RESEARCH ARTICLE

Evaluating the concept of political masculinity/ies: a simple idea or a case of too many ideas?

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This article critically interrogates and evaluates the concept of political masculinities as part of enhancing dialogue between political science and critical studies on men and masculinities. It discusses what counts as masculinity, what counts as political and how they connect. The connections are all too clear in mainstream politics, not only in populist, authoritarian, ethno-nationalist and militaristic politics but also in democratic, socialist and various activist politics. The evaluation of the concept of political masculinities is conducted by asking three main questions: how does the concept add to, complement or contradict existing and established external concepts and theories? How is the concept constructed internally, and with what structure, elements and interrelations? And how can the application of the concept be possibly extended into fields beyond those usually recognized and labelled explicitly as specifically political fields, including the politics of the everyday and the politics of multiple global crises?

Key words conceptualization • critical studies on men and masculinities • evaluation • masculinities • masculinity • political masculinity

Key messages
• The concept of political masculinities can complement and be consistent with patriarchy theories and masculinities theory.
• The concept raises basic questions of what the political players, political domains and political claims are.
• Political masculinities operate beyond mainstream politics in everyday life.
• Political masculinities operate in the creation of, and resistance to, multiple global crises.

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Introduction

This special issue centres on the analytical category of ‘political masculinities’ and different ways of applying, conceptualizing, defining and critiquing the concept (Starck and Sauer, 2014; Starck and Luyt, 2019; Löffler et al, 2020; Luyt and Starck, 2020a; 2020b). Specifically, this article seeks to evaluate the analytical category of political masculinities as part of bringing into closer dialogue political science and critical studies on men and masculinities (CSMM), that is, critical, feminist, historical, cultural, relational, materialist, deconstructive and anti-essentialist studies of men and masculinities (see Hearn, 2004; Kimmel et al, 2005; Gottzén et al, 2020). I approach this dialogue from long-term involvement in CSMM, along with sociology, organization studies, social policy, cultural studies and interdisciplinary gender studies. Despite that, it was not until the mid-2010s, prompted by the Political Masculinities Research Network, that I worked explicitly on the concept of political masculinities (Hearn, 2020). However, in retrospect, something like it has always been there, implicitly, from the late 1970s, with men and masculinities being recognized as political matters, hence the notion of ‘political men’ and ‘man/men in politics’ (Clark and Lange, 1979; Carver, 2004).

The apparently simple idea that masculinity/ies is/are linked to power/the political has been clear from at least the 1970s, with the impact of second-wave feminism on the politicization of gender, gender relations and gender identity. Indeed, arguably, the politics of men and masculinity, if not an explicit notion of political masculinities, has always been part of feminist theory and practice. Already in 1990, Jalna Hanmer (1990), identified 54 anglophone, mainly US, feminist books on women’s lives and their (political) relationships to men, all published by 1975. Politics and power are part and parcel of feminist and pro-feminist approaches to men and masculinities. Furthermore, (pro-)feminist, and thus CSMM, understandings of politics, power and the political – as diffuse and beyond specifically labelled ‘political’ institutional domains – may tend to differ from some traditions in political science, especially malestream, non-feminist approaches and those playing down gender power relations. While many CSMM scholars emphasize those former understandings, some further, often less gendered, distinctions within political science, notably between politics as ‘spatial’ sphere and politics as ‘temporal’ activity, are introduced in the following to assist interdisciplinary dialogue.

Aims of the article

Much, if not all, CSMM is embedded in power relations and the pursuit of politics, so key questions are: What does the concept of political masculinities add? And how do we critically evaluate its strengths, weaknesses and possible applications? This article interrogates in a critical and constructive way the very concept of political masculinity, focusing on the concept as spelt out by Luyt, Sauer, Starck and associates. The concept of political masculinity is distinguished from various uses of ‘masculinity/ies’ in and around politics, including some diverse and implicit applications and examples of political masculinity. Thus, this article is not a literature review of the many and various ways in which the term ‘masculinity/ies’ has been deployed, explicitly or implicitly, in politics. That would be an immense task, worth attempting, but well beyond a single article.
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The concept of ‘political masculinity’ can be distinguished from the general understanding of ‘masculinities as political’, not necessarily located in explicitly political domains but rather as power-laden, in keeping with the insights of second-wave and subsequent feminisms. Seen thus, masculinities include hegemonic, complicit, marginalized and subordinated masculinities, as well as those understood within, for example, poststructuralist and post-humanist frames. In addition, the focus on political masculinity overlaps with the more specific analysis of masculinities within politics, seen in terms of political domains within which masculinities are located. Masculinities within such political domain politics include those understood as power-laden, as well as those framed in some other, less overtly political ways, not necessarily even linked to the making of political claims (see Figure 1).

Both these alternative approaches – the broader masculinities as political and the narrower masculinities in politics – need interrogation, but the focus here is on an intermediate approach between them: the concept of political masculinity. This intermediate approach goes beyond how masculinities are enacted within what are labelled as ‘political domains’ but is narrower than seeing (almost) all masculinities as political and power-laden, if only by differential reference to power.

