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Acknowledging multiple ‘masculine’ organizational identities: moving beyond the singular model of Workplace Safety Culture to a *Multiple Safety Cultures* perspective

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Abstract

This research proposes a challenge to the singular notion of Workplace Safety Culture (WSC) recurrently popularised in Industrial Psychology and Human Factors scholarships. The investigation explores interconnections between workplace ‘masculine’ identities and institutional safety and risk-taking practices on a remote offshore oil and gas drilling platform: the ‘Point Delta’ oil installation operated by ‘DrillMech’ (both pseudonyms). While WSC is typically defined as the overarching safety attitude of an organization or workplace locale, findings uncovered four workplace cultures of identity underpinned by four distinct ideologies of oilfield masculinity. Three cultures were symbiotic and performed safety practices to uphold their workplace identities. One culture resisted these cultures, performing risk-taking practices to legitimize their masculine workplace ‘oilman’ identity. Implications for safety culture theorizing are discussed, primarily in the context of the inherent ‘blind spot’ of the homogenized ‘single culture’ approach that is ill-fitting for the complexities of contemporary modernity's organizational reality. This approach fails to acknowledge the presence of multiple cultures of organizational identity with different safety and risk practices that resist condensing into a singular ‘safety culture’. Conclusions drawn suggest that the traditional singular notion of WSC is reductive; failing to account for the existence of multiple, distinct workplace cultures with varied safety and risk practices influenced by different identity ideologies. Regarding practice implications, outcomes highlight safety interventions in the workplace should be tailored to recognise and address diverse cultures and ideologies of identity present, rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all approach to understand and build positive safety culture.

Keywords

Safety Culture; Masculinities; Safety and Risk-Taking; Organizational Identity; Human Factors; Industrial and Organizational Psychology

Introduction

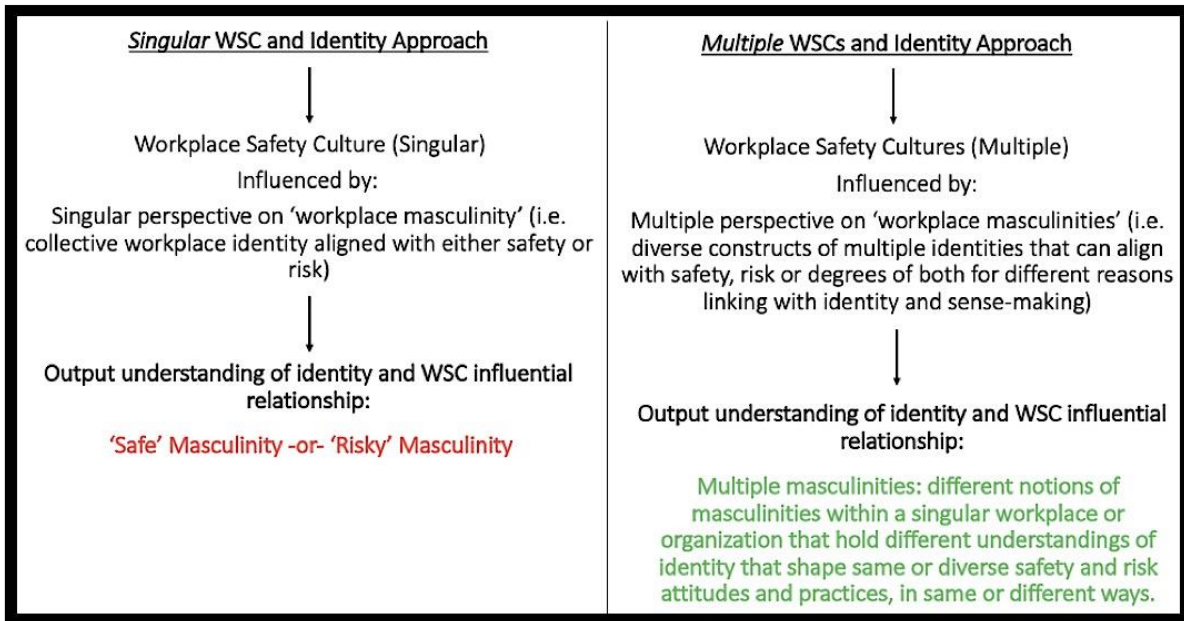
Workplace Safety Culture (WSC) is typically framed as a singular construct, embodying the combined attitudes, behaviours, and principles concerning safety within a workplace or wider organization (Cooper, 2000; Guldenmund, 2018; Parker et al., 2006; Reason, 1998). WSC is often claimed to reflect an organization's overarching safety identity, shaping recognition, communication, and management of safety throughout all operational tiers (Beus et al., 2016; Edwards et al., 2013; Taylor, 2010). Framing WSC in singular terms helps evaluate institutional safety, accentuating the unified importance of organizational safety obligation and the salience of collective dedication to striving for a safe workplace. However, the trend for conceptualizing WSC as a singular construct overlooks workers' identities and how these are constructed: organizations comprising of diverse cultures, perspectives and subcultures formed by employees within a single worksite. This framing leads to assessment 'blind-spots' and a lack of recognition for diverse pockets of cultures which may hold different -possibly diverse and clashing- perceptions and attitudes towards safety-risk, and how these cultures interact. This diversity is rendered invisible by a single normalized focus.

