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Exploring the Distress of Striving for  
Independence and Autonomy: The 'Lone Wolf'  
Experience

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Submitted in the fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of:

Doctor of Psychology

City University London

Department of Psychology

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## Table of Contents

### Contents

Acknowledgments .....	10
Declaration of Powers of Discretion .....	11
SECTION A	
PREFACE .....	12
SECTION B	
DOCTORAL RESEARCH	
ABSTRACT .....	19
CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW.....	20
INTRODUCTION.....	20
FREUD AND JUNG.....	22
ESSENTIALIST MASCULINITY.....	22
PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY.....	24
ADLERIAN THEORY .....	25
THE ANDROGYNY PARADIGM.....	26
THE IDEOLOGY PARADIGM .....	27
THE GENDER ROLE STRAIN AND GENDER ROLE CONFLICT PARADIGMS	27
THE DECONSTRUCTION/SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST PARADIGM .....	30
REFERENCE GROUP IDENTITY DEPENDENCE THEORY .....	31
AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE .....	33
COMMON FACTORS IN MEASURING MASCULINITY .....	34
SHAME AND DEFENSE MECHANISMS.....	34
NEW PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACHES - THE FRAGILE MASCULINE SELF	36
IDENTITY AND GENDER.....	37
SMILER'S STEREOTYPES .....	40
HETEROSEXUAL SEX AND DESIRE .....	40
HOMOPHOBIA .....	42
MALE HOMOSEXUALITY AND TRADITIONAL MASCULINITY .....	43
ETHNIC MINORITY MASCULINITIES RESEARCH.....	43
AFRICAN-DESCENT MEN .....	44
LATINO MEN .....	45
ASIAN-AMERICAN MEN .....	46
EMBODIED MASCULINITY .....	47

FATHERHOOD.....	48
MASCULINE CAPITAL.....	49
THERAPY AND MEN: GENDER ROLE CONFLICT.....	50
THERAPY AND MEN: EMOTIONAL CONTROL.....	50
HEALING OF THE FRAGILE MASCULINE SELF.....	51
POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY/ POSITIVE MASCULINITY (PPPM).....	51
A TRANSDIAGNOSTIC MODEL FOR MALE DISTRESS.....	52
MALE-FRIENDLY THERAPY.....	53
CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE MASCULINITY STUDIES.....	55
RATIONALE FOR PRESENT STUDY.....	56
METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	60
INTRODUCTION.....	60
DESIGN.....	60
Ontology.....	60
Epistemology.....	60
Methodology.....	62
Intentionality.....	62
Hermeneutics.....	63
Method: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.....	64
Bracketing.....	67
Giorgi's Criticisms of IPA.....	68
Other Qualitative Methods.....	69
Pleck's Suggestions for Future Masculinity Research.....	69
PROCEDURE.....	70
Participant selection.....	70
Sample Size and Characteristics.....	70
Sampling.....	71
Issues of Interview Locations.....	74
Participant Demographics.....	74
Questionnaire Construction.....	75
The Questions.....	76
Data Transcription.....	80
Data Formatting and Analysis.....	81
REFLEXIVITY.....	83
Epistemological Reflexivity.....	83
Quality and Validity.....	84

Methodological Reflexivity.....	85
Personal Reflexivity.....	85
Intersubjectivity in the Interview Process with Men.....	88
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	88
Analysis Exemplar.....	91
ANALYSIS.....	94
OVERVIEW.....	94
BEING MASCULINE.....	96
Power.....	96
Leadership.....	98
Independence and Autonomy.....	99
Action Hero.....	101
Good Man.....	102
Masculinity Through the Body.....	104
Work as Significant Life Aspect.....	105
THE SELF TOWARDS SUPERIORITY.....	106
Young Self as Inferior.....	106
The Source of Masculinity.....	108
Being an Intellectual.....	109
Malleable Definition of Masculinity.....	111
Self vs. the World.....	112
The Self as Superior and Privileged.....	113
WHAT IS MASCULINITY.....	115
Masculinity Beyond Words.....	115
Nature and Nurture.....	116
Questioning Masculinity.....	117
THE EMOTIONAL WORLD.....	119
Emotional Strength.....	119
Detachment and Perspective Shift.....	120
Help-Seeking.....	122
OTHER MEN.....	123
Father as Point of Reference for Masculinity.....	123
The Male Group.....	125
Idealized Men.....	126
Homosexuality.....	127
THE OTHER GENDER.....	129

The Power of the Female .....	129
Negotiating Masculinity with Partners .....	130
Being Different from Women .....	132
SUMMARY.....	133
DISCUSSION.....	136
INTRODUCTION .....	136
INTEGRATION, RELEVANCE AND IMPLICATIONS - FINDINGS AND LITERATURE.....	138
BEING MASCULINE.....	138
Power, Leadership, Responsibility.....	139
Independence and Autonomy .....	142
Action Hero .....	143
Masculinity Through the Body .....	145
Work as Significant Life Aspect .....	146
THE SELF TOWARDS SUPERIORITY .....	147
The Source of Masculinity .....	148
Malleable Definition of Masculinity.....	149
WHAT IS MASCULINITY .....	151
Masculinity Beyond Words .....	151
Nature and Nurture .....	151
Questioning Masculinity.....	152
THE EMOTIONAL WORLD .....	153
Emotional Strength .....	154
Detachment and Perspective Shift .....	155
OTHER MEN .....	156
Father as Point of Reference for Masculinity.....	156
The Male Group.....	158
Idealized Men .....	159
Homosexuality .....	160
THE OTHER GENDER.....	160
CONCLUSION.....	162
EVALUATION, QUALITY AND METHODOLOGICAL REFLEXIVITY .....	163
Sensitivity to context .....	164
Function of communication.....	164
Convergence and Divergence .....	165
Personal Engagement with the Data .....	166

Willig's Epistemological Criteria .....	166
PERSONAL REFLEXIVITY .....	167
IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE .....	168
Counselling Psychology .....	168
Limitations and Future Research .....	171
REFERENCES .....	174
Appendix 1 - REFLECTIVE EXTRACTS FROM INTERVIEWS AND ANALYSES .....	204
Appendix 2 - POSTER AND FLYER .....	208
Appendix 3 - INFORMATION AND DEBRIEFING FORMS .....	209
Appendix 4 - INFORMED CONSENT FORM .....	213
Appendix 5 - DEMOGRAPHICS FORM .....	214
Appendix 6 - INTERVIEW SCHEDULE .....	215
Appendix 7 - INTERVIEW SCHEDULE WITHOUT PROMPT QUESTIONS .....	217
Appendix 8 - CITY UNIVERSITY ETHICS RELEASE FORM .....	218
Appendix 9 - MASTER THEME TABLE WITH QUOTE LINE NUMBERS .....	224
Appendix 10 - EMERGENT THEMES BELONGING TO MULTIPLE CONSTITUENT THEMES .....	228
Appendix 11 - REFLECTIVE NOTES ON QUALITY CRITERIA .....	229
Appendix 12 - THEME MAPPING TO EARLIER LITERATURE .....	245
SECTION C	
Socratic Phantasy and Conflicts of Independence:	
A Client Study on Integrating CBT and Brief Dynamic Therapy for Panic Attacks .....	246
PART A - INTRODUCTION AND BEGINNING OF THERAPY .....	249
Introduction .....	249
Theoretical Frameworks .....	249
Rationale and Focus of Modality Choices .....	250
Referral and Setting .....	252
Profile of Client – Biographical Details .....	252
First Session, Content and Aims .....	253
Initial Assessment and Formulation .....	255
PART B - DEVELOPMENT OF THERAPY .....	256
The Pattern of Therapy .....	256
The Therapeutic Plan and Main Techniques .....	257
The Therapeutic Process and Content .....	258
Difficulties in the Work .....	259
Making Use of Supervision .....	260

Changes in the Formulation.....	261
Changes in the Therapeutic Plan .....	263
Changes in the Therapeutic Process Over Time and Content .....	263
PART C - ENDING AND REFLECTIONS .....	265
The Therapeutic Ending .....	265
Evaluation and Reflection on my Work.....	266
REFERENCES .....	270
APPENDICES.....	275
Appendix A - Clark's Cognitive Model of Panic.....	277
Appendix B – My Panic Attacks.....	278
Appendix C – Panic Attack Worksheet.....	279
Appendix D – The IPAF .....	280
SECTION D	
Publishable Paper	
The Experience of Masculinity: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.....	282
Abstract.....	286
Introduction .....	287
Method .....	298
Results .....	301
Discussion.....	307
References.....	314
APPENDIX.....	326

**THE FOLLOWING PARTS OF THIS THESIS HAVE BEEN REDACTED FOR  
DATA PROTECTION REASONS:**

**Socratic Phantasy and Conflicts of Independence:**

A Client Study on Integrating CBT and Brief Dynamic Therapy for Panic Attacks Pg. 246 - 274

## Tables, Diagrams and Illustrations

Table 1 : Participant Demographics	75
Table 2 : Semi-Structured Interview Agenda/Schedule	78
Table 3 : Master Theme Table Outline	95
Table 4 : Being Masculine Master theme	97
Table 5 : The Self Towards Superiority Master theme	107
Table 6 : What is Masculinity Master theme	116
Table 7 : The Emotional World Master theme	120
Table 8 : Other Men Master theme	124
Table 9: The Other Gender Master theme	130
Diagram 1 : Interrelatedness of Master Themes	138
Illustration 1: Analysis Exemplar - Initial Annotation	93
Illustration 2: Analysis Exemplar - Emergence of Themes	94

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SECTION A

PREFACE

## **PREFACE**

This section introduces the Doctoral Thesis portfolio components: The Doctoral Research, an article (Publishable Paper) that grew out of the Doctoral research presenting some of its findings and the Client Study. The theme of the portfolio refers to the qualitative exploration of the experience of independence and autonomy and of possible conflicts pertaining to these concepts. The Research component addresses masculinity as experienced by men in various contexts. One such context is being independent and autonomous in order to achieve and/or retain the masculine status. Literature suggests that masculine norms and ideology encourage, or impose on, men to become defensively autonomous across various life domains: financially, professionally, but more importantly, interpersonally and emotionally. While it can be argued from the Critical Literature Review and the Discussion of the research's findings that striving for independence and autonomy can be subsumed under an underlying striving for power, it is nevertheless important to highlight how defensive autonomy can have a pervasive impact on men's personal relationships and psychological well-being. The second part of the portfolio pertains to conflicts of independence as formulated within the Client Study of a young woman, who was a client of mine in one of my clinical placements. The Client Study extends the inquiry regarding conflicts of independence and, possibly, defensive autonomy beyond gender norms.

The overall aim of this portfolio is to demonstrate a qualitative exploration of striving for independence and autonomy in a way that might instigate interpersonal and intrapersonal difficulties for the person. The portfolio furthermore attempts to demonstrate qualitative differences and similarities in the conflict as experienced by men (the research participants) and a woman (the client). Men in the study may have experience seeking to become autonomous as a rite-of-passage for their masculinity, or may still be experiencing conflicts around seeking help or “dealing with a problem” on their own, while my client may have had experienced ambivalence towards being

autonomous primarily through physical symptoms (panic attacks) and through her resistance to address historical factors that may have possibly contributed to such ambivalence.

## **Section B: Doctoral Research**

This section presents the Doctoral Thesis Research on the study of the Experience of Masculinity by men, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

The Critical Literature Review part of the Research aims at providing a historical and critical perspective on masculinity studies from various social sciences and at addressing the significance of further inquiry into the phenomenon. Masculinity seems to be a system of interconnected beliefs and concepts aimed at shaping men's experience of themselves and of the world in a healthy and meaningful way, but has nevertheless been suggested to also create distress in men in various forms and in multiple contexts. Various theoretical viewpoints have addressed the problems masculinity may have created for men. Counselling and psychotherapy modalities have grown to adapt to the gender-specific issues that drive men away from therapy and to further investigate into the reasons for which they might need therapy.

Qualitative research into the psychology of masculinity has only started to bud and I argue that the need for a phenomenological inquiry into the concept is needed in order to better understand how men experience masculinity affecting their lives rather than attempt to impose a-priori categories of meaning on it. Doing so might stifle the very voice men find it difficult to give to their distress when in counselling and psychotherapy contexts.

Through a relativist, contextualist framework I attempted to interpret the experience of masculinity by the men in the study in order to privilege their understandings and

meaning-making of the phenomenon in question. My role as a man and as a researcher in the process is reflected upon throughout the research.

I interviewed seven (7) men aged 29-59 using semi-structured interviews in order to explore their lifeworld as shaped by the phenomenon. The data were analysed using IPA and the resulting thematic structure of the men's experience of masculinity is discussed in relation to previous masculinity literature as well as to implications for Counselling Psychology practice and for future studies.

### **Section C: Client Study**

The client study focuses on the progress of therapy for a young woman experiencing panic attacks during a period of professional transition in her life. Because this client approached therapy with a very clear goal in her mind, one of "getting rid of" the panic attacks without addressing her past, I opted to address the symptoms with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy interventions and techniques while also tentatively formulating the client case in a psychodynamic framework. In the process of therapy however it started to become clear to both of us that more than the symptoms needed to be addressed. By referring to psychodynamic literature and discussing the case in psychoanalytic supervision my tentative formulations pertaining to the client's interpersonal patterns became a working hypothesis pertaining to the client's experience - conscious and subconscious - of conflicts of independence and dependence. In the context of this therapy I better learned to allow the client to inform my formulations and to be even more flexible when integrating CBT interventions in my psychodynamic practice. I was also prompted by this client study to face my own conflicts of independence, as a young man, as well as my own limited experience of panic attack symptoms a short time before this therapy started, and how they linked to said conflicts.

## **Section D: Publishable Paper**

This section presents an article version of the Doctoral Research aimed at being published in the *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* journal. The format of the text follows the guidelines given by the Journal.

## **Conclusion**

There is overlap of literature between the Doctoral Research and the Client Study as, although they both address similar issues of independence and historical/developmental roots of related conflicts, they do so in different contexts and through different epistemological positions. The completion of this portfolio is a significant part of my training and development as a Counselling Psychologist and demonstrates how my reflections of both practice and research have enriched my understanding of aspects of psychological well-being and distress. I feel more empathic towards men and women striving to form and traverse their own path in the world and the difficulties they might face in doing so, as they negotiate closeness with others and with their own emotions. The image of the "Lone Wolf", of the solitary, independent and autonomous individual who "makes it" all alone in the world comes to mind when thinking about my development as a person and I can see in many people the same image shaping their journey through life. Completion of this portfolio has allowed my understanding of the impact of this striving for defensive autonomy to grow and has prepared me to work more in depth with men and women struggling with interpersonal difficulties and with accepting their very human part that craves for validation, acknowledgment and acceptance.



SECTION B

DOCTORAL RESEARCH

## **ABSTRACT**

Scientific literature, across different disciplines, has indicated a significant impact of the concept of masculinity in the lives of men, including psychological well-being. Although many quantitative studies have constructed different perspectives around the subject matter, qualitative studies have only started to investigate the phenomenon. The present phenomenological research investigated the experience of masculinity by men from a contextualist epistemological viewpoint. The participants were 7 men of ages 29 to 59. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to produce analysable transcripts of the men's experience. The transcript data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Six Master themes emerged that illustrated the contexts within which the experience of masculinity might have been experienced: Being Masculine, The Self Towards Superiority, What is Masculinity, The Emotional World, Other Men and The Other Gender. These themes represent interpretations of the men's experience addressing structural, functional, developmental, personal and interpersonal aspects of experienced masculinity. Of particular interest was the pervasiveness of the concept of power throughout the Master themes and through many of their Constituent themes. Illustrative accounts are quoted in order to illuminate how the men experienced masculinity to be impacting their lives. It is also argued that the new and rich understandings gained from this study might help Counselling Psychologists to better help their clients address masculinity-related issues and to accept and define their own way of being men.

## **CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Numerous recent studies have suggested that masculinity, which can be generally defined as the "[p]ossession of the qualities traditionally associated with men" (Masculinity, n.d.), can be a source of distress for males. Managing gender roles expectations can be strenuous for men and can lead many to significant mental health problems. Even if males manage to sustain a stable identity as men, the traits, norms and ideologies associated with masculinity can still be a source of chronic distress (Levant & Pollack, 1995).

Defining masculinity seems to be a complex task the result of which seems to never be a stable consensus. Masculinity has been defined variably as a gender role, a set of personality traits, a product of human evolution, an ideology and as a structure shaped by social norms and power relations (Addis, Mansfield, & Syzdek, 2010; Hammond & Mattis, 2005; Thompson & Pleck, 1995). Literature has also defined masculinity as a set of coping strategies for sociopolitical inequality that communicate personal qualities such as pride, strength, power, aggressiveness and self-respect (Lazur & Majors, 1995; Mosher & Sirkin, 1984). However, the concept of masculinity still eludes a clear or comprehensive definition (Connell, 1998; Englar-Carlson, 2006; De Visser & McDonnell, 2013; O'Neil, Good & Holmes, 1995; Thompson & Pleck, 1995; Whitehead, 2005).

Males, at least in the Western world, may employ various, potentially harmful, defenses in order to cope with the perceived distance between themselves and an ideal of masculinity. Research indicates that conflict stemming from conformity to masculine norms is linked with psychological distress (Clatterbaugh, 1990; Good, Heppner, DeBord, & Fischer, 2004; Liu, Rochlen, & Mohr, 2005; Sharpe & Heppner, 1991) and maladaptive correlates, such as reluctance to seek psychological help (Benenson &

Koulmazarian, 2008; Blazina & Watkins, 2000; O'Brien, Hunt & Hart, 2005; Szymanski & Carr, 2008), which may explain the prevalence of suicide in male populations around the world (World Health Organization, 2011) as well as other, arguably dysfunctional, defense mechanisms (Chuick, Greenfeld, Greenberg, Shepard, Cochran, & Haley, 2009; Levit, 1991; Lobel & Winch, 1986; Krugman, 1995; Pittman, 1993; Vaillant, 1994), greater relationship dissatisfaction and romantic relationship difficulties (Blazina & Watkins, 2000; Burn & Ward, 2005; Jakupcak, Lisak & Roemer, 2002) and increased health and behavioural risk (Cohn & Zeichner, 2006; Jakupcak, 2003; Liu & Iwamoto, 2007; Oliffe et al., 2007; Parent, Moradi, Rummel & Tokar, 2011; Verdonk, Seesing, & de Rijk, 2010). Gender role conflict, which seems to be embedded in the phenomenon of masculinity, has been found to be related to increased loneliness, emotional distress, shame, depression, anxiety, anger, substance abuse, and interpersonal problems in heterosexual and homosexual men (Blazina, Pisecco, & O'Neil, 2005; Blazina & Watkins, 1996; 2000; Good, Robertson, Fitzgerald, Stevens, & Bartels, 1996; Good, Robertson, O'Neil, Fitzgerald, DeBord, & Stevens, 1995; Hayes & Mahalik, 2000; Sánchez, Greenberg, & Liu, 2009; Sharpe & Heppner, 1991; Simonsen, Blazina, & Watkins Jr., 2000).

Investigation into the exact causes of gender-related conflict is not conclusive, as O'Neil notes (2008) and many different factors seem to be involved in its prevalence (Smiler, 2004). Empirical literature is also not entirely conclusive with regard to the link between masculinity and male psychological health, yet the evidence base for said link is slowly expanding (O'Neil, 2008). Research suggest that one powerful underlying cause is a fear of being associated with feminine traits (Blazina & Watkins, 2000; Emslie et al. 2006, Jung, 1953; Flood, 2008; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson & McKee, 1978; O'Neil, 1981; 1986; Smiler, 2004; Willer et al., 2013).

The topic of masculinity is an extensive one. The very definition of what masculinity is has been at the core of the development of masculinity studies. This section aims to

provide a summary of how masculinity has been studied in psychological and sociological literature, what limitations each framework has met in understanding and explaining the phenomenon of masculinity and how Counselling Psychology research can further our understanding of the experience of masculinity.

## **FREUD AND JUNG**

Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung formulated the first psychological explanations of masculinity upon which many future theoreticians would build their own. Freud postulated the Oedipal phase of development, during which the boy has to resolve a conflict between himself and his father. Having primarily formed his masculinity through identifying with the mother, the boy begins in fantasy to stand in for the father and later confrontation with reality becomes the first narcissistic wound to the boy's self-esteem and sense of masculinity (Clatterbaugh, 1990; Kimmel, 1997). The father consequently facilitates the development of the boy's masculinity by having it identify with him (Mander, 2001). For Jung, the collective unconscious, a theoretical concept encompassing all the mental processes that are universal to humans, allows varied access to archetypes, such as the shadow and anima. The shadow contains all the primal, masculine urges boys and men can express, while the anima is the feminine aspect of the male's self. Jung postulated that, by accepting these different parts of himself and allowing a balanced expression, a man may find harmony (Clatterbaugh, 1990; Jung, 1953). The aforementioned theories were based on clinical experience and practice and were for the most part restricted and in need of empirical support, yet they assisted the inception of more elaborate and empirically supported theories of masculinity.

## **ESSENTIALIST MASCULINITY**

The essentialist masculinity paradigm is the earliest framework in literature to describe and explain masculinity. The basic premise of this paradigm is that masculinity is

intrinsic for every man and is characterized by unalterable, fixed traits, deviation from which results in anxiety, depression and low self-esteem (Pleck, 1995; Smiler, 2004), such as heroism (Oliffe et al., 2007; Whitehead, 2005). Essentialism has also been said to be linked with moral and biological conservatism and can be found to reduce gender differences to biological factors and universal qualities found within members of each gender (Clatterbaugh, 1990; Petersen, 1998). Several lines of such inquiry have produced reliable evidence for sexual dimorphism which may have significant effects on psychological development and functioning (Kingerlee, 2012; Vilain, 2008), such as in social bonding, motivation (Becker et al., 2008), sexual desire (Kenrick, Keefe, Bryan, Barr & Brown, 1995; Lippa, 2007), reactivity to threats to masculinity (Willer et al., 2013) and the interaction between stress and learning (Cahill, 2005). Still, the inquiry for biologically and evolutionary rooted sex differences has been controversial and in need of further research (Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei & Gladue, 1994; Schmitt, 2003; 2005).

Adherence to culturally defined standards of male conduct was also considered to be psychologically healthy for men. These desired male traits are, among others, defensive autonomy and emotional suppression: a man should be self-reliant, competitive, in control, fearless and shy away from intimacy, seek power and success, be action-oriented and be clearly differentiated from women (Good & Brooks, 2005; Pleck, 1981; Smiler, 2004; White, 2009). Within the essentialist paradigm masculinity has to be proven continuously as well, as if masculinity manifests both in inherent traits and in social norms to be followed (Bosson, et al., 2009; Kimmel, 1997; Levant & Pollack, 1995).

Later proponents of the essentialist paradigm, comprising the Men's Rights Movement (MRM), place the cause of psychological health problems in the disconnection from male archetypes in contemporary society, such as the King, the Warrior (Moore & Gillette, 1990), the Wise Daddy (Rowan, 1987) or the Wild Man (Bly, 1990). The MRM

produced criticisms of traditional masculinity, conceptualizing it, for example, as an ideal that placed males in no-win social situations and in an eternal quest for the "big impossible" (Bly, 1990, p. 15), an elusive masculine status (Gilmore, 1990; Vandello et al., 2008; Whitehead, 2005). Nevertheless, the MRM's ideas might be problematic because they perpetuate the essentialist paradigm in its attempts to rediscover the "essential masculinity" (Brooks & Silverstein, 1995, p. 324) and to re-instate men's fierceness and freedom (Bly, 1990). Although emphasis on the individual experience of masculinity has been added to the literature through the MRM, the paradigm seems to interpret male distress more in terms of fixed and unalterable mythology and archetypes rather than in terms of relative and fluid contextual factors.

## **PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY**

The post-Freudian psychoanalytic movement posited various intrapsychic and interpersonal models with regard to the normative process of development for boys. The Other, a significant psychoanalytic construct, describes a person's perception of another person as one of unique function towards the self in terms of desire and with whom interaction patterns are bound to be repeated throughout life with individuals encouraging similar discourses (Evans, 2005; Greenson, 1981). Verhaege (2004), ascribing to Lacanian psychoanalysis, posits two neurotic personality structures as historically defined in clinical settings: the hysteric and the obsessive. The author reasons that, since patriarchy has loosened its sociopolitical grasp on the genders, men can be conditioned to a more passive interpersonal stance, thus cultivating a hysteric personality structure, but the one mostly associated with masculinity has historically been the obsessive structure. The obsessive structure aims at differentiating the self from the Other's imposing desire as much as possible. Such a differentiation is considered to be normative in the development for boys, who are developmentally expected to dis-indentify from the mother at any cost in order to be able to identify with a male role model, thus departing from safety and avoiding

symbiosis and incestuous engulfment with the mother (Abelin, 1971; Clatterbaugh, 1990; Greenson, 1968; Horner, 1984; Mahler & Gosliner, 1955; Meerloo, 1968; Mitscherlich, 1963). Some limited empirical evidence exists about a mediating role of the father but mostly pertaining to maternal rejection (Papadaki & Giovazolias, 2013). Although psychoanalytic theory incorporates contextual factors in attempting to explain the formation of masculinity, it seems to still place primacy on the male sex as a point of origin for contextual factors to merely accentuate inherent tendencies. Moreover, psychoanalytic theory possibly focuses more on normative development rather than on inquiring into the experience of male development as it is, without imposing a priori categories of meaning on it.

### **ADLERIAN THEORY**

Alfred Adler (2011) posited the masculine protest as a psychic phenomenon present in both genders that stood as paramount to gender differentiation. Because all traits associated with vulnerability also become associated with femininity, children of both genders very early express masculine protest by assuming masculine (non-vulnerable) traits, and carry this phenomenon into their adult lives. The masculine protest becomes a vehicle for acquiring the psychic means for independence and normal development is defined as an eventual compromise between power and vulnerability (Connell, 1998). The neurosis in men, Adler posited, was founded on a conflict between the (inferior) "feminine foundation" and the masculine protest (Hirsch, 2005).

Although the premise seems overdeterministic as to the cause of psychological distress compared to more recent theories of psychopathology, it touched upon gender issues that would only much later be framed as arbitrary gender trait definitions: "On the basis of a false evaluation, but one which is extensively nourished by our social life" (Adler, 2011, p. 22). Adlerian theory seems to have focused more on the social and political factors affecting the phenomenon of masculinity. Nevertheless, even in Adler's

critical view of gender, the source of psychological distress was still deviation from gender roles - an assertion shared with the essentialist view of masculinity.

### **THE ANDROGYNY PARADIGM**

After the 70s psychological research underwent a conceptualization shift with regards to gender. New research challenged existing assumptions of normative masculinity (Pleck, 1987; Smiler, 2004). From a sociological point of view, Connell traces such shift via the women's and gay rights movements (1998). Poststructuralist feminist scholars rejected the idea of the genders' unchanging, context-independent nature present in the essentialist thought that dominated gender theories until then (Petersen, 1998).

Sandra L. Bem (1974) suggested the androgyny concept, according to which humans acquired their gender roles at a very young age through their social environment. "Androgyny researchers" (Smiler, 2004, p.18) rejected the biological roots of gender and defined it as socially desirable clusters of traits defined as either masculine or feminine (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). The Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974) differentiated individuals as either masculine, feminine, or androgynous based on the score discrepancy between masculine, feminine and neutral items. Research indicated that gendered traits were not mutually exclusive as they could be found to be expressed by both genders. Although this research movement redefined the two genders as distinct, nonexclusive entities varying within and across individuals (Bem, 1974; Spence & Helmreich, 1978), they maintained the earlier theoretical position of essentialism towards gender (Bohan, 1997). Masculinity was still conceived as a set of fixed traits and the epistemological paradigm shift was limited (Morawski, 1985, p. 215). Nevertheless the link between gender and mental health was addressed with Bem (1974) even suggesting that more androgynous individuals (identifying equally with masculine and feminine traits) will set in the future the standard for psychological

health. Still, little was inquired into how an individual, male or "androgynous", may experience the link between masculinity and psychological well-being or how "androgynous" men may experience their masculine identity or their connection to other males.

### **THE IDEOLOGY PARADIGM**

Brannon (1976, p.12) observed four masculine socialization prescriptions operating in the US culture: to avoid presenting as feminine ("no sissy stuff"), to gain status and respect ("the big wheel"), to appear invulnerable ("the sturdy oak"), and to seek violence and adventure ("give 'em hell"). Brannon outlined masculinity as a belief system, or ideology, and contrasted with the androgyny movement's assertion that masculinity and femininity were not mutually exclusive. Brannon asserted that very few masculine traits ran counter to the anti-feminine, anti-homosexual ideology present in masculinity. His work seems to have brought masculinity literature slightly closer to the shared idiosyncrasies of men's experience of masculinity, introducing cultural terms in order to describe masculine values. He might also have paved the way for later theorists to focus on the inherent contradictions and limitations of the masculine role (Pleck, 1981; 1995; Smiler, 2004).

### **THE GENDER ROLE STRAIN AND GENDER ROLE CONFLICT PARADIGMS**

According to Pleck's Gender Role Strain (GRS, 1981) model, a parallel to O'Neil's latter conceptualization of Gender Role Conflict (GRC; 1981), gender roles offer standards of conduct that can put great psychological and physical strain to the individuals striving to meet them. Discrepancy from or even adherence to established gender norms is said to have negative consequences for self-esteem and psychological well-being in general (Pleck, 1995). For O'Neil, GRC is one aspect of Pleck's GRS and defines it as the state in which "socialized gender roles have negative consequences for the person or others" (2008, p.362). Men typically experience GRC and GRS when conforming,

trying or failing to meet masculine norms and ideals and when said norms induce restrictions to, violations of and devaluation of themselves or others (Bosson et al., 2009; Englar- Carlson, 2006; O'Neil, 2008).

Pleck categorized GRS into Discrepancy strain, Dysfunction strain and Trauma strain. Discrepancy strain is defined as the negative psychological well-being effects produced by continuous exposure to the discrepancy between actual and ideal male self. Discrepancy strain has been empirically assessed by researchers (Liu, Rochlen & Mohr, 2005). Dysfunction strain is defined as the outcome of adhering to male ideology that has only negative effects on men and those close to them, for example, aggression and disconnection from relationships. Trauma strain refers to the distress produced by experiences associated with being male that are traumatic, like separation from the mother, conflicts around sexuality or returning from war (Levant, 1996).

Pleck's GRS found support in several quantitative lines of inquiry into measuring masculinity. The Male Role Norms Inventory (MRNI; Levant & Richmond, 2007) was constructed on theoretically derived, traditional masculinity norms and was developed through a period of 15 years. The traditional norms that were used were Avoidance of Femininity, Fear and Hatred of Homosexuals, Self-Reliance, Aggression, Achievement/Status, Non Relational Attitudes Toward Sex, and Restrictive Emotionality. Endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology was found to vary according to sex, sexual orientation, cultural conservatism, marital status and age. As predicted by the GRS paradigm, the MRNI correlated with fear of intimacy, lower relationship satisfaction, lower paternal participation in child care, negative attitudes toward racial diversity and women's equality, sexual aggression, alexithymia and reluctance to seek psychological help. With a research focus similar to the MRNI, Mahalik, Locke, Ludlow, Diemer, Scott and Gottfried (2003) developed the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI). The authors wanted a new scale that would factor-validate a large number of masculine norms in the literature. The CMNI

assesses affective, cognitive and behavioural conformity on 11 dominant masculinity dimensions: Dominance, Emotional Control, Disdain for Homosexuals, Playboy (sexual promiscuity), Power over Women, Pursuit of Status, Risk-Taking, Self-Reliance, Violence, Winning, and Work Primacy. After analysis the authors concluded that their inventory could illuminate relationships such as one between violence, dominance, aggression and psychological distress. The case could be that the only sanctioned way for distressed and isolated males to cope is to be competitive, dominant and aggressive, or that males who engage in such sanctioned behaviour eventually do report greater psychological distress.

