Men, masculinities and flexible working

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INTRODUCTION

It is argued that the relationship between women and work-life balance issues is at the root of the gendering of flexible working, (Kirton and Greene, 2004; Glover and Kirton, 2006). So, rather than a gender neutral policy, the implementation of flexible working practices is assumed to accommodate the need for women to combine domestic and waged labour (Kirton and Greene, 2004). The extant literature confirms this argument (Kersley *at al*, 2006, ONS, 2008); accordingly, rather than re-visit such debates, this paper uses flexible working as a vehicle through which to explore the social construction of masculinities within contemporary organisations. As such, we examine the enactment of different masculinities through the lens of flexible working, in particular, we explore how men perceive, utilise and defend their engagement with flexible working practices in contemporary organisations. Using flexibility in this manner allows us to analyse how masculinity is challenged, constructed and produced in the context of assumed feminised working practices. This enables us to explore what it means to see, think and behave like a man when working like a woman. In so doing, we challenge the taken for granted natural dominance of masculinity (see Connell, 2005) and reignite debates about gender power, gender relations and gendered identities. The key research proposition explored within the paper is the notion that men have distinctive ways of articulating and negotiating flexible working that are tightly bound with socially embedded norms of gendered identity and masculine dominance. The gender hierarchy and associated power structure is therefore, little disturbed and may even be reinforced, when men engage in flexible working.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Flexible working is a familiar and much researched topic (Davies and Freedland, 2007, Noon and Blyton, 2007); there is however, less recognition of tacit assumptions regarding the gendering of flexibility (Liff, 2003). Successive Labour governments have, since 1997, promoted flexible working under the auspices of 'family-friendly' working and latterly as 'work-life balance'. Yet, despite use of gender neutral language there is an underlying presumption that flexible working is primarily aimed at women so they might more easily accommodate waged work and caring/domestic labour (Houston and Waumsley, 2003). Contemporary data would suggest that this presumption is well founded. As a group, women are far more likely to apply for and utilise flexible working practices, with the exception of home-working (ONS, 2008). Furthermore, it is more likely that a wide range of flexible work options will be available in female-dominated organisations than male-dominated workplaces (Kersley et al, 2006). The opportunity to work from home however, and so to be explicitly trusted to work without direct supervision is marginally more prevalent in organisations where women are *not* the majority and is more accessible to managers (Kersley et al, 2006).

The gendering of work organisation reflects traditional gendered stereotypes wherein women assume primary affiliation to the home and men adopt the role of the breadwinner (Sheridan, 2004). Currently, the employment rate for women is 70 percent (ONS, 2008), yet societal expectations are for them to continue to be domesticated and home-centric (Houston and Waumsley, 2003); hence their stronger attachment to flexible forms of working. Whilst we are accustomed to women in paid work, the notion of a female breadwinner remains contrary to normative expectations. As Gatrell and Swan (2008:19) comment, the idea of a women as

the *primary* earner 'contradicts deeply ingrained ideas about the social role of women''. So, the male breadwinner model although possibly challenged, is still very much alive and women, as a consequence, find it difficult to compete with men on an equal basis in employment (Fredman, 2004).

At the heart of the imbalance between the work and life patterns of men and women is the assumption that 'masculinity is ontological in its non-nurturingness' (Reeser, 2010:39) and that femininity is essentially oppositional in orientation. Masculinity and femininity are thus, often depicted as two separate, discrete and diametrically opposing categories. Reeser argues that 'the notion of binary opposition cannot be disassociated from the issue of power' (2010:38), the two-fold categorisation propagates the concept of dual and oppositional genders, wherein 'men and masculine discourses occupy the dominant centre of rationality, displacing women and femininity to their seemingly emotional margins' (Knights and Kerfoot, 2004:431). Connell too recognises that 'dichotomy and difference are the substance of the idea of gender' (2009:9) but is wary of simplifying gender to a game of contrasts in which hegemonic masculinity represents a fixed and absolute depiction of what it means to be a man and femininity a fixed notion of what it means to be a woman. Rigid assumptions regarding the reality of the binary are problematic and result in a gender hierarchy infused with power differentials (Knights and Kerfoot, 2004). Instead of being an innocuous configuration, the binary classification is fertile ground for entrenching the view that he is 'the one' and she the incidental 'other' (de Beauvoir ([1949] 1972) cited in Payne 2006:70).

