

Pecis Lara (Orcid ID: 0000-0002-2590-8942)

Priola Vincenza (Orcid ID: 0000-0002-8816-9104)

Title: The “new industrial man” as un-hero: doing postfeminist masculinities in an Italian pharmacological research centre

Running title: The “new industrial man” as un-hero

Lara Pecis, Lancaster University, UK, l.pecis@lancaster.ac.uk

Vincenza Priola, The Open University, UK, Cinzia.Priola@open.ac.uk

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Abstract

Recent work has documented the need to engage with how men construct masculinities within postfeminist discourses in the workplace. Postfeminism has sparked debates concerning the changing ideals of masculinities, highlighting the tensions between traditional forms of patriarchy and “new” ways of being a man (e.g. emotional, a “new father”, in crisis). Men have been depicted as being in search of a new identity, opposed to the ever-growing confidence and empowerment of women. In mobilising postfeminism as a discourse, this article extends existing theorisations of masculinities by showing how men working in an Italian pharmacological research centre assume subject positions that contradictorily fluctuate between tradition and fluid modernity, to reveal a masculinity that we identify with “the new industrial man”. These postfeminist masculinities mesh pro- and anti-feminist ideas by appealing to un/heroic subjectivities. In discussing the empirical analysis of this organisation, managed by men but dominated by women, we also show how the few men seemed threatened by women’s presence and used biological differences to reinforce social ones and devalue the feminine. The postfeminist subject positions mobilised by these men romanticize men’s masculine heroics, but overlook the evident gender inequalities in the organisation, also characterised by women’s absence from top managerial positions.

Keywords

Masculinities, postfeminism, postfeminist masculinities, gender, new industrial man

Introduction

This article builds on initial work in management and organisation studies (MOS) attempting to understand the influence of postfeminism as a discourse on aspects related to gender in the workplace (e.g. Gill, Kelan, & Scharff, 2017; Kelan, 2018; Lewis, 2014; Lewis, Benschop, & Simpson, 2017; Liu, 2018; Ronen, 2018). Specifically, it draws on the notion of “postfeminist masculinities” (Rumens, 2017) to examine and advance research on contemporary men and masculinities in the workplace and to explore the intersections between postfeminist masculinities and continuing gender inequalities at work. Postfeminism is associated with discourses of masculinity in crisis and men in search of a new identity, opposed to the ever-growing confidence and empowerment of women. The postfeminist man “is fallible, self-deprecating and liable to fail at any moment” (Gill, 2014, p. 193). However, as Rumens (2017, p. 251) asserts, such political discourses “disseminate cultural tropes of male injury, loss and underachievement without acknowledging the hegemony of men’s practices in the reproduction of gender inequalities” within many work settings. In critiquing the crisis discourse, Hearn (2015) calls for critical analyses that explore the continuing hegemony of men in organisational settings, even in so-called postfeminist times.

Whilst there has recently been a flourishing interest in postfeminist femininities in organisations (see for example the collections by Lewis, Benschop, and Simpson, 2017, 2018), the role of men in responding and adapting to (post)feminist discourses in the contemporary world of work is less understood. The gender literature has analysed men’s performance of masculinities in society (Connell, 1982, 1983, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and in the workplace (e.g. Collinson, 1992; Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Kerfoot & Knights, 1993; Knights & Kerfoot, 2004; McCabe & Knights, 2016; Morgan, 1992), focusing on more dominant or hegemonic masculinities; however, little empirical research has explored contemporary discourses and practices of postfeminist masculinities in organisations. Indeed,

while social science scholars have explored how postfeminist discourses concerning women's empowerment affect men and masculinity in society by focusing, for example, on ontological insecurities in a postfeminist world (e.g. Roberts, 2014), or on more inclusive and non-homophobic masculinities (Anderson, 2010), limited research has explored men's positioning within contradicting postfeminist discourses in the workplace.

In responding to calls for a critical understanding of postfeminist masculinities at work, this paper investigates how aspects of postfeminism as a cultural discourse influences constructions of contemporary masculinities in the Italian workplace. In doing so, it offers important theoretical and empirical contributions to the MOS literature. First, it contributes to a nascent stream of literature in MOS exploring gender through postfeminist discourses (Adamson, 2017; Adamson & Kelan, 2018; Gill et al., 2017; Lewis, 2014; Lewis et al., 2017; Liu, 2018; Ronen, 2018; Rumens, 2017) by theorising three key features of postfeminist masculinities: (i) the move away from a conceptualisation of the "old industrial man" towards a "new industrial man"; (ii) the construction of heroic/unheroic positions; (iii) the use of gender differentiation to point to men's superiority. These features show how men draw on specific discourses and practices to construct complex and contradictory (postfeminist) masculinities. Thus, the paper advances the theoretical refinement of 'postfeminist masculinities' as a critical concept by offering new insights on men's positioning within patriarchal traditions, on the one hand, and contemporary pressures for more egalitarian relations on the other. It does so by empirically exploring the entanglement between social discourses and work practicesⁱ and suggesting how the emerging dynamics contribute to maintain gender inequalities in the workplace.

Second, the paper offers a novel empirical analysis of masculinities from both social and organisational perspectives. Italy is a particularly interesting social context in light of its historical legacy, particularly fascism and the strong influence of the Catholic Church, which continue to affect constructions and representations of men, women and the traditional family as an institution. The “traditional position that masculinity and femininity are rooted in nature and biology” (Wanrooj, 2005, p. 278) is also gaining greater popularity in both Italian academia and the media. Nonetheless, studies of masculinity and gender in the Italian workplace remain scarce, making Italy an attractive cultural setting for our research. The organisational context of a non-profit pharmacological research centre, characterised by a culture influenced by the “natural sciences”, is also a particularly interesting site for gender and masculinity research for several reasons. The equal presence of men and women at the start of the profession (women make up 48% of researchers) becomes less balanced towards the highest ranks, with less than 17% of posts as directors of research institutes or departments held by women. Furthermore, in the overall non-profit sector (in which salaries tend to be lower than in the large private biomedical companies) women make up 67% of all researchers; yet, their presence in the highest ranks (managing directors and business owners) is half that of men (Istat, 2011, as cited in Deriu, 2014). Thus, this study contributes an enhanced understanding of the dynamics that keep women confined to lower hierarchical positions, even in a context (i.e. the biological sciences) characterised by their equal participation at entry levels.

The paper is organised as follows. We first set the context of the study, by providing a brief overview of Italian masculinities. This is followed by a review of research on masculinities in the workplace, with specific reference to postfeminist discourses. Next, we illustrate the methodology and the organisational context before presenting the analysis of the empirical study. The data analysis is organised according to the themes emerging from the data,

focusing on the “new industrial man”, heroic and unheroic positions and the naturalisation of gender differentiation. The concluding discussion highlights the contributions of this paper to the understanding of contemporary masculinities, symbolised by the image of the “new industrial man” as a simultaneously heroic and unheroic subject position.