O'Neil's parallel investigation of masculinity focused more on the cognitive appraisal of any stress that might be produced by perceived gender role discrepancies. O'Neil's Gender Role Conflict model described 6 patterns pertaining to male gender role socialization: "(a) restrictive emotionality; (b) health care problems; (c) obsession with achievement and success; (d) restrictive sexual and affectionate behaviour; (e) socialized control, power, and competition issues; and (f) homophobia" (O'Neil, 2008, p. 361). The fear of femininity as an underlying factor were consistent with Brannon's earlier assertion of gender exclusivity (Smiler, 2004). O'Neil, Helms, Gable, David, and Wrightsman, (1986) further suggested that GRS restricts the individual's actualization of human potential, or of others. O'Neil's investigation into masculinity has been long, comprehensive, and empirically supported directly with or in conjunction to relevant core research (Hayes & Mahalik, 2000; O'Neil, 2008; Pleck, 1995; Thomson & Pleck, 1995). O'Neil asserts that although the GRC model is associated with Pleck's Discrepancy strain theory, the GRC Scale (GRCS; O'Neil et. al, 1986) devised after the model measures Dysfunction strain (O'Neil, 2008). GRC has been since then empirically linked to male depression, stress, anxiety, self-esteem, alexithymia, shame, substance abuse, attachment and interpersonal functioning. Issues of validity and cultural bias for the GRCS have been extensively addressed in studies following its

conception (Heppner, 1995; Moradi, Tokar, Schaub, Jome, & Serna, 2000; O'Neil, 2008; Rogers, Abbey-Hines and Rando, 1997) .

Expanding the GRS literature, Eisler and Skidmore (1987) developed the Masculine Gender Role Stress scale (MGRS) which focused more on the stress and coping aspect of the GRS, testing the hypothesis that GRS stress occurs when men feel judged of falling short of the standards the masculine role sets.

The GRS and GRC paradigms constitute a strong line of research that highlights the relationship of masculinity with psychological well-being and the contextual factors within which it manifests. There is still however a need for a qualitative investigation into whether and how strain and conflict may be experienced as related to men's understanding of masculinity and what common or varied features this experience may have across different men.

### **THE DECONSTRUCTION/SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST PARADIGM**

Masculinity literature continued to grow with the addition of a broader sociocultural perspective. Drawing from historical and sociological accounts, a shift was noted with regards to the cultural evolution of the masculine from the communal in 18th-19th century American man to the individualistic one in the 20th (Kimmel, 1996). Smiler notes (2004) that sociology authors such as Connell, Kimmel and Messner contextualized masculinity: not all masculine traits, as organized by masculinity ideology, were expressed in all settings by all men (Messner, 1992).

The new paradigm highlighted variations in ideology endorsement across individuals and defined dysfunctionality in terms of insufficiently or overly endorsing hegemonic masculinity - Connell's model (1998) suggests a hierarchy of masculinity based on exerting power over women and other men, modelled after and by the powerful few (Moller, 2007). Researchers have suggested that a need for power, while equally met

in both genders, can reinforce traditional male gender roles and norms and patriarchal social structures (Hofer et al., 2010). Moreover, it has been demonstrated that threats to men's masculinity can invoke overcompensatory reactions that support hierarchies of male dominance and it is suggested that these hierarchies might in turn perpetuate a sensitivity to male gender threats (Willer et al., 2013). Whereas earlier paradigms framed masculinity as existing exclusively within the individual or as a result of individual reactions against imposed ideologies, this new paradigm posited a more active and varied construction of masculinity (Addis & Cohane, 2005; Smiler, 2004), where masculinity is framed as a set of practices engaged by individuals (Schippers, 2007) and highlighted the link between masculinity and power (Moller, 2007).

Connell's work attracted some criticism through the years. Critique was made for artefacts of essentialist thinking in contemporary sociological literature. Petersen (1998) notes that Connell himself perpetuates residuals of essentialist thought by merely shifting from "masculinity" as a category to multiple "masculinities". Moreover, Connell's model has also been challenged as being overly focused on the political dimension of gender and biased towards men's abuse of power (Moller, 2007).

Connell's work sparked a research movement that may have focused more on the function of power structures rather than on ways these are experienced in men's everyday lives. Nevertheless, Connell's work has further highlighted the importance of qualitative inquiry into how each man may experience masculinity differently from others and the significance of power structures as a contextual factor influencing said experience.

## **REFERENCE GROUP IDENTITY DEPENDENCE THEORY**

Studies have suggested that "male bonding" within all-male groups is a significant aspect of masculinity yet not always in good effect. Homosociality "refers specifically to the nonsexual attractions held by men (or women) for members of their own sex",

"promotes clear distinctions between women and men" and "between hegemonic masculinities and nonhegemonic masculinities by the segregation of social groups" (Bird, 1996, p. 121). Studies have linked male homosociality with endless competition, the regulation of men's social and sexual practices and the fear of the feminine (Bird, 1996; Flood, 2008; Kimmel, 1997). Yet the phenomenon of the male group still stands which might indicate a strong motivation by men to construct it.

Wade (1998), in line with both Pleck's conflictual paradigm on masculinity and the emerging sociocultural perspective for masculinity proposed the Reference Group Identity Dependence theory (RGID). This new theoretically integrated perspective was important as it restated the problems present in masculinity not as the existence of dysfunctional aspects but as overadherence (Smiler, 2004) to masculine norms. According to RGID theory men internalize representations of masculinity based identification with reference groups. Men's masculinity is consequently shaped according to how they interact with said representations: they may be dependent on them (ego conforming), nondependent (ego integrated) or have no reference group at all (ego undifferentiated or unintegrated) (Smiler, 2004; Wade, 1998). Research into the development of the RGID scale (Wade & Gelso, 1998) suggested a link between feelings of disconnection from other males and depression, anxiety and low self-esteem, a strong relationship of GRC with identification with traditional groups and a strong inverse relationship of GRC with appreciating masculinity diversity.

The RGID theory and research places a greater focus on categorizing and assessing the impact of social factors on how men form their male identity yet it poses interesting questions for future research, such as how the achievement of identity may interact with group identification. Further inquiry into these questions framed from a qualitative position may lead research into exploring how a man's development of identity is experienced in relation to the social contexts within which it takes place, how dynamic it may be and what needs it may be possibly addressing throughout different life stages.

## **AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE**

Studies have suggested that manhood is perceived by men as a social status that has to be continuously, and sometimes aggressively, earned because it can be easily lost (Bosson et al., 2009; Vandello et al., 2008). It has also been supported that because of this precariousness of status more agentic traits, such as the need for social power, authority and exertion of power over others, have been traditionally associated with masculinity (Cohn & Zeichner, 2006; Vandello et al., 2008). Active earning of manhood has said to be evolutionary adaptive as it increases access to female mates over competition (Bosson et al., 2009; Vandello et al., 2008). Research has suggested that physical aggression can be used to defend one's social standing when his manhood is threatened (Bosson et al., 2009; Whitehead, 2005), when GRS is experienced (Cohn & Zeichner, 2006), or when social capital is lacking altogether (Whitehead, 2005). Men seem to understand that their aggression can constitute an instrumental means of exerting control (rather than an loss of emotional control) and might use other alternatives if they are deemed to be equally effective, such as sport or risk-taking (Bosson et al., 2009; Vandello et al., 2008). Another way of framing aggression or violence might be through the concept of heroism and courage which is said to be a common aspiration for all men regardless of context (Whitehead, 2005).

Hypermasculinity, defined as over-endorsement of traditional masculinity, has been linked to higher levels of aggression, sexual aggression, intimate partner violence and exposure to danger. It has been suggested that it is the experience of GRS that influences aggressive behaviour, not just the existence of prescribed masculine behaviours (Cohn & Zeichner, 2006; Locke & Mahalik, 2005; Moore & Stuart, 2005). Researchers clarify that traditional masculinity and specific forms of aggression might be mediated by additional factors: with regards to sexual aggression, alcohol might be the mediator (Locke & Mahalik, 2005) and violence against intimate partner might have more justification for the aggressor than against other women (Moore & Stuart, 2005).

## **COMMON FACTORS IN MEASURING MASCULINITY**

A meta-analysis by Walker, Tokar and Fisher (2000) addressed the issue of validity of masculinity-related measures. Analysis indicated that four underlying dimensions of masculinity largely accounted for variability in the 18 scales that were examined: Masculinity Ideology, Liberal Gender Role Attitudes, Masculine Gender Role Stress and Comfort With Emotionality - Affectionate Behavior Between Men. Issues of validity, reliability and representation in measuring aspects of masculinity have risen in virtually all quantitative studies because college, Caucasian, middle-class and/or heterosexual men were overrepresented (Blazina & Watkins Jr., 2000; Moradi, Tokar, Schaub, Jome, & Serna, 2000; O'Neil, 2008; Levant & Richmond, 2007; Mahalik, Locke, Ludlow, Diemer, Scott, & Gottfried, 2003; Rogers, Abbey-Hines & Rando, 1997; Sánchez, 2005; Szymanski & Carr, 2008; Wade & Gelso, 1998). What could be of additional value with these findings in the future is a meta-comparison with common themes that emerge from phenomenological studies on masculinity and mapping them against a transtheoretical framework that would help us better understand the common and idiosyncratic features of the experience of masculinity.

## **SHAME AND DEFENSE MECHANISMS**

In psychoanalytic literature so far little differentiation is made between male and female clients who have experienced relational trauma in terms of coping. Maybe an unsubstantiated assumption is in place that women, even if traumatized on similar terms (e.g., sexual abuse), necessarily develop different coping mechanisms. Krugman, by focusing on shame, may have partially addressed this issue of differentiation.

Krugman (1995) has proposed that shame, which acts as a corrective mechanism for divergence from socially acceptable conduct, is experienced significantly more profoundly in relation to masculinity. Shame develops into a “signal affect” that corrects

one's route into human interaction and allows them to adapt. Early shame for children is overwhelming and undifferentiated but healthy development within an accepting relationship transforms it into a manageable signal affect.

Males seem to be prone to feelings of shame (Thompkins & Rando, 2003) to such a degree that even boys use this in order to further establish masculine ideology among peers (Pascoe, 2005). Krugman (1995) and Gaitanidis (2012) argue that due to the gender socialization process males do not develop healthy, containable shame and thus maladaptive, strong reactions against it develop. Studies indicate that male infants are more expressive and emotive than female infants (Haviland & Malatesta, 1981). Males are also usually separated from the mother earlier than females - what is called a "traumatic abrogation" (p.41) - and a healthy transition to separatedness is said to require the presence of a father who will mitigate the shame of yearning for the mother (Osherson & Krugman, 1990), although it is not clear how this might not compound the trauma (Chodorow, 1978; Pittman, 1993).

Due to unmitigated shame men often deploy dysfunctional and immature defenses against gender role discrepancy strain. Studies has suggested a preference for men to adopt externalizing defenses such as projection and displacement (Lobel & Winch, 1986; Levit, 1991) or for repressing negative affect rather than expressing it (Chuick et al., 2009). Most of these defenses have been said to be unhealthy, or immature (Vaillant, 1994). Furthermore, masculinity ideology can put the male into a position of not sharing vulnerability, thus denying themselves a proper holding environment (Pittman, 1993). Avoiding such crucial exposure to possibly accepting relationships acts as a reward for avoiding shame and the opportunity for developing affect tolerance is lost (Krugman, 1995). Krugman's return to the psychoanalytic concepts of developmental trauma and defense mechanisms might be adding a functionalist perspective into why men behave in certain ways, yet empirical inquiry into how shame and early separation from the mother are experienced might also address the gap

between the why and how of said experience. Literature in line with Pittman, Krugman and Gaitanidis's work may also suggest that hermeneutic methodologies can be better suited for exploring qualitatively the experience of masculinity than descriptive methodologies since the presence of shame and defense mechanisms might necessitate a more suspicious, albeit empathic, approach to understanding masculinity.

### **NEW PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACHES - THE FRAGILE MASCULINE SELF**

Within the frameworks of Kohut's self-psychology and analytic psychology the parental gender socialization process seem to be primarily linked with male developmental trauma. Boys are required to develop a sense of self independent of others, while girls do so in relation to others (Gilligan, 1982; Krugman, 1995; Pittman, 1993). In Winnicottian terms, this is possibly the false self, defending against a hostile or unempathic rearing environment (Abram, 1996; Phillips, 1988; Winnicott, 1960). Blazina (2001) critiqued the existing psychoanalytic postulates and presented an integrated model accounting for developments in theory of gender. Blazina critiqued the necessity of the gender role socialization trauma and supported the view that dis-identification with the mother inhibits emotional connectivity - what has been termed as relational dread (Bergman, 1995). In conjunction with Chodorow's (1978) assertion, masculinity thus becomes a task of negation of a relationship (with the mother) rather than one of positive identification (with the father).

When self-psychology postulates are applied specifically to address gender role conflict a new dynamic understanding emerges. A self-object is defined as "one who performs a particular psychological function for another person, and is essential to the other individual's emotional functioning and sense of cohesive self" (Blazina, 2001, p. 54). The developmental process of the self is postulated into three lines: grandiosity, idealization, and twinship (White & Weiner, 1986). If a boy's pain is met consistently with gender-socializing shaming his self-worth is stunted (grandiosity postulate), and if

disconnected from a greater-than-the-self the boy might not develop resilience and empathy (idealization postulate). Finally, a boy who has not been positively conditioned to sharing similarities with others may carry on feeling fundamentally alienated from others (twinship postulate). To further compound this inherent loneliness, masculine ideals reinforce hierarchical competition which further disconnects the male from others (Blazina, 2001; Kohut, 1977, 1980, 1984).

Self-psychology poses an interesting line of inquiry into how masculinity may be experienced by men and how lapses of empathy in primary caregivers can be corrected later in life. Phenomenological inquiry into how men may compensate for a developmentally stunted sense of worth might have clinical implications on to how certain behaviours may appeal more to a man wanting to feel good about his maleness (e.g., competitiveness, focus on work) than others (e.g., relating and internalizing good self-objects) or how men may compensate for lack of emotional resources in their adult life.

## **IDENTITY AND GENDER**

Bergman (1995) suggests that men "[become] fixated on achieving a separate and individuated self" (p. 71) and refers to Pleck's (1981) male sex role identity as a manifestation of such a fixation. The very concept of identity is not less challenging to define than masculinity, yet there seems to be a link between the two (De Visser & Smith, 2006). In the case of males, there seems to be a consensus that men are more strongly inclined their gender identity (Willer et al., 2013).

Findings from the field of personality and social psychology have formed the Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and have indicated that ascribed categories such as gender provide a basis for self-definition. Tajfel and Turner posited that the self-concept is reinforced by positively identifying with one's own group(s) and contrasted to relevant outgroups - a particular case being a contrast between men and

women. Hornsey (2008) highlights that all groups become "psychologically real" (p. 207) only when compared to other groups, which might help explain why defining masculinity includes a strong dis-identification from the feminine (Pleck, 1995). The functions of group identification include self-esteem, self-insight, power, self-efficacy and social support (Hornsey, 2008) and may constitute a powerful motivator for said identification, even in the face of adverse effects from seeking it (Pleck, 1981), as the case might be for a man seeking identification with male groups, or with the whole gender group of males.

Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Wetherell (1987) developed from SIT the Self-Categorization Theory. The new theory suggested three levels of cognitive self-categorization: the superordinate human identity (self as human), the intermediate social identity (based on ingroup/outgroup comparisons, such as gender) and the subordinate personal identity (based on interpersonal comparisons). Furthermore, category content was said to be context-dependent and dynamic rather than static (Hornsey, 2008). This model may frame masculinity as part of one's identity that stands between being human and other, more specific aspects, e.g. friend, husband, or professional. Social and personal identity are said to be only a provisional dichotomy as elements of the former gradually become these of the latter (Deaux, 1993), or as group memberships intensify some personal traits (Breakwell, 2010).

Breakwell (1993; 2010) in his Identity Process Theory (IPT) defines identity as a dynamic product of the interaction between idiosyncratic and context factors. By assimilation-accommodation identity adds to and locates in the existing structure new personal and social elements (e.g., attitudes, group memberships). Assimilation and accommodation (concepts proposed earlier by Piaget (2013)) are said to be motivated by the maintenance of (a) self-esteem (primarily), (b) continuity of the self across contexts, (c) distinctiveness of the self and (d) efficacy (competence and control). Qualitative studies have found that with age, consistency and adaptability of the

masculine identity increases (Johnston & Morrison, 2007). The processes posited in IPT might help explain whether male identity can be refined or revised as the person gradually finds himself identifying with new groups (e.g., from the unemployed to the active workforce, or even cheerleading (Anderson & Anderson, 2014)) or investing in new relationships (e.g., becoming married, or becoming a father) and how the male identity can adapt to the person's circumstances in order to maintain said person's self-esteem or sense of self-efficacy.

The theory of Exclusively Masculine Identity (EMI; Kilianski, 2003) posits two influential factors in male self-identity. While the highly valued ideal self (for some men, the stereotypically/ traditionally masculine) is abstract and open to future change and corrective effort driven by aspirations, the undesired self seems to be a more concrete accumulation of undesirable behaviours and affects (for some men, the stereotypically feminine) which have to be avoided. Discrepancy between the two selves predicts the presence of negative emotional states. The EMI was tested and found to be valid when addressing the construct of the ideal self. A more qualitative inquiry, however, could elucidate the ways men may categorize behaviours as desirable or undesirable and what influence society and culture might affect this process.

Subscribing to the ideal, hegemonic masculinity tends to reject feminine behaviours in men as undesired, but not comprehensively so. Qualitative studies have explored how men may trade-off some hegemonic masculinity behaviours for others (e.g., one may not drink excessively but can be a good athlete and still be considered masculine) while others may have adopted stereotypically feminine behaviours (e.g., being compassionate) without perceiving their ideal masculine self as less masculine (De Visser & Smith, 2006; 2007; Killianksi, 2003). It seems as if rejection and acceptance of different hegemonic masculinity prescriptions can happen at the same time and in many different, idiosyncratic ways.

Both qualitative and quantitative research into gender identity might facilitate better understanding of the potentially adaptive nature of the concept of masculinity.

Answering both why men adapt their ideals around being a man and how they experience this change may help us better understand in clinical settings how a man can address his psychological well-being in relation to his concept of his male self and how his motivation to change can be a function of the fixity of his identity.

### **SMILER'S STEREOTYPES**

Smiler (2006) writes that quantitative studies have been historically biased towards non-variant, dominant forms of masculinity, while qualitative studies have been inquiring about varied forms of masculinity. He constructed a set of masculine stereotypes grounded on masculinity, cultural and sociological research literature which included concepts such as the Average Joe (reliable, hard-working, unexceptional), the Businessman (self-aggrandizing, competitive professional) and the Nerd (socially unattractive, academically inclined and intellectualizing). Analyses indicated that tough and business-oriented images of patriarchal hegemony may be appealing to men of varied masculine norm endorsements. Although the validity of the images suggested in that study was supported, Smiler did note that individual experience surpassed the images' narrow definitions. Smiler's study uses non-technical language that could significantly add in masculinity literature, although this begs for further research that would better account for language and culture differences in describing stereotypes. Moreover, inquiry into stereotypes lends a more idiosyncratic, experience-near view of masculinity that could facilitate qualitative research in the future.

### **HETEROSEXUAL SEX AND DESIRE**

Sexual practices have been said to be primarily socially constructed rather than the product of independent and primal urges evading social control. Male sexuality is now understood less in essentialist or mating-strategy terms and more as a product of

embodied sexual practices mediated by culture (Braun, Gavey, & McPhillips, 2003; Hofer, 2010; Weeks, 2003). Male sexuality is said to be defined by being contrasted with female sexuality and focused more on a bodily performance aspect rather than a relational one (Farvid & Braun, 2006, Mooney-Somers & Ussher, 2008; Oliffe, 2005) or to constitute an impulsive expression of a need for power (Hofer, 2010). Male heterosexual discourse seems to have undergone scrutiny yet not detailed examination, as some suggest that the experience of heterosexuality has been taken for granted (Mooney-Somers & Ussher, 2008).

Hegemonic masculinity again becomes a framework through which heterosexual desire is viewed. Feminist critiques posit that male heterosexual practices perpetuate power inequalities (Rich, 2003). In a qualitative study, themes emerging around heterosexual desire pointed towards a sense of never 'having enough', that women deny sex and frustrate sexual desire, that men tend to be less emotional about sex and that sexual desire has to be controlled against loss of control and against losing performance (Mooney-Somers & Ussher, 2008). This might also reflect findings regarding adult male insecure attachment styles, which may facilitate strategies that restrict emotionality and possibly hamper romantic relationships (Land, Rochlen, & Vaughn, 2011; Schwartz, Waldo, & Higgins, 2004) in the name of defensive autonomy (Pollack, 2005).

Nevertheless, the possibility of experiencing deep emotional connection in conjunction with sexual desire was entertained by men (Mooney-Somers & Ussher, 2008; Rich, 2003) which may reflect that men will more likely challenge traditional masculinity ideas while in an intimate relationship (Terry & Braun, 2009). Romantic masculinity being the vehicle for such emotional connection begged the question whether it subverted the hegemonic forms of masculinity because of its adoption of traits associated with femininity (e.g., care and sensitivity) (Allen, 2007). Some argue that romantic masculinity has started to take hold in Western culture because hegemonic masculinity has assimilated it with the end goal of retaining of male power over women (Allen,

2007; Demetriou, 2001) and subsuming the very relationship in a man's quest for independence and autonomy, even from hegemonic masculinity itself (Terry & Braun, 2009).

The relevant literature may be pointing out towards men's defensive stance towards the negotiation of sexual desire and intimacy needs, encouraged and perpetuated through discourses of superiority over women. It is encouraging to see that research has started to delve deeper into this anxious negotiation through a qualitative exploration of how men make sense and meaning out of relevant experiences.

## **HOMOPHOBIA**

Antigay beliefs and homophobia are almost institutional to traditional masculinity (Anderson & Anderson, 2014) possibly because it further delineates the ingroup-outgroup reference for male groups (Wade & Brittan-Powell, 2001). Homophobia was coined by Weinberg (1972) to describe heterosexual men's aversion towards homosexuality, yet as a phenomenon it does not qualify as a phobia as much as it does as prejudice (Bernat et al., 2001). Non-heterosexual practices may violate the femininity-phobic masculine norms and thus produce GRC. Men may sense that if they are not heterosexual, they are feminine, and thus not real men (Madon, 1997; Kite & Deaux, 1987; Szymanski, & Carr, 2008). Homophobia restricts male sexuality to exclusively heterosexual encounters and even one-time exceptions might homosexualize a man, and thus possibly jeopardy his masculine capital (Anderson, 2007). It has been supported that exposure to homosexuality can trigger anger and aggression towards homosexual men maybe as means of enforcing traditional masculinity (Parrott & Zeichner, 2005), as a reaction to a perceived challenge of stable gender norms (Guss, 2010) or as reaction-formation to same-sex attraction (Willer et al., 2013). Homophobia has also been linked with authoritarianism, belief rigidity and less openness to experience (Furnham & Saito, 2009). Yet some say that homophobia

underlies a general fear of other men and their judgment of one's own masculinity as inadequate, or effeminate (Kimmel, 1997). Brannon's "no sissy stuff" (1976, p.12) seems to reflect, at least for US culture, this fear.

### **MALE HOMOSEXUALITY AND TRADITIONAL MASCULINITY**

Masculinity researchers are largely aware of how masculine ideals may be significantly affecting the lives of gay men yet relevant literature is rather thin and tentative in its results (Sánchez, 2005; Sánchez, Greenberg, Liu, & Vilain, 2009). Although some gay men seem to cope effectively with GRC (Hennen, 2005; Kurtz, 1999), traditional masculine ideals can negatively affect gay mens' self-esteem (Szymanski & Carr, 2008) and same-sex relationships (Wester, Pionke & Vogel, 2005). Bailey, Kim, Hills, and Linsenmeier (1997) asserted that desired traits in homosexual partners were stereotypically masculine, while any feminine ones were undesirable. Sánchez, Greenberg and Vilain (2009) conducted an ambitious exploratory qualitative descriptive analysis on perceptions of masculinity and femininity of gay men. Although the sample was culturally and socioeconomically biased (White, lower-middle class) the authors found many dysfunctional, traditionally masculine traits were being adopted by gay men as previous literature had suggested (Halkitis, 2001; Halkitis, Green & Wilton, 2004). Overall, studies have noted that pressure to conform to inflexible masculine ideals is also felt by gay adolescents and men (Harry, 1982; Martin, 1990; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993). Gay-shaming has such an impact that male homosexuality may even be considered a risk indicator for parental maltreatment, and more (Corliss, Cochran, & Mays 2002; Harry, 1989; Kimmel, 1997; Pascoe, 2005).

### **ETHNIC MINORITY MASCULINITIES RESEARCH**

As Kimmel and Messner (1992) have pointed out through a social constructivist view masculinity varies in structure and content across different races and cultures. Lazur and Majors (1995) assert that men adopt the attitudes and behaviours of the group(s)

in which they wish to be included. Men integrate the male gender role in their own idiosyncratic way but also employ prescribed attitudes and behaviours prevalent in and particular to their ethnic group in order to defend against inferiority and oppression. In a feedback process Lazur framed as conversing between the individual and the greater culture, a man thus shapes the image of masculinity he wants to project and learns gender role norms. It is in this process that gender role conflict also happens (Lazur & Majors, 1995) and is sought by the individual to be resolved. For men of racial minorities this conflict extends to how the individual negotiates or not traditional masculinity standards, the dominant culture's gender role expectations and his own culture's expectations (Levant, Majors & Kelley, 1998). For example, Wester, Vogel, Wei and McLain (2006) believe that African-American men experience greater gender role conflict because of conflicting expectations from both African American and Euro American cultures and of their social environment's preventing from meeting these expectations. If one acts in line with the dominant culture, agents of his own reflect a disloyal image back to him (Lazur & Majors, 1995), yet if he adheres to his own culture's prescribed masculinity while rejecting the dominant one, agents of the dominant culture might impede access to what said culture controls (e.g., finding a job) and might contribute to a systemic loss of masculinity (Hammond & Mattis, 2005). The following sections briefly cover studies on specific minorities mainly located in the US.

### **AFRICAN-DESCENT MEN**

The African American culture defines masculinity apart from the dominant culture and thus facilitates feelings of constant conflict and frustration, distrust and resistance, also fostered by the harsh political and economical reality of very limited access to resources. The "cool pose" has been described as a ritualized form of African American masculinity considered to be a coping strategy that signifies resistance to oppression and distrust of the dominant culture, pride, strength, power, competence, protection, control, and self-respect at the cost of genuine emotional expression and

intimacy (Lazur & Majors, 1995). A notable observation has been made (Aronson, Whitehead & Baber, 2003) in how low-income African-American males may achieve a strong sense of self. In the absence of ease of access to resources, African-American men may rely on increasing their reputation as strong men through exhibiting sexual prowess, toughness, defiance of authority and eye-catching goods. In a qualitative study on fathers and their health, Williams (2007) interviewed African-Caribbean and White working-class fathers in the UK and analyzed their accounts, extracting themes related to the topic. Although racism was a significant added negative influence of the African-Caribbean fathers of the sample, both groups shared the burden bestowed by hegemonic masculinity, the dictum of showing no weakness - to not disclose vulnerability, and thus underreport well-being and health issues. Another qualitative study (Hammond & Mattis, 2005) attempted to extract themes from the accounts of 171 African American men regarding how they make meaning out of manhood. Results from the study highlighted a prevalent theme of responsibility/ accountability and interconnectedness among four different relational contexts: to God, to self, to family, and to community.

## **LATINO MEN**

Various researchers investigated the Latino (Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans and men from South America) code of "machismo", which signifies physical strength, sexual attractiveness, virtue, heavy drinking, toughness, aggressiveness, risk taking, virility and potency (Lazur & Majors, 1995; Mosher & Sirkin, 1984). Saez, Casado, and Wade (2009) supported that greater identification with male Latino culture was associated with hypermasculinity, indicating a lack of tolerance towards other masculinity ideologies. Machismo seems to refer to a patriarchal culture and contributes to conflicts over independence and dominance, compounded by political oppression which reinforces alcohol abuse as means of coping with powerlessness (Lazur & Majors, 1995).

Research on Latino masculinity has been characterized as "limited and inconclusive" and negatively biased (Saez, Casado, & Wade, 2009, p.117). Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank and Tracey (2008) constructed and contrasted traditional machismo with caballero, distinguishing respectively between the anti-social, hypermasculine and chivalrous, nurturing aspects of Latino masculinity - yet without these aspects' presence in men being entirely mutually exclusive. Torres, Solberg and Carlstrom (2002) further conceptualized Latino masculinity as categories of degrees of conflict between adherence to traditional machismo and being compassionate. Further research into these conceptualizations might better account for ethnically biased samples and in order to support the very existence of these categories.

### **ASIAN-AMERICAN MEN**

Asian-American men tend to subscribe to a masculinity of saving face and prioritizing the serving of the family but there is not enough research to address the different and variant ethnic groups that comprise this overly generalized American group (Lazur & Majors, 1995; Liu & Iwamoto, 2007). A similarity found across different Asian-American cultures was a sense of duty and strong allegiance towards the parental family and an authoritative, emotionally restricted and dignified outlook as part of masculinity.

Emotional restraint, humility and investment in hierarchical authority also seem to be common grounds for Asian immigrants in the US (Iwamoto, Liao, & Liu, 2010; Sue & Sue, 1993). Relatively high academic and economic achievements in Asian American families also contributes to an image of a "model minority" (Wong & Halgin, 2006).

As shame is found to be an important aspect in interpersonal relationships, in addition to psychotherapy being a foreign concept for most east-Asian cultures and faith in mental health professionals lacking, the case might be that mental health issues and interpersonal problems are contained within the family and go underreported (Lee, Law & EO, 2002; Sue & Sue, 1993). However, recent studies indicate that Asian American

may be experiencing the highest amount of psychological distress compared to other minority groups (Iwamoto, Liao, & Liu, 2010). Another recent study (Liu & Iwamoto, 2007) suggests that Asian-American college men (Chinese American, Vietnamese, Filipino, Korean, Asian Indian, Japanese, and “other Asian”) may be more likely to binge drink and use substances than the national average for college men. Predictors for this use, among other factors, were conformity to masculine norms, particularly in perpetuating a sense of power and a disdain for homosexuality, and low emotional restraint.

### **EMBODIED MASCULINITY**

Research has also indicated that masculinity is experienced to a considerable extent through the body. Culture affects bodily behaviour and ascribes meaning to it, and this in turn can affect subconsciously the individual's dispositions and access to sociocultural and economic resources, like access to manual labour and its associations to being masculine (Connel, 1995; Light & Kirk, 2000). Ideals of dominance through male physique have prevailed in hegemonic masculinity and so gender practices involving these have promoted a collective of physical empowerment (Light & Kirk, 2000). Gill, Henwood and McLean (2005) support that there is a conflict for young boys and men between attending to the body (discipline) and not attending to it (normative lack of focus on appearance) at the same time. Masculinity ideology informs bodily behaviour and this in turn shapes perceptions of masculinity (Connell, 1998; De Visser & Smith, 2006).

Through the body men construct and maintain a coherent sense of self-identity (Gill, Henwood, & McLean, 2005). Illness of the body, testicular and prostate cancer in particular, has been said to affect status and the sense of masculinity, yet any of these effects may be denied (Chapple & Ziebland, 2004) - one alternative explanation being that if other aspects of the male role are re-established (work, in particular), masculine

identity is not severely challenged (Chapple & Ziebland, 2002). In Chapple and Ziebland's qualitative study (2002) medical treatment effects on erection did not have as much of an impact on the participants' felt masculinity as did effects on libido and energy levels. Complex is also the picture with men deciding for or against prosthesis after orchidectomy following testicular cancer: in another qualitative study, some did not find the visual absence of one testicle problematic, while others found the change in self-image a threat to their masculinity (Chapple & McPherson, 2004).

## **FATHERHOOD**

Traditionally a man fulfils the paternal role by being the breadwinner and provider (Brannen, 2006), yet possibly due to gender role strain, historical and sociopolitical pressures men seem to be struggling and re-negotiating this role. Fatherhood is an inherently profound change in a man's life, and Pittman (1993) highlights it as an important transgenerational aspect of masculinity for both father and child, maybe the healthiest part of masculinity there is. The norm of the father as master is not as prevalent as before, at least in Western societies, and divorce being a more popular choice for parents might have led to developmental arrests for the boys' secure attachment behaviours (Mander, 2001). Psychoanalytic scholars have frequently portrayed the father as the liberator of his sons and daughters from the mother's perpetuation of infant narcissism and thus threat to autonomy (Blazina & Watkins, 2000; Greenson, 1968; Mander, 2001), an image which does not account for the psychological development of many fatherless children.

Miller (2011) studied the experience of fatherhood from a social constructivist point of view in a qualitative longitudinal study on fathers in the UK. Her findings supported earlier qualitative research (Johansson & Clinth, 2007) suggesting that men have more power in choosing how and how much to engage in childcare, indicating that fatherhood would still appear to be negotiated on a basis of power differential between

genders. Soon into fatherhood men may fall back to existing gender practices, thus excluding possibilities for a genderless care. Fatherhood tended to still be experienced significantly around the breadwinner concept and by engaging in outdoor activities and public displays where fathers could be recognized as engaging in masculine practices (Miller, 2011), although in another study a trend towards non-exclusive "breadwinning" was noted across three generations of men (Brannon, 2006). Nevertheless, Miller's research has addressed sociopolitical issues in a way that could inform policy change surrounding fatherhood. Her research could enrich existing psychological discourses regarding masculinity, such as masculine capital (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013), and how fathers may be negotiating their masculinity through these discourses.