The concept of political masculinities

Political masculinities have been defined by Starck and Sauer (2014: 6) as:

any kind of masculinity that is constructed around, ascribed to and/or claimed by ‘political players.’ These shall be individuals or groups of persons who are part of or associated with the ‘political domain,’ i.e. professional politicians, party members, members of the military as well as citizens and members of political movements claiming or gaining political rights.

Subsequently, Starck and Luyt (2019: 435, emphases added) argued that ‘the concept of political masculinities can usefully be applied in instances in which power is explicitly

Figure 1: Masculinities as political, masculinities in politics and political masculinities

Note: This figure is illustrative and simplified, as there are also possible permutations that cut across these distinctions.
either being (re)produced or challenged’, notably in crises, transitions and post-transitions. Thus, the concept is not fixed but rather seen as an evolving heuristic.

In recent studies on or around political masculinity/ies building on the work of Luyt, Sauer, Starck and associates, several points can be noted. First, most studies citing political masculinity concern specific examples of different types or forms of political masculinity (see, for example, Myrttinen, 2019; Geva, 2020; Ozbay and Soybakis, 2020). There is a clear tendency (pace Caravantes, 2019; Myrttinen, 2019) to focus on right-wing and authoritarian leaders (see, for example, Ekşi and Wood, 2019; Geva, 2020; Linders et al, 2023) rather than the wider spectrum of political actors.

Second, some studies usefully develop and/or nuance empirical applications of political masculinity. For example, in analysing the governing of COVID-19 in Austria, Dursun et al (2021) articulate political masculinity as hybrid, being both rational and affective. They note that women politicians can deploy political masculinity, a point also elaborated by Geva (2020) on the interplay of political masculinity and (political) femininity with regard to Marie Le Pen. In examining political masculinities in Turkey, Ozbay and Soybakis (2020: 29) argue that ‘political masculinity … is a configuration through which [ordinary] men interact with political leaders and ideals and, as a result, reform their gender identity’. They propound ‘a correlation between hegemonic masculinity and political masculinities as they connect and work upon relationality, justification, and persuasion in gender relations, the legitimation of patriarchy, and hierarchical masculinities’ (Ozbay and Soybakis, 2020: 31). Regarding political masculinity in Turkey, Ekşi (2019) examines intertwinnings of state and masculine power, and how public policing masculinities connect to the extent of commitment to democratization.

Third, some studies refer to political masculinity but do not develop the application. For example, Linders et al (2023: 656) state that ‘(Political) masculinity and sexuality co-constitute each other’ but then do not use the concept of political masculinity further in studying populist radical-right leadership.

Fourth, other recent texts take up similar issues without using the concept of political masculinity. Examples are Petrogiannis and Freidenvall’s (2022) analysis of hegemonic masculinity and the hegemony of men in pro-austerity rhetoric in Greek political discourse, Ralph-Morrow’s (2022) study of the English Defence League, and Caravantes’ (2019) examination of Podemos.

Most importantly, most recent studies do not interrogate the concept of political masculinity itself. This article focuses on that conceptual interrogation, rather than on types or versions of political masculinity. However, before proceeding further, some brief clarifying words on, first, masculinity and masculinities and then politics and power may be useful.

Any kind of masculinity

The definition from Starck and Sauer (2014: 6) quoted earlier begins with ‘any kind of masculinity that is constructed around, ascribed to and/or claimed by “political players”’. Masculinity, indeed masculinities, can be interpreted variously. There are established traditions in social psychology and kindred disciplines linking masculinity to set sex/gender traits, as in m–f scales and sex/gender roles. Masculinity is often tied directly to the gendering of males, men and boys, as in ‘those sets of signs indicating that a person is a “man”, or “not a woman”, or “not a child”’ (Hearn, 1987: 137),
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or identities and patterns of practices associated with the positions of men within the
gender system (Connell, 1995). Masculinity can be used more variously to refer to,
for example, gender expression, gender performance and psychodynamics, as well
as individual and collective practices, norms, values, discourses, social processes and
power structures given meaning in relation to gender, male, female, men, women
and further gender and sexual categories. In turn, multiple, complex masculinities,
for example, older working-class masculinity or young Black masculinities,
might be recognizable, along with various hybrid, pastiche or contradictory
political masculinities.

Thus, a problem with the term is that it can refer to many different social
phenomena, with a possible consequent unclarity (Hearn, 1996; Clatterbaugh,
1998). Moreover, by using the phrasing, ‘any kind of masculinity’, a theoretical
and substantive liberality seems suggested by Starck and Sauer (2014) for dealing
in an inclusive way with such complexities and variations. This is simultaneously
an advantage in developing different applications and a possible point of criticism
from perspectives advocating a more precise definition of masculinity/ies. Similarly,
‘constructed around, ascribed to and/or claimed’ makes possible a wide range of
relations of masculinity to political players: construction around and ascription to
presumably done by other actors (political or not), as well as more specific claims by
political actors themselves, presumably in some sense agentically. We return to these
questions in the following.