Masculinities in the Italian workplace

Despite Italy having one of the strongest feminist traditions in Western Europe, mainly associated with the labour movement and embedded in issues of gender and class (Kaplan, 1992), Italian masculinities remain anchored in representations of the virile, macho man (Pozzo, 2013). Furthermore, views and representations of women as objects of desire and/or located in the realm of the house (as wives and mothers) remain dominant in the country. Socio-historical constructions of gender and masculinities have been heavily influenced by the Catholic Church, fascism and the communist party (Kaplan, 1992; Tager & Good, 2005), as well as the geographical position of the country between Western Europe and Mediterranean countries (including north Africa). Furthermore, the relatively recent unification of the country (since 1861) means that regional differences are still extensive, in particular between northern and southern regions. The south has historically been closer to Mediterranean traditions, such as honour and shame, which have affected specific constructions of masculinity(ies) and femininity(ies) (Pozzo, 2013). However, common to both north and south is a conceptualisation of masculinity founded in the fascist rhetoric and ideology, within which “virility” articulates many of its disparate elements (Spackman, 1996). The fantasy of male reproduction, homosociality – intended as social bond among men that repudiates any same-sex erotic ties (Priola, Lasio, Serri, & De Simone, 2018) – and the constant fear of homosexuality, are rooted in the fascist notion of virility, as well as in the Catholic idea of family as a natural institution. Virile masculinity was reproduced in the rhetorical practices of Mussolini (Spackman, 1996), but continues to be relevant in the

representations of more recent premiers and vice-premiers, such as Silvio Berlusconi and Matteo Salvini, as well as in the popular media (Coladonato, 2014).

These historical influences become entangled with social pressures for change, as experienced in most Western countries, such as globalisation, greater participation of women in the labour market, same-sex marriages and alternative models of family (see Andolfi, 2001; Badolato, 1993; Bellasai, 2004; Bellasai & Malatesta, 2000; Graziosi, 2000; Kaplan, 1992; Pescarolo & Vezzosi, 2003; Piccone Stella & Saraceno, 1996; Pietropolli, 1995). These contradictory pressures mark Italy as distinct from most European countries in that these social changes, while pressing, do not seem to have achieved the same magnitude as in other Western countries (Tager & Good, 2005). Indeed, Italy is characterised by a divorce rate lower than the European Union (EU) average, limited reconstructed families (Ruspini, 2009) and lower women's participation in the labour market (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018).ⁱⁱ These tensions are reflected in contemporary views of masculinities, which mesh traditional constructions embedded in the figures of the Latin "macho" and/or "paterfamilias", with more recent transformations, including legislative changesⁱⁱⁱ that embrace new articulations of the roles of fathers and partners within the family. Against this background, the emergence of new associations, such as the Italian Association of House Husbands (Associazione Italiana Uomini Casalinghi) and the Association of Separated Fathers (Associazione Padri Separati), appear to be troubling gender relations in and out of work. These reflect as well as offer new models of masculinity that include a broadened emotional landscape associated with caring and nurturing.

The "new" man (Genz & Brabon, 2009, p. 143) is generally portrayed as an inclusive, caring, emotional individual, who may be conflicted and subjugated, but also combines behaviours associated with traditional forms of masculinity (Rumens, 2017). These behaviours can be produced almost concurrently within the same or different contexts, or can emerge under

different conditions at different times. This contemporary representation of masculinity in society has implications for constructions of masculinities in the workplace (Wanrooij, 2005) and poses a challenge for Italian men, who, as Ruspini (2009) argues, struggle between tradition and modernity. Thus, while researchers (e.g. Rumens, 2017) conceptually represent contemporary postfeminist masculinities as conflicted, more empirical knowledge of men's positioning within postfeminist discursive regimes is needed to explore the relations between masculinities and enduring workplace gender inequalities. Postfeminist regimes mesh feminist expectations of equality and empowerment with traditional, anti-feminist pressures, such as patriarchal expectations concerning women's bodies and sexuality and their role in the family (Gill, 2007). Critics dismiss postfeminist masculinities because they encompass these multiple, often contradictory, positioning, rendering the concept too vague. Yet, we argue, understanding the complexity of contemporary discourses of masculinities has the potential to unveil the practices that contribute to maintain deeply-rooted and persisting gender inequalities in the workplace.

Men, Masculinities and Postfeminism

Exploring how discursive constructions of masculinities are revealed in men's and women's workplace practices and behaviours is fundamental to further understandings of gender relations. The gender literature has shown how men's workplace practices often hinder women's advancement (Cockburn, 1991) and exclude women and those who do not conform to hegemonic forms of masculinity. Through practices of male bonding (Hawkins, 2013) and the creation of male-only networks within organisations (van den Brink & Benschop, 2014), but also across hierarchies and organisations (Martin, 1996, 2001), structures are set up to favour the advancement of men and masculine ideals (Bendl, 2008). Furthermore, Kelan (2018) suggests there are other ways in which men tend to do/undo gender at work, by distancing themselves from women, trying to impress others, or displaying heroism. Yet,

empirical accounts of how wider social postfeminist discourses of “new men” and “empowered women” can be reconciled with these persisting workplace inequalities are still lacking. Thus, the further understanding of how men navigate between feminist demands for empowerment and equality and the simultaneous strengthening of traditional images of masculinity is crucial to advance current knowledge of gender inequalities.

The literature on masculinities at work (e.g. Cockburn, 1991; Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Knights, 2015; Knights & Kerfoot, 2004; McCabe & Knights, 2016) has highlighted the complexity, ambiguity and fluidity of masculinities and how these are experienced at a subjective level, for example in male-dominated (e.g. Kanter, 1977; Kerfoot & Knights, 1998) or female-dominated workplaces (e.g. Alvesson, 1998; Simpson, 2004). These studies emphasise the often authoritarian and instrumental behaviours of men and their association with power and higher status, as well as the gendered makeup of organisational structures supporting the stereotypical masculine ways of working, even in more feminised professions (e.g. Cross & Bagilhole, 2002; Pullen & Simpson, 2009; Simpson, 2004). For example, studies (e.g. Alvesson, 1998; Pringle, 1993) have shown that men reconstruct their jobs to enhance their “masculine” components and restore their dominant position, often by devaluing femininities (Williams, 1993). Other authors have reported how they perform “careerism” by aspiring to management positions (Heikes, 1992; Williams, 1995) and displaying practices of male bonding (Simpson, 2004), in particular when their position could be threatened by feminisation or by the dominance of women. Similarly, research (e.g. Heikes, 1992) has highlighted that in workplaces dominated by women, men make faster career progress than women (Floge & Merrill, 1989), achieve greater pay and benefits (Williams, 1993) and assume authority, claiming the higher status of masculinity (Simpson, 2004).