### **MASCULINE CAPITAL**

Qualitative studies (De Visser & McDonnell, 2013; De Visser, 2007; De Visser & Smith, 2007) have also posited that there seems to be a symbolic form of capital associated with masculinity. Men do not need to engage in all recorded masculine behaviours to be considered masculine. Men gain "masculine capital" by engaging in masculine activities, which provides a form of "credit" to be "spent" in non-masculine behaviours. This way, a man can engage in non-masculine behaviours – as long as he has enough "masculine credit" to spend. Masculine activities include competitive sports, drinking, and conspicuous heterosexuality, whereas feminine activities (non-masculine) include homosexuality, excessive concern about appearance and 'excessive' worry. The hypothesized mechanism might be a way for males to "trade-off" harmful masculine behaviours, like excessive drinking, with more desirable ones, and vice versa, depending on how one subscribes to masculinity ideology. This line of research has begun to explore deeper into whether, why or how gender becomes psychologically salient for men and lends a new way to conceptualize variability in masculine behaviour and male identity.

## **THERAPY AND MEN: GENDER ROLE CONFLICT**

Researchers suggest a need for therapists to address GRC with their clients and to focus on its consequences on the therapeutic process. O'Neil (1981) and Brooks (2010b), among others (Blazina & Watkins, 2000; Hayes & Mahalik, 2000), have suggested that assessing and increasing awareness of GRC for male clients is vital. Doing so allows for a healthy alternative to suppressing psychological distress and puts issues into an expanded perspective, allowing for a re-evaluation of gender roles, a critical re-examination of assumptions linked to GRC and increasing empathic understanding of the issues addressed by men in therapy. Research has indicated that GRC is related to separation/ individuation issues (Blazina & Watkins, 2000) and to hostility, social discomfort and obsessive-compulsiveness (Hayes & Mahalik, 2000). Particular focus should be paid to the therapeutic relationship, which due to its traditionally introspective relational style might increase experienced GRC, and particular caution should be paid to power dynamics (Blazina & Watkins, 2000). In therapeutic contexts, the GRC seems to provide a framework through which male clients may address core mechanisms behind their distress, yet there is a risk of imposing a priori understandings before we allow the client to uncover their own meanings.

## **THERAPY AND MEN: EMOTIONAL CONTROL**

Emotional restriction and suppression, and containment of pain, have been emerging consistently in various studies of masculinity. Men tend to retain expressive control over their emotions and assume a stoic position (Mahalik, 2005a). Courtenay (2000), in line with Connell (1998), argues that such emotional containment is a product of hegemonic masculinity and it signifies strength, while disclosing pain is perceived as weakness. Kinglerlee (2012) highlights emerging empirical support which links male emotional regulation with early maternal care that encouraged detachment as a coping

strategy (Mak et al., 2009). Exceptions to restriction of help-seeking behaviours, as O'Brien, Hunt, and Hart (2005) noted in their Scottish sample of men, pertain to such behaviours that aim at restoring other masculinity enactments, such as sexual functioning. Such exceptions may beg the question of how men may experience such compensatory strategies for what literature has dubbed "dysfunctional" masculine behaviours.

### **HEALING OF THE FRAGILE MASCULINE SELF**

Proponents of Self-Psychology (Blazina, 2001; Kohut 1977; 1980; 1984) have suggested that therapy should begin with a therapist allowing themselves to be experienced as corrective self-objects to male clients. The therapist is called to mirror the client's inner world, correcting for the early significant others' lack of empathic understanding and explaining to the person what is going on in their minds -and admiring the client for the current striving. The therapeutic work is one of a relational nature, with the therapist increasing awareness but also being acceptant of the gender role conflict as experienced by the client. By also monitoring countertransferential feelings of male insecurity and fragility, further wounding of the client's sense of self can be avoided. Finally, by developing kinship with the therapist and other men, the male client transitions from idealized connectedness to egalitarian relatedness and thus a more mature sense of self develops.

### **POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY/ POSITIVE MASCULINITY (PPPM)**

Kiselica and Englar-Carlson (2010) emphasize the strengths cultivated via traditional masculinity as a starting point for therapy with men. They have introduced the Positive Psychology/Positive Masculinity (PPPM) framework with the goal being to help males promote in themselves the healthy and constructive aspects of traditional masculinity, namely, "male relational styles; male ways of caring; generative fatherhood; male self-reliance; the worker-provider tradition of men; male courage, daring and risk-taking; the

group orientation of boys and men; fraternal humanitarian service; male forms of humor; and male heroism" (p.277). The authors acknowledge that these aspects are socially constructed rather than invariable universals exclusive to men. Research has shown though that focus on strengths decreases depression and increases happiness (Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010). Likewise, the PPM paradigm aims at increasing awareness of male clients' strengths, sense of belonging and hope, and it would be detrimental to let those be ignored, dismissed, or invalidated. Although the authors' goal is based on valuing the experience of masculinity there might be a risk of discouraging men from becoming aware of "non-masculine" strengths and values they may have and thus eventually possibly discredit more idiosyncratic ways of "being a man", especially if the men's "less-masculine" aspects cannot be mapped against the proposed "healthy and constructive aspects of traditional masculinity".

### **A TRANSDIAGNOSTIC MODEL FOR MALE DISTRESS**

Kingerlee (2012) proposed a transdiagnostic model for male distress that would address male mental health while acknowledging masculinity differentiation and challenging essentialism. Kingerlee's aim was to add "precision and predictive value to many or even most formulations of men's psychological issues" (p.84). Kingerlee integrated earlier transdiagnostic work with personality disorders with schema theory to conceptualize a male-specific-profile (MSP), a constellation of specific schemas that tends to be present in many men across spectra of psychopathology. According to the model, men under distress function under meta-cognitive beliefs that deem the distress as shameful, in need of concealment, and a threat to their status. Avoidant behaviours are subsequently engaged and the distress is externalized into more recognized but maladaptive masculine behaviours, such as aggression (Jakupcak, Tull, & Roemer, 2005). The end goal is to avoid reflecting on emotions and retain masculine control, even through suicide. The latter, conceptualized as instigated by a Reflection

Abandoning Mechanism (RAM), has also been said to be responsible for men's reluctance to seek psychological help.

Kingerlee suggests that increasing awareness of the schemata of MSP for the clients will help them better reflect on their cognitive-behavioural patterns and on their much avoided psychological distress - especially by employing mindfulness meditation and a focus on compassion within therapy. One area of possible development of the model would be a deeper inquiry into how it might account for gender differences and under which circumstances the model could also explain similar patterns of coping for women. Qualitative inquiry into how men experience this avoidance of emotions, and whether they experience it as avoidance, might greatly inform Kingerlee's model.

### **MALE-FRIENDLY THERAPY**

Kiselica and Englar-Carlson (2010) and Good and Brooks (2005) have proposed adaptations to existing therapeutic traditions and protocols that may render the practice more male-friendly. There seems to be a relational style incompatibility between the introspective style of helping professionals and that of traditional masculinity and professionals have been too brief to conceptualize this as resistance to the process. Good, Thomson and Brathwaite (2005) highlight that building an empathic, therapeutic alliance with men might challenge their sense of agency and suggest a focus on motivation for change, and setting explicit therapy goals.

### **Adaptations in Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy**

Cognitive therapy facilitates problem-solving and reality testing of unhelpful thoughts that trigger negative emotions (Beck & Weishaar, 1995).

Mahalik (2005a) suggests a clinical agenda of monitoring, reality-testing and challenging gender-specific cognitive distortions and their connection to the client's emotions and behaviour. The cognitive component of this agenda might help male

clients become aware of the irrationality of said distortions and the behavioural component will encourage modification of old, dysfunctional behaviour. Cognitive and behavioural approaches address feelings but focus more on thoughts, task and assignments and skill-building which male clients find congruent with their action-oriented masculinity. Change is experienced as fast and concrete, which is also in accord with male clients (Brooks, 2010a).

### **Interpersonal Therapy**

Interpersonal Therapy (IPT) is an approach that could benefit male clients greatly even if motivation to engage is low (Brooks, 2010a). Gender-specific prescriptions around interpersonal styles reinforces men to be detached and to seek dominance discourses (Mahalik, 2005b). The model's focus on interpersonal deficits makes it relevant to masculinity issues (Brooks, 2010a; Rabinowitz, 2006). IPT focuses on current, immediate interpersonal and life issues and its conceptualization of conflict around the needs of control and affiliation also seems to represent well masculinity-related issues.

### **The Integrative Problem-Centred Therapy Model**

Brooks suggested (2010a) that the best way to render therapy male-friendly would be to combine existing approaches using the Integrative Problem-Centred Therapy (IPCT) model. The IPCT is "failure-driven" (Brooks, 2010a, p.143) and assumes the client is capable of solving his issues without major interventions and that the maintenance mechanisms for these problems tend to be superficial rather than deeply rooted. This way interventions are employed from less complex to more complex, starting with here-and-now behavioural interventions and, should these prove ineffective, moving towards more elaborate, introspective interventions (closer to psychodynamic therapy).

Although suggestions towards attunement with masculine relational styles in therapy might unavoidably bring some theoretical assumptions in the therapeutic space, they

do however facilitate prioritizing how men may want to engage in therapy rather than psychological theory. Brooks and others seem to be encouraging the development of methods that adapt to how much men want to engage in therapy and, in doing so, give priority to how men experience their own psychological distress within the context of their own masculine identity.

### **CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE MASCULINITY STUDIES**

Addis, Mansfield and Syzdek (2010) claim that the current conceptualization of masculinity is limiting scientific progress, gender equality and well-being. They posit that there is a need for a set of compatible ontology, epistemology and ethical considerations of the social consequences of research into masculinity. The authors themselves adopt a functionalist perspective and assume that explanations regarding masculinity are best sought in the consequences gender-related activities bring and in the context in which they occur. O'Neil (2010) agrees with Addis et al. (2010) that masculinity research must be critical of itself and its constructs but warns against comprehensive dismissal of existing literature. He supports the view that essentialist thinking can promote gender inequality but argues that such fears limit the field of masculinity research, as they exclude a "long tradition of analytic, intrapsychic, and archetypal thinking about the internal aspects of masculinity and femininity" (p. 104), referring to Jung, Adler, Horney and earlier psychodynamic thinkers.

While a focus on the contexts within masculinity exists has historically been indicated to be a vital research endeavour I find some of the points above in need of clarification. A functionalist approach may not necessarily facilitate understanding of how men experience the impact masculinity has on themselves and others because it assumes men understand said impact in the same way researchers do. Moreover, total abrogation of existing explanatory models may be impossible because they constitute part of the context which we may examine as exerting influence on how masculinity

comes to be, and while we may become more critical of how the cultural and theoretical context affects our understanding of masculinity (and its social consequences) we may never become able to isolate it from the phenomenon in question.

### **RATIONALE FOR PRESENT STUDY**

Early psychological literature adhered to an essentialist (traditional) view of masculinity as a fixed, unalterable concept: sets of behaviours that were considered primarily male. Although a few thinkers attempted to challenge this view only later research shifted the focus towards the contextual factors that defined masculinity. Further paradigm shifts framed masculinity and gender as different constellations of feminine and masculine traits, as an ideology and as a socially constructed concept. They furthermore elucidated the politics of masculinity as well as the adverse psychological consequences masculinity ideology can bring to men.

A significant portion of gender literature has empirically tested the theoretical constructs related to masculinity and has increased confidence in observing relationships between traditional masculinity and psychological distress. Counselling psychology and psychotherapy literature has made good use of early and contemporary psychoanalytic thinking and of case studies in informing practice with male therapy and counselling clients. Masculinity literature consists largely of psycho-sociological research of both quantitative and qualitative nature. Psychological has now been enriched by qualitative studies of men's experience of particular aspects of their masculinity in relation to their body, their health and their environment. There is still a need for qualitative research to highlight idiographic elements in the experience of masculinity and its conscious or unconscious impact on other life experiences. Because masculinity has been shown to be a vital concept in how men give meaning to

their life experience, Counselling Psychologists would benefit from further exploring how this meaning-making takes place in a man's life.

Masculinity literature is polarized towards either examining masculinity in relation to dysfunctional behaviours or towards theoretical examinations on how masculinity is developmentally linked with those behaviours. The present study addresses a need for qualitative research that would further elucidate how masculinity is experienced on an idiosyncratic level and in various aspects of their life.

Further qualitative research is needed in order to privilege the phenomenology of masculinity (Kierski, 2013). Masculinity is linked with restriction of emotionality (Courtenay, 2000) and reluctance to seek psychological help (Blazina & Watkins, 2000), mostly because variably masculinity ideologies might discourage such behaviours (Smiler, 2004), and when these behaviours do take place, internal conflict may compound already existing stress (Liu, Rochlen, & Mohr, 2005). Counselling Psychology research might help men, both practitioners and service-users, make meaning out of these experiences and empower them to allow their sense of being a man to contribute positively in their lives. Further qualitative research in masculinity might help the public and institutions tightly linked with specific male groups (e.g. prisons, drug and alcohol services, veteran mental health services) better understand how men make meaning out of their sense of being a man. Similarly, policy makers may be better able to understand how men negotiate their manhood in significant life transitions, like when becoming a father. Counselling Psychologists could support such services by increasing awareness of and inviting change in the ideologies that perpetuate unhelpful beliefs and behaviours.

The phenomenological ethos of Counselling Psychology can lend itself to qualitative methods (Cooper, 2009) and can help both clients and practitioners challenge the psychologically inflexible ideologies and the status quo of hegemonic masculinity. Not

all men adhere to masculinity ideology and not all men experience discrepancy from such ideologies. Furthermore, not all men wish to acknowledge that their masculinity might contribute to their stress, or that they experience stress at all. Phenomenological studies, using the IPA method in particular, seem to have generated hypotheses as to how masculinity is embodied in differential behaviour (De Visser & Smith, 2006; De Visser and Smith, 2007; Johnston & Morrison, 2007; Kierski, 2013). Qualitative research can contribute to exploring new topics and phenomena, to linking these with the temporal and contextual factors that shape them and to create new understandings (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003). Qualitative studies privileging meaning making, the idiosyncratic nature of masculinity and depth of meaning - as does Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis - might help in understanding how men relate to masculinity in different ways.



## **METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

While much of the masculinity literature has proliferated through quantitative studies, not much focus has been given in qualitative research within the Counselling Psychology field. Thus, there is limited qualitative literature that allows us to examine how men experience masculinity through interpretative perspectives. For this reason, and for reasons outlined in this chapter, I have chosen to approach the subject with a qualitative methodology.

### **DESIGN**

#### **Ontology**

In this research I adopt the ontological stances of relativism and phenomenology. As a simplified presentation of the ontological stance of phenomenology, objects in the world exist in relation to the consciousness(es) perceiving them (Giorgi, 1997; Moustakas, 1994). A relativistic view of the world challenges the postulated laws and lawful relationships a realistic view would posit and focuses on how variably the world can be interpreted (Madill et al., 2000; Willig, 2008).

#### **Epistemology**

There is a stark contrast between the epistemological positions of positivism and phenomenology and the difference can be apparent in how the topic of masculinity has been approached as well. A positivist paradigm postulates that there is a real world in which everything, including human psychological traits, has definite and measurable characteristics. Phenomena can directly determine our perception of them and our representations of the phenomena directly correspond to the phenomena themselves. Moreover, knowledge of the real nature of the world can be gained by the application of quantitative methods (Langdridge, 2007; Willig, 2008). In that regard, masculinity is assumed to be a measurable concept that can be quantified by inventories,

questionnaires and experimental methods, such as Bem's Sex Role Inventory (1974) and the Male Role Norms Inventory (Levant & Richmond, 2007). However, phenomenology would approach masculinity primarily as an experience, through the description and understanding of which we would be able to reach the essence of the phenomenon termed as masculinity (Giorgi, 1997; Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2008).

Because of the phenomenological diversity of masculinity, as highlighted in the literature review, I am adopting the contextualist position, according to which knowledge is linked to the context in which it is produced. Knowledge is produced in the course of human action and within cultural, historical and social contexts (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1988). For that reason, knowledge is tentative and situation-dependent (Madill et al., 2000). Knowledge is affected by the participant's understandings, the researcher's interpretations and the cultural, historical and social context that influences them both (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). Similarly, my making sense of the participant's accounts is embedded in my own personal, cultural and historical context, and my participants' making sense of their experience is similarly tied to their own context. My education and knowledge in the field of Counselling Psychology, as well as my personal experience of masculinity as a young man, are part of the context through which I am making sense of my participant's experience. Through the use of my understanding (empathy, analytic attitude) I am grounding the knowledge gained by my participants' descriptions. This position is very much congruent with the character of Counselling Psychology as a humanistic science as well as with IPA's sensitivity to the contextual factors that shape our experiences (Larkin et al. 2006; Smith et al., 2009). Thus masculinity, known through the context within which it has been experienced, will vary as a phenomenon between me and my participants and across my participants. My analysis will produce knowledge inadvertently influenced by the contextual factors that gave rise to each experienced masculinity.

On a continuum of epistemological positions spanning from naïve realist (everything in our context can be objectively measured) to radical constructionist/relativist (everything is understood only through subjective concepts), contextualism or contextual constructionism is said to be found in the middle because it still privileges the context as well as the subjective perceptions of it (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1988; Willig, 2008).

### **Methodology**

A return to the “things themselves”, a focus on the experience of a phenomenon, is the central aspect of the phenomenological stance (Moustakas, 1994). Any phenomenon posits itself as an object which it is, inevitably, possible to perceive only subjectively. Phenomenological methodologies aim to understand the phenomenon through the consciousness (subject) that perceives it and attributes meaning to it, for said perception of any object is dependent on the subject. For the phenomenological researcher, consciousness is not a neutral observer of objects but actively shape their meaning (Moustakas, 1994; Dowling, 2007). Phenomenological methods are said to also correspond to the middle of the realist- relativist epistemological continuum (Willig, 2008), similarly to the contextualist position.

### **Intentionality**

The phenomenological stance acknowledges that the reality of the world is shaped by our experience of it at any point in time and can be different in terms of when we experience it, or in terms of who is experiencing it. Perceptions of the world, of subjects and of objects, is driven by intentionality, that is, what the subject’s intent is for the objects they perceive, and this intent unavoidably shapes the phenomena examined (Moustakas, 1994). Intentionality is a vital function of consciousness (Giorgi, 1997), as it allows for consciousness to direct itself to objects in the first place. What is of interest for analysis is not “what we think about”, but “what we think” (Boedeker Jr., 2005; Wertz, 2005).

## **Hermeneutics**

It is said that there is a difference between phenomenology that describes and phenomenology that interprets (Finley, 2009). These two different schools of thought are said to be represented by Husserl's and Heidegger's views respectively. The Husserlian view focuses on the essential structures of a phenomenon through broadly normative and scientific description, whereas Heidegger's hermeneutic tradition focuses more on idiographic elements of a given experience interpreted within particular theoretical frameworks. Although these viewpoints can be argued to be categorically different, some find they constitute points on a continuum of understanding (Finlay, 2011).

Heidegger described lived experience as a reciprocal interpretive process rather than a superficial, descriptive process as envisioned by Husserl (Todres & Wheeler, 2001). For Heidegger, pre-understanding (Copperstone, 2009) and interpretation (Finley, 2009) are inevitably embedded in the experiencing. Hermeneutic understanding is a reciprocal process of interpretation that necessitates personal involvement of the researcher, although there is a differentiation between facilitative preconceptions (to understand) and obstructive preconceptions (to impose understanding) (Dowling, 2007). Furthermore, Van Manen and Gadamer differentiated interpretation into (a) interpretations towards returning to the things themselves and (b) interpretations that refer to external frameworks (e.g., psychoanalytic theory), or what Ricoeur similarly conceptualized as hermeneutics of meaning-recollection and hermeneutics of suspicion (Finley, 2009).

I agree with Heidegger's and Ricoeur's views that phenomenological understanding comes by allowing the researcher to apply themselves to the analysis of the data, while holding in mind how their preconceptions affect the interpretative process.

Furthermore, I find Ricoeur's assertion appealing: hermeneutics should draft ideas from different theories and sciences towards a function of suspicion, or of finding latent

meanings (Finlay, 2011). Without an (informed) interpretive capacity there is little that can be said about how the participants' spoken accounts might differ from what they actually wish to disclose, or how they are managing to express how they might be truly thinking or feeling (Smith & Osborn, 2008). With masculinity, for example, the disclosing of sensitive material might be continuously monitored by internal processes that have to sustain and protect masculine capital (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013), or status (Kingerlee, 2012), so it makes sense that an empathic yet critical understanding might be a fit approach to examine the experience of masculinity by men. Thus hermeneutics of suspicion in the present study prompted questions during analysis such as why a participant phrased a sentence in a particular way, what emotions and triggers might be implied (e.g., swearing might mean anger, and anger might indicate presence of threat in the narrative) or what would the opposite of what a participant claimed mean for him (what if X had not happen). Participant comments that were vague, contradictory or communicated with remarkable non-verbal cues more readily invoked hermeneutics of suspicion that allowed the researcher to move beyond their overt meaning and entertain the possibility that deeper meanings were protected by efforts to preserve a masculine status quo.

### **Method: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

For the present study the data were analyzed by employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in order to describe and interpret the phenomenon of masculinity as experienced by men themselves. My purpose was to better understand how the participants experienced masculinity in their lives, how important masculinity is for them and what impact it had in their lives, as well as to attempt to understand the contextual factors that shaped their experience. The IPA was the method of choice because it would allow me to enter the frame of reference of the participants while retaining my own and thus interpret their experience. In contrast with quantitative

methods, no hypothesis is tested in this study; rather, the aim is to generate data particular to the phenomenon explored.

The IPA method puts greater emphasis on interpretation rather than description (Langdridge, 2007). IPA integrates empathic and questioning hermeneutics: along with trying to understand the participants' point of view, the method lends itself to questioning said point of view for a richer analysis (Smith, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2008). With IPA we ask what is the participant trying to tell us, trying to conceal or what could be the contextual factors that led the participant to experience masculinity in a particular way. (Willig, 2012). Willig further differentiates between suspicious and empathic interpretation, the former bringing explicitly a theoretical context (e.g., psychoanalysis) to construct a formulation out of the data and pinpoint causes of phenomena (*to explain*), and the latter to amplify meaning through clarification and "elucidation of an absence" (p.14) (*to understand*). Following Ricoeur, Willig suggests a dialectic between *explaining* and *understanding*, and others have suggested differentiating between levels of interpretation: from empathic-descriptive to critical-hermeneutic.

I chose IPA over phenomenological analysis because the interpretative inquiry acknowledges and makes use of my own influence over the findings while clarifying what this influence is, in order to also possibly arrive at latent meanings of experiences as given by individuals. As part of the philosophy of the Counselling Psychology field, best practice can be achieved by reflexivity over interpretative processes, that is, how we make sense of how our clients and participants make sense of the phenomena under inquiry. Finlay (2011) suggests that therapeutic processes and phenomenological research both have the goals of promoting self-other understanding, let both the practitioner/researcher's and client/participant's views be heard and involve similar practitioner/researcher skills, such as openness, empathy and critical and reflective interpretation.

IPA also resonates with the values of Counselling Psychology for prizing individual, subjective experience. Cooper (2009) outlines these values as, among other points, the prioritization of the client's experiencing, the democratization of the therapeutic relationship, the appreciation of client uniqueness and the understanding of the context in which the person interacts. IPA allows for these values to inform our research as well.

Ricoeur held that the facts of lived experience (the phenomena), in order to be captured by the subject, are done so in the human language, which guarantees that said experience will always be an outcome of a process of interpretation (Finlay, 2011). This is why in attempting to understand a phenomenon, as experienced by others, the researcher moves back and forth between examining preconceptions and interpreting the material. The vital (and some argue the only fixed) method in hermeneutics (and the backbone of IPA) is said to be the hermeneutic circle, the moving back and forth between the researcher's interpreted object and their preconceptions that facilitate said interpretation, to be acknowledged and challenged (Finlay, 2011; Willig, 2008). Making sense of one's experience as an external observer entails the participant's making meaning of the experience and the observer's making sense of the subject's meaning-making process. This is called a double hermeneutic and it renders a phenomenon observable through two different hermeneutic devices: that of the one who experienced it and the one who observes the first one (Smith, 2004). Therefore in the present study my assumptions will be unavoidably brought into exploring and interpreting the participants' experience with masculinity as it is impossible for me to fully ever know another person's phenomenological field without doing so (Willig, 2008; Smith, 2011). My first and foremost assumptions brought into the research is that all males have knowledge and experience associated with the concept of masculinity and that said experiencing and knowing has affected their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours in some way.

## **Bracketing**

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) focus on an important aspect of the IPA method termed “bracketing”. Although Giorgi (2011) was critical of the way the term is used to describe two different processes in the method, Smith et al. (2009) nevertheless brought attention to two vital components of describing and analyzing the experience of the subject: (a) the examination of one’s assumptions of the studied phenomenon, and (b) the suspension of essentialist attitudes towards the phenomenon. For interpretive inquiry into the participants' experience, though, some authors argue that there is no need or indeed the possibility for total suspension of one's assumptions and preconceptions but there is still a need for an acknowledgment of how these may affect the analysis and interpretation of data (Dowling, 2007; Smith et. al, 2009; Willig, 2008). Willig also reminds us that "interpretative phenomenology also aims to gain a better understanding of the nature and quality of phenomena as they present themselves [...] [and] it draws on insights from the hermeneutic tradition and argues that all description constitutes a form of interpretation" (p. 56). Bracketing of preconceptions is vital in descriptive phenomenological methods but even then we have to refer to the disciplinary context (here, Counselling Psychology) through which the description is made if our method is to be scientific rather than philosophical (Giorgi, 1997; Giorgi, 2008). Heidegger's take on bracketing preconceptions was that although they are essential to interpretation they should never be prioritized over the object of interpretation, an idea echoed by contemporary researchers. Instead, and in order to engage with scientific discipline, we are called to examine said preconceptions through the things themselves (Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). For example, when extracting themes from interview data, it is considered sound practice to address researcher preconceptions that would render an interpretation un-grounded in the data (Brocki & Wearden, 2006).

## **Giorgi's Criticisms of IPA**

Giorgi has criticized Smith over confusion of phenomenological terms and concepts, phenomenological reduction in particular, that could render IPA non-phenomenological and that could leave IPA and qualitative methods in general open to serious scrutiny from proponents of quantitative methods in the psychology field (2011). Giorgi argues that Smith constructed the IPA method by being eclectic in the phenomenological and hermeneutic perspectives as they were brought forth by earlier authors (Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer) with the net results being a "minimalistic and simplistic" method (p. 206). However, Finlay (2009) offers a "solution": phenomenological research should be deemed as such as long as it involves rich description of one's lived experience and the researcher refrains from comprehensively imposing external frameworks to said experience with the cost of losing sight of it. Moreover, Finlay suggests that there should be clarity in research as to which views one subscribes to. In the present study, for example, I explicitly ascribe to Ricoeur's notion that understanding of lived experience is only possible through positional interpretation and thus by the researcher's personal but disciplined involvement (Todres & Wheeler, 2001) through both hermeneutics of empathy and hermeneutics of suspicion.

Giorgi has also suggested that IPA as non-scientific because it does not allow for replication of research. Giorgi also highlights that Smith et al. do not outline predetermined procedures for analysis that would allow for replication of findings amongst researchers, and suggests that IPA practitioners have a fear of "fixity" (2011, p.211) that renders IPA unscientific. Smith has argued prior to Giorgi's comprehensive critique that there is indeed a pre-set series of steps to be applied in IPA. The steps for IPA are fixed in sequence of implementation but said implementation can be done differently by different researchers, for example, the number of times a transcript is reviewed before themes were extracted. Brocki and Wearden's (2006) critical evaluation of IPA studies gives a different picture. The authors argue that IPA lends a

more straightforward and accessible route to research because as a method it does lend itself to replication, although more clarification on the levels of interpretation is desired for future development of the methodology.

### **Other Qualitative Methods**

Thematic analysis, discourse analysis, grounded theory and critical narrative analysis were considered in the inception of this study but were rejected as methodologies.

Thematic analysis was considered to be concerned with description rather than interrogation of the findings, which was not my aim for this study. Discourse analysis focuses on how people construct social reality through the use of language, which corresponds greatly with a social constructivist perspective. However, I was more interested in the idiosyncratic meanings that men have for masculinity. Finally, grounded theory was found not sufficient to address the aim of this study, as it primarily concerns itself with building a "bottom-up" theory based on categorizations of the data and describing social processes, rather than idiosyncratic meaning (Willig, 2008).

Critical narrative analysis was found to be very intriguing in its depth of exploration but in danger of potentially leaving out idiosyncratic ways of perceiving one's life as a man (Langdrige, 2007).

### **Pleck's Suggestions for Future Masculinity Research**

This study's phenomenological inquiry will be informed by a few suggestions from the literature regarding future research into masculinity. Specifically, Pleck (1995) argues that future research should account for (a) a possibly very dynamic nature of the discrepancy, (b) positive outcomes of not following masculinity standards and (c) the psychological salience/ importance of various aspects of masculinity. This will allow approaching the participant experience even more liberated from the assumptions and conclusions met in the literature.

## PROCEDURE

Following approval of my research proposal from City University London, I started the recruitment process explained below.

### **Participant selection**

Inclusion criteria for this study were to be male, ages 18-60, and currently residing in the UK. Candidates that did not speak fluent English, or that were underage (less than 18) or over 60, or that were at the time suffering from severe distress were not considered suitable candidates for the study.

The first two participants that were recruited helped with the pilot study. The pilot study helped refine and adjust the Interview Schedule (Appendix 6) in order to better explore subsequent participants' experience.

### **Sample Size and Characteristics**

The participant sample of the present study was seven (7) males, excluding those in the pilot study, of ages 29 to 59 varying in cultural and educational backgrounds and socioeconomic status.

In trying to determine what number of participants would suffice for my research I came across varied views on the matter. Addressing practical considerations, authors have suggested a range of four to ten participants for professional doctorate students (Langdrige, 2007; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et. al, 2009). The authors argue that there is no rule of thumb that would predetermine this number and it can vary depending on the research question, the organizational constraints and the richness of the data at hand. One criterion is data saturation, a point in the research when additional data constitute repetition of earlier findings (Wertz, 2005). Since masculinity is a broad topic and can be experienced very differently across individuals, data saturation would not be possible within the study's time constraints. The choice of

number of participants in this study was made by consulting the research supervisor and by referencing the existing "rule of thumb" as given by Smith. Because of the idiographic and time-consuming nature of the study, the sample size was deemed adequate (Langdridge, 2007).

Smith (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009) suggests that purposive sampling is more fit for IPA studies, as the aim is not to produce generalizable results but to study the experience of a homogeneous group. The aim of purposive sampling is to examine a homogeneous sample which, although not representative of the general population, will allow for analyzing points of convergence and divergence in relation to the topic (Smith et al., 2009). However, in my study a very diverse group was initially considered: men. It quickly became apparent though that, due to the recruitment process being snowball sampling, the candidates attracted would share some of the demographic characteristics that I had: Caucasian, heterosexual and middle class. Indeed, within the time and contextual restrictions (limited networking as a recent immigrant myself), the people most available for interviewing were Caucasian heterosexual males and within the means of middle class. Although the sample was not diverse enough to include different sexualities and racial backgrounds, the purposive nature of the sampling would allow me, as per the spirit of IPA, to focus on idiographic elements of the experience of masculinity.

### **Sampling**

Flyers for the study were given to university peers and one copy was also attached to an announcement post on a Psychologist group on Facebook, asking for dissemination of the flyer to all who might be interested in participating. While the latter route did not yield any results, the former route proved to be the most efficient way to recruit participants.

Convenience sampling, such as snowball sampling used in the present study, has to be approached with consideration. Participants were recruited by advertising the study to people within the academic setting offering for help in recruitment. These individuals, termed here as "mediators", brought me in contact with the candidates who in turn became my participants. This specific sampling was considered by both researcher and supervisor as a safer route to recruitment. Through snowball sampling I was assisted in clarifying participation interest via mediation of the people that knew the candidates personally. That assured motivation to engage in the research and safety for all parties involved. However, one has to consider selection issues when interpreting the data and acknowledge factors that could possibly affect motivation for participation in the first place. Rob (2004) explains that men in an interview process might well be motivated to prove their masculinity while discussing about it.