Politics and power

Politics and power are clearly and intimately related. Power figures in doing politics,
both inside and outside formal institutional political arenas, in leadership, hegemony,
governance, representation, social movements, resistance and more. However, power
and politics are not synonymous, not least with the different meanings that can be
attributed to them. There are many sites, forms and meanings of power, politics and
relations of politics and power, and thus many possible approaches to the analytical
category of political masculinities. In mapping some initial distinctions within this
vast field, with reference to the notion of politics, Palonen (2003: 171, emphases
in original) very usefully clarifies: ‘policy refers to the regulating aspect of politics,
politicking alludes to a performative aspect, polity implies a metaphorical space with
specific possibilities and limits, while politicization marks an opening of something
as political, as “playable.” Policy–politicking and polity–politicization form two
conceptual pairs.’ He continues by distinguishing politics as a ‘spatial’ sphere and
politics as ‘temporal’ activity: ‘In the sphere-concept, the core of politics is occupied
by the borders and regulations of the polity–policy space, whereas in the activity-
concept politics is constituted by the “verbal” figures of politicization and politicking’
(Palonen, 2003: 171).

All these aspects are relevant to evaluating the concept of political masculinities,
even while Starck and Sauer’s (2014: 6) definition quoted earlier appears to focus
mainly, if not exclusively, on the ‘sphere-concept’ and the ‘polity–policy space’. This
is not in itself a problem; rather, the emphasis in applying the concept thus far has
tended to favour more formal political arenas where polities and policies are most
clearly articulated. Equally, processes of claiming or gaining political rights might
be linked more to politicization, politicking and the ‘activity-concept’ of politics,
pointing to potential for wider possible applications. These distinctions are useful for interdisciplinary dialogue between CSMM and political science, specifically in understanding politics and power as aspects of the concept of political masculinities.

To sum up, power can be understood as both taking different forms and a more abstract(ed) concept encompassing structures, processes and agency – laden with ethico-epistemological-ontological assumptions, (almost) regardless of content and context – rather than the matter of politics – which has substance or content, in relation to which politics is done. Different forms and different understandings of power can be both employed and analysed in various versions of politics and with different political masculinities. With these clarifications in mind, I now continue with three approaches to evaluation.

**Evaluation: external, internal and extended**

There are several ways to pursue the conceptual evaluation of the concept of political masculinities. First, in terms of external evaluation, political masculinities are evaluated in terms of how the concept may add to, complement or contradict existing and established external concepts, frameworks and theories – in this context, patriarchy theories and gender regimes, as well as masculinities theories. Second, evaluation can be understood as internal evaluation, that is, the evaluation of political masculinities in terms of the key elements that make up the concept and their interrelations (Starck and Sauer, 2014; Starck and Luyt, 2019; Löffler et al, 2020; Luyt and Starck, 2020a; 2020b), and as applied to ‘political domains’. Through this evaluative lens, political masculinities raise basic questions of what political players, political domains and political claims are. A third, more open-ended, extended approach concerns how the application of the concept can be extended into domains beyond those usually labelled explicitly as ‘political’, for example, in the everyday and the mundane, which may be incipiently politicized, and beyond the nation in creating and resisting multiple global crises, which can appear almost beyond the reach of what is included in much (conventional) politics.

**External evaluation: patriarchy theory and masculinities theory**

To continue with the external evaluation of the concept of political masculinities, I take two examples, both central to the development of CSMM: patriarchy theory and gender regimes; and masculinities theory.

**Patriarchy theory**

So, first, how might political masculinities relate to, extend, complement or even contradict patriarchy theory? Patriarchy became an important framework in feminist theory from second-wave feminism for explaining the systemic persistence of gender inequality. It was used to frame and explain male domination, both broadly and specifically. Focused approaches included those emphasizing biology, sexuality, sexual hierarchy within the family, kinship systems, the domestic mode of production, reproduction, sex/affective production (Ferguson, 1989) and interrelations of male power and capitalism (Hartmann, 1979). With such variations in applications of the concept, arguments continued about its usefulness and different ways of analysing
such relations, processes and sites/domains as structures. From the late 1970s, the concept of patriarchy was subject to increasing critiques from within feminism as being too monolithic, too categorical and Eurocentric.

These debates were further developed, synthesized and historicized in the patriarchy debates of the mid- to late 1980s and early 1990s. Walby (1986; 1990; cf. Hearn, 1987) identified six main domains of patriarchy: capitalist/paid work, family/household, state, violence, sexuality and culture. Political masculinities could be seen as a useful extension of, or complement to, theories of patriarchy, for example, spelling out how masculinities are derived from, and enacted within, patriarchal domains in addition to the patriarchal oppression of women. Therefore, if one compares the political masculinities approach and these six patriarchal domains, then one might assume that one can identify: work(ing) masculinities, family masculinities, violent masculinities, state masculinities, sexual masculinities and cultural/ideological masculinities. So, where do political masculinities fit here? Are they part of, or adjacent to, for example, political party, state or movement masculinities? Or, is it rather that all these domains, in their sexual, organizational or family politics, might also be sites of political masculinities? Or, is it that all the possible masculinities just noted are sub-forms of political masculinities?