The gendered specifics of high-risk workspaces are often overlooked when designing and developing frameworks for conceptualizing WSC. However, factoring links between gender and workplace identity are essential. Many safety-critical workplaces are dominated by male workers (Bauerle, 2012; Bel-Latour & Granié, 2022; Ibáñez & Narocki, 2011; Lacuone, 2005; Stergiou-Kita et al., 2015, 2017). Some scholarship has explored links between industrial worker masculinities and safety and risk-taking (see Collinson, 1999; Stergiou-Kita et al., 2015, 2017). Research is divided; some historic research positions such 'high-risk' workplaces as governed by local 'hegemonic' (i.e. singularly normative) notions of workplace masculine identity, suggesting links to hidden cultures of risk-taking and safety-resistance (e.g. Barrett, 1996; Collinson, 1999). Other perspectives suggest changed notions of 'alternative' institutionally positive masculinities aligning with safety that can resist this 'hegemonic' label (e.g. Ely & Meyerson, 2010; Filteau, 2014). Additional findings highlight complex cultures of masculinity linked to co-existence of safety *and* risk cultures in single workspaces that resist homogenization into a single workplace identity construct; workers sometimes performing 'safe' behaviours but incorporating components of 'risk' into performances to reaffirm and uphold their gender -masculine- identities (i.e. Ashcraft, 2005; Wasserman et al., 2018).

Despite some workplace masculinities research, framing of institutional identities linked with safety-risk can be reductive. Multiplicity is evident when drawing upon gender studies research suggesting identities as diverse, intersectional and multiple (Christensen & Jensen, 2014; Connell, 2020). This perspective opposes a singular stereotype of 'masculinity' aligning with either safety or risk. Gender perspectives suggest implications for WSC theorizing. Some research reveals multiple organizational identities that operate in different configurations of change, resistance, collaboration and tensions (i.e. Wasserman et al., 2018). This perspective places homogenized -singular- definitions of WSC under challenge.

Figure 1 (below) compares a singular approach of Workplace Safety Culture (singular) linked with notions of a single workplace masculinity; *masculine identity*, to a multiple, conceptual approach of multiple Workplace Safety Cultures, linked with multiple organizational masculinities.

Figure 1: Explanatory framework of singular workplace masculinity and multiple workplace masculinities approaches, comparing perspectives.



Research Design and Methodology

Investigative research adopted an 'embedded' ethnographic approach to examine workers' attitudes, beliefs, identities and practices on the Point Delta (PD: a pseudonym) oil and gas drilling platform, a mid-water UK dual oil and gas installation in the Scottish UK North Sea. Two research trips, equalling fifteen days, were conducted in December 2017 and January 2018. During this time, this researcher lived and worked alongside drill crews, completing occasional tasks, and conducted thirty-five semi-structured interviews with drilling-crew oilfield workers aged between 21 and 60, representing various drilling roles offshore. The interviews were all conducted in active labour contexts, with workers engaged in drilling and oil and gas recovery operations, 'down time', extraction activities, and maintenance operations. Thus, in addition to interview methods, locational 'embedded' observational methods were employed. Observational recordings were made in a field journal. As work on PD is ongoing, occurring twenty-four hours a day, diverse observational and contextual data directly complemented interviews.