Although access to participants came from convenience sampling, there was care to have an adequate range of views represented relevant to the phenomenon (e.g., partnered and single, age range, varied cultural origins) (Yardley, 2008).

After consent to communicate with the participants was given via the mediators, I used their e-mail address or telephone number to let them know that I was interested in interviewing them. During initial contact with the candidates I assessed suitability in consultation with the mediator and ensured that participants were within the age limit and not currently under severe distress. No candidates were non-suitable for the study. Within a frame of 44 weeks seven candidates both reported interest and participated in the study, while four more opted out before an interview date could be set. Reasons given for opting out paralleled the reasons given for delays between contact and interview for the participants that did stay, and pertained to very tight work and holiday schedules.

Participants were given the forms presented in Appendix 4 - Informed Consent form, Appendix 3 - Information and Debriefing Forms, and Appendix 5 - Demographics Form, in this order, before the interview. The Informed Consent form summarized the purposes towards which the recorded data would be used and the terms of their protection (anonymization and confidentiality), as well as outlined the right to withdraw participation and data retention any time up to one week following the interview without penalization of any kind and stated researcher and supervisor contact details. Both researcher and participant kept one signed copy of the consent form for future reference. The Information and Debriefing forms explained in more detail the purpose of the study, the interview process, safeguarding procedures, confidentiality and researcher/supervisor contact details and for that reason it was given prior to the Informed Consent form. The Demographics form was also given in order to gather demographic data. Said data presentation was adjusted for presentation and confidentiality: for example, "sexual orientation", when noted as "straight", was changed to heterosexual and "occupation" was masked to further protect the identity of the participants. Following each interview, a Debriefing Form (Appendix 3) was given that elaborated more on the purpose and rationale of the study, and encouraged the participants to inform the researcher should they feel distressed from the interview.

The seven participants attended a semi-structured interview, lasting from 45 to 90 minutes, in safe and quiet environments. The interviews took place at the City University London campus in pre-reserved rooms under the researcher's name and on a couple of occasions they took place in private residences. The interviews were recorded in digital audio format to be transcribed before the analysis (Appendix 6 - Interview Schedule).

### Issues of Interview Locations

Due to schedule conflicts two of the participants requested to be interviewed at home. In order to further assure safety for both parties should something happen (e.g., participant became distressed or wanted to feel safer) the person that had brought us in contact was asked to be close by in case they were needed. Reflections on how the physical context might have affected the data are discussed in the Discussion section and Appendix 16 - Reflective Notes on Quality Criteria.

### Participant Demographics

From the Demographics form in **Appendix E** the following table of demographics was created:

**Table 1 : Participant Demographics**

<b>Rf.</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>Education</b>
A	59	Caucasian	British	Heterosexual	Masters
B	29	Caucasian	British	Heterosexual	Undergraduate
C	29	Caucasian	British	Heterosexual	Masters
D	33	Caucasian	British	Heterosexual	Masters
E	33	Caucasian	German	Heterosexual	Masters
F	57	Caucasian	British	Heterosexual	Masters
G	33	Caucasian	Australian	Heterosexual	Masters

## **Questionnaire Construction**

After reviewing what would be the core of the psychological and sociological literature on masculinity I started constructing the interview agenda. The agenda was informed by the literature in terms of life aspects inquired into, the questions were constructed according to guidelines related to IPA and semi-constructed interviews and were subsequently revised with the guidance of the research supervisor also following the pilot study.

The semi-constructed interview agenda was constructed according to guidelines provided by IPA research authors. The agenda consisted of open-ended, non-directive questions as suggested for IPA (Willig, 2008). The interview combined elements of a formal interview, namely, the existence of an agenda and fixed roles within the process, and features of an open-ended inquiry into personal experience. The questions encouraged the participant to elaborate upon their experience pertaining to masculinity, thus staying close to the research question without dictating the interview process (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Willig, 2008). The structure of the interview allowed for the participants to introduce issues that might not have been predicted by the questions themselves, but still followed the research question (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The questions were not always asked in a linear fashion in order to accommodate the flow of the participant's narrative.

I also encouraged the participants to elaborate on vague terms and expressions by adopting a curious and naive stance ("stating the obvious", Willig, 2008, p.25; "disciplined naivete", Finlay, 2011, p.23). With all my participants I followed Langdrige's (2007) and Willig's (2009) suggestions that the interview should be "a relaxed affair" (2007, p. 69), meaning that I matched the participant's pace and sense of ease, there was no note-taking that would create a distance between me and them, allowed silent moments without probing and asked if everything was okay before, in the middle, and at the end of each interview. Rapport was built by matching each

participant's style of engagement as early as right before the interview and although adherence to the interview schedule was maintained, spontaneity and responsiveness to the participants' narrative facilitated the conversational flow (Finlay, 2011). If the participants reported feeling that they were not contributing to the interview, I reflected on how useful they have been so far and assured them that the topic is a difficult one.

Spradley (1979) has suggested four categorizations for questions depending on what they are trying to elicit from the participant. *Descriptive questions* aim for general accounts: biographical information, anecdotes and so on. *Structural questions* aim at participant knowledge structure: categories and frameworks of meaning. *Contrast questions* aim at comparisons between events and experiences. Finally, *evaluative questions* aim at exploring the feelings of the participant towards someone else, or towards a concept.

Smith (Smith et. al, 2009) also suggests constructing interview questions on epistemological grounds. Primary research questions are grounded on the epistemological position of the study, thus aiming at exploring idiosyncratic understandings of experience. Secondary questions are more theory-driven and attempt at providing material for evaluating existing theories based on the data. However, secondary questions do not have the function of testing a hypothesis but instead they are meant to engage in the theories examined at the literature review.

### **The Questions**

The questions presented below are also in Appendix 6 - Interview Schedule. In the table below, also presented in Appendix 7, prompt questions are not included for the sake of simplicity.

## **Table 2 : Semi-Structured Interview Agenda/Schedule**

### PART I – PERSONAL MASCULINITY

1. What does “masculinity” mean to you?
2. How is it for you to feel like a man?
3. How is your life as a man different from being a woman, or a boy?
4. How is your way of being a man affecting your life?
5. Would there be any reason or circumstances for you not to feel like a man?
6. I am wondering how significant it is for you to be a man.
7. You mentioned challenges and struggles in your life as a man. I am wondering how do you cope with situations like these.

### PART II – ENVIRONMENT AND LIFE EVENTS REGARDING MASCULINITY

1. Has your view on masculinity changed throughout your life, and how?
2. Can you remember an important event that had to do with your masculinity?
3. Were there any important people in your life to discuss what “being a man” means?
4. How do you find yourself, as a man, relating to other people?
5. What views have other people had (in your life or in general) on manhood?

I found my first question quite useful in opening up the interview with my participants, although most of them commented on how general and difficult it was. "What does masculinity mean to you?" is a primary, structural question. Although Smith et al. suggest that questions should not be on "too grand a scale" (2009, p.47) I found that the first question in the agenda helped the participants orient themselves directly to the topic, without expecting a definite, "right" answer. Moreover it constituted the start point of a funnelling process (Smith & Osborn, 2008), which guides the agenda from questions of a broader perspective to a more narrow ones. After consulting my supervisor, the question was deemed to serve the agenda well, and I kept it.

I used the phrases "masculinity" and "being a man" interchangeably in the schedule since there has historically been ambiguity in the literature regarding this conceptual overlap. By doing so, I aimed at implicitly introducing the question of definition to the participants and possibly allowing them to differentiate the concepts based on their experience.

The questions following the first focus on the participants' personal experience of masculinity, and that is why they are under the heading "Part I - Personal Masculinity". Question 2, "How is it for you to feel like a man?" begins in a general way to explore the relatability of the concept. Like Question 4, Question 2 is primary, as both questions are not informed by theory, and are evaluative, as they inquire into how the participants feel about masculinity. Question 3 is secondary as it is informed by the literature that suggests that there are differences between living as a young boy, or as a female, and is structural as it further explores categories of meaning. Question 5 is based on the literature that suggests that masculinity is experienced conditionally, and is one of evaluation and possibly contrast between an event that would potentially threaten one's sense of masculinity and the actual experience of the event. Similarly, Question 6 follows Pleck's (1995) suggestion for future research to focus on salience of masculinity for men, how important it actually is for them and is one of evaluation. Question 7 emerged after the first pilot interviews. I felt that inevitably participants would mention problems they had in life or issues that had to be resolved, so after consulting my supervisor I felt this question would always be relevant to what the participants said, even if it had to be asked later in the schedule. Literature suggests that men tend to cope with problems in characteristic ways (e.g., suppression of painful emotions) and one aim of this question was to explore possible patterns of responses to stressful events or issues.

Part II of the questions, "Environment and life events regarding masculinity", aims at exploring the interaction of the participant, masculinity as a phenomenon, and the

social environment. Question 1 is primary and structural and aims at exploring possible mutability of the experience of the concept across development. Question 2 is a primary, contrast question and I thought it would relate experience to events in order to make said experience more salient. Questions 3 and 5 were informed by literature suggesting the formation of masculinity is also affected by the greater social environment, and I wanted to further explore whether and how masculinity was communicated and negotiated. Finally, Question 4 was informed by literature indicating that men tend to adopt particular relational patterns with other people (e.g., detachment), and I wanted to explore whether such patterns would emerge within my sample.

Although the number of questions initially seemed high for the time allotted for the interviews, careful consideration deemed the number appropriate. I discussed within supervision my concerns around difficulties in disclosing personal material that men may have within an interview framework, as the literature suggests may happen in therapy as well. Both I and my supervisor felt, after a revision of the initial draft, that the amount of questions and their function was non-directive, reasonably informed by literature, comprehensively exploratory and close to the research question.

The questions changed after the first draft was presented to the supervisor for feedback. In order to further free the text from theoretical presuppositions, questions regarding *masculinity standards* were revised or removed altogether, and closed questions were phrased as open-ended to ensure elaboration. However, after discussion with my supervisor and after I inspected the recordings of the pilot interviews, it seemed that a few of the closed questions that remained in the agenda did not discourage participants from further elaborating. For example, for the question "Would there be any reason or circumstances for you not to feel like a man?" whether it was answered affirmatively or negatively the participants went on to elaborate why this was the case, and the answering style persevered throughout the interviews.

Furthermore, turning these questions into open-ended might have communicated an assumptive stance from my part, for example, phrasing the same question as "What would be a good reason or circumstance for you not to feel like a man?" would assume that there can be something to evoke such a situation for the participant, and possibly miss out any perceptions that there are no reasons or circumstances that would challenge one's masculinity.

Almost each question included prompts that would encourage the participants to elaborate on their account should they feel stuck or disoriented with the question itself (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The prompts are noted in Appendix 6 - Interview Schedule in italics. Some of the prompts aimed at relating experience of masculinity with events, while others facilitated elaboration of the answers given. Impromptu questions that were more closely tied with the interview themselves were also asked by reflecting on and summarizing what the participants said, like "Can you tell me more about this?" or "What do you mean by ...?".

All the participants commented after the recording process that the interview was interesting to them, and that it made them think about their masculinity in a different way since they had mostly not talked about it this way before, or in this depth. Seeing this as evidence for having a positive and enriching impact on the participants, I preliminarily concluded that the schedule facilitated the conduction of good quality research (Finlay, 2011).

### **Data Transcription**

The interview transcripts were produced with Smith's, Langdrigde's and Willig's (Langdridge, 2007; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et. al, 2009; Willig, 2008) recommendations on the process. The transcription recorded every spoken word that would be analyzed, along with errors in pronunciation or idioms, and focused on semantic meanings. Most significant pauses and non-verbal behaviour such as laughs

were deemed supplementary to interpretation and were noted as well. Most of my nods and prompts to continue ("Okay", "Yeah") were not noted as they were deemed not supplementary to the participants' meaning but rather served as building rapport within the interview. Transcription accuracy was improved by re-reviewing each transcript in order to also remove references to names and places and ensure participant confidentiality.

### **Data Formatting and Analysis**

Following the IPA model, data formatting and analysis was segmented in a step-by-step fashion as proposed by IPA researchers (Langdrige, 2007; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2008). Each step except for the final one was repeated for each of the seven transcripts.

The first step was the organization of the interview data into a format that would allow for analysis. Each text had a wide left margin for notes and a right margin for annotation of themes. After thorough and repeated reading of each transcript three types of comments were made on the left margin, as Smith et. al suggest (2009): descriptive, linguistic (underlined) and conceptual (*italics*). Descriptive comments described my sense of what was happening for the participant, linguistic comments magnified the role of specific words in the text and conceptual comments pertained to how meanings were associated with each other, how the particulars relate to the whole, and what may be missing from the text (guided by hermeneutics of suspicion). This step helped me better understand each participant's experience by allowing myself to contextually align myself to the data, and adopt a broad perspective of what is going on for the individual.

**Emergent themes** were annotated during the second step on the right-hand margin of the transcripts. Emergent themes are attempts to capture the essential quality of sections of the data. At this stage psychological terms were used if they seemed

appropriate to describe said essence of experience. Left-margin notes were used to inform the broader-level of meaning invoked in the themes. The choice of themes is also inevitably selective, as the interpretation process continues throughout the analysis of the data. As no claims for objectivity are made though the epistemological and ontological stances adopted for this study, this selective attention to the data (*intentionality*) was on par with the spirit of the IPA analysis. In this stage I also sometimes produced alternative themes for the same passages to promote the validity and rigour of the analysis.

At the third step a chronological list of the Emergent themes of the previous stage was made, followed by a column indicating the line of the text which contained the data upon which I based each theme. I then grouped themes into **clusters** depending on the concepts they elicited and how these concepts were linked between the constituent emergent themes. Willig (2008), Smith and Osborn (2008) suggest referencing back to the original data in order to ensure that the clusters are still grounded in the data, and their meaning is not lost in abstraction.

As the fourth step, a summary table for each transcript was made for all Emergent themes and clusters, along with their line number references. As also indicated by Willig (2008), some of the themes were excluded from clusters as they were not relevant or useful to the research question or were not well-represented in the data. Nevertheless these themes were kept under the label "Orphaned" in case they related to other themes, from other participants, later on in the analysis.

As the final step, I integrated the Emergent themes of each participant into six (6) **Master themes**, consisting of 26 **Constituent themes** in total. This way common ground in the experience of masculinity between the participants was mapped. A summary table was produced listing the Master themes, the Constituent theme and their corresponding participant / line number reference. Accounting for the sample size,

only themes present in at least four participants were deemed sufficiently supported by the data (Smith et al., 2009). Many Emergent themes were integrated in more than one Constituent theme because they touched upon different concepts and topics. A sample of the multiple relationships between Emergent and Constituent themes can be found in Appendix 14 - Emergent Themes Belonging to Multiple Constituent Themes.

Throughout the aforementioned steps the hermeneutic circle was in effect, leading me back to the text itself to check whether the themes were grounded in the data. This is why some new or revised themes emerged as late as the final step. In addition, and to account for alternative interpretations of the same passages, different themes were produced and listed as the hermeneutic circle was in effect.

For further transparency, I have retained documentation of the whole analysis process, from transcript data to emergent themes, to the formation of the master themes. This audit trail is another attempt to meet the criteria for good qualitative research (Walsh & Downe, 2006; Yardley, 2000).

All transcripts were annotated by using Microsoft Word, and all of themes were manipulated by using Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel.

## REFLEXIVITY

### **Epistemological Reflexivity**

Phenomenological studies such as the present one lack in generalizability, as the participant samples are not representative of the population, and the researcher's subjectivity is allowed (and required) to inform the analysis. Thus the researcher cannot aim at the reduction of it to "invariant structural properties" that will hold true for the general population (Langdrige, 2007, p. 58). It is also impossible to describe and/or interpret an account by totally bracketing the researcher's own subjective judgment or agenda, an issue inherent in the double hermeneutic. While no claims at objectivity are

made, alternative interpretations were produced from the participant's data in order to allow for different meaning to emerge, as seen in the overlap between themes in the Analysis section.

Each participant has a different experience of what can objectively be named as being the same, or alike, and the present study aims at exploring said difference in experience and its contextual meaning. With phenomenological methods knowledge is gained by inquiry of the content of one's consciousness that corresponds with objects in the world outside said consciousness (Willig, 2008). Small-scale qualitative methodologies cannot make generalized claims based on their findings. However, since at least part of the examined experiences is socially constructed and possibly accessible to others within the same historical, cultural and societal contexts, it can be possible that qualitative findings are potentially open to the possibility of being experienced similarly by others (Haug, 1987; Kippax et al., 1988).

### **Quality and Validity**

Yardley and Smith offer criteria against to assess good qualitative research. Yardley (2000) posits four characteristics of good qualitative research that acted as a guide for the present research. The criteria are (1) context sensitivity (existing theory and empirical research, grounding on epistemology, awareness of socio-cultural factors), (2) commitment and rigour (prolonged research and personal engagement with the topic, completeness of data collection and analysis, use of intuition and imagination grounded on theory), (3) transparency and coherence (clarity of research process particulars, meaningful research narrative, research question and epistemology/methods fit) and (4) impact and importance (utility, to exert influence on the reader's beliefs and actions or the general socio-cultural context). Smith (2011) adds: (1) clear research focus, (2) strong interview data, (3) rigour (prevalence of themes, representation of data), (4) elaboration on theme analysis, (5) focus on

interpretation rather than description, (6) demonstrate divergence and convergence on themes and (7) good writing. Adherence to these criteria is addressed in the Analysis and Discussion sections of this study.

Research supervision was also source of validity for the present study. New reflections were produced from peer feedback and taken to the supervisor for further feedback, suggestions, and reflection. In the spirit of IPA, feedback drew attention to the hermeneutic process itself and how my preconceptions on masculinity may have affected the interpretative process.

### **Methodological Reflexivity**

The present study aims at an understanding of the experience of masculinity akin to a Counselling Psychologist's (interpretative and reflective) understanding, rather at objective descriptions of masculinity. Theories are not tested out on the data but the data are used to invoke the experience, to illuminate the full picture (Finlay, 2011; Willig, 2012). In line with the necessitated reflexivity on one's own interpretative process I acknowledge throughout the Analysis and Discussion sections my own preconceptions as a male, trainee, Counselling Psychologist, studying the experience of masculinity. As Walsh and Downe (2006) phrase it in their meta-synthesis of vital qualitative research frameworks, "[I]t is imperative to publish some reflexive content so that the reader can sense how the researcher shaped the entire project, and, in particular, the interpretation of findings" (p.116).

### **Personal Reflexivity**

Because the process of entirely and utterly bracketing one's preconceptions is incongruent with my epistemological and methodological stance, I am addressing the inevitability of bringing my own experience of masculinity in this section. By increasing awareness of my own preconceptions I can better understand my side of the double

hermeneutic inherent in the methodology and can be more mindful of my interpretation of the data. For the present study I had to bracket my own experience and preconceptions of masculinity as formed within my social environment.

My interest in masculinity stems from conflicts within my own personal experience which have stimulated both my personal development and growth and my intellectual curiosity regarding the matter. My motivation to engage with the subject is rooted on my earlier anxieties to "be a man" and their persistence through time regardless of my efforts to attain this gendered status. I increasingly became aware, through my social networks and my studies, that most, if not all, claims to "what masculinity essentially is" were fitted around cultural and idiosyncratic conceptualizations. I soon realized that the more I adhered to supposedly masculine values and traits in order to cope with interpersonal anxieties and to make meaning out of life, the less sense the concept of masculinity made to me because of contradictions between value judgments and interpersonal harmony.

Whatever personal struggle I have had with trying to be a man was magnified for men directly "challenging" the cultural status quo, e.g., homosexual men. I found the idea of individuals trying to "fit in" what other men suggested as a "proper way" to live problematic because many times (a) it meant that one had to disown perfectly healthy parts of the self and (b) one "proper way" was not compatible with another. I felt concerned with the realization that men, like me or others, could experience distress around their own masculinity based on inflexible and dogmatic views on "what a man should be".

Moreover, I found the distress stemming from following cultural directives on gender needless and irrational, but at the same time I could also strongly identify with the reasons why a man could inflict such distress on himself. I grew puzzled and concerned with the phenomenon of males trying to reconcile masculine virtues such as

responsibility towards their loved ones, with problematic coping strategies, such as alcohol abuse or being abusive towards their family and spouses. Many men I met expressed directly or indirectly a conflict between an emotionally restricted life and an intuitive pull towards a "strong" male lifestyle, and I found the phenomenon in need of investigation on a subjective level.

I find that my research taps into my understanding of the feelings a man might have regarding his masculinity: the struggle to accept different parts of the self and the constant negotiation of their worth with the outside world. I find that men with issues around masculinity are among the groups of people with which I empathize more. Both on a personal and a professional level I came to understand that masculinity is a highly variable concept and that each man may have a different perception of what a man should be, and that was reflected in my contextualist epistemological stance as well. As a trainee Counselling Psychologist I aspired to further help promote well-being of men with issues stemming from the concept of masculinity not only by practice but also through research.

In relation to the research process itself I reflected on an idiosyncratic bias that could interfere with the interviews and analysis of data. In my personal life I tend to react negatively to excessive masculine displays of strength (physical or emotional) and thus resort to intellectualizing dismissal of such displays as strictly pathological. To counter this I had to suspend my reactions regarding participant statements that might have conveyed a sense of similar over-confidence and instead engage in a more empathic way, as practiced through my training as a Counseling Psychologist. By addressing and reflecting on my own experiences as a man throughout my professional training I came to understand that over-confident displays of masculinity come in many forms, and my own defence of intellectualization was no different from any other.

I understand however that merely pre-acknowledging preconceptions based on past experience and understanding is not sufficient grounds for quality research, as Finlay (2011) and Giorgi (2008) have pointed out. Reflexivity should be continuous and evident throughout the study.

### **Intersubjectivity in the Interview Process with Men**

Male behaviour can be greatly affected by the context in which it is examined, as indicated by research. Robb (2004) conducted in-depth interviews with British fathers that explored the intersubjective space between a male researcher and male participants. Robb reasoned that an interview process with both parties being male might be guided by a wish for masculinity validation, even if the concept itself is challenged through the discussion. In addition, discussing sensitive topics might trigger a defensive stance by both parties, creating distance from each other. Robb finally suggests that male researchers should be reflexively aware of the unconscious motivations that underlie the intersubjective dynamics between them and their male participants. Robb's research is admirably reflective and introspective but due to the nature of the research generalization of the findings is not possible - however, his findings further inform how the interpretative process and the double hermeneutic might be affected by interpersonal factors operating between men. Similarly, Johnston and Morrison (2007) reasoned that their male participants in their IPA study might have adapted reactively to the study context and thus adopted a more mature, independent and even self-deprecating masculine behaviour, which might have been judged as more desirable or politically compliant by the researchers.

### **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Masculinity has always been a sensitive subject to males mainly because it may be associated with strong affect and with a personal sense of identity. Associations with ambivalent relationships with persons of either sex may surface during an interview

about masculinity and relevant cognitions and emotions might instigate distress. Participants may also feel they are being judged or that their status is being questioned. Furthermore, exclusion from the study in the recruitment phase might instigate feelings of rejection in the candidates. For all these reasons stated above certain measures were taken beforehand to ensure participant well-being, first and foremost being the request for the Research Ethics Committee's approval at City University London (Appendix 8 contains relevant documentation).

The interviews were primarily held at City University London campus grounds, where the environment was both safe and predictable. Access to security was available and presence of other people as well as administration awareness of each interview taking place further increased safety for all parties concerned. For interviews taking place in home settings, safe and protected settings were chosen, assessing beforehand the presence of distress and risk factors for both parties by the mediators. The mediators were also in the vicinity of the interview area, close enough to provide help if needed but also far enough to ensure participant confidentiality and ease. Although the setting itself might have factored in the interview process, this is an issue addressed in the analysis of the data.

During the interview I made sure the participants were not experiencing significant distress by asking if they were okay with how the interview was going. Furthermore, the participants were informed prior to the study that they had the right to withdraw from it without having to provide a reason and without being penalized in any way for it. I also stayed with each participant for a few minutes after the end of the interview to make sure there were no adverse effects from the process and to be available for answering questions, clarifying outstanding issues, and generally ensuring that the participants left the process without harm. In the unlikely case that a participant would report or show significant distress I would make sure they had access to mental health services contact details (e.g., Mind, Samaritans) and would follow with a call or an email to

ensure participant well-being. As to the candidate selection process, any distress caused by rejection to participate in the study would be proactively handled by making clear that rejection to participation does not constitute a failure of any kind on their part.

Further consideration was given to two of the participants having met me in a very brief social capacity prior to the interview. In a brief discussion before the interview on whether these facts would interfere with the process, the participants stated feeling comfortable and safe in the process and confident in my professional capacity for keeping confidentiality. In retrospect I feel that no additional preconceptions or biases have entered my data collection or analysis as I have approached my participants with an open and naive stance, as indicated by my methodology.

In order for the analysis to remain idiographic, as well as interpretative, I have adhered to this study's philosophy by allowing myself to remain reflective on the factors that affect my interpretative capacity. Such a capacity has been developed throughout my training as a Counselling Psychologist. Moreover, the necessary abstractions in extracting themes were always checked to be grounded in the data instead of creating a conceptual dissonance that would require the reader to go to great pains to understand a meaningful link between two different points.

Participant details and data were and will be kept stored for a period of time of 5 years on paper and in a computer system, according to the British Psychological Society's minimum standards of ethical approval (BPS, 2004). The laptop computer used for storage of the data is isolated from all networks to ensure protection, privacy and confidentiality of the data, thus eliminating the danger of random, untargeted hacking. All data access was password-protected. Paper records were kept locked under key in the researcher's residence, with all participant names obscured with specialist tape. No other than me had access to the laptop computer and the paper container, and to the

password(s) and keys granting access to those. An e-mail address with the exclusive purpose of communicating with the participants was also used.

The audio files of the recorded interviews were edited first to make sure that all mentioned names, locations and other identifying information cannot be heard (silences were inserted in their place instead). To ensure participant anonymity there were slight alterations in demographic information given and in the nature of the persons or locations mentioned in the interviews. Index letters (A, B, C,...) and pseudonyms were given to individual names and notations replaced brands, company names and locations.

I also understand that there is an ethical consideration related to my personal reflexivity and involvement in the study. As part of our Counselling Psychology course requirements we are to be in therapy ourselves, part of which I used to address the very issue of masculinity discussed in this study and how my own preconceptions could possibly stand in the way of interviewing or analyzing the data.

#### Analysis Exemplar

An exemplar case of analysis is presented below to add to the transparency of the process as well as to better orient the reader to the findings presented later on.

In the snapshots below a transcript can be seen in the stages of annotation and analysis. Donovan here relays his experience of feeling physically challenged during school games.

Not good at physical activities. Dyslexic and dyspraxic.

Angry within school, masculinity and anger associated

Tied up, can't, can't, couldn't: *useless. Threat to self-esteem?*

*Anger is threat, identity is threatened via not being competent, and thus, manly.*

Dismissed physical aspect of masculinity because of lack of physical (catch, running, driving) competence.

*Concept of masculinity excluded physical competence.*

Judge, discounted. *Anger-instigated responses? Modifying masculinity. Tailor-made masculinity.*

*Self-defined, adaptive masculinity.*

241 live by affects my life, but in some ways it doesn't affect my life,  
242 um...so certain aspects of manliness that I recognize exist don't  
243 really seem to affect me that much, um, you can be disrespected... I  
244 really struggle to give a shit. I, up until recently I didn't express  
245 anger very much. I'm now trying to express anger, I went to therapy  
246 and established that I actually have quite a lot of anger. Mostly like  
247 um because I am dyslexic, all my anger was at school, I was tied up-  
248 and this is why being a man was never been associated with  
249 competence for me - because I'm dyslexic and I'm dyspraxic - and I  
250 can't catch, I can't write, at school I basically couldn't do anything,  
251 so any definition of being a man that was associated with, you  
252 know, being good at football, or uh running fast, or driving fast or  
253 doing anything well, um, I discounted and said "I can't compete at  
254 that game so that's not how I'm gonna judge my masculinity" and  
255 that's why my wife and I argue sometimes because she'll say, well,  
256 you know, "you're being incompetent" in that, that definition of  
257 manli-masculinity, and I'd go "that's not a definition of masculinity I  
258 recognize, that's just being competent". Um...So, so what I was  
259 saying was that those things don't really affect... my life, um... but  
260 decisions about being a man, meaning growing up, had- has had a  
261 big effect in my life.

### Illustration 1: Analysis Exemplar - Initial Annotation

My annotations on the left pertain to Donovan's descriptions of his experiences and my interpretations of them. Descriptive comments in normal font summarized the overt meaning of Donovan's words (e.g., being angry, being dyslexic and bad at sports). Linguistic comments (underlined) focused on word associations that could further illuminate latent meanings (e.g., being tied up and a repetition of the verb *cannot*). Finally, conceptual comments in italics allowed for associating between the text and more broadly defined concepts, attempting to answer the "why?" questions (hermeneutics of suspicion). There was a sense of inability in the text for Donovan to perform well physically which seems to have prompted a re-evaluation of the concept of masculinity. The words "discounted" (line 253), "judge" (line 254) and "recognize" (line 258) were interpreted as signifying a meta-cognitive process of manipulating the concept of masculinity. Further interpretation through hermeneutics of suspicion prompted me to ask "why so?". The gravity of the words as well as the mention of anger may indicate a presence of threat to self-esteem (as annotated on the left in italics). The meta-cognitive process of manipulating the concept of masculinity may

have been instigated by a need to preserve self-esteem and thus it could be said that masculinity, as a concept, was *adapted* to fit Donovan's strengths and that it may have helped Donovan adapt later on in life as well.

In order to define an emergent theme pertaining to the adaptability of masculinity I had to decide which excerpt would better demonstrate the theme and then give it a title - "Adaptive masculinity". I opted for the passage 249-258, which was then highlighted (annotated below as E45 by the text editor).

The illustration below indicates the emergent theme discussed as well as other themes in the vicinity and their respective passages:

Not good at physical activities. Dyslexic and <u>dyspraxic</u> .	243 really seem to affect me that much, um, you can be disrespected... I	
Angry within school, masculinity and anger associated	244 really struggle to give a shit. I, up until recently I didn't express	
<u>Tied up, can't, can't, couldn't; useless. Threat to self-esteem?</u>	245 anger very much. <u>I'm now trying to express anger, I went to therapy</u>	Comment [E42]: Unknown anger 245-246
<i>Anger is threat, identity is threatened via not being competent, and thus, manly.</i>	246 and established that I actually have quite a lot of anger. <u>Mostly like</u>	Comment [E43]: Identity is threatened 245-249
Dismissed physical aspect of masculinity because of lack of physical ( <u>catch, running, driving</u> ) competence.	247 um because I am dyslexic, all my anger was at school, I was tied up-	
<i>Concept of masculinity excluded physical competence.</i>	248 and this is why being a man was never been associated with	
<u>Judge, discounted, Anger-instigated responses?</u> <i>Modifying masculinity. Tailor-made masculinity.</i>	249 competence for me. <u>because I'm dyslexic and I'm dyspraxic - and I</u>	
<i>Self-defined, adaptive masculinity.</i>	250 can't catch, I can't write, at school I basically couldn't do anything,	Comment [E44]: Self-defined masculinity 249-254
	251 so any definition of being a man that was associated with, you	
	252 know, being good at football, or uh running fast, or driving fast or	
	253 doing anything well, um, I discounted and said "I can't compete at	
	254 that game so that's not how I'm gonna judge my masculinity" and	
	255 that's why my wife and I argue sometimes because she'll say, well,	
	256 you know, "you're being incompetent" in that, that definition of	
	257 manli-masculinity, and I'd go "that's not a definition of masculinity I	
	258 recognize, that's just being competent". Um...So, so what I was	Comment [E45]: Adaptive masculinity 249-258
	259 saying was that those things don't really affect... my life, um... but	
	260 decisions about being a man, meaning growing up, had- has had a	
	261 big effect in my life.	

Illustration 2: Analysis Exemplar - Emergence of Themes

## ANALYSIS

### OVERVIEW

The analysis produced a comprehensive organization of the interview data consisting of six (6) **Master themes** and 26 **Constituent themes**. As Smith (2009) suggests the organization of this data describes both how participants' accounts converge towards an organizing principle and how they diverge from each other in idiosyncratic ways. The table below summarizes the aforementioned themes.