Given that gender studies have hitherto focussed on a binary combination of gender, masculinity as the prioritised gender has been left relatively unexamined and taken for granted in the literature (Collinson and Hearn, 1994). Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1993) refer to masculinity as a key feature of default identity; the natural and normal state of being. Default identities, they argue, 'are always less articulated, less self-conscious than are oppositional or oppressed identities' (1993:32) and so there is less need to scrutinise men's actions. This seat of privilege may however, be subject to challenge in the changing contemporary context. For example, traditional working class based masculinities constructed around manual labour, grit and muscle are left adrift as employment in manufacturing and production has decreased in recent decades (Glover and Kirton, 2006). Secure male employment has also been displaced by technology, resulting in the decline of men's role as the breadwinner (Besen; 2007). In the private sphere of the home too, male patriarchal authority is no longer automatic as divorce and separation force a re-consideration of masculine identity. Such changes impact on men and construct men in multitude of ways (Hearn, 1999). Against this dynamic backdrop, studying men and masculinities 'is no longer considered so esoteric' (Hearn, 1999:149); indeed men are now becoming 'objects of critical interrogation' (Knights and Kerfoot, 2004:436).

In emergent masculine discourse, hegemonic masculinity, whereby men are afforded power and privilege by virtue of their maleness (Simpson, 2004:350), is sometimes considered as destabilized in contemporary society (Reeser, 2010) and there are calls to masculinise men again. In contrast, other contemporary discourses censure male dominance and instead advocate 'new man'; a rekindling of masculinity as 'kinder, softer and in touch with its feminine side' (Reeser, 2010:33). In a shift away from binary and fixed conceptions of gender Connell argues that being male or female is not a static or determined identity rather, 'it is a becoming, a condition actively under construction' (Connell, 2009:3). In this sense, masculine and feminine categorisations are not straightforward. Whilst recognising that gender is socially shaped, Connell acknowledges that individuals 'often enjoy gender polarity' (2009:6) and consciously or subconsciously self-construct an essentially masculine or feminine identity in an effort to conform; but this is not to say that identities outside the confines of the binary frame are elusive. Just as with every twist of the kaleidoscope, the image through the viewfinder settles to a new pattern, gender is a delicate social set of arrangements, sensitive to shifts, tensions, overlap and reinvention. In pursuing a post-

structuralist account of gender, Connell (2009) explores in more depth *how* masculinities are constructed and reconstructed. Such accounts consider how masculinity is experienced at a subjective level by men themselves and how numerous masculinities exist relative to the overriding (hegemonic) form. This is a helpful stance since in the acting out of lived lives a polar categorisation can be problematical for those men (and women) who exceed or deviate from the terms of binary proclamations (Eveline, 2005).