Interview discussions primarily focused on understanding:

- *Men and Masculinities in the offshore oilfields*: are there workplace identities specific to the UK North Sea? And - (how) do these identities interlink with understandings of 'what it means to be a man' working in the UK North Sea Oilfields?
- How are notions of workplace masculinities constructed? And - (how) do these change over time?
- What is the influence of the oilfield and remote location upon masculinities, identity and behaviours? And - (how) are workplace -oilfield- masculinities linked with institutional risk and safety attitudes in the oilfield?
- What behaviours, attitudes and values do these identities underpin. And – (how) are processes of linkages constructed?

Data collected was further complemented by seven onshore interviews completed over the prior twelve-months at DrillMech's (a pseudonym) onshore head office. These seven interviews

were conducted with safety policy-makers with lengthy experience in the UK offshore oilfields; now located in primarily onshore roles, bridging the gap between policy constructed onshore and implementing desirable safety practice executed offshore. Policy-makers providing historical perspectives, enhancing offshore insights by recounting reflective accounts of their time in UK oilfields from historic to present day; charting change and contrast. All had worked offshore in different roles for a range of different timelines. Six were male, one was female. Accounts allowed me to compare data collected offshore with narratives onshore. In tandem with onshore interviews with policy-makers. A structured document analysis of DrillMech safety policies was carried out. This generated a further stage of insights into the safety culture behaviours, attitudes and values DrillMech desired in the oilfield; how these were taught, monitored and enforced. **Figure 2** (below) shows a diagram of data-triangulation from these four data-sources

Figure 2: Data triangulation framework

<u>Data Triangulation Framework</u>		
Data source/ Method	Location: onshore/offshore	Participant sample
Interviews	Onshore	Onshore/offshore policy-makers
Policy Analysis	Onshore	Five key offshore policy documents (confidential)
Interviews	Offshore Oilfields (PD Platform)	Thirty-Five oilfield workers, range of roles, time in job, occupations and ages
Observations	Offshore Oilfields (PD Platform)	Ongoing – all time offshore

During the year onshore at DrillMech, this researcher engaged in lengthy training in safety protocols and for ‘life offshore’, allowing for unsupervised access to the offshore drilling platform; facilitating continuous interviewing, observation, and shadowing of oilmen throughout offshore ethnography in the safety-critical socio-technical labor context of Point Delta.

Analysis of triangulated data involved repeated -iterative- coding using Braun and Clarke's framework (Braun & Clarke, 2012) and multilevel-coded thematic analysis to identify shifts in identity, behaviors, and factors influencing these changes, as recorded from interview data-sources. Comparative coding phases were also conducted to triangulate, compare-and-contrast data: comparison of policy goals and language, interview data; perspectives, stories, questions, and observations recorded. This facilitated a comprehensive -networked- exploration of workplace masculinities, identity construction, gendered behaviours, safety-risk practices and transformation and change in linked associations between categories.

To provide offshore ethnographic context, **Figure 3** (below, left) shows the PD platform from the perspective of the top of the drilling tower, which this researcher climbed (with permission) to take the photograph below with a borrowed camera, whilst offshore.