<b>1. Being masculine</b>	<b>2. The Self Towards Superiority</b>
Power	Young Self as Inferior
Leadership	The Source of Masculinity
Independence and Autonomy	Being an Intellectual
Action Hero	Malleable Definition of Masculinity
Good Man	Self vs. the World
Masculinity Through the Body	The Self as Superior and Privileged
Work as Significant Life Aspect	
<b>3. What is Masculinity</b>	<b>4. The Emotional World</b>
Verbalizing Masculinity	Emotional Strength
Nature and Nurture	Detachment and Perspective Shift
Questioning Masculinity	Help-Seeking
<b>5. Other Men</b>	<b>6. The Other Gender</b>
Father as Point of Reference for Masculinity	The Significance of the Female Desire
The Male Group	Negotiating Masculinity with Partners
Idealized Men	Being Different from Women
Homosexuality	

Table 3: Master Theme Table Outline

The first Master theme, or organizing principle, Being Masculine, refers to traits, behaviours and concepts experienced by the participants to be associated with masculinity.

The second Master theme, The Self Towards Superiority, organizes Constituent themes pertaining to the development of the self in a structure spanning from a variably disadvantaged social position towards a status of superiority.

The third Master theme, What is Masculinity, refers to how the participants reflected on the concept of masculinity, where it comes from, and their conceptual doubts about it.

The fourth Master theme, named The Emotional World, describes the most common features of the participants' experience of coping with difficult emotions.

The fifth Master theme, Other Men, describes how the participants relate to other men.

Finally the sixth Master theme, The Other Gender, reflects how the participants experience themselves and their masculinity in relation to women.

The aim of this chapter is to produce a compelling account of how the data were analysed and organized yet due to the quantity of the data that emerged only a portion is presented here for the sake of parsimony. The presented data constitute an account of how the research question was answered in this study and in order to present it in a parsimonious yet compelling way I selected data from participants that were considered representative of the organizing principles.

For each theme examined in this chapter relevant data from the participants, in the form of verbatim quotes, are provided, along with my interpretation of how the data were subsumed and abstracted to the Master themes. As explored in the Methodology chapter, the analysis of the data is an attempt to understand without privileging any relevant literature over the data themselves. However, my own understanding of my

participants' experience is still grounded in my own perspectives as a man and as a Counselling Psychologist in training (Finlay, 2011; Langdridge, 2007; Smith, 2009; Willig, 2008; 2012).

The participants are presented here with pseudonyms in order to preserve confidentiality.

For a more detailed account of my reflections around the interviews and each analysis please consult Appendix 1 - Reflective Extracts from Interviews and Analyses.

## BEING MASCULINE

The Being Masculine Master theme refers both to how the participants perceive masculinity manifests as a concept in their lifeworld but also to how they experience themselves as men relating to masculinity through its manifestations. The concepts described in the Constituent themes were the most prevalent in association with the meaning of masculinity.

<b>1. Being Masculine</b>
<b>Power</b>
<b>Leadership</b>
<b>Independence and Autonomy</b>
<b>Action Hero</b>
<b>Good Man</b>
<b>Masculinity Through the Body</b>
<b>Work as Significant Life Aspect</b>

Table 4: Being Masculine Master theme

### **Power**

Power reflects the participants' experienced link between masculinity and the exertion of various forms of power (physical, mental, and/or social) over the environment. One

common thread running through the participants' accounts is how power becomes significant for men although there is divergence in the way they regard their own relationship, positive or negative, present or absent, with particular forms of power. Another common thread might be that power can be seen to relate to physical power even though it may come in other forms as well.

For Alistair power is experienced as in relation to other men. There is really evocative language in describing a hypothetical scenario of a younger man challenging his leadership. Leadership here is associated with demonstration of superiority, which lends an element of power over others rather than one of inspiration. Also, the self as "older", "no longer as vigorous" or as fit as a younger man evokes images of an aging body losing its power to assert itself. The excerpt evokes images of young men challenging the venerable, ageing alpha male in tribal societies of the past (or the present):

[A]s you get older... you're no longer quite as... vigorous as you may be when you're young and so maybe in a situation where I'm challenged by maybe a younger man who is fitter and whatever, I could feel... not so good. And in those circumstances I'd be pissed off, that I couldn't do, I-I couldn't be the leader, or demonstrate my... superiority [...]. (Alistair: 76-82)

For Donovan feeling powerful or powerless comes from creating desire in the female. The phrases "in the zone" and "good in bed" convey a sense of performance and exertion of influence ("magical power") with the aim to "charm" the female. The focus of this power is so significant that lacking "magical power" is experienced negatively and probably prompts distancing from a repulsive version of himself :

[I]f I take a... my wife on a date and the date is rubbish, and I'm tired, and um... I am really sort of... kind of "in the zone" and... I'm not..... kind of having a magical power that you want to have... um... so when I'm not charming, when I'm not charismatic, when I'm not affective, when I'm not good in bed or, or, so on, those times I don't feel like a man, I just feel, eh [with disgust] emasculated. (Donovan: 304-311)

For Eames power is linked to the body and its physical strength. The ability to exert physical power over his environment and to manipulate it to his own ends may be how Eames experiences power. In comparison with women, who in this excerpt are thought of as physically weaker, Eames expresses gratefulness for his masculine body allowing him to do so. Absence of such power may be felt as frustration ("drive me nuts"):

[O]ne of the things I would hate if I was a woman that I am in a way f- I like for that that I am a man- is not being able to carry your suitcase when and if you want. For ex- one of the best things is women notoriously have issues lifting their onboard luggage into the overhead compartment. And this would just drive me nuts if I didn't have the physical strength to do so. (Eames: 236-242)

## **Leadership**

In this theme participants describe their experience of being the leader within particular contexts, or of having qualities of leadership, or how being a leader has been strongly associated with being a man.

Bruce describes the role of the family provider in what may be seen as being an instance of masculine leadership. His father having been too ill to provide for his family, Bruce had to "step up" to the role of the provider and keep the family income flowing. That "stepping up" was experientially associated with being "more like a man", taking leadership of the family's finances, supporting his mother and his sister, and denotes an improvement in status by virtue of filling in a vital role in the family, which is also a masculine role:

[B]eing the only one that was working and when my dad was ill and I was the one who was providing... money for my mom, my dad, uh, help my sister out in the university and stuff, there was certainly like a strong sense of, uhm, you know, kind of stepping up and feeling more like a man (Bruce: 109-113)

Carney's description of masculinity suggests leadership as well but not solely in a financially supportive way or as contextually limited a way as Bruce does. Carney refers to being a "kind of a pillar" in order to be reliable and inspiring to those one cares for:

[B]eing a provider to a partner, being able to kind of be someone that someone can rely on, that's quite a... I think that's quite a masculine, em, quality. It's something I would like to have as a man, whether it's with a... em, a girlfriend or a sibling or a member of the family, someone that you can, who can be seen as a kind of pillar of... maybe not strength but reliability or inspiration [...] (Carney: 60-67).

Faris seems to relate to leadership in a cautious way. For Faris being a leader or being a follower might resemble a relationship that threatens his individuality. Leading and following seem to revolve around being a man for the masculine group ("pack") rather than being his own man and for that reason leadership is not appealing:

I don't, I don't want to lead a pack and I don't want to follow somebody else's pack around, is how I would put it. Um, you... sort of lose your individuality, um, and again, you're, you're... doing almost, not what one other person wants, but because you are going along with, with, with what the pack wants. (Faris: 729-734)

### **Independence and Autonomy**

This theme illustrates the participants' experience of independence and autonomy as related to masculinity. Independence and autonomy seem to relate to the ability and freedom to actualize one's will without interfering physical, mental, or social obstacles.

Alistair seems to define his autonomy as freedom of choice in making decisions. For Alistair, being a man involves autonomous decisions without referring to others for approval (to "answer to other people" or "explain it"). Decisions are made and implemented solely by him and the source of autonomy seems to be the capacity to take responsibility for his decisions:

I would not-not want to be a woman, or a boy. [...] I like being a man, I like having the choice of doing what I want to do when I want to do it and not having to answer to other people or... explain it. So I like the idea of being a man, yeah. (Alistair: 98-103)

Donovan describes a possibly more ambivalent relationship towards autonomy.

Donovan's "instinct" indicates a preference for co-operation rather than autonomy. Help from others, however, seems to only partially help him ("will only take me so far"), and then dissatisfaction with the help increases ("fuck it") and he feels that the best course of action is to "deal with it" independently (a phrase seemingly associated with being masculine):

Um [pause] My first instinct has always been to seek support. From [wife], from my friends, from [pause] um, people I work with, from anyone, you know, I'm kind of- because I'm an only child, um, my instinct is, when faced with a problem, gather an alliance [laughs]. Um... But [pause] it's also – I seem to go for a pattern, you know, I stop being frustrated, then I'll try and seek support, that will only take me so far, at a certain point I, I kind of tend to go "fuck it, I'm gonna deal with this" and deal with it. (Donovan: 381-388)

Eames associates masculinity with having the autonomy and independence to acquire material goods on his own. Parents' support is experienced as antithetical to autonomy ("they meant well, but") countering the sought-after "struggle" that defines a man in getting what he wants. In addition, one of the physical objects he wants - the motorcycle - can also be seen in conjunction with his belief that "the road is the way". Eames wishes to experience 'how' he can become a man, the "struggle" is part of what defines masculinity, rather than "[take] it for granted":

And I think this is one thing that I've told my dad numerous times that often, although he meant well obviously as a parent but you gonna always say that to parents, or that they meant well, but I said why don't you... just... let me... let me work for the motorcycle, for example, or for my driving license, I was just given it. Taken for granted. And I think being a male in particular to link it back to masculinity it's quite important that... the struggle, the road is the way basically. (Eames: 921-925)

## Action Hero

In this theme the participants describe how their feeling of masculinity can also be linked to overcoming deliberately chosen challenges, engaging in risk-taking or being exposed to danger. Dealing successfully with a difficult situation or task tends to be positively experienced and there seems to be an overarching sense of body and mind performance in tolerating pain and effort.

Carney speaks a lot about how overcoming sough-after challenges makes him feel more like a man, and this excerpt early in the interview possibly summarizes in a succinct way how positive these experiences are. Referring to his Army training, he gives gravity to his experience ("bloody hell") of succeeding in the assigned tasks ("coming through") and links difficulty with positive affect - "hard" with "good":

Yeah, I remember thinking that was, coming through a few of the particular training episodes, thinking, bloody hell, that was quite, that was good, that was hard (Carney: 89-92)

Donovan makes a strong link ("was always a thing") between his personality and determination to overcome. Although earlier "definitions" of what constituted a challenge may have become obsolete, what seems to have remained a stable quality is seeking courses of action that would require him to meet an emotional challenge with courage and determination. This overcoming would seem to reinforce his sense of manliness:

PA: The concept of... courage and determination. Um... was always a thing, I do not give up... that's- was always a thing and that, and- if you give me two options, one's the harder, riskier one and one's the easier one, there was a tendency that I would always take the harder, riskier one. Although I would often have an interesting definition of what that was.

RE: Meaning?

PA: Meaning that I wanted to take the one that was emotionally more challenging.

(Donovan: 526-535)

Faris finds overcoming physical risk a "significant component" of being masculine. The challenges Faris seeks after deliberately involve considerable risk of harm ("your life, your limbs on the line") and may allow for his endurance to be demonstrated ("you tolerate"). Faris at the same time also seems to negotiate the degree of risk involved ("reasonable", "not to be too stupid") so as not to render the challenge a demonstration of recklessness, but a structured, socially condoned activity instead, like extreme sports:

Um [pause] I, yeah actually yes, it's quite, I would say quite a... significant component, what I consider to be masculine is you, you take and you tolerate a reasonable level of physical danger. Um and... yes, you-you-you deliberately put, you know, your life, your limbs on the line. Um, you try not to be too stupid about it, but there is quite a bit, you've got base-jumpers and even sort of more extreme climbers, you put your life on the line pretty comprehensively there. (Faris: 441-448)

### **Good Man**

This theme illustrates the importance the participants placed on having principles and values in being a man, with a particular focus on being responsible for one's actions and for others. It describes a moral, pro-social, conscientious aspect of masculinity.

Alistair defines his role as a father by historically being the one to make the difficult decisions that would affect the well-being of the entire family. He frames the significance of the responsibility for these decisions as a solitary and demanding endeavour. "Forging" a decision might imply that he had to persist in the realization of a decision despite all obstacles. "[N]ot taking action" might imply that responsibility can involve a higher-order, wiser thinking that inhibits reactionary decisions:

So my life is different in the sense I think that, um, I had to be the one making the decisions, forging it, taking action, uh not taking action, making the decisions (Alistair: 54-56)

Donovan also associates responsibility with development into a man. There is a significant point of divergence here: Donovan frames the transition from boyish selfishness to mature responsibility as a resolution of "tension", possibly implying ambivalence regarding motivation towards one or the other. The resolution involves a transformation from selfishness to responsibility ("you selfishly want to") as if responsibility can also have the 'selfish' goal of satisfying the self. For Donovan responsibility as an adult man is experienced as a lack of ambivalence between selfishness and altruism:

[B]y that definition of a man, the one that I have in my head associated with maturity is when you're completely comfortable with responsibility and you... are relaxed in that role. Um... And in fact that's the one you want to be in, um, whereas I think that as a boy you have none of it, and in-between there- there's, there's a constant tension... uh between selfishness and responsibility, you'd reach the point where... selfishness is actually responsibility, the way you, you selfishly want... to be responsible. (Donovan: 202-209)

Carney defines responsibility as a realization that a man cannot mitigate the consequences of his actions by delegation and, possibly, as an inherent feeling of duty towards the self. Not having a "unit" to "fall back on" may be highlighting Carney's experience of 'alone-ness' in taking responsibility for himself. For Carney the sense of responsibility seems to also come from within ("you start to realize, wait a minute") as a result of his development from a boy to a young man ("I'm becoming a man"):

You don't really have a unit, you don't have a family unit or em a kind of, a sense, a lack of responsibility to fall back on when- when things go wrong. When y-, obviously I'm aware that, I'm aware from quite a young age, I suppose, I have to take responsibility for my actions, I think at that point [...] you start to realise, wait a minute, em, I am a man now, I'm becoming a man, this is what I need to do now, I need to, em, I can't kind of call off mistakes or I can't call off kind of misadventure as, och, well, I'm only, I'm only a kid, I'm only at school kind of thing. (Carney: 115-127)

## **Masculinity Through the Body**

In this theme the participants highlighted the importance of their body in the experience of being men. This theme comprises of different aspects of the experience, namely, the significance of physical activity, of being physically strong and resilient enough to overcome, of keeping fit, of experiencing their body as inadequate or compromised, and of being symbolically related to masculinity.

Alistair highlights the significance of a masculine body part, namely, the testes, to his sense of being a man. Alistair implies that "losing a testicle" due to his cancer operation was the worst experience he could have as a man, so much in fact that he "passed out", possibly reflecting an embodied experience of losing control. He suggests the vital relationship between a man and this body part, and phrases a rhetorical question, inferring that it is a well known fact:

[...] you know, it's quite an emotional thing to lose a testicle, uh, I passed out when they told me, you know [laughs] what's worse than telling a man that they're gonna cut your balls off, you know? (Alistair: 370-374)

Faris describes a subjective and objective sense of physical inadequacy ("feel crippled", "you're crippled" in quick succession emphasizes this sense) and how he coped with it by what may be seen as trying to demonstrate physical toughness in spite of his injury. This was portrayed as a "trade-off", yet it might also be seen as a naive ("do[ing] stupid things") compensatory strategy for feeling inadequate at the time:

When I've been, when I've been in plaster... um, you sort of feel crippled at the time, you're crippled at the time. Um but you do stupid things like, you play around on, on your crutches and you try to be as tough as possible and you try to trade off [smiles]. (Faris: 166-170)

Galen thinks of physical strength and activity as being a masculine characteristic and feels more masculine while exercising, but displays some cognitive dissonance between this experience and how he wants to think about genders. The term

"stereotypical" and his laugh may give away how he feels about simplistic depictions of masculinity ("build a shed, dig a big hole") yet physical activity itself resonates with him feeling masculine. The phrase "stereotypical feeling" on its own may also further signify this dissonance:

Um, [smiles] going exercising... makes me feel... [deep breath] I guess, I guess there is a certain aspect of masculinity that, that, I probably still do feel I like... I probably still have a bit of a stereotypical feeling I guess that masculinity is being stronger, is being fit and able to must do everything physical, build a shed, um, dig a big hole [laughs] these kind of- run fast, pick up heavy, heavy items, those sorts of things. (Galen: 376-380)

### **Work as Significant Life Aspect**

In this theme the participants describe how work as performance and as a context might be a significant and defining part of a man's life. Out of the seven participants, six presented accounts that could fall under this theme.

Alistair found himself reflecting upon his outstanding dedication to work ("which no normal person would do") possibly having a detrimental impact on his health ("working my... guts out"):

" So I looked at this and I thought, you know, here I am, working my... guts out, em, doing all this stuff, which no normal person would do, um, and I need to stop that" (Alistair: 413-415).

Bruce through his long experience with manual labour experiences a special relationship between what type of work a man does or should do:

" I always did a lot of, uhm, like my summer jobs, stuff like that, were always just straight, manual labour and stuff like that, they were never sort of, uhm, I don't know, working in an office, or anything like that, so I guess it was like sort of traditional sense of what a guy does" (Bruce: 191-195).

Finally, for Faris what seems to be an important aspect of his masculinity ("I derive it") is to portray professionalism to others:

" Um, I derive it from, um, being thought of as, um, reasonably confident and professional and bright at what I do at work. Definitely from... the example I set to people around me. " (Faris: 132-135).

## THE SELF TOWARDS SUPERIORITY

This Master theme outlines a possibly common developmental path experienced by the participants in divergent ways. The most characteristic feature is that there seems to be a point of origin from which the participants may have felt inferior as young boys and gradually came to know masculinity, understand how one can feel more masculine, then define their own idiosyncratic ways of being a man, finally arriving at an oppositional stance towards the world. They also convey a sense that they are superior in some way, mostly because of their intellectual status.

<b>2. The Self Towards Superiority</b>
<b>Young Self as Inferior</b>
<b>The Source of Masculinity</b>
<b>Being an Intellectual</b>
<b>Malleable Definition of Masculinity</b>
<b>Self vs. the World</b>
<b>The Self as Superior and Privileged</b>

Table 5: The Self Towards Superiority Master theme

### **Young Self as Inferior**

This theme illustrates how participants experienced themselves as vulnerable, weak, inadequate or inferior during their childhood or adolescence. The term 'inferior' contrasts with the experiences analyzed under the theme The Self as Superior and Privileged, presented later, and places the inferior position opposite to others, felt at the time as superior.

For Carney inferiority was felt in the form of lack of fitness. Being "massively" overweight seemingly left him with a sense of incapability and powerlessness ("couldn't do anything"). His sense of body, experienced as "weak", may have also affected his self-esteem, mood or ability to socialize - a profound effect, as indicated by the phrase "affected me mentally" - and may have contributed to feelings of inferiority stemming from a comparative context, the school yard:

Em [pause] I think eh getting uh, becoming fit. I used to be quite unfit years ago. I was used to be very, very em massively overweight and very, very unfit and I couldn't do anything. I'd, I felt quite weak and I kinda had no strength, and obviously that affected me mentally when I was at school [...] (Carney: 423-429)

Donovan's sense of an inferior young self was associated with his school teacher's communication of the message that he was not good enough at studying. The necessity of a "special school" and his "extremely hard" work give a picture of a boy whose academic capabilities, if not his mental capabilities as a whole, were met with much criticism. Donovan's use of "every trick in the book", including his parents confronting the teachers, may suggest that he felt so intensely inferior to the teachers that he had to be brought up to their level in any way he could:

Um... you know I was told that I wasn't good enough, I was told that I should go to a special school, um... I would just work extremely hard , um- I would also get my parents to come in and shout at the teachers when they weren't treating me fairly, in my view. Um, so I'd use every trick in the book... (Donovan: 404-408)

Eames experienced inferiority in terms of his body, "struggling" as he grew from a boy to a man and finding that his height did not correspond to that of his peers. The inferior position may be inferred by his attempts to seem taller:

When I made the [transition] from being a boy to a man. Then I struggled with that, true, I struggled with that, even bought shoes with, uh, high plateaus deliberately to be slightly taller. (Eames: 858-862)

## The Source of Masculinity

This theme illustrates the participants' shared sense that being a man may impose various criteria on them that, if fulfilled, one may feel masculine, and if not, one may feel emasculated. What is also illustrated through this theme is the participants' awareness of what makes them feel more or less masculine and what impact these feelings may have had in their lives. Finding what makes them feel more masculine may have been a response to feeling inferior at earlier times.

Alistair's feeling of being a man is closely tied with his feeling of being in control. For Alistair there is a continuous sense of being a man and one has to wonder, by employing hermeneutics of suspicion, how would Alistair feel if he woke up one day and he was not "in control". The phrase "I feel like a man because" may imply, if not a condition/prerequisite for feeling masculine, at least a strong relationship between being in control and masculinity:

Every day. Every day I feel like a man, uh, you know... I don't think there is a specific event, every day I wake up and I feel like a man because I wake up and I feel in control of what is going on and take charge and uh, manage it. So, I think every day is, is... an event.(Alistair: 38-41)

For Bruce there is a differentiation, explained during our interview, between being a man and being masculine. However, he explains that he feels there is some kind of "duty" to fulfil in order to be a man. Although he refers to the second person ("*your* duty"), it might be implied that he is talking about himself ("*you feel*"), and possibly pointing out feeling masculine depends on whether this duty is fulfilled. He also seems to experience this duty as imposed from outside ("whether you want it or not", "what has been asked of you"), the fulfilment of which resembles a very concrete checklist, or list of criteria, as may be seen in the repeated "this, this and this":

You sort of, it makes you feel, I would say like a man, like you sort of... not fulfilling your duty, but, like, uhm... You've... Yeah, I guess you've fulfilled something that has maybe been placed on you by a greater thing, by society, society maybe, would suggest as a man you must be this, this and

this... Otherwise, you know, you are not quite, quite man. Uhm, so, whether you want it or not, if you do fulfil this, this and this, I guess it just naturally makes you feel like, uh, like a man, like, you've done what's been asked of you, you know? (Bruce: 77-85)

Donovan's sense of masculinity seems to be derived from a sense of "mojo" and from being "brilliant" - terms that might denote a more demonstrative, communicable and attractive form of intelligence. Donovan frames this as a "need" to be "manly" in his own idiosyncratic ("historically") way - not being brilliant is experienced as emasculation. His laugh at the end may signify a humbling contrast between his perception of brilliance and the simplicity of his definitions:

Getting a great story out makes me feel full of mojo, slightly manly. Not getting any stories out... not having anything, I have a – which is separate to my concept of manliness but, I think it is fair to say that I have historically had a need to be brilliant at everything, um, and so being brilliant is part of how I define manliness. Not being brilliant is part of how I define being emasculated [laughs]. (Donovan: 333-338)

### **Being an Intellectual**

This theme represents the participants' perceptions of themselves as intellectual individuals that have a sophisticated perspective on things, masculinity included. Although it is not always explicit, sometimes the function of a participant's language, as interpreted through hermeneutics of suspicion, may serve the purpose of communicating sophistication. This could be the next developmental step, allowing the Inferior Young Self to reflect on the Source(s) of Masculinity and move on to adapt his masculinity later on.

For Alistair, different views on masculinity may solely depend on intellectual prowess. He uses words whose common theme might be intellectual ability, possibly implying that views on masculinity can be qualified by their owner's sophistication. Even the word "stem", which might be associated with scientific writing rather than with laymen's terms, can lend a tone of sophistication for Alistair's claim itself. The phrase "wide

variety of things" may have been used as a diversion from possibly perceiving Alistair as idealizing the link between masculinity and intelligence, thus qualifying his claim as more objective rather than subjective, and maybe that is why he repeats it in the end:

Everybody's got a different view, depending on a wide variety of things, I mean, a view stems from perspective, intelligence, information, understanding, a wide variety of things (Alistair: 609-611)

We already saw Donovan's link between intelligence and masculinity (The Source of Masculinity, Donovan: 333-338). Donovan's propensity to intellectualize his emotions, and masculinity itself, had been so strong that he had to employ willpower to stop intellectualizing. Even an evaluation of an intellectualizing approach to life may signify a higher-order, meta-level of thinking that reinforces the very image of being an intellectual, and the same function serves the humoristic interlude "I will work at it!":

Now I still often see problems that way. That it can be overcome if only I think of the right way to do it. That methodology, by-the-by, doesn't work so well for, say, sex [both laugh][deepens voice] I will work at it! It's not a fantastic approach. [...] I had to use that approach, that same, um, willpower to kind of stop using that approach, to say "actually no, live more by your emotions" [...] (Donovan: 410-417)

Galen's intellect seems to be characterized by its critical nature. The contrast between persuasion because of "evidence" and just "because" highlights his high regard for intellect and reason, and may act as a boundary to others - and this is probably why he uses the phrase "happy to" twice (similar to how Alistair repeated himself above), to draw attention away from what could be perceived as intellectual elitism:

[And] I love talking and debating and discussing things, but I'm quite happy to keep my point of view unless someone can provide me with something that makes sense, so if they do, I am happy to change my thinking [...] but if someone... tries to convince me with no evidence or with no, no basis to change my mind other than "because", then I'm not going to. (Galen: 298-305)

## **Malleable Definition of Masculinity**

In this theme participants describe a malleable aspect of their own definition of masculinity which allowed them to define it by adapting it to other parts of the self and by themselves adapting to particular contexts. This might have been a crucial developmental step for the participants as they tried to form an acceptable and positive form of masculinity for the Young Inferior Self.

For Alistair, this proposed malleability allowed him to choose ("created for myself") the context in which he would experience a difficult, possibly traumatic transition ("jaws of hell") from a boy to a man, as possibly pictured by the word "initiation", which invokes images of masculinity initiation rites. This choice allowed him to independently assert his masculinity:

[S]o it was sort of like, uh, way of, um... you know almost like going into the jaws of hell, you know, and, and taking the dragging and shaking, and then coming back and saying okay now I've done it, kind of thing, so, almost like an initiation that I created for myself, yeah, so I think that's how I did it, that was an important event in my life. (Alistair: 231-237)

Donovan experienced his definition of masculinity as malleable as he adapted it to his own abilities. Rather than comparing himself to a definition of masculinity that included all of which he could not do (physical performance), he excluded himself from a framework of competition ("that game") that did not account for his own abilities, and possibly adapted the concept to what he could do:

[B]ecause I'm dyslexic and I'm dyspraxic - and I can't catch, I can't write, at school I basically couldn't do anything, so any definition of being a man that was associated with, you know, being good at football, or uh running fast, or driving fast or doing anything well, um, I discounted and said "I can't compete at that game so that's not how I'm gonna judge my masculinity" (Donovan: 249-254)

Eames' malleable definition of masculinity reveals the integration of feminine characteristics into his stable sense of masculinity, thus expanding his emotional and

behavioural repertoire. It is not entirely clear though where the boundaries between genders exist, as indicated by the expressions "I would like to think" and his self-correction from femininity ("fem-") to "female gender", and there is likely still some internal negotiation:

I think for my masculinity, I am not, I would like to think, I'm so secure in my own masculinity or me being a man, that I do not, and this is the crux here that I will not shy away from adapting certain behaviours or allowing certain emotions that are more normally associated with fem- with the female gender. (Eames: 354-359)

### **Self vs. the World**

This theme illustrates experiences of opposition of the self against the world (represented variably in the form of individuals or groups) that might also imply elements of aggression and violence. This theme might also illustrate a culmination of a tension between an Inferior Young Self and the world to which it was contrasted.

Carney finds being a soldier a desirable experience ("amazing"). Besides finding the image of the soldier as just being socially attractive ("cool"), Carney probably also finds the experience elevating, tapping into a higher-order, archetypal masculinity ("warrior kind of thing") which, in order to exist, one has to probably keep on fighting the world.

The "warrior" concept might feature an element of aggression:

I think that's what, that's what a man should do, you should, I mean [pause] I think being a soldier is amazing. I think it's such a, being a warrior kind of thing, it's such a cool, it kind of it really plays to my, I suppose, my ideas of what a man should be (Carney: 473-477)

Eames' experience of opposition is an internal, naturally aggressive one ("fire").

Aggression has to be suppressed ("reigned in") at a great cost ("struggling") and is felt as a "burden". The whole process is probably pointless ("wasted energy") which may also suggest an image of a society that does not only not accept but also imposes restrictions on Eames' natural masculinity:

It's very, it consumes a lot of energy. Reigning in that, reigning fire when you just want to yell at people or just want to... punch people, I'm still not quite there but it's getting better and better with age but I'm still sometimes struggling to hold back what I really would like to say and this is, this is very energy consuming, unfortunately, which is sometimes a burden because this energy is wasted energy, it's not going anywhere (Eames: 609-616)

Faris seems to experience opposition as also an opportunity to take corrective and aggressive actions towards the world. In the following incident there seems to be more of a focus on the others' reckless nature ("drunk lads"), on the sequence of events ("came shooting", "squealing to a halt") and bodily harm ("I banged the top of it") rather than on his emotional response. Aggression may be implied to be the means for Faris to "get involved" in order to engage in a corrective form of violence ("brink of violence", "sort this out"), standing in for a personal form of justice (the "no" here might be alluding to a sense that the incident was morally unacceptable):

Um... Yeah, I remember one interesting episode. I was walking home when I was in [the UK], and um there was, there was, sort of, it was-was... crossing, a zebra crossing and sort of- then a car with three or four drunk lads... came shooting across in front of me, so I banged the top of it. Um... they sort of came squealing to a halt. I thought, ah, time to get involved here. In this case, it didn't, it didn't come to blows, but it was clearly... on the brink of violence, I thought that... no, you step in and, and see what you can do to sort this out. (Faris: 557-565)

### **The Self as Superior and Privileged**

This theme illustrates that the self is experienced within a framework of favourable social comparison. This theme suggests a developmental outcome of the conflict between the adapted masculine self and the world. The participants variably experience themselves as superior to or privileged compared to other men, or to women, or the world in general.

Alistair may experience himself as superior to "some people" because his perspective on masculinity, and on life in general, encompasses an understanding of the world that

he feels other people lack. He highlights himself as enlightened, perhaps positioned similarly to a religious figure:

PA: Everybody's got a different view [...] it's almost like, um, when Christ said "turn the other cheek", you know, you can understand where he was coming from, he was saying other people, some people just have a perspective that they don't know any better. "Forgive them, my Lord, for they not know what they do". And I hate quoting religious things, but, you know, that's what I think, I think a lot of people don't actually know how to live in the world, most people in fact never really understand what they're doing here, why they are here, where they came from, most people don't know anything about their environment. (Alistair: 607-621)

Bruce experiences himself as privileged compared to women in bearing higher professional status in his male-dominated workplace. Although he finds it "awful" that merit seems to be less important than gender he cannot help but laugh at the absurdity, possibly to ease a dissonance between what he feels is wrong and enjoying the benefits of being positively associated with this privileged male group:

... It's awful [laughs] but they don't take the, like, some of the senior women in my team that - people far senior to me, um, they'll probably listen to me before they listen to them purely because I'm a guy, um, so it helps in terms of that (Bruce: 254-258)

Donovan may be getting a sense of superiority by rationally criticizing other masculinities as inferior. By pointing out the irrational nature of a particular masculinity, that it does not promote success or happiness, he assumes a position of powerful judgment. His intentions might be to elevate his position and diminish the other ("this wonderfully successful individual" as irony):

Well, they come from their families. It's very easy to see, uh, you just knew- and when I challenge them I tend to say "well, you mean like your father, this wonderfully successful individual", you know, they go on and say, "well I fall back on my dad's definition", if I say, "well your father's definition of masculinity. Great, but he's not very successful and he's not very happy, so therefore his version of masculinity doesn't work", but that's my ultimate judge, does the version of masculinity lead you to be happier, or successful? (Donovan: 784-792)

## WHAT IS MASCULINITY

This Master theme describes the participants' awareness, conceptualization of and objections to the phenomenon of masculinity.

<b>3. What is Masculinity</b>
<b>Masculinity Beyond Words</b>
<b>Nature and Nurture</b>
<b>Questioning Masculinity</b>

Table 6 : What is Masculinity Master theme

### **Masculinity Beyond Words**

This theme describes the participants' experience of having trouble articulating, in different contexts, their understanding of masculinity. These contexts include the interview itself, communicating masculinity to others, or introspection.