The domain of paid work has long been inextricably linked, not just to men per se but to the performance of masculinity (Cockburn 1983, Guerrier and Adib, 2004). As a rule, men are expected to adopt the breadwinner role, supported by women whose primary allegiance is to the home (Connell, 2009). For men, being in a position to do this is a signifier of manliness and masculinity and the loss of this role diminishes masculine identity and power (Besen, 2007). Work can thus be conceived as an important space in which men trial and demonstrate their masculinity (Gaylin, 1992) and so achieve credibility and legitimacy as a male. Men who work in gender atypical areas or in gender atypical ways are arguably placed in a dichotomous position as they pose a challenge to conventional attitudes and assumptions. They rock the gendered sub-structure of the organisation and in so doing become highly visible. Simpson (2004), in her study of men's experiences in female dominated occupations, articulates the different ways in which men and women experience being in a 'token' or isolated position, away from others of their own gender. She asserts that 'while token women can be severely disadvantaged by their minority status, positive career outcomes may well accrue for 'token' men' (2004:352) as they are assumed to be career oriented even if they are not and they are deemed to have special expertise. Simpson's work and other similar studies (Cross and Bagilhole, 2000, Lupton, 2000) show that men have a variety of ways of coping with feminised work, for example, sometimes they distance themselves from women in an attempt to mark themselves out as different, often they re-work the job title to suppress overtly feminine aspects of the role and emphasise its male components. These strategies help men in minority positions to align their work more closely with hegemonic masculinity and thus deflect any derision they may face from other men.

Just as men's digression into feminised occupations prompts questions about masculine identity, men who transgress gendered notions of work organisation risk putting their masculinity 'on the line' (Simpson, 2004). Full-time work is the normative model and taken for granted as an assumed gender neutral arrangement, yet it is saturated with male values (Sheridan, 2004). Hegemonic masculinity, is not just associated with work but it is more acutely associated with work that entails long hours and behaviours to demonstrate prioritisation of the needs of the employer over and above personal and family time (Swan and Gatrell, 2008); necessarily therefore, full-time work. The challenge for men who engage in flexible work is how to manage the dissonance between the essentially feminine way in which they work and the demands of the dominant masculine gender regime (Simpson 2004).

Certainly, to use Puwar's (2004) expression, men who work flexibly could be described as 'space invaders'; entering an established feminised form of work organisation and in so doing, highlighting themselves as different. However, whereas women's minority status in masculinised work is often characterised by negativity or a requirement to act 'masculine' (Lupton, 2000), men might be able to use their visibility to resist prevailing interpretations of masculinity and construct 'trail-blazing identities that actively challenge current practices and champion different ways of doing' (Lewis and Simpson, 2010:9). Visibility is not always detrimental, on the contrary, Simpson (2010) argues that men may revel in token status and use it to construct a special identity for themselves, apart from other men. Pini and McDonald recognise this phenomena in their study of male flexible workers in an Australian Local Government organisation; the men who worked flexibly so that they could care for their children portrayed themselves and their choices as 'slightly on the progressive side and early adopters and believing in equality' (2008:606).This was markedly different to the manner in

which the men described their fathers who had been less family-centred. This example of men constructing masculinity through flexible working might be construed as either men rejecting the constraints of hegemonic masculinity (Swan and Gatrell, 2008) to legitimise doing gender differently, or an attempt to re-define hegemonic masculinity to incorporate variance from the traditional breadwinner model and so preserve manliness (Brandth and Kvande, 1998). Further, Pini and MacDonald's study (2008) failed to show that dominant gender discourses were disturbed by men engaging in flexible forms of working. So for example, male employees described choosing flexible work to complement study and/or other ventures designed to enhance future career success and emphasised the temporary nature of their attachment to flexible working. Critically, their orientation to flexible working was articulated as considerably different to that of female co-workers, who were assumed to choose flexible work for family reasons; a subordinate and unimportant reason, in their opinion. Older men, working flexibly as part of a pre-retirement strategy, felt vindicated as they had satisfied traditional notions of masculinity by past dedication to full-time work. These men were anxious to distance themselves from young male flexible workers and voiced the opinion that 'all real *young* men work full-time' (2008:606). In different ways both of these groups of men can be seen to articulate their masculinity, despite their involvement with flexible work. Other men might experience internal tussles with their own 'manliness' as a consequence of engaging in feminised forms of work organisation, 'perhaps toying between 'a perceived ontological notion of masculinity on the one hand and a more personalised definition on the other' (Reeser, 2010:44), ever conscious not to be bound to a marginalised or subordinated gender identity, or to arouse a 'suspicion of laziness or deviance by those looking in' (Marsh and Musson, 2008:46).

