power and privilege at the intersections of multiple axes of identity rather than only along the axis of gender.

Based on this research we have identified a few methodological recommendations that we believe can bring the field of studies of men and masculinities closer to honoring the full range of intersections – both with subordinated and marginalized identities and with other superordinate identities:

1) It is crucial that we move to innovate our sampling methods. We should no longer be satisfied with samples that are disproportionately white. This call to be critical of our sampling methods and expand them beyond the convenience of the college campus populations that so many of us are surrounded by is not new, but it is worth repeating.

2) When disproportionately white samples cannot be avoided, we must be critical about how that shapes our findings. Simply claiming that samples are not generalizable, we believe, has become too low a bar. We must begin to theorize how the whiteness of our samples shapes what we think we know, and what we don't know, about men and masculinities.

3) When we have samples that allow for comparisons between populations along the lines of race, whiteness cannot remain as the unexamined norm. It is a disservice not to ask how the lived experience of whiteness and/or privilege shapes the information gathered from respondents. Whiteness shapes the lives of white respondents just as we have learned to recognize that experiences of racism and cultural formation shape the lives of men of color.

We have evidence that research on masculinity that seriously engages in the study of whiteness is not only possible but contributes to a more sophisticated understanding of masculinities, and gender and race more broadly in society (Grove 2015; Kleiman *et al.*, 2015; Levant *et al.* 2015; Norman 2011). The fact that the debate about rethinking how race is used and how whiteness can be applied in statistical analysis is had by scholars engaged in quantitative psychological research on masculinities (e.g. Kleiman *et al.* 2015; McDermott *et al.* 2015; Schwartz 2015) leaves us optimistic that the field of Men's Studies may be on the verge of a shift toward treating whiteness with the same critical lens that is applied to masculinity. It is only by naming and examining whiteness that we may begin to understand the intersections of superordination.

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