Figure 3: Two visual perspectives from the Point Delta Oilfield Platform



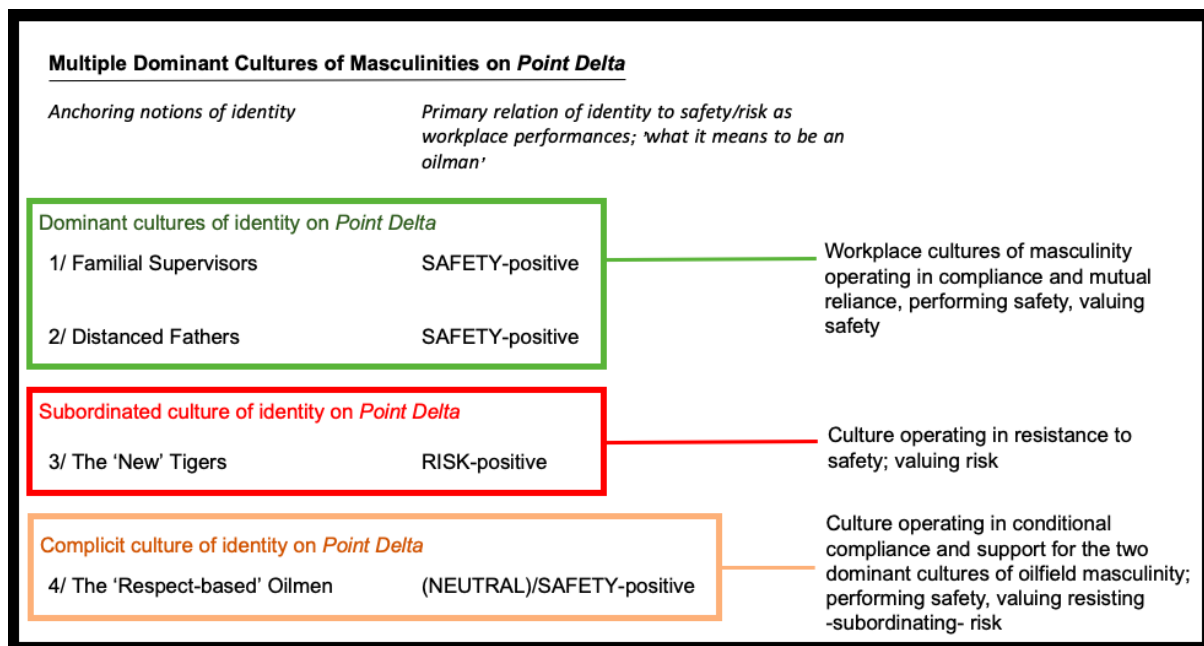
Note: *Left:* the view from the top of the drilling tower. An H175 Helicopter is about to land on the platform's helideck to conduct a crew-change. *Right:* the view from one of the upper decks of the PD drilling platform; all that can be seen is the sea, stretching out to the distance. These photographs highlight the geographical remoteness and isolation onboard Point Delta. Care has been taken to blank and crop-out any potentially identifiable information.

Results

This study identified four distinct cultures of local identity; oilfield masculinities offshore, each with unique understandings of masculinity: *what it means to be a man*, and identity construction processes. These were: 1/ *Familial Supervisors*, 2/ *Distanced Fathers*, 3/ *The 'New' Tigers*, and 4/ *The 'Respect-based' Oilmen*. Unlike the notion of a singular dominant masculinity governing the oilfield, two cultures retained co-local dominance on Point Delta, with three cultures emphasizing safety, and one predicated upon revering risk-taking as a central motif for defining workplace masculinity.

Figure 4 (below) shows a breakdown of the multiple cultural masculinities identified and their relationships to safety and risk understandings, practices and ideologies. **Figure 4** depicts a *Multiple Safety Cultures* approach.

Figure 4: *Multiple Safety Cultures* analysis of findings from Point Delta.



The first culture: *Familial Supervisors* was characterized by familial notions; supervisors framed themselves as “offshore fathers” who prioritized safety and cared for their teams like family. Their ‘fatherhood’ notions of protection were conditional on encouraging and maintaining the safety behaviours of the subordinate workers they supervised. The second culture: *Distanced Fathers* centred on notions of provider masculinity, emphasizing responsibility for onshore families and providing financial provision as the primary motif of fatherhood, being *a distanced provider*. This culture performed safety to preserve their provider ‘capital’. Considering implications for safety, both cultures prioritised safety. The first *Familial Supervisor* culture for reasons linking to predicating their oilfield masculine identity on being able to protect their team of workers they were responsible for and supervised. If any of these workers were injured, *Familial Supervisors* saw this as an invalidation of their oilfield masculinity; confirmation they were unable to fulfil their protective ‘offshore father’ role. The second culture of *Distanced Fathers* also prioritised safety practices. This was for reasons that injury, dismissal, or sanctioning from performing risk could cost them their jobs, invalidating their ‘provider’ identity. Similarly, injury could cause the same. Thus, they performed safety to protect themselves, which in turn protected their masculine identities (and indeed physical labour capital; capacity to work) from being placed under challenge or threat.