METHODOLOGY

In this particular study, our ambition is to understand how men articulate and carry out gendered behaviour within the context of flexible work. Since gender is performative (Butler, 1994), that is to say a dynamic, ascribed social identity which is fluid and negotiated reflecting context, the manner in which gendered identities are constructed and reconstructed is not easily identified and so presents particular research challenges.

A realist ontology articulated through a positivist methodology with focus on predictability and uncovering unambiguous truths is an inappropriate approach for exploring how gender is articulated, constructed and performed within the context of flexible working. The making and doing of gendered identity is subtle and complex; maleness does not equate to masculine with any more certainty than female equates to feminine, rather multiple truths or meanings surrounding gender inhabit the same space and even are these are constantly developing and transforming (Connell, 2009). This paper therefore adopts an interpretivist ontology and epistemology where the key objective is 'to try to see how the people involved understand what's going on, and what they see as the evidence involved' (Jankowicz, 2005:116). Such an approach accepts disorderliness of thoughts and actions and seeks to extract issues, in this sense it is more befitting than positivist approaches in exploring how gender (masculinity) is constructed and reconstructed through attitudes and actions displayed in, and around, the way in which work is organised.

Since interpretivist approaches give pre-eminence to qualitative research metholodologies (Jankowicz, 2005:123), the research tool adopted here is designed to elicit rich information from men about their perceptions of flexible working and their experiences of it, such that it is possible to analyse the content of what is said and what is meant. The researcher is not interested in the frequency of what is said or noting thematic counts and there is no intention to generalise to a population. Accordingly, data is generalised to theory (Yin 2003), and some emphasis is placed on 'naturalistic generalisability' (Stake, 2000), that is the ability to generate a sense of external validity by recognising similarities and common themes in the information ascertained.

The paper is based on a pilot-study comprising independent, in-depth case narratives with four men, as summarised here:-

Table One

Participants	Job role	Working hours
FlexBus	Business Analyst	Part-time, 25 hours/week
FlexTech*	Business Support Technician, UK University	37 hours/week, 41 weeks p.a.
FlexLec*	Lecturer, UK University	Full-time, flexibility to work from home
FlexDir	Self-employed consultant / Interim HR Director	Currently full-time, flexibility to work from home

(* with recent experience of part-time work)

Given the purpose of the study is to contribute to theory, the small sample enables the researcher to drill for depth of meaning, interpretation and understanding which might exemplify or defy theoretical wisdom or (less likely) generate new theoretical insight. The narratives were extracted using a biographical conversational technique, allowing the men to tell their story within a sequence of semi-structured questions designed to set the tone and direction of the conversation. Further probing questions were used to encourage participants to develop their responses. The 'guided' conversations were framed to reflect the research proposition and so sought to elicit the men's attitudes and perceptions of flexible working, their motives and triggers for engaging with flexible work and their social and work-related experiences of being male and a flexible worker.

There are a number of issues associated with adopting this method of research. Firstly as Pratt (2008:503) recognises, 'the unique constellation of relationships and interviews make some qualitative methods impossible to truly replicate', this is partially characteristic of the research conducted here, although the semi-structured nature of the tool offers some mitigation. Secondly, and more importantly for a study of this nature the researcher is acutely aware of her own judgements, experiences and knowledge and the way in which her pre-existing mental framework and personal theories might operate at a conscious or subconscious level to infuse meaning and interpret what is said. This latter issue can be articulated here as the imposition of an essentially feminist methodological orientation and in this sense the researcher is not dispassionate but equipped with an informed agenda concerning the gendering of flexible work. Through a process of personal reflexivity, instead of overlooking the inevitability of this phenomenon, we seek to openly and actively reflect upon the ways in which our involvement with the study shapes the research (Nightingale and Cromby, 1999) and permit others to share and challenge our analysis. This, coupled with conscious endeavour to couch the research within the theoretical context enables understanding to be 'co-created through dialogue and experience' (Angen, 2000:383).