Bruce felt the gender differences between him and his sister were “obvious” growing up, possibly meaning assured beyond any doubt. Maybe this is why he “never thought about it that much”. This might imply that it was not necessary for masculinity to enter awareness since it was a given, like breathing or walking, and thus putting it into words might have been difficult for him:

Quite young there was like an obvious sort of, yeah, like, div- like male female divide between me and my sister, ehm, and.... Yeah, I would... Yeah, I guess I never thought about it that much... (Bruce: 187-190)

Donovan may have become more aware of the concept of masculinity by addressing a feeling of its absence (“its reverse, being emasculated”). By addressing this feeling in therapy he probably found a way to give it a name and thus began an articulation of meanings associated with masculinity:

Because, um, as I said at the start of this conversation, I haven't thought much about masculinity except, perhaps, in my therapy, when I thought about mostly the concept of its reverse, being emasculated (Donovan: 542-545)

Eames confabulates as he attributes to me the words "grey thing", possibly referring to an earlier reflection of mine that defining masculinity might be a difficult task. Through this misattribution we might infer a struggle in articulating masculinity, possibly a lack of clear distinctions ("grey" instead of black and white, for example). In order for a distinction to be made, his current experience has to be contrasted with an experience he has not had and cannot have, namely, to be a woman. Eames seems to be struggling when he pauses to reflect and loses his train of thought:

I'm still struggling a bit, with the whole, by what you mean feeling like a man, um you're right, it's a bit of a grey thing, you mentioned that before. Um... for one, I don't know what it feels to be a woman [laughs] and then [pause] yeah! (Eames: 226-229)

### **Nature and Nurture**

In this theme participants describe their perception of masculinity as a product of either biological or cultural factors, or both, and how that may affect their experience of the phenomenon.

Alistair seems to experience a strong link with a long evolutionary heritage that he feels should be validated. For him, others seem irrational for dismissing a long biological history of gender differences and its is disrespectful for someone to "throw [evolution] out the window", like trash. For Alistair masculinity seems to be validated as a concept with a fixed meaning by an authority of logic and science - dismissal of masculinity on these grounds may be experienced as inherently wrong:

We've got three million years of evolution and these people just take it and throw it out the window. And it's illogical. And you just don't do that, evolution isn't something that, that, uh you can throw away. (Alistair: 669-672)

Bruce frames growing up as a man as something that comes from outside and acts on the self (being "channelled into"). Although his narrative here seems to be referring to a 'nurture' aspect of masculinity, the term "channelled" itself may refer to a natural flow, akin to a river, possibly lending a sense of naturalness into how culture shaped him into a man:

I guess you kind of, you kind of feel slightly channelled into a certain, you know, as you're growing up and I guess if you grow up as a girl you could if you asked a woman she might feel the same things, you kind of uhm feel slightly channelled into being a certain way (Bruce: 169-178)

Galen's experience of himself as a man seems to be grounded on his biological sex. Galen has been critical of the socially constructed concept of masculinity throughout the interview and his feeling of being a man seems to be rooted in biology. Manhood is in having male genitalia, possibly the common denominator of all forms of masculinity. His understanding of what being a man is seems elegantly simple and solid - he begins and ends his sentence demonstrating assurance, while the middle of the sentence contains the simplest reason for that assuredness:

Um... I don't feel unlike a man and, and I guess it comes back to what my definition of a man is and that is I have male genitalia, that makes me a man. (Galen: 319-321)

### **Questioning Masculinity**

This theme describes the participants' experience of questioning, challenging or disagreeing with the concept of masculinity in general, with their own definition of masculinity or the definitions of others.

Carney, in attempting to articulate masculinity comes up a few times with a concern over sounding sexist. It would seem that the interview gave him a chance to verbalize his intuitions and upon trying to "conceptualize" masculinity into a few simple definitions he deemed the outcome as out of touch with the social reality ("mad") or unfairly

gender-specific ("sexist"). The fact that we both laughed might indicate my identification with his puzzlement in defining masculinity. It would seem as if Carney is being critical of his own intuitions about masculinity:

Some of the questions, I'm just, em, it's just things I've never really considered, I suppose, and I kind of, I've never verbalised a lot of this stuff before so it's quite difficult to kind of conceptualise it and, eh, put it in a way that doesn't sound mad or sexist [both laugh], so, yeah. (Carney: 342-346)

Eames paints a picture of physically tough, aesthetically raw men, and then contrasts this with what he perceives as their hidden sensitivity. The "big guys" with the "bald heads and [...] tattoos" is the picture that contradicts their "sweet[ness]", at least within our shared Western cultural view. The contradiction is so strong for Eames that he uses Mike Tyson to highlight it. For Eames, this contradiction may be a suspicious sign that this 'tough' masculinity has no substance:

[W]hen you go to the gym, and you see the big guys and they have got bald heads and they got tattoos, when you talk to them they are often the sweetest in the world. Why? Because they are often afraid of the world, they haven't learned to cope. Have you ever heard Mike Tyson talk? (Eames: 401-408)

Faris similarly becomes critical of hypermasculine displays, the "lads mag loaded version of [...] masculinity". The word "caricature" is possibly used to dismiss this type of masculinity as lacking in depth - caricatures are exaggerated images, highlighting some aspects but only across two dimensions. The caricature "takes" masculine traits and "leaves" them, as if its description of masculinity never arrives at a real point. While he links this "lad's" masculinity with a root, "acceptable" version he nevertheless differentiates them:

I would probably describe it as the lads mag loaded version, of uh masculinity, which is really a sort of caricature of it. I think it takes, um... characteristics which-which might to a point have been acceptable and it takes them to the point of caricature, which I think, it- it then leaves it, um. (Faris: 70-76)

## THE EMOTIONAL WORLD

This Master theme illustrates attitudes, experiences, reactions and strategies used in relation to strong, often negative, feelings that are directly or indirectly linked with their way of being a man, or masculine.

<b>4. The Emotional world</b>
<b>Emotional Strength</b>
<b>Detachment and Perspective Shift</b>
<b>Help-Seeking</b>

Table 7 : The Emotional World Master theme

### **Emotional Strength**

In this theme the participants describe their experience of themselves as trying to remain emotionally strong, or resilient, in the face of adversity or emotional vulnerability.

Bruce seems to contrast his experience of emotional strength with his mother having a "breakdown" during a family crisis. Bruce had to be the one not to break down because he "felt that [he] couldn't", possibly implying an expectation coming from outside of himself yet placed from inside. He mentions that he could not "fall into" a state of brokenness like his mother did - this imagery seems to compare emotional pain with physical pain and as if his physical hardness had to be saved from a fall:

[M]y mom though, you know cried a lot, sort of, like, a breakdown quite a lot, uhm... And so I, yeah, I, yeah, sorry I'm repeating myself but I would say as a guy, I certainly felt that I couldn't... uh sort of fall into that. (Bruce: 397-401)

Donovan uses "willpower" to resist his usual, possibly detached mode of coping ("using my head") in order to stay with difficult emotions. Even the word "willpower" might imply the presence of some kind of strength needed to face emotions previously avoided.

Instead of "working at it", fixing a problem that evokes strong emotion, Donovan now consciously chooses to experience that emotion. For Donovan it seems that experiencing emotional strength is a new, preferable way of coping that might have evoked a whole new set of experiences ("an interesting process"):

Now I still often see problems that way. That it can be overcome if only I think of the right way to do it. That methodology, by-the-by, doesn't work so well for, say, sex [laughs][deepens voice] I will work at it! It's not a fantastic approach. So that's how the, I had to use that approach, that same, um, willpower to kind of stop using that approach, to say "actually no, live more by your emotions", uh, which has been an interesting process [smiles] because before I was trying to fix things using my head. (Donovan: 410-417)

Faris may be also using a physical hardness metaphor for psychological resilience ("tolerance levels", "begins to break", "pile [...] on top") thus implying that every person has a different level of strength. Although he says he has never reached his own limits, he leaves open the possibility that he might do so in the future, as it seems to be a universal given that people "break". Faris may be experiencing himself as resilient, or as if his emotional state is protected by a hard shell, but may also be humbly open to the possibility that he will not always be strong:

Um, but clearly people go through [...] sets of experiences which different people have different tolerance levels, I'm sure. So there comes a point at which everybody begins to break, so [...] if you pile... stresses and tragedies on top of each other, I'm sure everybody in the end needs to find ways to cope and ways to help, um, but I'm not sure I've ever felt at that point. (Faris: 295-302)

### **Detachment and Perspective Shift**

This theme illustrates how participants experience themselves detaching from intense emotions in difficult situations and how, by changing the way they look at things, they manage the intensity of their emotions.

Carney frequently came back to describing how he best deals with emotionally loaded situations - by detaching himself from them. In the following concise but succinct excerpt he seems to be describing in an almost step-by-step fashion how he himself experiences detachment. With "no" he seems to arrest a negative emotion in its tracks and with "listen" he draws attention away from the problem at hand. To "chill out" and "take a minute" might be invitations to distance the self and have some time away from the problem and the evoked emotion:

And a couple of those occasions I've had to be like, no, listen, just kind of chill out, just take a minute (Carney: 592-593)

In the past, Donovan tried to detach from his very sense of self by adopting the identity of fictional male heroes ("personas") in order to deal with strong emotions. He probably felt that, as himself, he could not deal with "worries and responsibilities" and thus tried to adopt ("turn into") the perspective of Captain Jack Sparrow ("I'll just be this guy"), a carefree dashing pirate fictional character, as he seemed to believe this character's way of coping was better than his:

And I could also adopt other personas, I could be the guy who makes amazing mojitos and so on and so forth, and so I thought I would turn into Jack Sparrow, 'cause I don't have any worries or any responsibilities, I'll just be this guy. (Donovan: 63-67).

Faris describes his detachment as protecting him from emotional feedback loops. The phrase "you can almost feel the brain and your thoughts" might evoke imagery that initially draws attention away from the contents of thought and onto their context, or where the thoughts are and what do they do. Then, with this "sort of conscious effort", possibly referring to a meta-cognitive process, he stops this apparently very threatening (the word "death" is repeated twice) emotional spiralling down ("loop") and "stands back a bit", or distracts himself:

Um [pause] I think certainly you can feel, you can almost feel the brain and your thoughts going into a, a death loop , and that happens, and... you almost have to make a sort of

conscious effort, stop-stop the death, death loop, stand back a bit, maybe think about something else. (Faris: 342-346)

## Help-Seeking

This theme illustrates how participants perceive and experience help-seeking in different forms and for different issues.

For Alistair help is sought possibly in order to further his autonomy in making decisions.

Help is information gathering and advice ("particular things", "knowledge", "information"). It might be implied that any other form of help is perceived as moving away from having the autonomy to make and own a decision ("but then I still make the decision"):

I may ask people for some advice, um, if they know, if they have specific advice about particular things on, you know, they may have particular knowledge of something or not, and if I'm going to hire... a tax advisor, I would ask somebody for some information, but then I still make the decision. (Alistair: 143-148)

Donovan describes how he experiences seeking help when feeling frustrated and powerless. It seems he might be seeking help for both the original frustration and the perception of being "needy" - experiencing an intense need of emotional support - because of said frustration. Help-seeking possibly helps Donovan "to break" (instead of avoid) his frustration and powerlessness by what seems to be (1) staying with the affect ("mindfulness"), (2) exploring it ("therapist") and (3) connecting with others ("go out for a friend, for some beers"), thus possibly increasing his emotional resources:

[...] I can be quite needy, um [pause] then I'll try to do something to break it. Um, maybe I'll see a therapist, maybe I'll go out for a friend, for some beers, um, maybe I'll do more mindfulness, maybe I'll try to arrange some kind of holiday or something. Um, yeah, that's generally how I respond. (Donovan: 341-346)

Faris frames help-seeking as a valid need for support that has nevertheless not risen yet in his life. The "last ditch" sounds like a combat term, possibly indicating that Faris

faces problems like a pragmatic combatant who is "reluctant" to seek help unless he "would have to and would need to" - possibly when the necessity for help becomes real enough in the form of misfortune and disaster (opposite of "fortunate enough"). For Faris, help might be sought when absolutely necessary because otherwise it might undermine his combative spirit:

Not really, but then that is probably because I've been fortunate enough not to really ever have to- ev- have, had to. Em... I would certainly, I would be reluctant to do so, um, so it is one of those slightly last ditch things. Um... but I've no doubt there will be circumstances in which I would have to and would need to. (Faris: 889-894).

## OTHER MEN

This Master theme is comprised of the participants' experiences of other men, in various contexts, and in relation to their own sense of masculinity.

<b>5. Other Men</b>
<b>Father as Point of Reference for Masculinity</b>
<b>The Male Group</b>
<b>Idealized Men</b>
<b>Homosexuality</b>

Table 8 : Other Men Master theme

### **Father as Point of Reference for Masculinity**

This theme describes the participants' experience of wanting and attempting to connect with their fathers in a way that informed their own sense of being men.

For Bruce, his father possibly represents both the point of origin of his own masculinity ("comes from") and a form of masculinity that is possibly outdated ("stayed behind"). It seems like the father here is someone who had a significant influence by being "quite present" and by teaching "values" and at the same time someone from whom Bruce

became differentiated - the multiple uses of the word "traditional" might imply the nature of that differentiation, the new versus the old:

I don't know, I guess, I guess, when you -you always think of it in a traditional sense, you know, like uh, uhm, you know, like, the traditional sort of values of being a man, maybe, probably comes from, like, maybe your dad, if he was quite present, uhm, uh, when you were growing up, like, and because that sort of a generation stayed behind, they tend to, I certainly, I guess, associate it with more traditional things (Bruce: 7-13)

Carney possibly diverged from the other participants in experiencing a clear sense of rejecting any connection with the father, albeit wishing at first to connect with him, because any connection with the father was deemed contrary to already established values ("should"):

[...] He's not somebody um, em, that I should have been aspiring to or I should have been waiting for (Carney: 374-378)

With Donovan we can see depth in relating to his father. One aspect of this relationship might resemble playful fight between a father and his 'cub', where the son asserts himself ("argue the toss"). Another aspect was seeking comfort for not meeting the challenges of masculinity in dating. The last instance seems like a point of conflict ("difficult conversations"), as Donovan's father possibly communicated rejection of his son's aspirations, values or capabilities. These aspects taken together might represent Donovan's wish to be accepted as a man by his father, his feeling partially rejected by him and, as a result, he might have experienced ambivalence towards his father:

Well that one was, was, that I tended to argue with my father, just argue the toss, really. Whatever you'd argue, I'd argue the reverse. Then if I decided his argument's better, I'd argue that. And force him to argue the reverse. Um, with that conversation when he stayed up late, was [UNT] memorable, because my night had been so spectacularly unsuccessful, so I was quite upset, and he was very comforting. Um... We've had difficult conversations about being a man as well because he... clearly... associated to being a man with earning money. (Donovan: 638-646)

Faris throughout the interview gives an impression of a subtle wish to connect to his father in a positive yet intellectualized, maybe even detached way. The excerpt below best represents this subtle communication: The comparison with the father is experienced as effortless ("without intending to") and assured ("definitely"). His emotional reaction to this seems to be positive as he finds the process "interesting" and refers to the man his father has been as "the way he carried on his life", possibly implying achievement or perseverance. However, there is little said about experiencing the father directly as a person in order to reach such conclusions:

It is interesting for me looking back, say, at how, without intending to, the sort of characteristics, the way he has carried on his life, are definitely coming through that I have done the same thing. (Faris: 623-627)

### **The Male Group**

This theme describes the participants' experiences and perception of groups of other men, and their relationship to the concept of men in groups.

Carney seemed to experience a very salient ("hammered home") bonding with fellow soldiers in the Army. Masculinity seems to be a multi-faceted experience here, consisting of an appreciation of others' male identity ("the masculinity of 12 guys together"), a sense of togetherness cultivated over "long periods of time" and a sense overcoming challenges with a shared sense of achievement ("yeah"). Carney's experience of the male group seemed to be one of mutual validation for being men:

[...] I spent a bit of time in the Army, and that was really [...] when it was hammered home how like the masculinity of 12 guys together, spending long periods of time together and doing really kind of difficult, really hard things every day but getting through them and getting through to the end of it and just be like, yeah. (Carney: 53-58)

Eames seems to be critical of the male group dynamics as experienced in earlier times. He abstracts his experience in a style that may resemble an academic's point of view

("it is quite common") and seeks to critically interrogate the other males in the group ("reality check [...] what do you mean all night"). It might be the case that the competitive spirit of the male group ("bragging") evoked in Eames a similarly competitive reaction - trying to regulate the others' self-enhancing statements and, through that, to superimpose his intellect:

I think this is quite common, bragging about sexual performances, oh! Last night all night, and when you look at it [laughs] from reality check, all night, what do you mean all night, from nine to nine, that is twelve hours. Lot of males bragged about sexual performances, uh, yeah, especially with the male... friends. (Eames: 770-775)

For Galen, the male group may be experienced as one within which guilty pleasures are enjoyed. Maybe for Galen the male group is a chance to act in a way men are supposed to, in socially disapproved and self-destructive ways ("smoke cigars", "stare at women", "drink total crap") but insulated from outsider disapproval - they "wouldn't happen anywhere near in the same space" with women.

I think that others definitely, like, yeah, boy's night we're gonna drink, we're gonna [...] smoke cigars, go to the pub, stare at women... feel, like, just drinking total crap, um, talk sport- talk football, um, whereas obviously if we were male and females, that wouldn't happen anywhere near in the same space (Galen: 1069-1074)

### **Idealized Men**

In this theme participants relate their experience or perception of masculinity to ideal or idealized men as representations of the concept and possibly as exemplars of it.

Donovan refers to fictional characters that may represent an idealized version of masculinity - adventurous, charming yet possibly solitary. Because of my own identification with these same characters once, I was able to abstract their essential nature in conjunction with the rest of the interview:

And Doctor Who is one of my models of the ideal man, in some respects, um, but before Doctor Who it was um Captain Jack Sparrow. So I have this sort of, um before that, the cowboy, the spaghetti western [...] (Donovan: 36-41)

For Faris the reference to idealized masculinity has similar undertones of fiction but there are no hints of identification. He instead seems to use the fictional as a way to understand a (real) man whom he seems to have idealized already:

Um... I guess that one of the first bosses I had [...] he had some great, great characteristics that way, he was a big, tough bloke, he looked like Blackbeard the Pirate [both laugh] [...] Um... he had a temper which he could turn on and off which always impressed me. (Faris: 106-113)

Galen spoke about men whom he has possibly idealized because of their extreme achievements. Galen might be even wishing to identify with them in a tangible way because he likes what they do:

[P]eople that are... able to... go... um, so the [sighs] so Felix Baumgartner, the guy that... dropped from... 20k in the air... Unbelievable, I would love to do that, I like that kind of extreme adrenaline type of things as well (Galen: 738-741)

## **Homosexuality**

This theme illustrates the participants' experience of, attitude and relation to homosexual men and the concept of homosexuality.

Alistair, by referring to homosexuality, possibly wants to highlight a strong link between masculinity and heterosexuality. By comparing the (implied here) 'heterosexual' to the "homosexual" he frames masculinity as something that is "needed" from both in a different way - thus also possibly increasing the perceived distance between one and the other. It might be even implied that masculinity is not as "needed" from homosexual men as it is from heterosexual men, thus rendering masculinity an inherently heterosexual concept:

Um, I think um- well not all men, some of my friends are gay and I don't think they necessarily appreciate masculinity, I-I don't think they, they don't need it in quite in the same way. (Alistair: 426-429)

Donovan's first contact with the concept of homosexuality seemed to be a threatening one. He seems to have experienced the fear of exclusion and alienation, invoked by a "powerful myth" while attending "an all-boy school" that "one out of ten" boys might be gay. The fearful nature of that myth may also be seen in Donovan seeking reassurance, or at least some answers, from his mother, who indeed responds in a way that may have countered the myth's function of exclusion with acceptance:

I was at an all-boy school and I was, like, so, you know, I had that- it's an urban myth I think, that one out of ten people are gay. Very powerful myth at my school. So I was like, maybe I'm gay [smiles] So I asked my mom "Am I gay?" [laughs] and she was like "well you could be, it doesn't matter" (Donovan: 485-490)

Galen seems to empathise with the psychological distress gay men may experience in society. He frames exclusion from the male gender as an aggressive act that has a profound effect on the well-being of homosexual men maybe because he has felt being excluded himself, albeit for different reasons - he does seem to abruptly pause his pace of speech, possibly to internally monitor this identification. The statement "I have a major problem with that" seems a powerful statement that may indicate a personal involvement in the issue. Moreover, his reference to gay men's internal states ("mentality", "someone's else's thought") might also indicate introspection rather than just empathy for others:

[B]ut the, the impact on them, um, their mentality, by being told they're not a man, because they're gay... I have a major problem with that. Because, like I say, that's impacting on someone else's thought, like, you're, you're making a choice and a statement which can be quite... have quite an impact, um... (Galen: 1340-1345)

## THE OTHER GENDER

This Master theme illustrates different perceptions of, positions towards and relationships with women as experienced by the participants.

<b>6. The Other Gender</b>
<b>The Power of the Female</b>
<b>Negotiating Masculinity with Partners</b>
<b>Being Different from Women</b>

Table 9 : The Other Gender Master theme

### **The Power of the Female**

In this theme the participants describe their experience of the impact and power the wants, wishes and desires of the other gender can have on them or on the male gender in general.

For Bruce, a woman's wish can be a powerful motivator for men. Bruce seems to experience his own gender as so susceptible to a "girl's" wants that a man's very volition almost disappears - the relationship can be as simple as 'girl wants, man does' ("doing right away", "do it straight away"). The lack of clarity on how a "girl's" wants can have such a powerful effect may imply an assumption on his part that I know what he is talking about ("does that make sense?"): a common secret between 'us men', which might further signify the ubiquitous power of the female – we all have come to know it:

[W]hen you're on site and you've got a builder that you need something doing right away, it certainly helps to be, to be a girl, you know, they just, they just... I'll say "ask them to do something", [...] the guy will do it straight away, does that make sense? (Bruce: 269-274)

Donovan may have experienced the power of the female in the context of a past, fleeting wish to sleep with a lot of women. For Donovan, the "itch" to sleep with "lots of

women" may have been a strong wish to be desired and being desired by women seems to have been at some point equated with being loved. The term "itch" itself evokes images of pathology and perpetual, compulsive satisfaction, possibly instigated by the very power women can be perceived to have:

The itch? Oh, wanting to sleep with lots of women. Because you don't actually want to sleep with lots of women. You want to sleep with lots of women who you love and who love you. Which is not actually possible [laughs]. Donovan (604-608)

For Eames, the female desire may as well be reduced ("break it down") to a basic, pragmatic 'truth' (as opposed to "becoming philosophical", possibly meaning idealistic) about the male gender as a whole. The female power here may be the very ability to form competitive structures within the male gender. The phrase "we are here just to" might be further promoting the reduction of the fate of men into a competition for the women's desire ("what do women find attractive") and the word "basically" may be further framing the female desire as a vital component in a man's life. Eames laughs at any notion more complex than that possibly because on some level he might be finding this basic, reductionist premise inherently satisfying:

I mean there are certain, if you're talking about selection, I mean we all compete for women in a broader sense if you want to break it down, it's all- we are here just to reproduce, to have offsprings, and that's it, without becoming philosophical here [laughs] in this matter, so basically, the question is what do women find attractive in a man. (Eames: 114-119)

### **Negotiating Masculinity with Partners**

In this theme the participants describe their experience of defining and negotiating their masculinity within the context of romantic relationships. In some cases the implicit wish might be for the other to accept them as they are, and in others, to help them become more defined.

Carney may have experienced a developmentally significant negotiation of his masculinity within his early romantic relationships. He identifies explicit and implicit ("conscious or unconscious") expectations imposed on him ("push on you") in terms of being a man – a factor that compensated for the absence of a male role model, a possibly much needed corrective experience ("try to adhere to that a bit more than other people might"). This way Carney may have shaped his masculinity not only based on how he wanted to be, but also on what a partner wanted from him as well:

Em I've had em kind of long term partners on and off since I was quite young, since I was 16, em so girlfriends, as well, I think they always, they kind of, especially at a younger age, they maybe, unconscious or conscious, I suppose, push on you how they want you to be, anyway, so maybe because I didn't have a father figure, because I didn't have a parent around, I maybe try and adhere to that a bit more than other people might, so that's probably a big part of it, as well. (Carney: 677-685)

Donovan experiences the rejection of his masculinity from a partner as a rejection of a significant, core part of himself ("my...essence of being"). A perceived difference between the man he thinks he is (possibly an adequate one: "I don't believe that I haven't") and the man a partner wants him to be ("not being the man I want you to be") seems to be experienced as a comprehensive rejection: being a man within this context is probably equated with being "good enough" as a person. He furthermore corrects the term "girls" with "women" which might also reflect a long-standing pattern of such negotiations in his life:

I get upset when my masculinity is challenged, even though I don't believe than I haven't, um... because... I feel like... my... essence of being is somehow being challenged, like, like, the way I am is good enough, because... people want other people, girls want boys or women want men to be men, so they're saying, "you're not being a man" and I don't hear "you're not being a man", I hear, "you're not being the man I want you to be". So that's why it matters to me. (Donovan: 795-802)

Galen's experience of negotiating his masculinity seems to diverge significantly from the other accounts as both he and his partner seem to challenge gender stereotypes when it comes to living together. What seems to be negotiated within his relationship is how Galen's masculinity can transcend stereotypes in relating to his partner (to be "the complete opposite" of "stereotypical"):

[T]here might be some things that I do because my partner is, like, I just can't touch that or, or feels really bad about it and then- which might be the stereotypical sort of male-female role, but again there might be something that I'm, I don't want to do, which she's fine to do, which could be the complete opposite. (Galen: 250-263)

### **Being Different from Women**

This theme illustrates how the participants perceive themselves to be different from women and how this differentiation might have brought an impact in their lives and definitions of masculinity.

Alistair observes a female inability to grasp what being a man is that is contrasted with the men's intuitive sense of masculinity. Although a woman may use her intuition to infer what makes a boy into a man, her intuition seems to be not enough compared to his capacity to perceive the "obvious". For Alistair probably being a man means knowing what a man needs, and a woman cannot know unless she is explicitly told, which might also reflect a belief that only the fathers can make men out of their sons:

And I suppose from a woman's point of view, she doesn't know what boys need to become men other than perhaps what she feels intuitively. So for her to have it made explicit is maybe useful, for me it's like... This is like saying the obvious. (Alistair: 483-487)

Donovan feels his male nature defines his desires and, therefore, who he becomes as a person oriented by these desires ("direction"). For him being a man means having an inherent motivation to promote gender-specific ("the way that I associate men do") and attractive ("to impress", "charismatic") traits. Absent of male-specific desires ("a thing in

my heart") these traits have no purpose. The masculine wish to be desired by a woman might be for Donovan what differentiates him from the other gender:

Um... I think..... I think if I weren't a man, if I wasn't trying to impress in the way that I associate men to do, I wouldn't really have much of a direction. I could re-brand being a man, being a... adventurous person or, you know, charismatic person or whatever. I could gender-neutralize the phrase. But... the thing... is extremely significant 'cause otherwise I wouldn't have a thing in my heart that led me to want to do things. (Donovan: 353-359)

Faris speaks from his experience as a father in order to highlight the difference from being a woman/mother. Each gender seems to have a different parental function, him being a model for overcoming difficulties ("rough stuff", "things that I've been through") while a mother can complement that with providing emotional regulation, such as soothing, in the face of such difficulties. The phrase "sort them out" may be highlighting how different the parental roles are, as if Faris cannot quite explain exactly what a mother does:

[Y]ou see this with-with, uh... the boys [...] I would generally do the, uh, you know, you do the physical, rough stuff, with them, you, you give them a certain, um example I suppose of things that I've been through, um... and the woman is more, more there to sort of soothe them and sort them out when they're upset. (Faris: 395-400)

## SUMMARY

Experiencing masculinity would appear to be a very comprehensive phenomenon, touching upon vastly different and profound aspects of my participants' lives. It can be argued that men of similar contextual influences or along similar contextual parameters might experience masculinity similarly, having to adapt and respond to a dynamic environment through which masculinity becomes both a question about and an answer to life's challenges. Common thematic elements were demonstrated to be shared among the rich descriptions produced by the participants regarding their lived

experience, yet allowing both convergence and divergence to be shown was vital in order to further illuminate a more idiosyncratic nature of masculinity.



## **DISCUSSION**

### INTRODUCTION

The following section constitutes an attempt to integrate the present research findings with existing literature and thus deepen our understanding of the data (Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2008).

The literature review has indicated a long history of broad examination of masculinity, yet qualitative research into the phenomenon as experienced by men is only recently budding (Kierski, 2013). IPA was chosen with an aim to provide a contextualised understanding of the lifeworld of men while bracketing, to a certain extent, previous theoretical and personal understandings of the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009).

The contexts within which the participants have experienced masculinity seem to be interrelated. This can be reflected in how Master themes can be linked through shared emergent themes (Appendices 9 and 10 offer another sample view of emergent themes belonging to multiple Constituent, and thus Master, themes). The diagram below tentatively depicts the interrelationship.

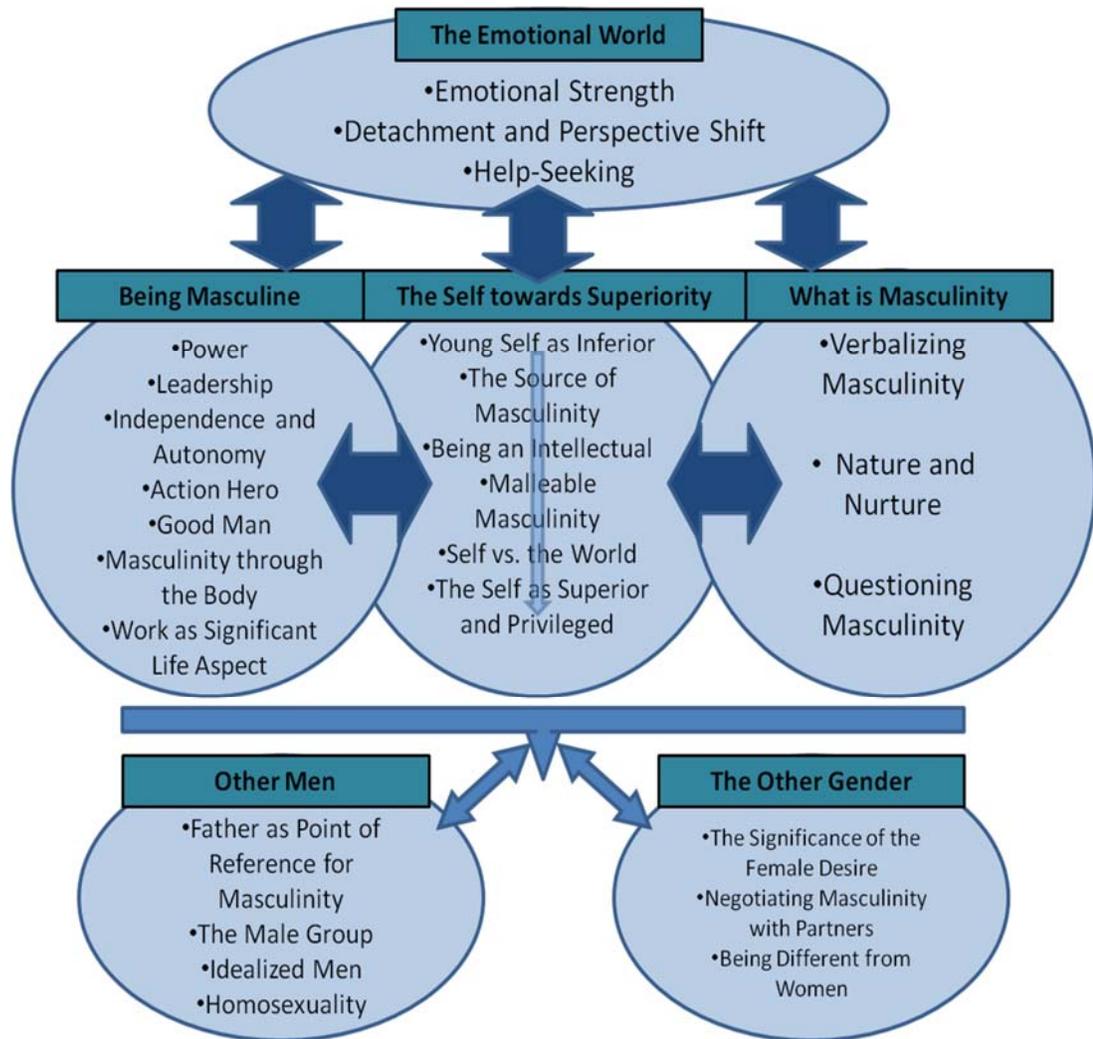


Diagram 1 : Interrelatedness of Master Themes

It would seem the experience of masculinity takes place within multiple interrelated contexts.