While these studies explain some of the practices engaged by men in female-dominated occupations, there remains the need to investigate the more complex issues related to how contemporary postfeminist discourses concerning women's empowerment and men in crisis affect men's (workplace) masculinities in varied cultural and social contexts. This is particularly important in the current postfeminist landscape, in which images of powerful, generally white, middle-class, heterosexual, women (Adamson & Kelan, 2018; Negra, 2009) and caring, emotional, conflicted and subjugated men (Rumens, 2017) coexist alongside traditional gender roles. Indeed, traditional roles anchored to ideas of women as wives and mothers and of men as "tough, independent, a winner if not a breadwinner, impregnable, and indestructible" (Knights & Tullberg, 2012, p. 390) have been revived in social and organisational discourses across several countries (Sunstrøm, 1999; Treas & Widmer, 2000).

We are thus interested in exploring these complexities and we argue that traditional discourses of manhood, associated with the figure of the breadwinner (Cockburn, 1991) and "industrial man" (Fine, 1993) continue to influence construction of contemporary Italian masculinities alongside different pressure to change (as seen in the previous section). While Italy has experienced a delayed industrialisation, when compared to the UK and the US, it is worth noting that the country has been the fastest growing economy across OECD countries in the mid-80s, with impressive figures on industrial production mostly sustained by innovative small firms (Goodman, Bamford, and Saynor, 1989). Fine's (1993) conceptualisation of the "industrial man", as bounded to a dignity derived from work, autonomy, dedication, loyalty, fraternal identification and mutualism has been applicable to the Italian society well into the 1980s, when north European countries were developing their service economy.

'Industrial' men, who showed economic care and support of "the two families" -the work organisation and the private family- could realise themselves from the bottom up and through relations within the organisational community. However, in recent decades the "industrial man" has succumbed to social and legal changes, not least to feminist pressures exerted against the patriarchal ideology as well as neoliberal interventions. The image of the industrial man is substituted by the image of men in pursuit of individual and instrumental goals, without concern for their intended or unintended consequences, as represented throughout the service economy and culminating in the financial crisis (Knights, 2015 and 2019). In the last decade the postfeminist man has been portrayed as still negotiating the impact of feminism on his own identity, yet there seems to be a (re)turn to traditional masculine pursuits as part of subject positions that contain irreconcilable pro- and anti-feminist stances (Genz & Brabon, 2009). The postfeminist man seems to be a contradictory and hybrid man, encapsulating positions that include inclusive, caring and emotional behaviours alongside more traditional forms of masculinity (Rumens, 2017). This reflects contemporary postfeminist discourses, embedding feminist values of freedom of choice, self-determination and equality of opportunities in patriarchal expectations concerning motherhood, family and female beauty and sexuality (Gill, 2007; Liu, 2018). Antifeminist ideas, such as the (rhetorical?) remaking of the traditional family and traditional roles within the family are thus entangled with feminist ideas, related to women's empowerment and independence (Gill, 2014; Gill & Scharff, 2011; McRobbie, 2004).

Critical scholars (e.g. Adamson & Kelan, 2018; Gill, 2017) argue that postfeminist discourses, in advocating empowerment, individualism, choice and self-discipline, tend to silence structural inequalities and cultural influence and "[depoliticize] many of the fundamental issues advanced by [...] feminism" (Rosenfelt & Stacey, 1987, p. 78). The analysis that follows builds on this critique and shows how postfeminist discourses that

embed tensions associated to patriarchal expectations, entangled with current cultural changes (e.g. men as new fathers, non-winners - neither breadwinners etc.), influence the construction of contemporary forms of masculinities. The analysis also questions whether and how these postfeminist masculinities affect the gender dynamics in an organisation numerically dominated by women but managed by men.

Research Methodology

The analysis is based on data drawn from a larger qualitative, ethnographic study of Biomedicine for Life (BfL). BfL is an institute dedicated to clinical and biomedical research, developing innovation and research in several biomedical areas, including cardiovascular, kidney and neurological diseases and cancers, spread across nine departments. BfL was founded in 1961 as the first private Italian non-profit foundation dedicated to biomedical research. The three branches (BfL Alpha, BfL Beta, BfL Gamma) have very modern laboratories and technologies. This study took place in BfL Alpha, an extensive research centre based in a Technology Park, comprising offices, conference and meeting rooms, a digital library and numerous laboratories. At the time of the study, BfL employed 900 people in all its centres, including over 60 in BfL Alpha.

The study employed both overt participant observation of the Tissue Engineering Unit of BfL Alpha and 25 semi-structured interviews with BfL Alpha researchers, ranging from the director to junior researchers. The interviewees were between 23 and 65 years of age, all but one being of Italian nationality and most born in the region where BfL Alpha is located. What makes BfL Alpha an interesting site for observation is its gender composition, with over 80% female staff members. This was reflected in the proportion of men and women interviewed: out of 25 interviewees, only 7 were men. The hierarchical structure was also quite clear, with the positions of funder (and president) of BfL and the director of research and research coordinator – the highest management positions – being occupied by white middle-age men.

Despite the dominance of women in BfL Alpha, only one woman, a leading scientist worldwide, recognised by an international body as one of the top Italian scientists in Biomedical Science was a head of department (out of nine in BfL as a whole). In this paper we focus on the seven interviews with the men working at BfL Alpha and use pseudonyms for all participants and the organisation itself.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

The interviews began with a job history approach – “Tell me about your job, when you started, what your job entails and how you feel working in this environment” – and then proceeded in an informal, semi-structured way, allowing participants to discuss what their job meant to them and what doing research in a highly innovative context implied. The participants immediately identified the numerical prevalence of women in the organisation as a characteristic of BfL Alpha. This was often associated with the economic conditions of their job: low wages and the scarcity of permanent contracts. Most participants were qualified at the PhD level, having completed undergraduate programmes and two further years at Master’s level before commencing their PhD. Constant learning was an important topic brought up by participants as they reflected on their educational journey and their daily work practices.