Later, Walby (2009) compressed the patriarchal framework through the concept of gender regimes, comprising four major domains: economy, polity, civil society and violence. These domains might be complemented by economic masculinities, political masculinities, civil society (family, sexuality and culture) masculinities and violent masculinities, respectively. In this interpretation, political masculinities are more attached to the political sphere of polity and policy as a domain of gender regimes.

Alternatively, political masculinities can be seen throughout patriarchy and gender regimes in terms of activity-in-time. For example, economy or civil society can be seen as sites of politics and political action, and sites of patriarchal political masculinity. In such interpretations, political masculinities appear to refer to the political quality of relations rather than separate political/policy/polity domains. In this argumentation, the notion of political masculinity, or patriarchal political masculinities, can be understood as consistent with, and complementary to, theories of patriarchy and its derivative gender regimes.

Masculinities theory

Second, how might the concept of political masculinity extend, complement or contradict masculinities theory? How do political masculinities and masculinities theory compare? Around the same time as feminist critiques of the concept of patriarchy were developing, there were critiques of sex/gender role theory (see, for example, Eichler, 1980), burgeoning literature on Black masculinity (see, for example, Franklin, 1984) and post-imperialist, class and gender critiques of masculinity (see, for example, Tolson, 1977). Building on second-wave feminism, CSMM opened up the constitution of masculinities (hegemonic, complicit, subordinated and marginalized) and their multiplicity, seen as power-laden and deriving from men’s unequal power relations, both to women and between men (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). While this approach has been subject to diverse applications, elaborations and extensive critiques, it does supply a framework for understanding some political masculinities understood as power
relations both between men and between men and women, and both within and legitimating patriarchy (or not).

Political masculinities can be related to all or any of hegemonic, complicit, subordinated and marginalized masculinities, and such further masculinities as resistant, ambivalent, dominant (Messerschmidt, 2016) and protective (Johnson, 2013; Johnson and Williams, 2020; Wojnicka, 2022), constructed intersectionally as sources of (gendered) power or loss/lack of such power. Hegemonic (as well as complicit, subordinated and marginalized), dominant and protective masculinities are all descriptors of masculinities (both types and processes) and can be specific versions of masculinity and/or political masculinity. While hegemonic masculinity, dominant masculinities and protective masculinity are all (likely to be) political, in the broad sense, and can overlap with political masculinities, they are not necessarily examples of political masculinity, as defined and discussed here (Starck and Sauer, 2014).

The key point here is that hegemonic masculinity, dominant masculinities and protective masculinity are different kinds of concepts to political masculinity. Ozbay and Soybakis (2020: 29, 31) emphasize that ‘hegemonic masculinity is not the same thing as political masculinity’ and continue that ‘political masculinities and hegemonic masculinities … dynamically co-constitute and transform each other’ as ‘synchronous, sometimes overlapping and mutually constitutive. In certain contexts, political masculinity may help promulgate specifics of hegemonic masculinity, and vice versa’ (cf Myrttinen, 2019; Geva, 2020). Importantly, Connell and associates emphasized that hegemonic masculinity, along with complicit, subordinated, marginalized and (more lately) dominant masculinities, is part of theorizing wider gender order(s). Political masculinity is a different kind of concept to hegemonic masculinity; less tied to theorizing on hegemony and specific empirics, it can indeed be hegemonic, counter-hegemonic, dominant, anti-dominant, protective or non-protective.

To reiterate Starck and Luyt’s (2019: 435, emphases added) words: ‘the concept of political masculinities can usefully be applied in instances in which power is explicitly either being (re)produced or challenged’ – one might add, in many different, including counter-hegemonic, ways. Thus, political masculinities can be evaluated as a frame for analysing masculinities when power is explicitly mobilized. Interestingly, both hegemony and complicitness involve some degree of implicitness in the mobilization of power. Seen thus, political masculinities can be an important aspect of the emphasis, rather than a fundamental rethinking, of hegemonic, complicit, subordinated, marginalized and further masculinities – in terms of how explicit mobilization of power operates. Another possible contribution of masculinities theory, and CSMM more generally, is in highlighting implicit power in studying the political. The concept of political masculinities can be useful for those purposes. With these two possible ways (patriarchy theory and masculinities theory) forward from external evaluation and critique, I now move on to possible avenues of internal evaluation and critique.

**Internal evaluation: spelling out the elements**

Political masculinities concern ‘any kind of masculinity’ constructed around, ascribed to and/or claimed by political players. More precisely, political masculinities have been defined as:
any kind of masculinity that is constructed around, ascribed to and/or claimed by ‘political players.’ These shall be individuals or groups of persons who are part of or associated with the ‘political domain,’ i.e. professional politicians, party members, members of the military as well as citizens and members of political movements claiming or gaining political rights. (Starck and Sauer, 2014: 6, emphases added)

Let us take some of the main elements in turn, beginning with ‘political players’, then ‘political domain’ and ‘claiming or gaining political rights’.