The interview transcripts were scrutinised manually through a process of reading and re-reading. The issues to emerge in each interview were highlighted and three major themes identified; firstly, the underlying, yet, at times, wavering stability of the male breadwinner model, secondly, men's differing motives for working flexibly and thirdly, the way in which men perform gender when the cloak of invisibility is removed. These themes, together with the conversational fragments which illuminate them, are presented below.

RESULTS

Whose work is breadwinning?

Fredman (2004) notes that the male breadwinner model has not shattered despite women's entry in to paid work. The data from the case narratives shows men as breadwinners, dual-earners and secondary income generators, it also illustrates men and their wives/partners rotating the breadwinner role. Even though not all of the men were currently the breadwinner, they all recounted periods in their careers when they had been. With the exception of FlexBus, who appeared to progress through serendipity, the men described educational and/or employment choices designed to maximise income and employment prospects. For men, to do well in employment so that they can provide for others is a strong signifier of masculinity (Besen, 2007). The men in the study, therefore, in choosing their work paths carefully and studying to enhance their career prospects, can be seen to be conforming to gendered expectations;

FlexTech describes a time when he left a full-time job to return to study;

'I left there and took myself out of there because I thought I have to get myself a trade, and I took myself to college and I did a City and Guilds in Electrical Installation'

Similarly FlexLec reveals his thought processes as a young man building a career;

'Inevitably you are, as a young guy, looking for opportunities to increase your earnings capacity'

There was also evidence of gender socialisation in the men's lives, particularly shaped and reinforced by the family (Sheridan, 2004). For example, FlexDir explained how his mother had deterred him from catering work;

'I was looking at going into catering, being a chef was always something I'd fancied, but my mother was adamant that wasn't going to happen in terms of earnings potential and unsociable hours'

FlexTech also recounts how his father recommended that he went after work at the University, having been employed as a carpenter there himself;

 'He was always saying if you can get in [at the University] it's really good'

Unlike the other men in the study, FlexTech, appears to hold profoundly more gendered views concerning the breadwinner role and a stronger sense that relationships work best when men adhere to this role. He explains how, since having their first child, his partner has returned to work on a part-time basis and he is now the primary earner;

'Breadwinning wise, even today, well, probably less today, it's normally the guy who is the breadwinner. How my situation has gone now obviously it's turned right around but it does work better that way'.

FlexDir, apart from a brief spell at the beginning of their relationship when his partner earned more, has always assumed the breadwinner role and continues to do so. He describes their situation as a practical one, implying he would have been comfortable to reverse traditional gendered roles;

'If we could afford it that was always the plan, that one of us would have worked and the other one would have reduced their hours or not worked, and that's effectively what we did. And the decision to do that in terms of my wife working reduced hours was circumstances; it so happened that my career was doing well'

In common with FlexDir, FlexBus and FlexLec in the presence of a female researcher at least, adopt the view that the breadwinner role can be interchangeable. FlexLec is resolute;

'For me there was no issue about am I going to be emasculated when my wife is supporting me (through study), it didn't even enter my head. When we first came over to stay it was a case of I am doing this for a reason and it's not just for my own sake, it's to enhance our future so the motivation was a joint motivation'

Men's motives for flexible working

The men in the study all acknowledge that flexible working is gendered (Fredman, 2004) and in particular, strongly associated with mothers, such that they can combine paid work with childcare (Glover and Kirton, 2006). Men in the study gave differing reasons for their own engagement with flexible working. FlexTech accepted part-time employment to gain a foothold in the University, he did so at a time he was living with his parents and so financially he could afford to take a career gamble. In common with some of the men working flexibly in Pini and MacDonald's study (2008), FlexTech emphasised the intended temporary nature of his attachment to part-time work; as time went on he hoped he would be able to increase his hours.