Perceptions regarding "Being Masculine" inevitably overlap with developmental struggles regarding being or becoming "Superior" as a person. Reflecting on the concept of masculinity (What is Masculinity) seems to also overlap with the aforementioned developmental journey. These three contexts seem to also have an impact in the emotional realm and to inform how one relates to men and women. In turn, the emotional context and interpersonal relationships seem to influence the

perceptions of being masculine, the developmental journey to superiority and reflections upon the concept itself.

A deeper understanding of masculinity within the aforementioned contexts might help mental health professionals, such as practicing psychologists, better support male clients experiencing masculinity-related conflicts in similar contexts. I will be relating the data and the examined literature to Counselling Psychology and will make recommendations for future research. After examining the findings new literature became relevant and has been subsequently added in this section.

Please refer to Appendix 16 – Theme Mapping to Earlier Literature for a list of the present study's Themes and suggested thematic correspondences with previous literature: masculinity concepts, phenomena, manifestations, norms and aspects based on the descriptions and definitions of their authors. This mapping aims at providing a general picture of how the present findings may map on to previous literature findings and which themes might be contributing to new understandings as to how masculinity is experienced.

#### INTEGRATION, RELEVANCE AND IMPLICATIONS - FINDINGS AND LITERATURE

The analysis has shown that masculinity is a pervasive, multi-faceted phenomenon that permeates multiple contexts within which the self, others and interactions between the two are perceived and understood.

#### BEING MASCULINE

The conceptualization of masculinity as a configuration of traits is considered to be outdated as it is closer to an essentialist position towards the concept (Addis, Mansfield, & Syzdek, 2010). However, Constituent themes within the Being Masculine Master theme resemble more closely manifestations of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants. Therefore this Master theme might resemble an

integration of masculine traits as seen in Bem's research (1974), masculine norms and ideals as seen in the works of Branon (1976), Pleck (1981) and Mahalik et al. (2003), all expressed within the context of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995).

Nevertheless, participants seemed to experience masculinity as something they can have or through which they can be, not as something they engaged into, contrary to Connell's perspective (Schippers, 2007).

### **Power, Leadership, Responsibility**

The Power theme described how power becomes significant for men, albeit in different forms. Alistair, Bruce and Donovan seemed to engage in power relations towards men and women, thus possibly directly reinforcing a hegemonic structure of masculinity (Addis, Mansfield, & Syzdek, 2010; Courtenay, 2000; Hammond & Mattis, 2005; Thompson & Pleck, 1995). Both Galen and Eames seem to experience power through their bodily strength, which links to literature highlighting the role of a strong male body to dominant masculinity (Connell, 1995; Light & Kirk, 2000), yet their body was not necessarily experienced as participating in discourses of dominance. The pervasiveness of the theme Power as a concept throughout other themes (for example, Embodied Masculinity, Leadership, Good Man, Emotional Strength, Being Different from Women) suggests that the hegemonic model of masculinity may reflect a more stable, underlying and structural element for masculinity, albeit from the data it is not always evident that power is experienced within the context of a hegemonic structure (Terry & Braun, 2009). IPA has been said to challenge hierarchies of meaning (Langdrige, 2007) and here the concept of power was deemed to have been experienced by the men as less of a core element of masculinity than hegemonic models of masculinity would suggest.

Another way the participants have experienced the power aspect of masculinity is through its opposite, powerlessness. Literature suggests that powerlessness is

experienced negatively by men because it is associated with femininity and thus it is not masculine (Adler, 2011; Blazina & Watkins, 2000; Emslie et al. 2006, Jung, 1958; Flood, 2008; O'Neil, 1981; 1986; Smiler, 2004; Wade & Gelso, 1998). Although the men did not have a uniform reaction to powerlessness they seemed to experience confusion, frustration, or emasculation when confronted with feelings of powerlessness. These feelings could be understood in terms of Gender Role Discrepancy Strain (Pleck, 1995) or as an anxiety of not being man enough (Pitmann, 1993) when contrasted with an ideal. Lacanian psychoanalysis (Verhaeghe, 2004) might frame this as the core of the neurotic structure: a profound sense of lack, an inadequacy to satisfy the Other via not possessing the phallus, or "it", "it" being a signifier of power. In terms of Identity Process Theory (Breakwell, 2010) the case might be that the person has trouble assimilating or accommodating powerlessness as an acceptable part of male identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Powerlessness seemed to be an unacceptable emotion that had to be dealt with first and foremost, sometimes by shifting the very source of feeling powerful, as in the case of Donovan, who wanted to become "powerful through emotions" (Donovan: 521-523).

Similarly to Power, Leadership might be linked with the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Leadership might be a trait, or experience, that resembles the outcome of competition (Good & Brooks, 2005; Smiler, 2004). Leading positions and traits exhibited by leaders seem to make intuitive sense to the participants as being foremostly masculine. Being in a leading position might create feelings of being masculine possibly because they feel that, if they are leaders, then other men must be beneath them, and thus, less masculine. Alistair's presentation as an 'alpha male' might stem from his positioning himself as better than other men because of his intellect and his self-made-man journey through life.

The Good Man theme outlined different ways in which a sense of masculinity provided the men with self-enhancing, pro-social values and a sense of responsibility, "to do the

right thing" (Galen: 778-787). Selfless generosity and self-sacrifice has been suggested to be a criterion for being masculine (Brannon, 1976, Levant, 1996). The PPPM framework (Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010) has suggested that masculinity can offer positive and self-enhancing values, some of which may be paralleled to what participants have experienced, a "fraternal humanitarian service" (p.277).

Responsibility seems to be an aspect of masculinity manifesting across different cultural contexts (Hammond & Mattis, 2005). In the data, a pervasive sense of responsibility seems to also be linked with being an adult regardless of gender.

Responsibility can come in the form of accountability for one's actions and caring/protecting others and may be experienced as a mandatory, almost inevitable part of adult life, resistance to which is nevertheless deemed as not-masculine.

Responsibility was also framed by some of the men as being autonomous in making decisions, without delegating those decisions to anyone else. In that sense, personal responsibility was not only considered a virtue but also a pathway to autonomy.

It would seem that, at least in the social sciences literature, masculinity and responsibility overwhelmingly meet in very fixed points. What is interesting is that literature on masculinity addresses responsibility mainly through fatherhood and the 'breadwinner' concept (Brannon, 2006; Miller, 2011), possibly a more crystallized form of the experience of being, or having to be, responsible for others, and through its lack, which comes in the form of anti-social, irresponsible behaviour towards the self and others (Cohn & Zeichner, 2006; Jakupcak, 2003; Liu & Iwamoto, 2007; Parent, Moradi, Rummel & Tokar, 2011).

Another perspective on responsibility could be that it is desired, as Donovan described, rather than merely accepted. Having responsibility might imply that one can (or has to) exert power over or assume a leading position in relation to others. Connell's (1995) hegemonic masculinity concept might be better able to explain why responsibility for others can be an attractive goal to men, as it may facilitate the maintenance of their

position within hierarchical structures. Within the social context power, leadership and responsibility might be interconnected in a way that, when one of them is perceived as manifested in the self, the other two may soon follow. Experiencing the self as responsible might open up opportunities for also experiencing power or the attainment of a leadership position.

### **Independence and Autonomy**

Independence and autonomy may be another pervasive aspect of what is felt as masculine (Good & Brooks, 2005), of what is deemed as masculine (Bly, 1990; Mander, 2001) or what is regarded as healthy, traditional masculinity (Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010). This theme relates to the masculine norm Self-Reliance seen in Male Role Norms Inventory (MRNI; Levant & Richmond, 2007), Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI; Mahalik et. al, 2003) and the Positive Psychology/Positive Masculinity framework (PPPM; Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010). Independence and autonomy take many forms in the present study: for Alistair it is independent decisions that lead to a comprehensive sense of control and for Eames autonomy is tightly linked with how a man reinforces his own sense of masculinity. Bly (1990) places the young man during his journey to manhood in situations where he must materialistically assert his autonomy, which might resemble Eame's idea of earning his masculinity on his own.

Autonomy and self-reliance in adolescence are said to be facilitated by emotionally supportive parental relationships (Kenny & Gallagher, 2002). A mixed picture, however, emerges from the men in the present study. Self-reliance may have been achieved regardless of emotionally supportive parental relationships and may be linked instead with striving to achieve a defensive, disconnective autonomy (Good & Brooks, 2005; Pleck, 1981; Pollack, 2005).

A less gender-exclusive approach to independence might be that during the stage of 'emerging adulthood', ages 18-25, both sexes experience a normative transition that highlights the importance of being independent (Tanner & Arnett, 2009). It might be the case that the men of this study may have made sense of their own transition by referring to older men's similar transitions, or to the mythologies and traditions pertaining to the matter, thus reinforcing a historically cultivated false attribution, an outdated idea that independence is primarily a transition for men, ignoring the fact that women had much less opportunities for such a transition until the Information Age (Tanner & Arnett, 2009).

### **Action Hero**

The title of this theme was given in order to integrate the two original concepts touched upon through the analysis, risk-taking and overcoming challenges.

Kiselica and Englar-Carlson (2010) include risk-taking and male courage in the positive aspects of traditional masculinity. Alistair's experience might be reflecting one aspect of risk-taking, one of having to make difficult decisions while enduring uncertainty about their outcomes. This theme might also be referring to Whitehead's (2005) conceptualization of male heroism, the function of which might be to prove oneself against a difficult task in order to reinforce either social standing or a private sense of being masculine. Yet the case for the men might have been that risk-taking and demonstration of courage could also be the means to a self-initiation into masculinity and, thus, into the world of men, by relating to the abstract concept and male archetype of the Warrior (Bly, 1990; Moore & Gillette, 1990). In this sense, masculinity here can be seen also as a practice with collective elements (Connell, 1995) in which the men participated and through which they found their own way of assessing their performance in terms of how much effort and pain their bodies and mind can take.

Danger in the form of exposure to aggression and violence, as seen in the data, might also be linked to Gender Role Conflict and shame (Cohn & Zeichner, 2006; Jakupcak, 2003). Men seem to be stuck in a position between being naturally aggressive (Clatterbaugh, 1990) and having to be aggressive (Bosson et al., 2009; Whitehead, 2005) which might make aggression-related shame inevitable. Men are expected to be fighters - Pittman (1993) hypothesizes that the word "machismo" might actually be derived from the Greek word for "battle" - *machi* (μάχη). Galen may experience losing a fight as either Gender Role Conflict or shame possibly because of a norm he adopted growing up:

"in a society thinking that if you get punched and you go down, that's worst [...]" (Galen: 580-593).

Galen's sense of Gender Role Conflict might lie in "socialized control, power and competition" (O'Neil, 2008, p. 361) and may be resulting in shame because of a perceived distance between an ideal of masculinity and the actual. Externalization and acting out the shame (Krugman, 1995) though, as related to aggression and violence, did not seem to be as evident in the men in this study. Galen can probably save face if he "rides the punch out" (580-593) and Faris framed what could be a shaming experience of aggression as a fair response to his own wrongdoing ("fair enough", 545-552).

There was only marginal relation to self-harming behaviours associated with masculinity (Blazina & Watkins, 1996; Liu & Iwamoto, 2007) within the participants' data: Galen's health-abusive "boy's night out" might be more linked to that phenomenon than anything else in the data. Abusing one's own health is not considered necessarily heroic yet it might be considered masculine in terms of having the capacity to withstand the abuse (De Visser & Smith, 2007).

Risk-taking seems to be a more context-independent and possibly even a transcendental manifestation of masculinity (Lazur & Majors, 1995; Whitehead, 2005) because it may rely mostly on men's stronger bodies, a more gender-exclusive biological heritage (Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei & Gladue, 1994; Denman, 2004; Schmitt, 2003; 2005).

All in all, the behaviours narrated in the context of performing as an Action Hero might imply that there is a perceived distance between the actual self and the masculine ideal which has to be traversed. The more outstanding or extreme the behaviours the more they might help the person traverse this distance, which might imply that said distance is phenomenologically significant, salient, or too much to be addressed by more conventional, safe behaviours. Alistair's "Hell's jaws" initiation, Carney's intense army experience, Donovan's war correspondence, Faris's threatening outdoors activities and Garen's aspiration for extreme sports may indicate that these men, at least at some point in time, experienced this distance from an ideal as best addressed with serious engagement.

### **Masculinity Through the Body**

Men's sense of masculinity can be defined or challenged by the health and fitness of their body (Connell, 1995; Gill, Henwood & McLean, 2005). Alistair openly expressed his experience of a challenged masculinity when battling with testicular cancer, contrary to literature suggesting that men may deny such experiences (Chapple & Ziebland, 2002; 2004). In the present study there seemed to be a general sense that if the male body cannot function or stand up to comparisons the man might feel powerless or regressed - masculinity in that sense is not dualistic but is tightly linked with both body and mind (Connell, 1995). Faris also described his feeling of being "crippled" (Faris: 166-170) at one time as challenging and, like Alistair and his experience of working while doing radiotherapy, may have tried to express behaviour

that negated his vulnerable state and briefly overcompensated for a perceived threat to his masculinity (Chapple & Ziebland, 2002; 2004; Courtenay, 2000; Willer et al., 2013). Male body health and functionality/performance have been said to be linked (Olliffe et al., 2007) and these men seem to have experienced this link. By openly challenging their vulnerability, they may be hoping to retain some sense of being functional and thus able to perform - to be men. Even Donovan, who rejected physical criteria for masculinity, felt emasculated when sexual performance issues emerged. The sexually incapable body might elicit such feelings as it might challenge a power relation to women (Chapple & Ziebland, 2002) or because ejaculate ability has come to represent masculine power in general (Olliffe, 2005).

Most of the men here seemed open about their bodies' illnesses and damages thus possibly challenging, at least in this specific context, the view that men tend to be silent about these issues because they constitute a threat to their status (Courtenay, 2000), yet we cannot know for sure as the men interviewed may have been trying to validate their masculinity even via revealing their vulnerabilities (Johnston & Morrison, 2007).

### **Work as Significant Life Aspect**

Although it has been said that, in the context of generosity and self-sacrifice, workaholism may be a destructive form of self-entitlement (Levant, 1995), in the present study no such interpretation emerged. It might have been actually a sense of absence of entitlement that drove the men to work hard: a lack of sense of entitlement to a comfortable retirement (Alistair) or an inherently masculine drive to actively acquire rather than passively receive (Eames).

The permeating sense from this theme was that the participants' vocational choices and vocational attitudes probably reflected or further defined one's sense of masculinity. This can be linked to a more general phenomenon of men tending to choose less frequently cross-sex-typed work (Mahalik, 2006). One aspect of how work

can reinforce a sense of masculinity may be risk-taking. Traditionally men are expected to be involved in risk-enhancing jobs (Verdonk, Seesing, & de Rijk, 2010). Carney was dismissed from the Army because the risk of injury became actual injury and, regardless of his next job being in an almost male-exclusive field, the absence of risk gave him a much reduced sense of being masculine. Donovan was and maybe still is attracted to the war correspondent role because of its exposure to dangerous situations.

#### THE SELF TOWARDS SUPERIORITY

Adler (2011) posited a defensive reaction of children towards inferiority, which is positioned as a feminine trait, termed "masculine protest". He argued that neurosis stemmed from feelings of inferiority and that it perpetuated a striving for superiority (here, from the "Young Self as Inferior" to the "The Self as Superior and Privileged"). This striving might drive an individual to alienation from the community (Hirsch, 2005), reflected here in the theme "Self vs. the World". It might further be the case that the men engaged developmentally in a discourse of superiority by challenging hegemonic forms of masculinity (Terry & Braun, 2009) through the perception of the self as "Being an Intellectual". Another perspective could be that GRS in the form of Discrepancy Strain (Pleck, 1995) can be related to the manifestation of an inferiority complex (Adler, 2011) whereby a discrepancy related to an idealized masculine position is met with a developmental movement towards reducing this discrepancy. Because of the competitive aspect of the masculine position (Good & Brooks, 2005; Smiler, 2004), finally achieving the idealized may have produced a sense of superiority.

Adler's theoretical concepts were bracketed during analysis yet the data themselves aligned and gravitated towards an interpretation pertaining to inferiority and superiority. While Adler posited a life-long commitment to the masculine protest, I suggest that this commitment may have been much more accentuated in adolescence or early

adulthood. Furthermore, the drive towards superiority may have been mediated by factors such as the experience of the self as highly intelligent and educated and a malleable, adaptive quality of the concept of masculinity itself.

### **The Source of Masculinity**

By exploring how a sense of masculinity comes about, how the feeling of being masculine can be accessed and how the feeling of emasculation can be avoided, I suggested this theme to describe the men's experience of finding out how to be 'men'.

Masculinity as a precarious and conditional part of male identity is a concept explored frequently (Bly, 1990; Gilmore, 1990; Pleck, 1981; Vandello et al., 2008) and the men of this study seemed to have experienced this. Of particular interest was the perception of how threatening this conditionality could be: As long as the masculine self is safe from being challenged, conditionality could not threaten it - the perceived Discrepancy Strain would be low (Pleck, 1981). Since masculinity can be conditional it might be implied that if conditions are met, a male can feel masculine, and if not, he may feel emasculated (Pleck, 1981; O'Neil, 2008). The participants seemed to experience such a triadic link between the conditions, the positive outcome of satisfying them and the negative outcome of not satisfying them. Although some expressed that they have never, or they would never, experience the negative outcome, other data suggest that they can still perceive a hypothetical scenario within which they could feel emasculated, however improbable that may be.

Feeling safe in one's masculinity while acknowledging its precarious nature may be a contradiction. Bruce explicitly acknowledged the existence of conditions ("those boxes we checked", 130-133), or masculine standards, as the literature has previously suggested (Pleck, 1995; Willer et al., 2013). Yet at the same time Bruce cannot conceive of the possibility of not feeling like a man, distinguishing it from being masculine, which might indicate a more open, ego-integrated stance (Wade, 1998), as

if saying 'I belong to the male group and other men can be more masculine than me because they meet the standards, and that does not make me less of a man'. An economic model of masculinity (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013) might be able to account for such a sense of safety that echoes the safety one feels from having their resources secured: Bruce confers a stable sense men may have if they feel they have enough masculine capital to "spend", and are thus safe in their masculine identity. Like Bruce, Alistair feels constantly in control (38-41) so that might imply a steady "influx" of masculine capital, which contributes to a similar sense of safety. Donovan, in having this "mojo" (333-338), may be achieving this sense of capital security as well but may be losing it if this sense of power is lost, thus rendering the influx and expenditure of masculine capital as a gamble.

Another possible explanation for a sense of security in one's masculinity might lie with self-psychology (Blazina, 2001): if the men have not been shamed in childhood for not meeting masculinity standards (Pleck, 1981), their self-worth might be preserved in the face of 'failing' to meet them. Another way might be to accommodate the concept of masculinity and its criteria into a more inclusive and flexible form (Breakwell, 2010), closer to the way values are approached in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: with a psychologically flexible attitude, not with over-adherence (Smith & Hayes, 2005). Finally, and on par with Pleck's suggestions (1995), another possible viewpoint could be that the conditionality of masculinity might not always be as salient as to produce a sense of strain but can be so embedded in a man's life that it is not immediately perceivable most of the time (Willer et al., 2013).

### **Malleable Definition of Masculinity**

Experiencing GRS (Pleck, 1981), GRC (O'Neil, 2008) or gender vertigo - a destabilized sense of gender identity (Connell, 1998) - might have prompted the men to form their own masculinity, thus experiencing the definition of masculinity as malleable and less

dependent upon external expectations. Masculinity, being an abstract concept of an ideal self, may lend itself to corrections throughout life (Killianksi, 2003; Johnston & Morrison, 2007) in order to preserve self-esteem, competence and control (Breakwell, 1993; 2010). Masculinity has been said to be a flexible concept that can be adapted to fit individual definitions, attitudes, access to resources and needs (Courtenay, 2000; De Visser & Smith, 2006; 2007; Killianksi, 2003). Piaget (2013) posited the processes of assimilation and accommodation, later used to describe a process of identity formation (Breakwell, 1993; 2010). By these two processes new experiences could either be adapted to the existing concept of masculinity or the masculine identity or could themselves adapt the concept into a more informed form.

Some of the men located a shift in their gender identity during the 'emerging adulthood' period. Literature suggests (Tanner, Arnett, 2009) that 'emerging adulthood', ages of 18 to 25, may be yet another critical period for development as social and neurological factors contribute to a state of openness to identity change. It may be the case that masculinity is susceptible to change, and thus malleable, as part of a young adult man's identity.

Another form of malleability may have been experienced by the men in the form of a self-initiation process. Bly (1990) suggests that men in the Western world feel confused about how to be men because there are no elder men to provide initiation rites that would bestow them their male identity. Yet it is not clear how such initiations can be of any significance if masculinity is a relentless pursuit for the "big impossible" (Bly, 1990; Pittman, 1993) and thus running the risk of losing the masculine status. It would seem that the men in this study possibly sought on their own to experience an initiation, or a significant change, that would solidify their transition from boyhood - Alistair stated explicitly an engagement with such a process, while for others it might have come in subtler forms like supporting the whole family or asserting financial freedom.

## WHAT IS MASCULINITY

This Master theme aimed at describing experiences of reflecting on the experience and concept of masculinity. Because of the convenience sampling, the participants may have had a common increased capacity for introspection, as assessed by the mediators themselves (which would account for possible reasons why the mediators suggested the participants in the first place). Although it was not possible to assess whether each participant had been in therapy before beyond what was said in the interviews, the participants' capacity for introspection appeared to be evident given the depth of interpretation that their own interpretations allowed. It might be the case that with a different sample, this Master theme would be constructed differently.

### **Masculinity Beyond Words**

Bussey and Bandura (1999) assert that social learning of gendered behaviour is greatly reinforced by societal structures and that adhering to gendered behaviour feels rewarding, even from a young age, to both men and women. Following this framework it may be assumed that the men's focus might have been primarily on how to be men rather than on a meta-analytic level that would allow them to "step out" of their gender and examine the phenomenon rather than just experience it - thus explaining the difficulties the men had in answering some of the questions that required a broader perspective, like "How significant is it for you to be a man?". Another common thread in the men's experience was the realization that one has never been a woman in order to become aware of how masculinity may be affecting their lives - which might be linked with the observation that masculinity can frequently be perceived and defined through its antithesis with femininity (Hornsey, 2008; Pleck, 1995; Smiler, 2004).

### **Nature and Nurture**

There is significant literature on either side of the 'nature vs. nurture', and on the more inclusive 'nature plus nurture', debates regarding masculinity (Connell, 1995; Kinglerlee,

2012; Levant, 1995; Lippa, 2007; Willer et al., 2013). Cultural practices may also in turn define the context through which scientific knowledge is used to explain masculinity (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1988; Madill et al., 2000). The men acknowledged both factors (nature and nurture) as affecting the concept of masculinity yet they variably favoured one of the two as the primary force that shapes it. Favouring a factor almost always came in the form of scientifically-informed arguments informed by evolutionary biology and sociology. The function of scientific knowledge establishing the validity and origins of masculinity can be considered to be one of preserving self-esteem (Breakwell, 2010) or a rationalization defense mechanism used to conceal motivations of maintaining the self's status-quo (Clark, 1998). We have to consider Alistair's statement (655-664) about chromosomes: "we've got X and Y, they've just got Y, whatever the fuck it is" where possibly the importance of factual accuracy is superseded by the importance of attaching scientific credibility to the claim.

### **Questioning Masculinity**

This theme was initially considered to be another factor involved in the development of the self towards superiority as men seemed to question masculinity in an attempt to render the concept malleable, or to reject other masculinities in order to privately establish the status of their own, thus naturally leading to the Malleable Masculinity theme. Yet such an interpretation would not be able to account for instances where questioning masculinity could be an expression of a cognitive dissonance between what behaviours feel exclusively masculine and how rationally valid gender exclusivity is, or as the literature suggests, an expression of Gender Role Conflict (O'Neil, 2008). By bracketing strict adherence to theoretical viewpoints during Analysis (Smith et al., 2009) I decided to situate the theme more tentatively within the thematic structure and position it elsewhere.

An aspect of this theme is questioning the concept of masculinity itself without referring to other men, or hegemonic structures. The men may have experienced the beginnings of the processes of accommodation and assimilation (Breakwell, 1993; 2010) by having doubts regarding their own intuitive sense and definitions of masculinity.

Eames became critical of physically 'raw' displays of masculinity as being overcompensatory in nature, possibly referring to the phenomenon Willer et al. studied (2013). It might be the case that Eames uses that phenomenon as a way to challenge these physically dominant masculinities in order to validate his own. However, this does not necessarily mean that Eames is trying to reinforce his position in a hegemonic structure (Terry & Braun, 2009). Instead, he may be attempting a horizontal inclusion (De Visser & McDonnell, 2013) and thus possibly make himself feel more included in the greater group of men.

#### THE EMOTIONAL WORLD

This Master theme may be tightly linked with the theme Power, as perceived lack of Power in the men of this study has led to experiencing powerlessness, which may constitute an emotional state that has to be avoided (Emslie et al., 2006). For that reason the men might have demonstrated courage in the form of emotional control or detached from a situation in order to manage their distress or sought help in variable ways.

Powerlessness is not the only strong negative emotion the men presented in the data and not all coping mechanisms aimed at emotional suppression or detachment.

Although not adequately represented in the sample, some of the men also reported feeling they had to cope with anger and worry, and one additional way of coping tended also to be acceptance of adversity.

## **Emotional Strength**

Men tend to emphasise the importance of remaining strong in the face of emotional difficulties (O'Brien, Hunt, & Hart, 2005) possibly because of experienced norms that discourage the expression of grief and sadness (Brooks, 2010a) or in order to avoid the experience of shame (Krugman, 1995).

The men described experiences of emotional containment or suppression that can signify emotional strength, or courage, in the face of adversity. Land, Rochlen, and Vaughn (2011) suggest that emotional suppression follows cognitive reappraisal of negative affect (reflected here in the "Detachment and Perspective Shift" theme) and that it pertains to behavioural responses to feelings. Detachment can be argued to be perpetuating the ultimate goal of attaining emotional strength, the masculine stoic stance (Pollack, 2005). Literature also suggests (Connell, 1998; Courtenay, 2000) that this male-specific style of emotional regulation might be another way to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity in terms of (emotional) power. Mak et al. (2009) suggested that men tend to be better at regulating negative emotion, which might reflect the life-long development of strategies needed in order to demonstrate emotional strength. The men in the present study tended to demonstrate suppression by not engaging in emotional, cognitive or behavioural responses, such as feeling sorry about oneself, showing fear, crying, seeking help or acting out aggression.

Studies have also suggested that restrictive emotionality and emotional suppression in men might be linked to perceived-as insecure attachment styles (Land, Rochlen, & Vaughn, 2011; Schwartz, Waldo, & Higgins, 2004). It has also been suggested that men's stoic stance against emotions (also manifested as alexithymia) may stem from defending against the re-experiencing of early childhood disconnection from the parents (Pollack, 2005), which might also reflect Blazina's (2001) thesis on boy's gender socialization processes that leave them with an impaired internalized self-soothing mechanism. However, a link between interpersonal strategies and emotional

regulation, as supported in the literature, was not suggested by the men of the present study, possibly except from Carney:

"I'm not sure whether that's [...] a lack of, em, kind of emotional understanding, but, as far as I understand it, then that's, yeah, that's probably my masculinity impacting on, on relationships"  
(Carney:160-163)

Men might perceive help-seeking as a challenge to their masculinity (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Weiss, 1985): Responses from Alistair and Faris suggest their sense of help-seeking as a sign of powerlessness or lack of control. The other men, though, suggested otherwise: Donovan framed this help-seeking, here manifested as psychological therapy, as power-enhancing, being "powerful through emotions" (Donovan: 521-523), which might also be linked with the pervasive theme Power.

In the present theme some deviation from the literature was noted. Namely, the men usually did not seem to experience themselves reacting negatively and impulsively to emotional distress (Pollack, 2005). The men seemed to make a case for their best way to cope with intense emotions and situations, which might be due to the interview context within which they present themselves (Johnston & Morrison, 2007; Robb, 2004).

### **Detachment and Perspective Shift**

Literature suggests (Kingerlee, 2012; Mak et al., 2009) that male emotional regulation is linked to detachment strategies. It has been suggested that males tend to show more cognitive control, cognitive perspective taking and cognitive reappraisal strategies in order to resolve emotional conflict (Land, Rochlen, & Vaughn, 2011; Mak et al., 2009). The men in this study presented disconnective strategies that did not necessarily signify comprehensive avoidance of experiences of vulnerability (Brooks, 2010a) but rather signified emotional growth, a broader perspective on a situation, or resembled cognitive-behavioural interventions such as distraction (Wells, 1997) or 'defusion' -

detaching and examining one's thought instead of experiencing it as a fact (Smith & Hayes, 2005; Stroschal, et al., 2004). The men's detachment strategies resembled attempts to 'step out' of the experience of an intense emotional state in order to reflect on it and to mitigate some of its potency, rather than abandon any reflection on the experience (Kingerlee, 2012) or in order to become emotionally numb (Rabinowitz, 2006).

The men's detachment strategies and cognitive reappraisal styles can be linked to Brooks' (2010a) assertion that men may make good use of cognitive-behavioural models of therapy and that priority should be given to CBT interventions in integrative therapy for men.

## OTHER MEN

### **Father as Point of Reference for Masculinity**

Psychoanalytic theories posit that the father is the first male with whom the son wants to identify (Chodorow, 1978; Clatterbaugh, 1990; Kimmel, 1997; Mander, 2001) and social cognitive theory posits the father to be the first person to model masculinity for the son (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Pittman (1993) suggests that we need our fathers to anoint us as men, to acknowledge our masculinity. Some of the men of this study may have had an experience of longing to identify with the father. Donovan became a problem-solver, like his father, and Faris saw himself becoming the adult man his father was at the same age, even without consciously imitating him. However, in many instances the men expressed a wish either to only partially identify with their fathers and their fathers' expectations, or to become an entirely different man from whom the father was.

Psychoanalytic theory also posits the father as the boy's liberator from infant narcissism and omnipotence and a cultivator of their independence by fostering detachment from the mother (Blazina & Watkins, 2000; Greenson, 1968; Mander,

2001). Bruce may have experienced his father as the one to "channel" him into how men work and thus fostered a differentiation from the female members of the family, yet the other men of this study did not report or did not seem to have experienced, consciously at least, a father-mitigated separation from their mothers (Chodorow, 1978; Krugman, 1995; Pittman, 1993).

Most men in this study described variably detached or rejecting relationships with their fathers. Studies have indicated that boys may experience more parental rejection than girls do (Putnick et al., 2012). The absent father has been said to be potentially perceived as a rejecting father, and can be a source of a negative view of masculinity for boys, which in turn can disconnect the boy from masculinity itself (Bly, 1990; Mitscherlich, 1963; Pittman, 1993). Most men in the present study experienced other forms of masculinity as unacceptable or ripe for criticism (seen in "Questioning Masculinity") which might reflect this link between the absent or rejecting father and other men as representatives of his masculinity. However, the perception of being close and being similar to their fathers, as in the case of Bruce and Galen, coincided with greater openness about other masculinities, yet the reverse was not necessarily true - as in Eames' case. An absent father is also said to force his son to identify positionally, rather than personally, with the masculine role (Brooks & Silverstein, 1995) by developing gender identities in relation to what they are not (Chodorow, 1978). Carney might have experienced this when he first met his father as a young boy and subsequently dismissed him as an inadequate role-model, possibly because an image of an ideal masculinity had already been formed in Carney's mind by dis-identifying with the mother (Greenson, 1968) and/or by social learning (Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

Recent studies identify father involvement as a protective factor in children's development against maternal rejection and father absence and rejection as risk factors for later depression, problem behaviours, substance abuse (Papadaki & Giovazolias, 2013) and overall psychological well-being (Dwairy, 2009). This line of

research could potentially link back to Blazina's (2001) thesis on a boy's development of self-worth in relation to an empathic parent but also to Rogers' (1961) postulate that acceptance and unconditional positive regard contribute to good psychological health. Men in the present study may have experienced paternal absence, rejection or detachment more as a challenge to be overcome rather than as a developmental impediment in terms of asserting their self-worth. However, achievement expectations from the father may have been experienced as internalized pressure, similarly to Levant's (1995) assertion that some fathers who invest heavily in their sons tend to enforce compliance with gender stereotypes, which might also instigate Gender Role Strain (Pleck, 1981).

### **The Male Group**

Pittman (1993) suggests that men need other men "to let us join the team of men" (p. 189).