The data analysis drew on a grounded theory approach in the data reduction process (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012; Nag, Corley, & Gioia, 2007) and involved two main phases. First, all 25 interviews were coded, resulting in 58 first codes developed in proximity to the data (Charmaz, 2006) and describing actions as they were narrated. These codes were then synthesised into second-order themes, describing patterns of actions. The second-order themes were then combined into aggregate dimensions, identifying macro areas of processes, such as the creation of innovation and breakthrough knowledge, and experiences in gendered

environments, among others. In the second phase, we re-coded the stories of the seven men interviewed, looking at their understanding and enactment of forms of masculinities. An open coding scheme around postfeminist themes of masculinities emerged through the iterative reclassification of the data, leading to the identification of three themes, reconnected to current literature on postfeminism as a cultural discourse (Gill, 2007; Lewis, 2014; Lewis et al., 2017; Ronen, 2018) and to discourses and practices of masculinities. These are: a) the “new” industrial man; b) heroic and unheroic stances; c) (re)naturalisation of sexual differences (see Table 2).

[Insert Table 2 here]

The data are presented in the form of “fragments” (Pecis, 2016; Pullen & Simpson, 2009). We selected these fragments for their evocative tone and language (Martin, 2001) and their representativeness of the core themes summarising the construction of masculinities in BfL Alpha.

The “new industrial man”

Is the postfeminist man a new “industrial man”? In reflecting conflicting ideals of the new father with a reworking of paternalism (Hamad, 2014), Giovanni, below, laments his loyalty to the organisation (placed before his family duties) and his concern for his overworked colleagues, who earn less than him. In privileging work duties over family and self-interest, Giovanni performs the traditional ideal of the industrial man, demonstrating dedication and loyalty to the organisation (Hancock, 2012) and fraternal identification and mutualism towards his colleagues (Fine, 1993), who, earning less than him, cannot be expected to take on extra work.

I am the only one who knows how the conference room works. As if you needed a degree to turn it on. My baby was three days old and I had to come here because no-one could turn the

conference room on. I cannot tell you what my wife was swearing at me and she was not wrong. But how could I say no? They would have been in deep trouble. So I took an hour, I live in “Villageville”, which is 40 km away, so it means leaving everything, coming here, turning it on and that’s it. [...] when I do the videoconferencing I take only 20 minutes for lunch, because I need to prepare everything 10 minutes earlier. [...] You cannot disregard it, but you are not asked either. And one does the accounts: if I earn 1000 euros, thank God I do 8 hours of work and do my job, why should I do something else? Stupid me, I said yes at the beginning. How can I ask someone who earns 800 euros to eat in 20 minutes? No. (Giovanni)

Giovanni’s positioning as a traditional ‘industrial’ man is reinforced by his specific role as the father of a three-day old baby, who lives more than an hour away from work. While we do not dispute Giovanni’s dedication to his work, we question whether this representation is a faux-paternalistic sense of care for the organisation. One might argue, in fact, that managing a conference room is not beyond the abilities of highly specialised and technical workers and that the sense of care Giovanni assumes might be an attempt to escape an unheroic position and to position himself as indispensable to the organisation. Nevertheless, in doing so Giovanni constructs his renunciation of personal time and the care for his co-workers as a return to old values of “industrial” loyalty.

This morning I had to take my son to the nanny, so for me it meant getting here at 9 sharp. I no longer do as I used to, I did 9, 9 and half hours of work. I was always here at 8 am, 8.10 and then would leave at 6.15 pm. Now I have to juggle, I cannot ask the nanny to keep him two extra hours. Unfortunately, I have to leave. And the phone keeps ringing and emails also come in on Sundays. (Giovanni)

Paradoxically, while constructing himself as a traditional industrial man, Giovanni also remodels his masculinity and depicts himself as a “new father”, one who manages his son’s care (through dropping off and picking up from the nanny) and sets boundaries on his work schedule to fulfil his fatherly duties. Two contradictory practices of masculinities are evident in the extracts above, re-presenting a postfeminist regime (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2004, 2009) and a “melting pot” of masculinities (Rumens, 2017, p. 249). We refer to this contradictory position as the “new industrial man”. The new industrial man is one who is

available to his organisation and heroically sacrifices his personal and family time for his work and his colleagues, even when on paternity leave. He is also one who shows a new dimension of fatherhood; as a “new father”, he leaves the phone ringing after working hours and emails go unanswered on Sunday. Similar to the postfeminist woman who manages a successful career alongside “the perfect family” (Adamson, 2017), the postfeminist man fulfils society’s expectation of gender equality, at least in his shared care of the children, alongside his organisational loyalty and fraternal support for his colleagues. He cares for both families: the organisation and his personal family (Fine, 1993).

The cultural trope of a hierarchical organization of work and the corresponding subjugation to its order (reflecting the old industrial regime) was a common theme emerging from the interviews. However, the glorification of the choice of subjugation, the respect for the rules of the organisation and the demonstration of commitment are not only constructed as loyalty, but are also framed as a strategy for attaining the desired outcome. Thus, the new industrial man is one who is subjugated, but he is also a neoliberal subject: instrumental and determined in his pursuits. This is evident in the following extract from Bruno’s interview:

I always work from the assumption that they have you at the sharp end of the knife, so you let them finish talking and we see how it goes, and maybe you wait two or three times... I always start from a defensive mode, sometimes starting defensive or maybe showing enthusiasm for something that actually disgusts you – I will never like it, I will never like it, I feel like dying – but you wait a minute and ... what do I have to lose? [...] I want to work for BfL, I go there, do the interview, put my tail between my legs, as I did for my PhD interview. At the end of the day, they took me, not other people, not the woman the same age as me, from my same lab and who has done exactly the same dissertation, I mean at the same time, everything the same as me. She got there with the attitude: well, no ... hmm ... eh ... nodding no with her head. That is not right. You put your tail in between your legs for 5 minutes... (Bruno)

For Bruno, to pursue a career in biomedical research, “*you say yes even if inside of you in that moment you want to die*”, “*you put your tail in between your legs for 5 minutes*”. In a way, this speaks to the obedience characterising highly hierarchical and power-infused

organisations, in which submission is deemed a choice to respect the rules. Choice and respect are key elements for understanding the persistent power and inequalities in organisations and their resistance to change. The organisation has struggled to change its foundational elements since its establishment. The few men in BfL show that the persistent power of hierarchies (led by the same men who started the organisation) calls for a choice of subjugation to authority typical of more traditional work relations. At the same time, contemporary work arrangements are rooted in a discourse of empowerment, in which the glorification of choice underplays and silences structural inequalities, such as the social hierarchies of power (i.e. the dominance of white, middle-age men at the top echelons of the organisation) and gender relations (e.g. the absence of women from the top managerial levels) within the workplace. In this context, empowerment is a freedom bound by arrangements restricting the individual expression of feelings and thoughts (Mavin & Grandy, 2013) and the privileging of reason over emotion (Knights, 2015), which for Bruno characterises his instrumental approach and distinguishes it from a female colleague's self-assurance. These contradictions hint at a new mode of being a man in the organisation, one that we identify as the "new industrial man": a man who still assumes masculine heroics, while simultaneously performing unheroic stances. This is a man whose sacrifice (i.e. setting up the conference room while on paternity leave) makes him visible to the hierarchy, rendering the high number of women invisible and uncooperative (see also Simpson, 2004).