FlexDir's engagement with flexible working mirrors the findings of the WERS 2004 (Kersley *et al*, 2006) which shows the practice of home-working to be more prevalent in organisations in which women are not the majority group and more easily accessible to managerial employees. As a Human Resources Manager, employed on a full-time basis in a male-dominated manufacturing organisation, FlexDir enjoyed autonomy to work from home virtually at whim, without the need to seek explicit authority, he comments:-

'I would be out a lot of days, the days when I had been somewhere I would go home and I would work at home'

FlexDir has benefitted from home-working for many years and continues to do so in his interim post as Director of Organisational Development and Workforce Planning in an NHS Primary Care Trust. He also has new found flexibility; since taking redundancy from his former role in manufacturing he has established himself as a self-employed consultant and combines this with regular interim work. He describes his transition to this way of working as a lifestyle choice, much as the older male part-time workers do in Pini and MacDonald's study (2008) and paints his ideal scenario as two or three days lucrative work a week. This idealised way of working, which is close to becoming reality for FlexDir, is in sharp contrast to the demanding work schedule he followed in his full-time employment. Although his status gave him autonomy to work from home, he travelled extensively; working long hours whilst his wife adjusted her working week to assume a primary care role for their daughters. In this sense, FlexDir has proven his ability to perform hegemonic masculinity by demonstrating strong work orientation behaviours (Swan and Gatrell, 2008).

FlexLec and FlexBus both moved away from full-time employment with full support from their wives. FlexLec ceased full-time work to embark on study, and for the next five years worked part-time and shared the care of his son with his wife who worked part-time at first and then full-time to support the family. FlexLec comments;

'I really enjoyed the fact I was able to play a much more active role in bringing the kids up'

He talks at length about his desire to spend adequate time with his children and not be an absentee father. The way in which he presents his orientation to family as opposed to work reflects a deviation from hegemonic masculinity but not an acquittal of masculinity; he is quick to establish that*;*

'Nobody has expressed disapproval to me or suggested in any way what I am doing is wrong or that I should be pursuing my career. Nothing of that raising kids is women's work or anything like that'

In accordance with Brandth and Kvande's (1998) observation, FlexLec's stance appears to represent an attempt to stretch the definition of hegemonic masculinity to embrace childcare thereby preserving his manliness. The fact that FlexLec's association with part-time work only covered the period during which he was studying towards his PhD and the intention always was to revert to full-time work also helps to attest to his masculinity since work is considered central to men's identity (Guerrier and Adib, 2004). FlexLec has since secured full-time employment, allowing his wife to negotiate an 80 percent contract and reports that it is unlikely that he will return to a fractional contract;

'I don't think it would go down well if I said I am not enjoying full-time and I want to go back to 60 percent, I think she might have a small sense of humour failure'

Of all of the men in the study, FlexBus is the only informant to articulate childcare as the sole reason for engaging in flexible work. In parallel with the men in Pini and MacDonald's study (2008) FlexBus presents his transition to part-time work to become the primary carer for their children as somewhat altruistic and the natural actions of a man with strong equal opportunities values;

'We had been using childminders for school drop-off and pick-up but we were both concerned that this was not working out, we decided that we could afford for me to do the part-time role whilst [wife's name] continued with her career'

The notion of female breadwinner is still perceived as contrary to deeply ingrained ideas about the role of women in society (Swan and Gatrell, 2008) but FlexBus rationalises relinquishing the breadwinning role by praising his wife's ambition;

'She has always been more ambitious than me, she's studied part-time ever since we got married, she's invested a lot in her career and doesn't want to waste it'

In contrast to FlexLec who expresses considerable fulfilment from being a more central figure in his children's lives, FlexBus tends to emphasise the practical aspects of looking after the household;

'[wife's name] has never been to a parent's evening, when you're home it's the kind of thing you do isn't it? I do all the cleaning (looks around), it's Thursday so not looking it's best now, I do the washing and ironing, shopping…..ok, it's delivered but I sort it, I do the cooking too, luckily I like cooking'

Gaylin (1992) suggests that work is an important space in which men demonstrate their masculinity. In the absence of full-time paid work as a site for the construction of his masculinity, FlexBus seems to draw on the combination of part-time work and a demanding list of domestic tasks, as a credible arena in which to demonstrate his masculinity.