‘Political players’
In invoking political masculinities as a core concept in studying and changing men and masculinities, a major question is: does political masculinities refer to a specific definition, for example, in relation to certain ‘political players’, or does it ‘simply’ bring with it (too) many ideas? Depending on how this question is answered, political masculinities may seem a very specific and narrow notion or very broad, even ubiquitous, and recurring continuously in all fields of life. So, a first question is: does ‘political players’ refer to those with a ‘big P’, as in mainstream public realm politics, whether formal political representatives or informal political players, such as political non-representatives, or those with a ‘small p’? In the first case, is this those who define themselves or are defined as politicians, those doing politics or all making political claims, in fact, all citizens or non-citizens? Palonen’s (2003) distinctions on what is included in politics are again relevant.

Mainstream, or malestream, politics is replete with forms, examples and enactments of what can be called ‘political masculinities’ ‘played’ by mainstream ‘political players’. This is perhaps most obvious in individualized, ‘heroic’, mainstream political leadership. These include the Big/Strong Man (see Mies, 1986; Ben-Ghiat, 2020; Rachman, 2022), dictator, autocrat, military leader, charismatic leader, flamboyant showman, populist (Linders et al, 2023), nationalist leader, fascist, liberator, terrorist (Emig, 2019), revolutionary, fixer, statesman and technocrat (see Dursun et al, 2021) – which can be ways of both being a political leader and doing masculinity. There are also political masculinities that might be described in terms of post-heroic leadership or more fluid leadership. As extensively studied, Trump wreaks of a certain kind of political masculinity: vulgar, outspoken and dominating yet, in part, fluid (Messerschmidt and Bridges, 2017). In a different, supposedly more subtle, sense, Biden enacts a different, more paternalist political masculinity (see Dursun et al, 2021: 30).

However, the notion of political players can apply well beyond those in formal political positions and professional or self-identified politicians, whether elected, appointed or aspiring. For example, they could include social movement politics, ‘alternative’ politics and non-institutionalized politics, as in (pro-)feminist, queer, anti-violence and, increasingly, climate, mobility and food activism. Examples of men’s relations to gender politics (Messner, 1997; Egeberg Holmgren and Hearn, 2009) include the White Ribbon Campaign, Equimundo, Sonke Gender Justice, Men’s Action to Stop Violence Against Women, MenCare, MenEngage Alliance and the long series of Ubuntu events during 2020–21. Doing pro-feminism can be seen as an example of political masculinity, along with other superordinate critiques and
counter-hegemonic movements. Importantly, such political players may operate across the institutionalized–non-institutionalized political boundary (Bergmann et al., 2014).

In terms of the global political map, further masculinized groups of political power players include: managers of transnational corporations; oligarchs, with extreme wealth; dictators of authoritarian states; state elites of global metropoles (Connell, 2016); militarized masculinities, including peacekeepers; less violent masculinities promoted by global anti-domestic violence campaigns (Myrttinen, 2019); controllers of information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Little and Winch, 2021); and leaders in polluting and promoting climate change (Pulé and Hultman, 2021). Thus, the notion of political players is not a fixed category operating in a list of given political arenas or institutions; rather, it can be extended, including transnationally, while operating within what can be labelled, in some way, ‘political domains’.

‘Political domains’

The next element to examine is political domains and which domains we are most concerned with. In some ways, this returns us to debates on patriarchy and whether politics, or polity, is a specific separable domain of patriarchy, or whether politics operates across domains or without a specific site of its own. Societies clearly vary greatly in the extent to which there is an identifiably separable domain, or domains, of politics. Usually, political domain is a shorthand for some (relatively) public and (relatively) collective, if not necessarily democratic or representative, set of political processes – in effect, prioritizing some forms and forums of public politics. This may contrast with various approaches to deconstructing public domains and malestream public–private divisions (Clark and Lange, 1979; O’Brien, 1981).

Having said that, connections of (political) masculinities with public political domains are all too clear in much mainstream politics, not only in populist, authoritarian, ethno-nationalist, fascist and militaristic politics but also in somewhat different ways in democratic, liberal, socialist, anarchist, cyber and various other activist politics. At the collective level, many forms of mainstream, socialist, nationalist and right-wing politics harbour gender–inequitable, hierarchical, patriarchal and masculinist ideologies and practices (Bebel, 1971; Kollantai, 1977 [1909]; Cockburn, 1988; Brittan, 1989; Nicholas and Agius, 2017). Some of these forms of mainstream politics can be explicitly or implicitly gender conscious (Egeberg Holmgren and Hearn, 2009); some are simply misogynist and anti-feminist. At the same time, there are more fragmented and less formally organized political domains as sites of extra-formal political masculinities in the street, online or underground – ambiguously positioned in relation to, or separate from, public domains. These work across political spectrums, from right and left anarchism and individualism to right and left collectivism, and may be explicitly or implicitly gender conscious.