Un/heroes of the organisation

BfL is a non-profit, private organisation, meaning that it does not depend on government funding. Whereas this allows its members to do "pure research" (as highlighted by the interviewees), it also presents different implications. One repercussion is that while some departments (such as that led by Roberto and in which Giovanni and Cristiano work) are independent of any private and for-profit logic, they nonetheless depend on the funding they

manage to secure (e.g. via EU frameworks) and on the clinical tests that other departments perform for local hospitals or pharmaceutical companies. Another repercussion – and the one most lamented – is that the salaries in the organisation remain extremely low and that opportunities for career progression are limited, notwithstanding the high level of education of all members and their continuous training and achievements (e.g. securing funding, publishing in top journals, etc.).

The ideal of “self-sacrifice” in pursuing pure research and doing a fulfilling job is depicted by Giovanni as equally heroic and unheroic. It is heroic because only a few men would be prepared to accept limited financial rewards for a higher purpose; it is unheroic because one cannot survive on their own and one needs to rely on one’s partner (in his case his wife) for financial support.

I am this clown who goes around the labs and everyone needs. But a small group of men would die here (he laughs at this point). They die for this reason: there is an objective problem; on 1500 euros [monthly salary] you struggle. I earn 1400 euros after the 18 years I have been here. [...] Either you have someone who has your back so that you can afford it, or you decide you are still in education or you have to leave, there are no other options. You don’t eat. If my wife didn’t work for a pharmacy and earn more than me, we wouldn’t go anywhere, with a toddler and a mortgage. [...] Asking for a salary increase here is not easy. There is no production bonus, responsibility benefits, nothing, just “thank you”. To me, this is the reason why we are four men and otherwise all women. It is not about the fact that a woman needs to be at home more and the man doesn’t, but who has your back. If you have someone who can financially support you, then you can be a researcher, that’s great! If you don’t, you don’t survive. [...] Roberto [the head of department] has four salaries [due to external consultancy and projects] and my boss [a woman] is lucky to have a husband who earns well. So they do not think about how we get by until the end of the month. You may like the job, but at the end of the day you need to be realistic.
(Giovanni)

Whereas self-sacrifice is constructed in tension with the financial difficulties endured in the organisation, the gender issue is a matter of fact that remains unquestioned. In a way, the “metaphor of struggle” (McCabe & Knights, 2016) ingrained in self-sacrifice is part of a masculine discourse mobilised by men, for men only, as women (generally)

have male partners who earn more. Moreover, the acknowledgement of this financial struggle (only mitigated by the sentence that it is not about gender but “who has your back”) reinforces men’s role as breadwinners within the Italian context: “*this is the reason why we are four men and otherwise all women*”, “*Roberto has four salaries*” (i.e. he gets out there and does other work) and “*my boss is lucky to have a husband who earns well*”. In appealing to gender traditional roles, Giovanni simultaneously dismiss them with reference to his own personal case. In doing so he appears to construct himself as the postfeminist man in a enduringly traditional work setting. Similarly, Cristiano, below, questions the narrative of sacrificing a potential career with a good salary for pursuing a superior purpose, especially given that he is a fully qualified medical doctor:

I am now 50 and some things are getting harder ... the fact that you don't have [monetary] incentives here in BfL Alpha; it would have been useful also for the young people to have an incentive. I don't know if one should make big and long sacrifices in one's life for a superior purpose. [...] This can impact your personal life as well as the working one. (Cristiano)

In reading his lamentation, we can notice a selfless tone. Cristiano complained about the impact of this financial situation on his personal life, but he also considered his younger colleagues and the possibilities they had to make a decent living and remain motivated at work. This emerges also in the interview with Bruno, who is in his 20s and has to seek alternative financial means that can work in parallel with his full-time employment in BfL. Similar to Giovanni, he acknowledges that it is his family’s financial support that allows him to pursue the job he likes:

I tell you in all honesty, if my parents were not financially supporting me, I would not be here. I earn 700 euros a month. How could I make it? I babysit, I cat-sit, but you cannot do much with it. I manage to earn 100 euros with these jobs that I use for my personal expenses. But fundamentally you cannot do much. Gas to get here from [name of city] is expensive, the

motorway has a toll, if you do not have anyone at your back... I would not have done it, maybe I would not even have studied biology. I am lucky to do something I like. (Bruno)

Younger and older colleagues seem to have a common preoccupation with a masculinity that is frail and vulnerable, still self-assured and thus a melting pot of contradictory discourses. These men are “*lucky*” to do a job they like, free from the constraints imposed by the large private or public pharmaceutical institutes, but they are also “*clowns*”, men who are/pretend to be happy with their job, but rely financially on their partners and families. They are not traditional breadwinners, but rather postfeminist men with an empowered wife who is the breadwinner. They are also heroes because not many would sacrifice their lives to pursue pure research, and they are anti- or un-heroes because they cannot survive without their family’s financial support. As Gill (2014, p. 193) suggests, the postfeminist discourse of men’s vulnerability is expressed through a fallible, self-deprecating, unheroic masculinity, “liable to fail at any moment”. The masculinity presented here acts as a site in which gendered norms are negotiated and left untouched. The figure of the postfeminist hero and un-hero, in fact, dismisses any need to question the deeper structure associated with the enduring low pay of women-dominated jobs.

Gender differentiation

The construction of gender differences as natural sexual differences emerged as a dominant theme in the interviews, one that reflects postfeminist thinking endorsing gender essentialism, feminine devaluation and its simultaneous denial (Ronen, 2018).

Simone: The way in which a man and a woman work in our field is different. The woman is more precise, she follows a protocol from the start. She disregards stupidities and wants high repeatability. Men are more flexible and can develop good things during the protocol but are not as precise to start with. Men are messier. So yes you can have a good idea, you do a prioritising of things you want to do, then it is perfect working with a woman, it is more efficient. If you have many protocols and you are missing the intellectual flux, having a man in the group, not just one, maybe two, it is a different interaction. Men’s ideas are different.

Researcher: In what sense?

Simone: Men have more creativity, women are more stable, so when you have a man and a woman in the group, you have a mean of the two and something good comes out. Men are built this way: to develop weapons, guns, to find food, they have to have creativity. Without creativity they cannot hunt. Women have children, they need to be precise, to provide food, to manage, to manage a family, they need to be precise, there is no room for playing. Women are more stable, they look for doable things, men instead have creativity and together they do great things. You always need a man [in a team].