A third minority group: *The New Tigers*, revered notions of risk-taking and physical prowess framed as outdated and unwelcome by other groups, viewing safety practices largely with disdain. They idealized risk to affirm their oilfield masculinities through functional safety and status-quo resistance, viewing oilfield work as inherently dangerous and ‘a pro-safety oilfield culture’ as anchored in unrealistic and impossible expectations. They asserted that risk-taking was a natural component of the job, interlinked with ‘what it means’ to be an oilman. Thus, their masculine oilfield identity was predicated on similar ‘pro-risk’ ideologies and sense-making discussed in some other masculinities research (see Collinson, 1999; Stergiou-Kita et al., 2015, 2017). This group was viewed as ‘risky’ and ‘outdated’ in thinking by other workers and was -largely- ostracised by other identities offshore.

Lastly, a culture based on reciprocal respect: *The ‘Respect-based’ Oilmen*, valued respect for all oilfield workers regardless of their masculine identities and worksite behaviours. They propagated a mantra of ‘respect given and respect received’ – suggesting they did not judge

others for either their safety or risk ideologies, practices or identities. However, this culture trended to support the first two pro-safety cultures (*Familial Supervisors* and *Distanced Fathers*) over the third pro-risk culture (*The New Tigers*); acknowledging that their values of 'respect' were dependent on the continued majority 'rule' over the oilfield by the first two co-dominant masculine identity cultures. As such while these '*Respect-based*' oilmen purportedly supported all identities, they -in actuality- preferentially supported identities aligned with safety and resisted support for identities aligned with risk. This was because they felt that their masculine identities as '*Respect-based*' oilmen would be brought under challenge by *The New Tigers* were it not for the shared dominance of the two pro-safety cultures of masculinity: *Familial Supervisors* and *Distanced Fathers*. This culture of workers performed safety in support of the two pro-safety masculinities co-dominating Point Delta, conforming to their rule.

Discussion

WSC is normatively perceived as a singular construct consisting of collective -grouped- attitudes, behaviors, and values surrounding workplace safety. Typically, the role of personal and collective gender identity and identity cultures in shaping Workplace Safety Culture(s) is downplayed, save for a small pool of studies linking masculinity (singular) (e.g. Ely & Meyerson, 2010), masculinities (multiple) (e.g. Ashcraft, 2005) with workplace safety and/or risk practices. However, the findings of this research reveal additional complexities. Namely, this research challenges the singular view of organizational masculinity, and -linking with this- the singular view of a WSC, instead revealing multiple local cultures of oilfield masculinity linking with different, complementary and contrasting, safety and risk practices, but performed for different reasons anchored in diverse masculine identities. Thus, this research reveals *Multiple Safety Cultures* in the UK Oilfield.

Importantly, singular perspectives on workplace identity and WSC ignore the diversity of worker identities comprising an organization, and -critically- how cultural identities group together, interlinking with understandings of workplace gender identity sense-making, and how these understandings underpin motivations and performances of different institutional safety and risk practices. The findings of this research reveal multiple dominant cultures of masculinity operating in performances of safety, within a wider pool of four local, cultural identities of masculinities, all existing on the Point Delta offshore oil platform.

Current singular perspectives on WSC present a 'blind spot'. Conceptualizations risk normalizing diverse cultures of workplace identity and associated safety and risk behaviours, for example, the first and third cultures this research uncovered into a single Workplace Safety Culture concept. Condensing diverse cultures and their behaviours is risky, and collapses averages of pro-safety and pro-risk culture together into a single measurement output that renders an overarching, yet inaccurate, picture of WSC. This 'condensing' approach fails to pinpoint the location of organizational risks, the attitudes and motivations underpinning performances of safety, safety rejections, and risk. This approach also concurrently blocks the ability to develop nuanced understandings of cultural differences and approach inclusive solution-design to encourage identified pro-risk culture(s) towards safety and cultural congruence with the pro-safety and anti-risk practices of other workplace groups.