Performing gender in flexible work

In choosing to engage in flexible work men risk putting their masculinity 'on the line' (Simpson, 2004) since flexible working is considered to be female territory (Houston and Waumsley, 2003, Kirton and Greene, 2004). In the study, FlexTech appeared embarrassed to be working part-time, actively concealing his recent work status from his girlfriend;

'When I met my partner I had two part-time jobs, so she thought I was a workaholic. I didn't tell her that prior to that I was doing one shift!'

Amongst his male friends the fact he worked part-time attracted attention and some derision;

'It wasn't cool or anything'

Further, Just as Musson and Marsh (2008) suggest men in tele-work are suspected of being lazy or in some way abnormal FlexTech was the subject of teasing;

'Yes, they thought I was lazy, it's a bit of banter between lads but I don't know whether they meant it or not thinking about it'

In contrast, the other men in the study easily dismissed jocular remarks, FlexBus for example comments;

'My parents and friends are all fine with it, there's a bit of ribbing but no serious intent, no more than you teachers get with the long summer holiday (laughs)'

We have established that non-standard working patterns are more likely to be accessible to women than to men (Kersley et al, 2006) and are reportedly used by more women than men (ONS, 2008) so, by participating in flexible working men are likely to find themselves in the minority and highly visible. As Simpson (2010) argues visibility is not always problematic and men may use this opportunity to construct a special identity for themselves, distinct from other men. This phenomenon was especially evident in FlexLec and FlexBus. FlexLec reiterates that that flexible work has enabled him to spend more time with his children and be a hands-on father. He is critical of other men who, he thinks, prevent themselves from being more child-focussed because they are too conscious of impairing their masculinity if they relinquish the breadwinner role (Besen, 2007);

'I think men make it hard for men to do that. I think a lot of men have this expectation that the man ought to be the primary breadwinner, and if they are not I think a lot of men would struggle to accept that. In reality I do not think it's much of a problem for women to accept the idea of a man working part-time, I think it's more difficult for a man to accept the idea of a man working part-time'.

In articulating this view, FlexLec seemingly advocates himself as a 'new man' (Reeser, 2010). FlexBus has 'new man' credentials too. His primary attachment to home and family is not fully understood by other men in his workplace;

'There's a guy who's wife's just had a baby and he's a real 'noughties' father, what would Lily be now, three months or so I suppose, he's the type of dad who'll go home at lunchtime to feed her. My boss is an old fashioned Yorkshire man, little wife at home, not old, I mean my age, 42, but old-fashioned; he just doesn't get it. Nor is he used to me working part-time, he accepts that I'm part-time but you can see he thinks it's weird; he's the type of bloke who deliberately takes time off outside his children's holidays'

FlexBus and his 'Noughties dad' colleague challenge dominant masculine discourse. FlexBus might be seen as using his visibility to construct a radically new and different masculine identity (Lewis and Simpson, 2010) in sharp contrast to the conventional masculinity demonstrated by his manager. In addition to setting himself apart from other men in the organisation, FlexBus successfully manages to avoid being categorised with the other part-time employees. As a Business Analyst his role is technical and specialised;

'There's no other men doing what I do that I can think of', 'you're novel then?' (Researcher), 'yes, I like to think so'

He describes how the part-time workers in the contact centre are derided by other females in the office;

'They go off on the dot at 2.30pm, just as I am leaving to get the kids from school but the women in my office who work full-time have a right old moan, saying things like "'look at that, you could be mown down by that crowd if you were going in the opposite direction", they see them as abandoning ship'