The analytical problem is how to draw any reasonable line around political domains, both in an individual specific sense and more synthetically. In recognizing extra-formal organizing as in incipient political organizing or more organized social movements, it is very difficult to say what is not a political domain where politics of some kind are implicitly or explicitly practised, and where political masculinities are extended. This also shows the problem of drawing a neat border between the ‘sphere’ and the ‘activity’ approaches to politics, which brings us to the third main element of what is done in politics and politicking.
Claiming or gaining political rights

The third element that warrants critical attention is the claiming or gaining of political rights. What is to count as a claim and as claiming or gaining political rights? This suggests some notion of political orientation, or pursuing political ends. Arguably, the process of claiming or gaining political rights can link more directly to the ‘activity-concept’ of politics as constituted in and by politicization and politicking – with claims understood as verbal, discursive and material-discursive, as in political masculinity claims by violence.

Political rights raise challenges for both those in formal, organized and explicit politics and those affected, served or dominated by such politics (see Ozbay and Soybakis, 2020). We may also consider which political rights are addressed, among others: civil, political and social; feminist critiques thereof; and the expansion of rights claims, as with environmental rights. Political rights can be positive (demanding action) or negative (resisting action), and political claims can be across political spectra: progressive, regressive, feminist and fascist.

Claiming and gaining is enacted towards those actors who (can) grant rights. This is often the state, but not always, as with inter-state organizations that address or even resist conventions of human rights. The linking of political masculinities to rights and rights claims also raises a much larger question: is politics only about rights and rights claims, and what is neglected by focusing on political rights? There are several possibilities here: first, political masculinities might be relevant in resistance to claims, progressive or regressive; second, those who grant claims, or not, might also enact political masculinities; and, third, politics can be understood as broader than rights and right claims, including critiques of human rights discourse. Moreover, there may be agreement on rights but disagreement about how to get there.

Some of these questions around the multiple forms and aspects of political claims are made clearer in Starck and Luyt’s (2019) discussion of crisis, societal transitions and post-transitions, highlighting the conscious maintenance of, or holding onto, power and the explicit reproduction of, or challenge to, power. They link this with Connell’s (1983; 1995; cf Habermas, 1975) deployment of ‘crisis tendencies’, suggesting:

the gender order is crisis-prone rather than alternating between periods of crisis versus stability. This is seen as a result of inherent contradictions and tensions in gender practice. These ensure that hegemonic masculinities are always undergoing challenge and change … in order to offer a more successful strategy of legitimizing some men’s dominance over women and marginalized or subordinated men. (Starck and Luyt, 2019: 433)

In examining social change encompassing ongoing transitions, they write:

shifting patterns of patriarchy … may on one hand result from conscious efforts to maintain patriarchal power structures even under conditions of social transition. On the other hand, they may emerge from uncertainty and anxieties about the unknown, which leads to a holding on to known and valued patriarchal configurations. (Starck and Luyt, 2019: 438, emphases added)

There also seems to be a shift here towards the question of explicit (re)production or challenge. Indeed, they themselves write:
We are conscious of the critique that an adequate appreciation of gender might suggest that all masculinities are political in so far as they are imbricated within relations of power. But our definition contains an important subtlety. While … gender and masculinities are inextricably political concepts in the (re)production of power, the concept of political masculinities can usefully be applied in instances in which power is explicitly either being (re)produced or challenged. (Starck and Luyt, 2019: 435)

This, however, raises further questions, such as: why are explicitness and consciousness highlighted? What counts as explicit or conscious? Does this indicate the need for an explicit (political) programme, movement, collectivity, statement and intention? And why is the aspect of implicitness, as with, say, non-decision-making, hegemonic or capillary power, not recognized more fully in political masculinity? To address this last question, we may consider how power, whether more explicit or more implicit, can be theorized in multiple ways, as in one (directly behavioural), two (non-decision-making), three (structural), four (poststructural) and five (post-poststructural/post-constructionist) dimensions. Broadening understandings of power in political masculinity/ies towards more implicit and less conscious deployments of power involves recognition of how power around men, masculinities and the political might span one-dimensional behavioural, two-dimensional non-decision-making and three-dimensional structural (Lukes, 1974) approaches to power, as well as those inspired by poststructuralism (Foucault, 1980; Lukes, 2005), post-poststructuralism (Johnson, 1987) and post-constructionism (Lykke, 2010).

The discussion of crisis tendencies and masculine/ized attempts to recoup or challenge power opens up consideration of wider political processes beyond the immediate purview of the state, even if discussion is largely framed in the terms of societal (gender-patriarchal) crisis tendencies and/or postcolonial or related transitions. While the national/nation-state focus is generally paramount, a space is opened up for political considerations more widely still, as discussed in the following section.