... [later in the interview]

Simone: If you put many women together, it is biological to have issues. Women are dominant and want their space. [...] if you put many of them together, aggression levels rise, also mice do that: if you put many of them together, then they eat each other...

While Simone advocates the benefits of a numerically balanced workplace in which men and women bring different qualities, he constructs gender differences as biological and natural and assigns women and men a limited set of stereotypical qualities (Kanter, 1977), based on their historical responsibilities as mothers and hunters. Furthermore, by virtue of the dominance of women in the organisation, it appears that Simone implies that the feminine way of working threatens the possibility of novel discoveries in biomedical research, unless this is balanced by the messiness, courage and creativity of the masculine way of working. As also evidenced by Simpson (2004), men working in female-dominated environments tend to distance themselves from the dominant group by claiming a higher status. Their visibility may allow them to be exposed to more challenging situations demanding initiative and resourcefulness and this may help them to progress faster in the organisational hierarchy. While we could not ascertain this in our study, it was evident that these men were able visibly to challenge women's work, bringing original ideas to the experiments and thus they were more noticeable to their managers:

Marco: It is a bit different, there is lack of a practical sense, which the male component has. You [adding the researcher to the group of women] have rigour but lack practical sense.

Researcher: Could you give me an example of where you see this in your daily work?

Marco: How can I explain this to you ... women are much more organised so if they have to do something, they do it way beforehand because everything needs to go as it should go. Men instead tend to see what happens in the doing, do you understand what I am trying to say? In my daily work, for example, here there is a lot of attention to preparing two days in advance for doing what needs to be done, to get ready beforehand. In a way, this is better but I think it is more stressful. For me, from a practical point of view you lose [...] [for a man] if things do not go well they can be fixed, changed. I see the woman as: "It needs to go as it should go". Do you understand what I am saying?

Researcher: Yes, the experiment you are doing needs to follow the line you have planned

Marco: Exactly, if it goes off plan, then it is panic. Differently, a man is more ... well I am generalising here, but also when I was in Beta there was an attitude of we do, we undo, whereas here it is all more organised.

Similar to Simone, Marco acknowledges that women are more organised, diligent and precise than men. He also compares his experience with his previous work at BfL Beta, where the gender composition of employees was more balanced. In moving to Alpha, he felt strongly the difference between women's and men's work practices (e.g. in experimental designs) and approaches to biomedical research. In constructing essential gender differences Marco also devalues women's qualities; their thoroughness and precision are balanced by negative connotations, such as a tendency to panic, to be irrational and to cause unnecessary stress. Through an explicit stereotyping move, Marco asserts that essential gender differences are inevitable in their job and that men and women do biomedical research differently: men are more practical, pro-active and flexible; women are methodical, more rigid and prone to panic.

Bruno: I look at them [female colleagues] when they chat among themselves and I realise how many times ... a couple of them say: "Oh did you see that one?" Then in reality, when they see that person they are all smiley. So maybe even towards me they do the same, it could be, and this makes me laugh, because it seems to me that among men, even among my friends, if men need to tell you something, they do it immediately, if they have a problem with you they tell you. Here instead you have always to watch your back because you never know whether what you said will be retold in another way. [...] and this affects people's communications at the scientific level.

Researcher: Could you give me an example?

Bruno: To tell you simply, even recently with the Saturday shifts [he brings the example of women chatting behind each other's backs and gossiping during the break about a colleague who did not turn up for her shift] you feel you are the idiot in this situation, I am not used to these dynamics, I don't understand them.

While participants acknowledge the need for both feminine and masculine qualities, they also devalue women based on a range of stereotypical attributes, including their tendency to gossip, their pedantic attachment to trivialities and their hypocritical work relations. Marco, Bruno and Giovanni (see below) describe women talking behind others' backs and engaging in complex and distorted communication, while simultaneously suggesting that men's communication style is more direct and honest.

Giovanni: In my opinion women are less – allow me to say this – honest, compared to men. In the sense that if I need to tell someone to buzz off, between men you do it and the next day it is done and dusted. Here no. Here women do not do it, they speak to you in the canteen and they badmouth you in another place. So this is not a nice environment. [...]

Throughout the interviews, it was interesting that the men articulated essential gender differences, constructing masculinity as “more practical”, “more honest”, “more straightforward”. For the postfeminist man it seems that gender differences call for a gender-balanced environment, which works better in undertaking scientific research. While the ‘traditional’ man might argue that men dominance would ensure scientific success, the postfeminist man defends gender balance. However, when unbalanced by a lack of men, the perception is that femininity could actually be detrimental to the scientific progress. In an environment numerically dominated by women, the appeal to the “biological” characteristics that men bring to the work, such as creativity and flexibility, contribute to constructing masculinities as indispensable to work and the research process. As Gill (2007) reports, the greater interest concerning the nature of gender differences, supported by the revelation from genetic sciences that certain areas of the brain are different between men and women, has

affected the resurgence of popular ideas of natural sexual differences. It is clear that such ideas are fully embraced by biomedical scientists, who use them to justify their positive constructions of masculinity versus the more negative forms of femininities evident in their workplace.

Discussion

In analysing contemporary representations of masculinities at work, we discuss sometimes conflicting and paradoxical behaviours ascribed to men by men to explain the numerical dominance of women, while asserting the superiority of the masculine. The regime of postfeminist discourses (of powerful women and subjugated men) influences men's masculinities in the organisation, resulting in contradictory practices and specific gender dynamics that encompass changing masculinities within enduring traditional positioning in the workplace. On the one hand, women's success at work and their dominant financial position within the family lead to expectations of gender equality and to men's equal position in relation to child-care as "new fathers" (Genz & Brabon, 2009). On the other hand, traditional gender relations are reinforced by neoliberal expectations constructed around the industrial man, who is always available to the organisation (even when on paternity leave). This specific version of postfeminist masculinity, entrenched in what we defined as the "new industrial man", offers a new mode of being a man at work, allowing a variety of contradictory positions to co-exist to justify the less glorifying aspects of masculine "failure" (e.g. relying on one's partner or family's financial support) while still representing masculinity as superior to femininity. We argue that this way of "securing the self and identity through perpetrating attempts to control that which is 'other'" (Knights, 2019, p. 26) reveals masculine discourses and practices that continue to sustain inequalities in the organisation.