In contrast FlexBus reports that he is not labelled as 'jobs worth' even though he too leaves regularly at 2.30pm;

'Don't know why that is, s'pose because I have my phone with me and they know they can ring, its okay'

Finally, none of the men in the study felt that their careers had been harmed by flexible working. Indeed FlexBus was confident;

'If I wanted to work full-time, economic climate permitting, I'm sure the opportunity would be there'

As was FlexLec;

'I don't think the fact that I worked part-time is going to have an impact'

FlexBus was exceptionally relaxed and unconcerned about the future, suggesting he might want to pursue a career in teaching or do some more studying or play more golf. FlexBus can be seen to display characteristics of default identity (Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1993), where masculinity, and the privileged status it attracts, gives a sense of self assurance. Critically, FlexBus appears to have retained the benefits of masculinity despite surrendering breadwinner status to his wife a decade ago.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The research proposition considered at the outset of this paper centred upon the notion that men have distinctive ways of articulating and negotiating flexible working that are tightly bound with socially embedded notions of gendered identity and masculine dominance. The gender hierarchy and associated power structure is therefore little disturbed, and may even be reinforced, where men engage in flexible working. As explained earlier, the approach we have adopted in conducting this research does not facilitate generalising to sample; instead we seek to reflect empirical data back to theory. Accordingly, in unravelling each of the narratives the central finding is that despite the contradictory relationship between flexibility and masculinity, the men in the study were able to articulate their involvement in flexible working in ways that safeguarded their masculinity and in some cases, elevated it. For FlexTech and FlexLec part-time work represented space in which to develop a foundation for future breadwinning work. The temporary nature of their engagement with part-time work (for career enhancing reasons) represents an underlying compliance with traditional gendered expectations and so enabled the men to preserve their masculine identities.

In many ways the experiences of FlexDir and FlexBus are similar, both men have proven successful breadwinner credentials, special expertise and senior status in their respective fields and this affords them protected status in the workplace. Consequently FlexDir's choice to work less intensively in the latter stages of his career provokes admiration rather than

derision from other males and acts to confer his success as an employee and a man. The specialist technical expertise FlexBus possesses enables him to set himself apart from other flexible and part-time workers in the organisation and so avoid being categorised as uncommitted, effeminate or subordinate to those men who conform to the normative pattern of full-time work. It is evident that FlexBus and FlexLec in particular contravene hegemonic masculinity as they unashamedly embrace feminine roles of childcare and domestic work. Both men present their choice as enlightened and as an 'intelligent' form of masculinity, informed by equal opportunities values. In this sense the men articulate their version of masculinity as superior to 'macho' masculinity. Neither is concerned that their choices would be construed as feminine or that their decision to spend time in part-time work would impair their future career prospects. It is argued here that this level of self-confidence develops from the notion of men as 'the one' and female as 'other'.

Whilst the study has depicted the performance of different versions of masculinity, it is highly questionable whether the hierarchical dominance of masculinity is displaced when men engage in flexible work. The expression of masculinity developed by seasoned flexible workers such as FlexBus and FlexLec was viewed positively by the men themselves, in fact more positively than the traditional hegemonic form and certainly in the case of FlexBus, appeared to afford privileges in the workplace.

Due to the confines of this paper it has not been possible to conduct a detailed exploration of all the issues to emerge in the pilot study. Given the extent of the data gathered there is additional scope to enlarge the analysis to consider, for example, further issues of concealment and visibility in flexible work and linked to this how different organisational contexts make working under gaze more or less contentious for men and masculinity. In particular, in this study, we begin to see how FlexLec and FlexTech could conceal their visibility relatively easily in a University context, where the organisation is large, operating hours extended and employees' hours of work reasonably obscured. By contrast FlexBus was highly visible as the only part-time male analyst in a 9-5 office based environment.

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