Lastly, in this section, critical commentary is directed to the interrelations of these three highlighted aspects of politics: players, domains and claims. They might appear to fit neatly together in definitional terms but may not always do so in political realities, activities and politicking. This may be especially so with broadening the notion of political sites and locales, if not formal domains, and moving away from nation-state politics and societal crisis tendencies and towards the everyday and the multiple crises of the planet.

**Evaluation by application: extending political masculinities**

Finally, the concept of political masculinities can be evaluated in terms of its applications and extending its applications. As discussed, the concept is most obviously applied and applicable in relation to political spheres, domains and activities recognized as (distinctively) political. The concept may be employed with varying scales and scopes, times and spaces, more broadly and more loosely, or with a more precise and narrower definition, where each element is treated in a more limited, formal way and at varying scales in relation to more limited locales or more widely, more globally.

Two possible ways of developing the political masculinities concept are: using a broad(er) definition of political masculinities and applying it to narrower areas and
arenas (considered less political or that may not be considered political); or using a narrow(er) definition of political masculinities and applying it to broader areas and arenas (which may or may not be considered political). Such perspectives suggest that much depends on how political masculinities and political men are placed in relation to further frames, such as anti-ageism, anti-racism, decoloniality/postcolonialism and environmental politics. There are many possible applications here, so for reasons of space, some selected examples are provided.

Beyond ‘political’ domains

On the first count, there is a whole variety of possible applications of ‘political masculinities’ to situations or arenas that are temporally more inclusive and often not recognized as overtly political (by some or many), and are not usually subject to explicit claims to political rights. Just as culture can be understood as the power to define and understand culture (Wright, 1998), so politics is also about the power to define and understand politics. We are now concerned more directly with politicking and politicization, not only with the named formal institutional political sphere, polity and policy. The applicability of political masculinities could be very widespread if the conscious, explicit aspect of definition is played down and/or, moreover, if explicitness is considered from the point of view of the (more) excluded rather than the (more) included actors. Indeed, in some such situations, ‘nothing happens’ or appears to happen explicitly and ‘nothing is done’ or appears to be done – no masculinities are, or appear to be, performed from the point of view of the ‘conscious’ political actors with their own political masculinities – yet, just by being there, there are profound political effects for those affected, who may of course enact their own political masculinities.

This perspective might direct attention to, for example, men’s occupation of the physical and social space just by being there, or stopping others being there, seen as a form of political masculinity – just as those of older age or with disabilities may experience the claims of the younger and able-bodied as political (masculinities). Different bodies occupy space and can appear taken for granted and ‘in place’ or awkwardly ‘out of place’ (Puwar, 2004; Hearn, 2007) in organizations, in the street and on the land. Similarly, men’s domination of automobility can be seen as doing political masculinities in making (often unspoken) claims for space. Another relevant example is the domination of digitally hegemonic masculinities and networked masculinities in the manosphere and cyberspace, including masculinist political masculinities online and their claims taking up virtual space to exclude women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual plus (LGBT*IQA+) people by trolling, intimidation, harassment and so on. Similarly, routine enactment of gender binaries might be experienced as the enactment of political masculinities by some – as with analyses of ‘heteroactivism’ (Nash and Browne, 2020), thus contesting and extending normalized understandings of ‘activism’ and ‘activist’.

Beyond methodological nationalism and towards global crises

Political masculinities, and debates thereon, have often focused on claims made within the nation state, between states, in relation to the state and, more recently, within postcolonial transitions, as with reassertions of colonial violence in and around the state or renewed turns to capitalism or earlier traditions. While not explicitly articulated
in key texts on political masculinities, it is as if political masculinities are easier to see, or analyse, in national or newly forged nation-state contexts (Starck and Luyt, 2019; Luyt and Starck, 2020a). Methodological nationalism persists when national context remains unarticulated and reified, whether in politics, activism or research, and not least in the nation-state imaginary. Colonialist methodological nationalism is also easily reproduced in postcolonial transformations. Yet, increasingly, politics, including national and nation-state politics, as well as activist, (pro-)feminist and non-governmental organization politics, is transnational, transversal or pluriversal in form and spread, beyond national, even postcolonial, transformations.

Thus, political masculinities can be applied and need to be understood beyond the nation state and methodological nationalism. Political masculinities can be framed within or in relation to the transnational, or the national/transnational, and applied transnationally, in international relations and supranational relations, hence the notion of transnational political masculinities (Hearn et al, 2013; 2019). The transnational political field has diverse meanings – movements between nations, the metamorphosis of nations and the creation of new configurations beyond nations – and concerns, for example, global capital flows, migrations, information and communication and other advanced technologies, transnational cultures, and environmental change. These transnationalizations and transnational flows are not nation-based, and political masculinities in relation to them are not necessarily articulated in relation to nation-state political rights but rather potentially borderless.

Transnational shifts, beyond nations, become clearer in considering how political masculinities are involved in producing, and complicitly implicated in, global and transnational crises: often multiple, intertwining, engulfing crises for the whole planet, with uneven gender effects. These dire crises, until recently, with notable exceptions, downplayed in much CSMM, are increasingly taken up, along with the place of men and masculinities there, by scholars in and around CSMM. Political masculinities is not generally used as a productive concept in addressing such crises, but employing it might sharpen analysis of (individual/collective) gendered actors producing and resisting crises – including economic-financial-(de)growth, socio-political-(anti-)democratic and bio-environmental-ecological crises (Hearn, 2022). With limitations of space here, I focus on the last.