By recognizing the complexity and multiple dimensions of safety culture and normalizing a *Multiple Safety Cultures* perspective for safety-critical industries, organizations can begin to develop nuanced understandings of institutional factors influencing Workplace Safety Culture(s), how these influencers are formed and what they represent, and -using this

information- move to develop training and positively targeted cultural initiatives to progress pro-risk cultures towards safety. This change can be achieved in ways that specifically target pro-risk cultures, intensifying resources to focus where safety-resistance issues exist, avoiding a 'blanket' approach to safety training and education that some may already adopt, but reversely may be immediately rejected by others.

Conclusion

Overall, this study contributes directly to Industrial Psychology's understanding of safety culture and linkages between WSC and diverse masculinities within offshore drilling, highlighting the importance of considering multiple cultural perspectives in shaping safety practices and promoting a safe work environment. Findings have value for translation to comparable safety-critical workspaces. Crucially, the investigatory framework and visualisations provided by the *Multiple Safety Cultures* framework developed for this research provides industry with a new model to consider the presence of multiple, diverse and contrasting cultures aligned with safety and risk that may be present within industrial spaces. This avoids the trap of a singular Workplace Safety Culture model; condensing diverse safety and risk cultures to a singular -reductive- average. Linkages visualised by this research relating with gender identity: masculinities in male-dominated workspaces, are important. Findings spotlight that different masculine identities and sense-making of 'what it means to be a man' within industrial labour locales can underpin diverse workplace ideologies, understandings and practices towards safety and risk, leading to the formation of different safety cultures. Combined perspectives present new information on how safety and safety culture(s) can be considered in such workspaces and hold implications over culture measurement design, training and safety initiatives. By visualizing, acknowledging and addressing the diversity of perspectives and subcultures within organizations, organizations can foster inclusive and practical approaches to safety promotion, training and tracking that recognizes -as opposed to ignores- the complexities of modern organizational reality where identity and safety-risk are directly connected.

Further Reading and Linked Publications

This short report summarises key findings from my completed doctoral studies. Linked publications originating from the same research are highlighted below:

Adams, N. N. (2022). Examining oilmen's notions of 'fatherhood masculinity' as a pathway to understand increased offshore oilfield safety behaviours. *Safety science*, 145, 105501.

Adams, N. N. (2023). Four distinct cultures of Oilfield Masculinity, but Absent Hegemonic masculinity: some multiple Masculinities Perspectives from a remote UK Offshore Drilling platform. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 52(3), 344-378.

Adams, N. N. (2023). "It's how people act out there that counts": Examining linkages between emerging and protective organisationally desirable managerial masculinities and a reimagining of formal safety policies in the offshore oilfield. *Resources Policy*, 85, 103977.

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Commitment to Ethical Research Practice Statement

All Ethical approvals were sought and secured from the institution where this research was conducted. All human participants signed consent forms, and all data was immediately anonymized, stored, encrypted and secured, and assurances of confidentiality were provided to participants. The data associated with this project is unavailable and protected by a confidentiality agreement and assurances of confidential protections to the participants.

Author Biography

Nicholas Norman Adams is a Chartered Psychologist; an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, and a Science Council Registered Scientist. His academic interests are interdisciplinary and draw from applied psychology and sociology. His research predominantly studies *Men and Masculinities*; applying poststructural feminist theory to examine the formation of gender identities, cultures of masculinity, behaviour and ideologies. His work focusses on developing positive pathways towards human growth, particularly within the areas of risk-taking and mental health. He is especially interested in understanding barriers to men's mental health help-seeking practices, and men's risk-taking behaviours in a variety of work and wider societal contexts. He is employed in a permanent Research Fellow post, at Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, Scotland.

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