In an organisation dominated by women and characterised by low financial rewards and slow career progression, men describe their financially constrained condition and their choice to remain in the organisation in terms of “self-sacrifice” (Knights & Tullberg, 2012). Such sacrifice is for a superior purpose: doing pure research that is independent of the profit-oriented logic of the pharmaceutical industry. This sacrifice enables these men to accomplish “masculine heroics” (Cockburn, 1991) rooted in commitment to pure research and to the organisation. It is also reminiscent of what McCabe and Knights (2016) define as a form of masculinity that emphasises the “greater good” within masculine military discourses, as evident in the terminology used by Giovanni and Cristiano: “*dying*”, “*superior purpose*”, “*long-lasting and big sacrifices*”. As Mavin and Grandy (2013) suggest, men’s appeal to notions of heroism is a strategy to reposition their work as “good” work and construct positive subjectivities. However, these men also reveal an aspect of this subjectivity more attuned to the position of the un-hero, who is “*the clown who goes around the labs and everyone needs*”, but also someone who disengages from discourses of financial success and dominance within the family. We argue that this entanglement between heroic and unheroic positions contributes to construct a postfeminist masculinity(ies) within which contradictory discursive practices manage to co-exist.

In fact, the cultural trope of sacrifice brings to light the contradictions and ambivalence of a “post” heroism characterising masculinity in the current postfeminist economic and cultural landscape. This “post”masculine heroism expects men to perform roles that are more conventional, such as sacrificing themselves for the greater good (the functioning of the organisation, pure research, etc.), while also accepting a meagre salary, a low quality of life (despite their qualifications and extensive experience) and financial reliance on their partners and families. In doing so, they disrupt the figure of the “paterfamilias” and the idea that paid work and success is a central source of masculine identity (Cockburn, 1991; Walby, 1986),

namely that “employment provides the interrelated economic resources and symbolic benefits of wages/salaries, skills and experience, career progress and positions of power, authority and high discretion” (Collinson & Hearn, 1994, p. 6). Financial achievements no longer characterise the masculinity described here. We explain this by embedding these results within the postfeminist discourse but also within the Italian social context, in which neoliberal ideals of economic success and career advancement are affected by an enduring economic crisis characterised by high unemployment and low wages.

The study also revealed an interesting paradox: men’s acknowledgement of the financial struggle reinforces the social expectations of being breadwinners, as they depoliticise the fact that it is women who are generally employed in lower paid jobs and in the non-profit sector. Instead, they use this context and the narrative associated with it as the terrain for constructing a simultaneously heroic and unheroic subjectivity. The men in BfL recovered a masculine sense of self through the reworking of more traditional ideas of industrial man (Hancock, 2012). They performed aspects of a dedicated and loyal employee, embracing financial struggle together with a heroic sense of pride and responsibility (Morgan, 1992), attached to a duty of care towards both “families” (Fine, 1993) and the common good (McCabe & Knights, 2016).

Within a postfeminist narrative, we propose that these multiple and contradictory narratives of masculinity obscure gender issues by leaving unquestioned the deeper structure associated with the enduring low pay of female-dominated jobs and the lack of senior roles, even in organisations numerically dominated by women. While the participants suggested that the reasons for the numerical dominance of women in the organisation was low pay, they also glorified financial struggle as a heroic choice, afforded to those who have alternative financial means (generally support from partners and family). The promotion of the ideal of

the hero (whether a man or a woman), who can pursue pure research, contributes to a very individualistic logic and perpetuates gender segregation because it diverts attention from the genuine issue of low pay in female-dominated occupations or sectors. It also prevents a focus on why this is the case and what can be done to affect change.

Another important finding of the study concerns the essentialism of gender differences, which have also been highlighted by other scholars analysing postfeminism as a social discourse (e.g. Gill, 2007; Ronen, 2018). The men in the study were quite comfortable talking about gender differences and their experience of working in an organisation numerically dominated by women. They all emphasised the need to bring masculine and feminine qualities to scientific work to ensure the success of experiments and discoveries. They performed a “gender differentiation” based on positive representations of women (Cockburn, 1991): women “naturally” do research methodically; they are more industrious, diligent and precise. Yet, the men also suggested that negative aspects counterbalance these positive differences. The femininity depicted is characterised as excessively organised and prone to panic and is set against a superior version of masculinity, characterised as the “doer”, the creative and flexible researcher. Such construction not only marks men and women as different, but represents men as better researchers. This specific masculinity is indispensable and preferable in a scientific setting, while this version of femininity is less suitable for certain roles, unless it is balanced by the influence of masculinity. Under this logic, which reveals a postfeminist ideology, an anti-feminist discourse upholds the principle of gender equality, while denigrating women as pedantic, aggressive and also incapable of working with other women.

In contrast to the suggestions of other authors regarding gender blindness (Lewis, 2006) and gender fatigue (Kelan, 2009), our participants emphasised gender as an organisational issue; however, this extends only to a particular aspect. Specifically, men's emphasis on gender and gender differentiation is interpreted as a way for men to respond to the threat of women's numerical presence. Furthermore, the men in BfL rooted natural sexual differences in an evolutionary biological perspective that "scientifically" justifies the existence of differences in research practices. This reveals the reiteration of a postfeminist ideology, characterised by an emphasis on genetics, which appears to disavow the negative consequences of essentialism and devaluation of the feminine. Since these differences are repackaged as given scientific facts, they cannot be changed by individuals or through social transformation. Such (dangerous) logic could also be used to explain the lack of leadership skills in women, even though this was never implied at BfL. Gender blindness was, however, evident in relation to the absence of women from the highest echelons of the organisation. As also raised by previous research (e.g. Heikes, 1992; Lupton, 2000; Williams, 1993), the lack of recognition of an evident glass-ceiling phenomenon was neglected on the basis that the environment is heavily feminised.

Conclusions

The emergence of postfeminist themes and the recent social and legislative changes across many Western countries call for the exploration of the performative dimensions of postfeminist discourses in constructions of femininities and masculinities. We address a critical lack of empirical research on postfeminist masculinities in view of the fact that despite the rise of discursive constructions of men as vulnerable and in crisis, they continue to remain dominant in terms of power, position, leadership, management, pay and resources in most workplaces (Hearn & Collinson, 2017).