Bio-environmental-ecological crises, including around animals and non-humans, climate change, energy, water, extractivism, food, meat eating, oceans, transportation, and impacts on the planet and sustainability, derive very much from the tendencies of some men and masculinities towards domination and exploitation (of humans and non-humans, the environment, and the planet), and disregard for the effects of actions, with damaging environmental consequences. Political masculinities are certainly key in this planetary crisis, in several ways: in the creation of crisis in making claims for, for example, extractivism, meat eating, automobility and air travel, and potentially in making claims against these same processual phenomena and their possible alleviation, both cases make not only national but also transnational political claims. These are long-established themes within eco-feminism. Current critical research on men, masculinities and global environmental crisis is fast growing, explicitly naming the global crisis as an ‘ecocidal’ crisis in the (M)Anthropocene (Enarson and Pease, 2016; Hultman and Pulé, 2018; Garlick, 2016; Pease, 2019; Pulé and Hultman, 2021; Hearn, 2022; Aavik, 2023). Developing political masculinities to resist current dominant economic and political claims means going beyond nation-state
Evaluating the concept of political masculinity/ies, as in ostensibly more ecologically oriented ecomodern(ist) masculinity, and instead contributing to a feminist politics of men, masculinities, (anti-)violence and environmental sustainability that makes political claims for now and the future for both humans and non-humans.

Broadening the political ‘domain’ from the nation state to the transnational means engaging with anti-racist, anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist frames. The multiplicity of crushing crises – environmental, ecological, economic with global capitalist intensification, nationalist, xenophobic, authoritarian and (proto-)fascist – make a transnational, planetary orientation to political masculinities more urgent. Political masculinities can be recognized in the making of claims on the environment, non-humans, the natural world and the planet – understood within non-humanist or anti-humanist frames.

To conclude: how useful are political masculinities?

In examining gender relations, the concept of political masculinities prioritizes the political and that which makes something political. Three different, if overlapping, approaches to evaluation have been outlined: external evaluation in relation to existing frameworks; internal evaluation in terms of the elements of definition; and evaluation by extending its application. It is one way of bringing political science and CSMM into greater dialogue. Several questions and dilemmas remain.

First, as noted throughout, in evaluating the concept, much depends on what is to be seen as within and outside politics. Are political masculinities best understood in terms of a narrower concept or with a maximal inclusive approach to (‘all’ is) politics? Therefore, political masculinities might be either a specific, closely defined concept, emphasizing explicit claim making regarding political rights, or a broad, higher-level concept, incorporating, for example, patriarchal, hegemonic, complicit, subordinated, marginalized, multiple masculinities and more. In the latter view, patriarchy theory, masculinities theory and political masculinities can be combined, intersecting with and complementing each other.

Second, there is the question of how site specific political masculinities are to be. It might be argued that the application of political masculinities is not necessarily site specific at all, nor necessarily nation-state-related, but is of increasing interest transnationally. The idea of political masculinities can be useful in thinking with an explicit political emphasis, as with political claims, across social dimensions, from the psyche and interactions, through institutions, domains and representations, and on to the transnational, global and planetary. This take on the political alerts us to how men, masculinities and political masculinities manifest across scales and scopes, and times and spaces, and are open to critique, deconstruction and change from dialogue between CSMM and political science. Of special importance are political masculinities articulated in relation to broader change relating to transnational planetary framings, as in the complex entanglements of men, masculinities and multiple global crises. Political masculinities is an evolving concept.

A third issue is that the focus on, and denaturalizing of, political masculinities can have unintended consequences, potentially and inadvertently re-naturalizing the social category of men. Political masculinities may or may not be accompanied by political struggles around who or what counts ‘as a man’, as in diverse trans politics and the political deconstruction of the very notions of man/men. In patriarchal society, notions
of ‘man’ and ‘men’, not only masculinities, are themselves political. This has become clear in the increasing attacks from some imperialist, nationalist and populist regimes on so-called ‘gender ideology’, feminism, gender equality, women’s rights and LGBT* IQA+ movements. Naming, critiquing and deconstructing ‘men’, rather than accepting fixed categories of ‘men’ and masculinities, as well as the fixed binaries of both gender and materiality/discourse, are themselves forms of gender politics that might guard against reproducing patriarchal power, so easily done in political ‘challenge/ing’, however well intentioned. Such a material-deconstructive project arises from diverse inspirations (Hearn, 2015), bringing together materialist theory/politics and queer theory/politics: moves beyond the gender-binary two-sex model; queering ‘men’; multiple gender ideologies; undoing gender; long-term global, transnational and historical dialectics; socio-technological impacts; and the subversion of the hegemony of men.

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**Conflict of interest**
The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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