Our first contribution to current debates on masculinities in a postfeminist economic and cultural landscape (Rumens, 2017) is to elaborate on the concept of the “new industrial man”: a new man, a new father, a subjugated and respectful subject, different from and yet similar to the “traditional” industrial man (Fine, 1993). We contend that the concept of the new industrial man depicts a masculinity on the move between tradition and fluid modernity. The “new industrial man” uses contradictory discourses to construct a heroic sense of self. He chooses to remain in BfL because there he is free to pursue pure research, without necessarily bowing to commercial pressures; he also chooses subjugation and respect, a seemingly unheroic choice, to legitimise aspirations of career advancement and to reaffirm his superiority over women’s ways of working. While such a choice is constructed as free and gender neutral, the numerical dominance of women and the absence of women from positions of power implies a systematic exclusion of women from involvement in higher level decision making, authority and leadership, as well as from more lucrative careers in other organisations. The postfeminist emphasis on choice, according to which women are free to choose their career and where they want to work, obscures “how social structures enable some choices and obstruct others” (Lewis et al., 2017, p. 219). While men at BfL “can” forgo a lucrative career for a higher purpose, presenting themselves as heroes, structural social and work arrangements generally present women with little choice.

The second contribution to the theorisation of postfeminist masculinities in the contemporary workplace lies in showing that the conflation of gender with biological sex by the men enabled them to construct it as a determinant of work practices, rather than a way of being. Women’s presence, voices and ways of working appear to threaten the doing of biomedical research by virtue of the fact that they behave “differently” from men. Indeed, the gender differentiation discussed in the results frames women and femininity as less apt to undertake “innovative” biomedical research. In contrast to Cockburn’s (1991) idea that women are

“better” at work and better performers, difference is used here, within a postfeminist ideology of essentialism, to ultimately devalue women’s work and undermine their contributions to innovation. A postfeminist ideology upholding the notion that women and men come from different planets (Gill, 2014; Gray, 1993) is performed in more perverse terms in the organisation: this version of femininity is deemed less suitable than the masculinity depicted for engaging in innovation. In a profession based on the natural sciences, from which women have traditionally been absent, even the entrance of a large number of women seems not to bring equality at work. Quite the contrary, women’s numerical dominance is a threat to the few men in the organisation, who then need to justify their presence through the performance of a masculinity that is heroic and superior to the femininity depicted, while also disregarding women’s struggles in attaining managerial positions.

The study reveals the specific dynamics that permit the maintenance of a status quo in which non-profit pharmacological and biomedical organisations, such as BfL, are dominated by the tangible presence of women and any effort at gender equality is crystallised because numbers speak for equality and because feminine ways of working are still represented as subordinate to masculine ways of working. The implications of postfeminism for contemporary men and masculinities (and for women and femininities) not only upset discourses of traditional subject positions, but also generate messiness and displaced positions. This appears to be managed by men according to dynamics that while allowing the messiness to exist, continue to construct femininities as the ‘other’, subordinate and inferior to the masculinities performed by men. In other words, postfeminist discourses influence constructions of contemporary masculinities by legitimising a messiness rooted in contradictions that, whilst vocalising the pressures men experience in this new postfeminist cultural landscape, it maintains men’s centrality and power and masks persisting workplace gender inequalities.

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Table 1 BfL Male Interviewees

Name	Job role	Notes
Giovanni	Permanent researcher in renal biophysics	Giovanni is a permanent researcher and part of Roberto's department. He has been with the organisation since the early 1990s and has graduated in biology in his time at the institute. Giovanni is married to a pharmacist with whom he has a toddler.
Giulio	Fixed-term researcher (non-PhD) in the pathophysiology of experimental renal disease and interaction with other organ systems	Giulio was the youngest of the men interviewed. He is a molecular biologist on a fixed-term contract, finalising his Master's dissertation in the pathophysiology of experimental kidney disease and interaction with other organs. He started working for BfL a couple of months before the interview.
Bruno	PhD researcher in tumour angiogenesis	Bruno is a PhD researcher focusing on tumour angiogenesis and has been in BfL for over three years. He joined as a Master's dissertation student before starting his PhD.
Marco	PhD researcher in cell biology and regenerative medicine	Marco is a PhD researcher in cell biology and regenerative medicine. He has been in BfL for four and half years, three of which were in another BfL branch.
Simone	Post-doctoral researcher in organ regeneration	Simone came to the institute as a postdoctoral researcher in molecular biology four years before the interview took place. He was the only non-Italian man interviewed. His wife lives in their country of origin.
Cristiano	Permanent researcher, MD, in the pathophysiology of experimental renal disease and interaction with other organ systems	Cristiano is a medical doctor and a permanent researcher specialising in pathology and immunopathology. He does not have children or a partner and is a carer for his mother. He figured in the worldwide list of top Italian scientists (the same list as the female head of department).
Roberto	Head of the Biomedical Engineering Department	Roberto is a mechanical engineer and a head of department. He has been with the organisation since the mid-1980s and has held several appointments as a consultant and professor in various universities.

Table 2. Themes, Discourses and Practices of Postfeminist Masculinities

Postfeminist themes	Second-order codes	First-order codes
<i>The “new” industrial man</i>	Submission as a choice and strategy	Respect for authority in the organisation (submission as choice and hierarchical condition) In the job it helps to be assertive and decisive But not too assertive... It also helps to be strategic (submission as a career strategy)
	Care and support of “the two families”	Care for family and co-workers and issues in managing the double presence “You do this not for the money”
	Lack of collective support	Financial reliance on family/partners working outside the organisation (and bosses not caring about this as they are in a privileged financial position) Lack of collective action (e.g. asking for technological improvements or for pay increases)
<i>Heroic and unheroic stances</i>	Self-sacrifice	Conscious choice of low earnings Choice not to seek a career outside
	Unheroic stances	Reliance on partners and families Resenting low pay when discussing private life
<i>(Re)naturalisation of sexual differences</i>	Lamentation of the static hierarchy	No changes in the structure of the organisation/many people have been there for too long, leading to stagnation Politics needed to manage the hierarchical environment and hierarchical issues
	Tension concerning the gendering of the workplace	Interviewees immediately talk about the numerical presence of women in the organisation. Yet gender is unimportant. Men’s and women’s relations work, but not women to women as there is a battle that leads to a waste of time and a lack of communication among them when problems arise

ⁱ In this paper we view “discourse as a broad system for the formation and the articulation of ways of thinking, behaving, and, eventually, being.” (Nicolini, 2012, p.190). Discourses and practices are thus entangled and inseparable. Discourse itself is “a form of action, a way of making things happen in the world, and not a mere way of representing it. From this perspective, language is seen as a discursive practice, a form of social and situated action.” (Nicolini, 2012, p.189).

ⁱⁱ The presence of women in the workplace in Italy is still lower than in most European countries. According to the latest figures from the OECD (2018), the average employment rate among Italian women is approximately 50%, 10 points lower than the OECD average.

ⁱⁱⁱ Recent legislation includes equal paternity leave (Law no. 151, 2001) and a shared custody regime (Law no. 54, 2006). The latter introduced the joint custody of children as a general rule in cases of divorce. These have contributed to the reshaping of fatherhood practices and discourses of masculinities in society and the workplace.