Faris's experience might refer to being critical of the regulating effects of homosociality between men (Flood, 2008; Kimmel, 1997) which may impose on one's own interpersonal attitudes and behaviours. This experience may also refer to Reference Group Identity Dependence-related research (RGID; Wade, 1998): Faris might be experiencing relating to an all-male group as relating to traditionally masculine values and attitudes that are very different from his. Contrary to RGID research findings (Wade & Gelso, 1998), Faris seems to be psychologically better off for not identifying with such groups, with no reference group at all (ego unintegrated). Another possible explanation would be that Faris identifies with a broader, more abstract male group, thus feeling connected with the male gender as a whole.

The men may have experienced the male group in different ways. Eames has experienced and reacted to the disconnective competition within the group (Bird, 1996) by critically interrogating the interpersonal strategies involved and may have aimed at

horizontal inclusion (De Visser & McDonnell, 2013). Carney found himself feeling bonded with the group maybe because the function of individuation through competition was by default removed in the context of the Army and probably experienced horizontal inclusion.

### **Idealized Men**

Pittman (1993) claims that men also need "myths of heroes to inspire [...] and show [...] the way" (p. 189) of being men. Masculinity mythology, according to Bly (1990) and Pittman (1993), shows us that in order to achieve heroic status men have to abandon selfishness, the fear of death and humiliation and the desire for glory. The men of this study indeed expressed explicit or implicit admiration for real, or fictional, heroes but who do not necessarily exhibit these conditions for heroism. Pittman further suggests (1993) that boys who don't have fathers tend to invest emotionally more on superficial role models with pseudo-heroic qualities. Donovan's focus on fantasy heroes growing up might lend credit to Pittman's suggestion: although Donovan's father was present, his expectations from his son might have communicated an emotional absence and a reluctance to anoint his son as a man, and so the son turned to fictional male role models in order be validated.

Fantasy heroes and real-life athletes share in common the ability to embody masculine ideals and virtues. Athletes, moreover, might also offer more readily transferrable values into everyday life (Lines, 2001). Galen seems to be attracted to male role-models with "extreme" physical achievements because of the possibility to replicate their achievements through himself.

In terms of male archetypes accessed through idealized men it can be said that the men admired qualities found closer to the Warrior (perseverance, strength), the Magician (intellect, introspection) and the King (creativity, wisdom), with relational and interpersonal qualities found in the Lover missing from the descriptions (Moore &

Gillette, 1990). Although the latter qualities can be conceptualized as also being masculine, they tend to be regarded as feminine and may thus be less easy to idealize and identify with (Emslie et al. 2006, Jung, 1958; Smiler, 2004) - thus real-life and fictional heroes might tend to be representations of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). In Whitehead's (2005) framework, the Hero just needs a Villain and a non-man to exist in order to assert himself as a Hero, and at least in the case of fictional heroes, no relational qualities are needed for this configuration to operate.

### **Homosexuality**

For some of the participants, the concept of homosexuality seemed to be experienced as something very different from them or as something threatening to them. Although there was no sense of homophobia (Bernat et al., 2001), possibly reflecting a socially desired attitude of tolerance to diversity, there was a sense of disconnection from homosexual men. However, for Carney, Eames and Galen an empathic capacity that transcends this disconnection seems to be more apparent.

When exposed to the concept of homosexuality, the men might have experienced their identity as heterosexual men being reinforced (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and their membership to the greater male heterosexual group as more psychologically real (Hornsey, 2008). However, a few experienced this traditional ingroup-outgroup differentiation (Szymanski & Carr, 2008) as being challenged possibly because of opportunities to empathise with common experiences of homosexual men pertaining to masculinity.

### **THE OTHER GENDER**

Women have been largely experienced by the men in this study not only as being fundamentally different but also as having the power to define what these men are not (Blazina & Watkins, 2000; Flood, 2008; O'Neil, 1981; 1986; Smiler, 2004; Wade & Gelso, 1998) or whether they are men enough (Pittman, 1993). This is contrasted with

the observation of men's belief and experience that only men know how men should be (Flood, 2008; Johnston & Morrison, 2007). This powerful idea that only men can know masculinity was explicitly expressed by Alistair, who contrasted his inner sense of what a boy needs to do to be a man to a mother's well-meaning but misplaced intuition.

If we were to follow psychoanalytic theory on the formation of masculinity (Chodorow, 1978, Krugman, 1995; Pollack, 2005), it would seem that masculinity "happens" in the void left by the maternal separation: we are Men because we are different and separated from the Female. However, the present thematic structure cannot suggest that this differentiation is a core component of the experience of masculinity.

The men experienced themselves as emotionally stronger than women, something that has been unfoundedly assumed in the past yet has also been experimentally tested and supported (Mak et al., 2009; O'Brien, Hunt, & Hart, 2005).

The men have also variably experienced themselves as socially privileged over women. This experience might be reflective of the men's relative position within power structures in society (male, Caucasian and heterosexual), granting them greater access to resources (Hofer et al., 2010; Moller, 2007).

Moreover, there seemed to be a perception from the men that the female desire (wishes, wants, requests) has shaped not only their own masculinity - what they can do for their partners (Olliffe, 2005; Olliffe et al., 2007), what they can achieve to win their love (Bergman, 1995) or whether they have "it" to satisfy them (Verhaeghe, 2004) - but the concept of masculinity as a whole (Bosson et al., 2009; Vandello et al., 2008). The men may be longing for their "feminine" qualities to be accepted by their partners (Pollack, 1995) rather than aiming to perpetuate a hegemonic model of masculinity (Allen, 2007; Terry & Braun, 2009), even if the partners themselves may have unconsciously encouraged such a perpetuation by challenging them to be more traditionally masculine. Additionally, in some instances a romantic relationship itself

might have been experienced as a challenge to hegemonic masculinity, yet the question remains whether this self-improvement seeking and impenetrability from hegemonic masculinity may be in themselves manifestations of hegemonic masculinity (Terry & Braun, 2009).

## CONCLUSION

This study has illustrated that the experience of masculinity can take place in and be shaped by different contexts. However, the boundaries of these contexts outlined here are tentatively offered and aim to portray masculinity in line with IPA's aims (Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2008).

The men's experience of masculinity seemed to be charted across time and throughout their personal development. This development seems to be gravitating towards overcoming the feeling of being inferior to others by exploring how one may feel more masculine, how one can adjust his definition of masculinity in order to allow themselves to feel included in the gender, and how, before reaching a sense of superiority, one can experience the cultivation of this development in an oppositional stance towards the world.

A thematic structure around what is perceived or experienced to be masculine by the men in terms of traits, attitudes and dispositions was also suggested. A feeling of power, or overcoming powerlessness, was deemed to permeate many of these manifestations of masculinity, which in turn may permeate other contexts within which masculinity is experienced - having Power over other men, or expressing Leadership over Women, or being a Good Man towards loved ones.

Questions around masculinity, from verbalizing intuitions, to the origins of masculinity and questioning the concept on a personal or a societal level, were another aspect of the participants' experience. It has been illustrated that participants have been critical

of various definitions of masculinity, which has in turn affected their own definitions as well as their experience of masculinity.

Difficult emotions and help-seeking were shown to be mainly addressed as a possible threat to the men's masculinity. The men demonstrated different ways in which they have addressed this in their lives, aiming to detach from emotional intensity and strengthen the mind in the face of adversity.

Beginning with the father as a first point of reference for masculinity, the men seemed to perceive other men, even fictional or idealized ones, as a source of experiences that informed, challenged or reinforced their definition and sense of masculinity. Divergence was important to highlight in this context as the men displayed different stances towards other men, spanning from dismissal to idealization.

Finally, it was illustrated that women also provided a vital relational context for negotiating masculinity. By being mindful of the female desire or by experiencing the female within a romantic relationship, the men were able to see where they stand as men with particular dispositions and characteristics, and draw inferences about commonalities with and differences from the other gender.

#### EVALUATION, QUALITY AND METHODOLOGICAL REFLEXIVITY

In this section I evaluate the present study in relation to specific points regarding the quality of research, as outlined by Yardley and Willig. Reflective notes were made throughout the research pertaining to the quality criteria outlined by Yardley (2000; 2008) and Willig (2008) for qualitative research and by Smith (2011) for IPA. These notes are presented in Appendix 16 in order to give a fuller picture of how I engaged with the quality criteria.

### **Sensitivity to context**

Masculinity research, both theoretical and empirical, has been addressed both in the Critical Literature Review and Discussion sections, and tentative suggestions have been made as to how findings may be related to previous research in order "to link the particular to the abstract and the work of others" (Yardley, 2000, p. 220). Only provisional interpretations were provided with no claims to objectivity, which would be beyond the scope of qualitative research (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Willig, 2008; 2012; Yardley, 2000). The research question of how masculinity is experienced by men has been previously addressed by qualitative research in particular contexts: health-related behaviours (De Visser, 2007; De Visser & Smith, 2007), marginalization (Grahovac, 2012), fatherhood (Miller, 2011; Williams, 2007), sexuality (Anderson, 2007; Allen, 2007; Farvid & Braun, 2006; Mooney-Somers & Ussher, 2008) and homosociality (Flood, 2008). To my knowledge, inquiry into the experience of masculinity across contexts primarily defined by the participants, rather than by the research question, has been limited (De Visser, 2007). Some depth of analysis may have been sacrificed due to the relative broadness of the research question yet the phenomenon of masculinity is specific enough to produce thematic structures that are interrelated (Smith & Osborn, 2011).

### **Function of communication**

Communication from the participants is not deemed merely as a revelation of the inner world but also as having a function and an effect on the researcher. Robb (2004), Johnston and Morrison (2007) suggest that this function for men interviewed by men would be the validation of the involved masculinities, either by distancing from or by presenting a mature stance towards the topics discussed. This was felt as I caught myself from time to time leaning towards the construction of themes that resonated strongly with my masculine ideals, although at first they seemed to be grounded in the data. A strong example of this was the (not-included) theme Acceptance of Adversity,

the construction of which was encouraged by what I perceived to be a mature acceptant stance of my participants pertaining to their life's challenges. Once this reflection was included in the process, a more participant-led inquiry into the theme was followed, and the theme was dropped due to the lack of representation. Moreover, some of the participants may have not delved deeper into anxieties of feeling emasculated precisely because of the reasons outlined above and this may have affected in turn the depth of my analysis as well. As an example, the relative absence of data supporting the construction of themes around shame, which has been deemed a powerful factor in masculinity (Krugman, 1995), might be reflective of a reluctance from the participants to share such experiences and reluctance on my part to challenge their reluctance. Finally, reluctance to engage with particular topics may have influenced the flow of the conversation and the topics discussed with some or all of the participants. Topics such as impotence, although breached with a few participants, might have been something not easily shared with others, as it might have been deemed as exposing to another man. Similarly, my probing for possible homosexual experiences or sexual experiences in general, besides being a shaping of a very specific interview agenda, might have been perceived as intrusive as well, challenging the status quo of each man's masculinity.

### **Convergence and Divergence**

Convergence and divergence of the participants' experiences has been addressed in Analysis and in Discussion as pertaining to different aspects of experiencing masculinity. Due to the breadth of the phenomenon divergence was expected to be noted, which presented a few challenges in abstracting seemingly antithetical concepts under a single Constituent theme or Master theme. A strong example was the Father theme, which had to encompass different experiences of, attitudes towards, reactions to and feelings towards the father as a man.

## **Personal Engagement with the Data**

In terms of engaging empathically with the data (Yardley, 2000) I noticed that I tended to favour particular themes or that some quotes "stuck" with me even when I was not engaged in the research. This led me both to question my personal biases and to inform the analysis of the data with these intuitions. In terms of the former, I became more aware where the participant's meaning became less prioritised in contrast to my own interpretation and I prompted myself to revisit particular themes and, when needed, entertain alternative interpretations that were farther away from my own experiences (personal and professional). In terms of the latter I allowed my intuitive sense (Yardley, 2000) to inform the emergent themes and general thematic structure by exploring the emotional impact of the participants' communication on me. As an example, I frequently recalled the expression "I'm a great believer in not feeling sorry for yourself" (Faris: 333-334) having an emotional impact on me by inspiring a more 'proud and strong' aspect of my own masculinity when faced with difficult emotions. This prompted me to revisit the quote and entertain interpretations pertaining to emotional strength and courage.

## **Willig's Epistemological Criteria**

*Clear and appropriate research question and type of knowledge attempted to be generated from the epistemological position.*

The epistemological position of the present study presumed an ability to produce an interpretation of how the participants' experience was contextually derived. Experience was presumed to be always a construction, rather than a direct reflection, of reality and was assumed to be 'real' for the persons that had it. The aim was to 'give voice' to what the men said and to interpret their accounts in order to attempt to explain the reasons behind what they said (Willig, 2008).

*Outlined methodological assumptions about the world.*

The ontological stance in this research unavoidably brought in some assumptions about the nature of the world - "what is there to know" (Willig, 2008, p. 13). The relativist ontology of this research privileged the diversity of interpretations around masculinity, both from the participants and from the researcher.

*The role of the researcher in the research process following the methodology.*

IPA highlights the role of the researcher in the research process, although never more than the role of the participants themselves (Langdrige, 2007; Smith et al., 2009). The researcher is essentially participating in a construction of meaning (Willig, 2008). Reflections on how the researcher's subjectivity may have been implicated in the process are also offered in the Personal Reflectivity section of Discussion.

#### PERSONAL REFLEXIVITY

Interestingly, the Constituent themes within the Being Masculine Master theme portray a rather positive-trait view of masculinity, as also seen in more essentialist paradigms of masculinity (Addis, Mansfield, & Syzdek, 2010). It could be the case that a bias towards presenting a positive picture for masculinity or towards portraying my participants in a positive light affected my analysis and thematic structure. However, I feel that my suspicious approach (Willig, 2012) to these seemingly positive traits, inquiring for underlying, possibly dysfunctional aspects or patterns, might have countered such a potentially positive bias in a way that is explicit in the Analysis and Discussion sections.

Very little data prompted me to allow themes around shame to emerge. That could be due to participants' sensitivity towards experiencing and communicating the experience of shame and to my colluding with the participants' implicit wish not to 'go there'.

Moreover, I had to carefully monitor my reactions towards statements that were deemed as overconfident statements pertaining to the participants' masculinity.

Although I retained a suspicious stance towards such statements I also allowed myself to entertain the possibility that a man could potentially feel genuinely masculine without feeling his manhood is threatened by anything, even if that experience was something outside my own lifeworld.

The epistemological position of this study assumes a contextual understanding of masculinity both for my participants and my own interpretations. It is possible that due to my life circumstances at the time of writing, being a male Counselling Psychologist in training writing his Doctoral thesis, my interpretations leaned towards particular concepts more relevant to my own context (e.g., responsibility) and not towards others (e.g., control). If the transcripts were analyzed later on in my life when my understanding of the phenomenon would have evolved (through personal and professional experience) and my life contexts would have changed, my interpretations would be different as well. My understanding of my participants' experience might have shifted towards related concepts under different life circumstances, so it would not be any less grounded in the same data.

Finally, my initial reluctance to engage interpretatively with the data, as noted by Smith et al. (2009) to be the case with first-time analysts, led me to reiterate the analysis in order to allow more depth in my understanding. Multiple, alternative meanings emerged in order to allow for the possibility of other interpretations, which also led Constituent themes to become interconnected by sharing common Emergent themes.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

### **Counselling Psychology**

The present exploration of the men's contextually embedded experience of masculinity aimed at providing a broader perspective on the phenomenon in particular contexts (Smith et al., 2009). In this way, this study also aimed to support the reflective and humanistic ethos of Counselling Psychology (Cooper, 2009) when working with male

clients by inviting practitioners to challenge possibly imposing preconceptions about masculinity - as I did throughout this research - even if said preconceptions stem from well-evidenced theoretical models of male psychological well-being (Kingerlee, 2012) and to privilege the clients' experience before theory.

It has been shown that different contextual factors (professional life, school environment, health issues, relationships) may have different effects on the experience of masculinity. These findings not only link with parts of previous literature but can also be grounds for suggestions towards new research (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003; Smith, 2008).

By exploring the conditionality of masculinity, the present study could offer a move beyond the mere assertion that the precariousness of masculinity (Bosson et al., 2009; Pittmann, 1993), stemming from standards of conduct (Pleck, 1981; Levant, 1996), can be a source of distress for men (Pleck, 1981; O'Neil, 2008). There seems to be a potential for the precariousness of masculinity to be met with a variety of developmental responses that eventually aim at preserving one's self-esteem, sense of power and self-efficacy (Breakwell, 2010; Hornsey, 2008) and accepting oneself for the man they are. Counselling Psychologists could facilitate this process of acceptance by offering a safe space for men to explore what masculinity means to them and by modelling unconditional positive regard, congruence and empathy, in line with humanistic values in counselling and psychotherapy, and in order to facilitate a corrective emotional experience (Rogers, 1961) for earlier lack of parental empathy and validation (Blazina, 2001; Kohut, 1984). Overcompensation (Willer et al., 2013) or cognitive strategies that aim primarily at disconnecting from threatening and intolerable affect (Smith & Hayes, 2005; Stroschal et al., 2004) or a sense of false self that defends against shame (Krugman, 1995) and neglect (Abram, 1996; Phillips, 1988; Winnicott, 1960), could also be addressed this way.

Present findings that link the experience of questioning the very concept of masculinity with the concept's capacity to accommodate one's strengths may help practitioners support their clients by challenging assumptions and dysfunctional beliefs, using interventions such as those found traditionally in CBT (Wells, 1997) and then allowing for more personal, genuine definitions to take their place, with an aim for psychological flexibility (Smith & Hayes, 2005; Stroschal et al., 2004).

Mahalik (2005a) suggests that CBT interventions match men's thought processes more closely and that men reporting higher Gender Role Conflict respond better to CBT. He suggests a clinical agenda of monitoring, reality-testing and challenging gender-specific cognitive distortions and their connection to the client's emotions and behaviour.

However, it is not very clear how CBT on its own can address root factors behind GRC (e.g., the pervasive theme Power in the present study) in an interpersonally-emotionally corrective way (Blazina, 2001; Brooks, 2010a; Pollack, 2005). In the present study there was no emergence of a pattern around experiencing GRC; the participants experienced negative emotions and appear to have used the best possible way available to them to manage their thoughts. Also, a focus on the "illogicalness" of male-gender cognitive distortions (Mahalik, 2005a, p. 224) might reinforce the male client's gender socialization around emotions: to cope by using reason alone (Scher, 2005).

Brooks (2010a) advocates a stepped-complexity-of-therapy approach to male psychological well-being in the form of Integrative Problem-Centred Therapy, moving from cognitive-behavioural interventions to more introspective ones (from more complex to less complex). Addressing an underlying fear of powerlessness - seen here and in previous literature (Adler, 2011; Blazina, 2001; Blazina & Watkins, 2000) - and the defense mechanisms and psychic structures that possibly protect against it (Vaillant, 1994; Verhaeghe, 2004) might constitute a more effective way of addressing possibly one of the most core elements of the experience of masculinity.

We have seen that independence, autonomy, self-reliance and self-efficacy are also vital to how masculinity is positively experienced, also in line with previous research (Good & Brooks, 2005; Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010; Levant & Richmond, 2007; Mahalik et. al, 2003; Mander, 2001). Counselling Psychologists could facilitate independence within the therapeutic relationship by encouraging self-agency (Stroshal et al., 2004), by challenging assumptions about help-seeking and independence (Pollack, 2005) and by avoiding discourses that dis-empower the male client and potentially perpetuate similarly disempowering relationships for them outside therapy (Verhaeghe, 2004). Autonomy within the therapeutic setting has been said to be better served by allowing the male client to 'own' the ideas driving change and to use the therapist in order to "silently perform [...] missing functions" of reflection (Pollack, 2005, p.210). Self-reliance could also be facilitated in a way that includes others and their needs (Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010), thus addressing defensive autonomy (Pollack, 2005) and the human dialectic of self-agency and relatedness needs (Muran, Safran, & Eubanks-Carter, 2010).

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Good qualitative research must instigate new research questions and expand our understanding of phenomena (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003).

Research biased towards middle-class, Caucasian, heterosexual males might be illustrating phenomena and measurements that indeed refer to individuals within these cultural and racial contexts. More qualitative research with culturally and sexually diverse masculinities might be needed in order to further illuminate thematic structures that can emerge from the experience of masculinity and that could possibly indicate which aspects of the experience may transcend certain contexts, and which may not. Samples sharing a different cultural heritage or alternative sexualities might help

researchers address the phenomenology of masculinity beyond the contextual factors of this study's sample.

The findings of the present study cannot be generalized to the general population due to the sample size characteristics (size, representativeness), however they can inspire new research questions pertaining to masculinity. It may be useful to further explore how men understand hegemonic masculinity in their everyday life (Connell, 1998) and whether the concept is psychologically salient for them (Pleck, 1995). It may also be of particular interest, in the context of hegemonic masculinity, to explore the relationship between men's experience of power (or powerlessness) and autonomy, responsibility and leadership or how these concepts may be subsumed under a narrative of competition (Good & Brooks, 2005; Smiler, 2004). Future studies in the field of Counselling Psychology could also focus on how the experience of powerlessness might be linked with anxiety and depression in men, and whether (and how) these may be linked with Gender Role Strain or Gender Role Conflict (O'Neil, 2008).

It might be useful to also consider for future qualitative studies a narrower range of ages for men, as this sample's age range spanned from 29 to 59. A narrower sample age range might allow for greater focus on the common historical context within which the experience of masculinity took place. Thematic structures around the development of masculinity could also be studied in a narrower sample that shares the same transitional context (for example, moving out of the parents' house, finding work, retirement).

In the present study very little data supported the emergence of themes pertaining to shame. Shame has been deemed a powerful emotion in the development of boys and men and a significant one to be addressed across various psychological therapies (Kingerlee, 2012; Krugman, 1995; Pittman, 1993; Osherson & Krugman, 1990). Future qualitative studies might provide useful insights into the experience of shame in relation

to masculinity and how it may be linked with other phenomena, like aggression (Jakupcak, Tull, & Roemer, 2005).

It might also be useful to explore further whether and how a wish for being 'superior' might motivate questioning and re-defining masculinity. Of particular interest would be to further explore how self-esteem and the perception of GRS and GRC are affected by this process of assimilating and accommodating the concept of masculinity.

#### SUMMARY

Following the interpretative phenomenological analysis of interview transcripts from men describing their experience of masculinity several thematic commonalities emerged and were subsequently presented in this study. Moreover, integration with previous research findings may have led to new perspectives on and research questions regarding the subject matter as approached within Counselling Psychology.

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## **Appendix 1 - REFLECTIVE EXTRACTS FROM INTERVIEWS AND ANALYSES**

### **Participant A (Alistair)**

#### *Post Interview:*

Although disagreeing with many of the points raised during the conversation, particularly around topics pertaining to evolution of the species, I felt that Alistair's closing statement depicted a highly emotive interaction: talking about the same things, like men (intellectual men), in a pub. I got the sense that Alistair participated in order to get his point across, and highly respects his own opinions around the subject matter - he really trusts his interpretation of the life events related to his masculinity (and masculinity in general). I really felt I could listen to him for some time as he gave a sense of assuredness of which I sometimes feel I could have more.

#### *Post Analysis:*

There were many points during which I felt "I could have asked more about X". After consulting with my supervisor, we concluded that such a feeling will always be the case during the analysis. I will be monitoring this reaction throughout this analysis as I am aware of my wish to know more from Alistair. This way I can be more aware of my interpretative process, and whether I draw inferences that may not be grounded on the data, but would instead constitute an attempt from me to have a "discussion" with the data in a way that I would have a discussion with Alistair beyond the scope of this research.

### **Participant B (Bruce)**

#### *Post Interview:*

I was really mindful not to impose on Bruce as he struggled sometimes to come up with something. I got the sense from his apologies that he might have perceived the interview as a performance, and himself as not performing. To that end I believe I was reassuring enough without imposing on him. Furthermore, I thought that if I reflected more on what he said in order to prompt more material, I would give him words he did not come up with in the first place, thus greatly influencing the material. With this, I struggle. I feel that I may have come across as cold, leaving him in awkward pauses. Reflecting a bit more on the interview however I cannot find myself not communicating empathic interest through non-verbal communication, as I usually do.

#### *Post Analysis:*

I realized that even when there is a sense that the material is thin, or brief, meaning found and grounded on the data can still enrich the research process. I get the sense that in some aspects Bruce might be what my supervisor termed a "negative" case - especially when it comes to feeling masculine. There seems to be a steady, continuous sense of being a man that runs counter to what recent literature suggests around the conditionality of masculinity. Bruce feels he is a man, and he is content with that. He differentiates it from being masculine, which I found very interesting.

### **Participant C (Carney)**

*Post Interview:*

Carney was hard to understand at times due to his accent but he got to the gist of his story very fast, very efficiently. Almost like a soldier, so to say - which incidentally is one of the main themes of his story. I admired the way Carney disclosed his most vulnerable side with the same acceptance as he shared the side of him for which he is most proud. Although the interview was shorter than I expected, I did not leave with a sense that something was missing, or left unanswered, at least with no more than the usual, maybe even less. And although due to my own cultural bias towards army men I would expect me to zone out when it came to stories about the army, in fact I did not, and I did not find his account motivating a part of me sceptical of army masculinity.

*Post Analysis:*

I am happy to find that Carney presents an account which does not fit nicely with my two previous analyses. I am happy to go where his narrative takes me and introduce differentiation. I was also surprised to see that the Army, as a theme, did not emerge as largely as I had suspected, but I instead interpreted it more easily along the lines of other, associated concepts, such as confusion, regression to a boy, and the like. I did however draw a common theme along other points, which honours the army thing: warrior masculinity. Although the name came to me from one of the books I read, I found that concept shouldn't be necessarily theory-driven (after all, the Warrior is an archetype, according to these theories: available to all). Retrospectively, I do not get as much emotional material as I would expect, but instead I got a slightly more detailed account of how a man surpasses intense emotion: manning up.

**Participant D (Donovan)**

*Post Interview:*

I was happy to hear Donovan talk mostly because I liked the way he talked about his thought process. I suspect this will come up in the themes as well, as he put it, he prioritizes being an intellectual. Although a big part of me can easily identify with Donovan on this aspect I feel that when I get to the analysis I will be able to distance myself enough to see what is beneath the thought processes, possibly because I have first-hand experienced the functions and secondary gains of being brilliant in a social context. Nevertheless, further identification from my part should be carefully monitored.

*During Analysis:*

I keep on coming up with themes, and there have been many points in the transcript during which I felt "there should be more here", as when talking about the roommate, or about his previous job. I think this could be the function of a rich account, to generate more question, and I am trying to figure out how this can be represented in my themes. "Being brilliant", I guess that could include the meaning of drawing the focus towards a genius - literally, shining with a brilliant light. And as much I can identify with this theme so I can distance myself from it, and see the anxiety that may lie behind it. Interestingly, what emerges as the reason for being brilliant for Donovan is something that I have not experienced as a man, and that draws me closer to the text than towards my own preconceptions.

## **Participant E (Eames)**

### *Post Interview:*

I strived with Eames to stir the discussion towards his own experienced rather than have an intellectual discussion about it. Luckily Eames was as open to disclosing vulnerable parts of himself as easily. I found the rapport as easily built as with my other participants and that was my early signal to adhere a bit more closer to the agenda should the conversation stir off to generalized sociological essay. I did get the sense that Eames wanted to warm-up and open-up and that he needed time to do so, and I think this was also captured towards the end when he said he would want his more vulnerable side to be as privileged as his masculine side.

### *During Analysis:*

Luckily, even the sociological parts were linked to personal experience, and theory became a symbol for the lifeworld and phenomenology of Eames's life experience. There is a lot of stuff about challenging masculinity and since my recent participant, Donovan, also opened up the topic, I am getting the sense that this might be another line of inquiry - how men challenge the very concept of being men, or at least, which other masculinities they are opposed to.

## **Participant F (Faris)**

### *Post Interview:*

Faris was very pleasant to talk with, unfortunately my cold did not help greatly with my accent. Nevertheless I found myself building rapport easily albeit I had the sense that we come from very different places and that I would have to compensate for that. In fact, I did, and I am wondering whether I might have imposed a bit on his narrative. I left with a sense of completion and that I had a frank, open discussion about his experience, albeit not very much open to the possibility of not feeling masculine. The defensiveness surrounding emotion and vulnerability was probably exhibited while in the interview: Faris did tell me about his masculine "closedness", and at the same time did not expand greatly on what happens (or what has happened in earlier times) when he felt vulnerable.

### *During Analysis:*

Faris's analysis is coming along greatly, I find myself moving in a very smooth rhythm so far and this has me wondering whether I am analyzing superficially. As always, I will have to go back to the text time and again, yet it is the 3rd time I do so and I am still finding the text very easy to code. It is actually possible that Faris's account is a solid, well structured one, maybe just because his thought process is a coherent one. Plain and simple! And although I cannot find as many experiential touchstones to identify with as with Donovan or Eames, I do get what Faris is communicating - he is compelling in his account. I find myself being curious when I do not identify with his experience and I go back again to it.

## **Participant G (Galen)**

*Post Interview:*

Galen's thoughts were compelling, and I had some difficulty keeping him close to the research question. I think my greatest struggle dealt with my ambivalence regarding the narrative: much of it focused on a sociological account of masculinity (exactly what I feared about Eames). I thought that if Galen kept going back to it, there was a good reason for us to be there. So during the interview I also focused on what he touched, and brought it closer to him - I tried to find links to his own personal experience, and how such a detached account could be more personal to him than just academics. We found that there was much stuff there, and he had no problem delving deeper into material that was emotional. Undoubtedly I will have to go back to other analyses and revisit themes that have emerged in a similar fashion - challenging masculinity, I imagine - but I will have to wait before jumping into "predictions".

*During Analysis:*

Many themes emerged around challenging masculinity, and similarly to "aggression and violence", that led me to earlier participants in order to check whether they talked about the same thing, in a different, or in a more covert, fashion. I am finding yet again that one participant's theme can be another's hidden meaning. At the same time, as it was with Galen's transcript, I try not to see faces in clouds (especially faces of grand theorists), but I instead go back to the picture that is painted for me.

Appendix 2 - POSTER AND FLYER

**Recruiting **men** as research participants for a study at**

**City University London.**

Masculinity has been a very important and controversial issue for men and we are interested in hearing your personal experience regarding the matter.

You will have a friendly and safe environment to enlighten us with your experience of growing up as a man: the possible challenges you have faced, the important lessons you learned, cherished and memorable moments, the people you have met, your unique journey through life in general!

**We firmly believe that your experience is invaluable, and we would be honoured if you would share it with us!**

If you are male, between the ages 18 and 60 consider participating in a 60-minute interview in an academic environment in Angel.

This is part of a doctoral thesis in Counselling Psychology. Your thoughts would greatly help enrich our understanding of how masculinity affects our lives as men.

Contact the researcher at:



Contact the academic supervisor at:



## **Appendix 3 - INFORMATION AND DEBRIEFING FORMS**

### **INFORMATION REGARDING THE STUDY**

Dear participant,

Thank you in advance for taking the time to read this, as well as for the time volunteered by you in order to participate.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to gather interview data regarding the experience of men currently residing in the UK of their masculinity. Specifically, the focus of the study is how participants consider themselves as men and how they have experienced masculinity throughout their lives.

#### **THE INTERVIEW**

You will be required to participate in a 60-minute interview in a safe, academic environment near the Angel tube station, at City University London. The interviewer will ask you a set of open-ended questions, to which there is no right or wrong answer – just your own personal experience. The interview will be recorded in audio format.

#### **SAFEGUARDING.**

If at any point you feel distressed or cannot carry on with the interview, feel free to ask to leave. This will not penalize you in any way. You will not be asked to provide a rationale for such a decision.

No severely adverse effects are expected from participating in this study. However, speaking about a potentially sensitive matter, which is one's own sense of masculinity, might bring about feelings of anxiety, vulnerability, distress, or distressful memories. If

you become distressed during the interview brief psychological support from the interviewer will be provided. Feel also free to contact the following mental health services should you require additional psychological support:

MIND - 020 8519 2122

Samaritans - 08457 90 90 90

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information you provide will be confidential and no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. Any records and details kept in written or audio form will be safeguarded and password protected to ensure data security and thus, confidentiality. Furthermore, mentions of names, brands and locations will be hidden, changed, and silenced out of recordings to ensure that no information will link your person with the recording.

Feel free to ask any questions/clarifications at any point before or after the interview.

**Interviewer/Researcher: Panagiotis Bouzianis,**

**Email:** [REDACTED]

**Academic supervisor: Dr. Susan Strauss**

**Email:** [REDACTED]

## DEBRIEFING

Dear participant,

Thank you for your time and co-operation with which you helped make this study more valuable.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study aims at exploring the experience of masculinity for men currently residing in the UK and how has it affected their lives. In order for research to produce a deeper understanding for phenomena such as masculinity, in-depth interviews are conducted, like this one, and participants' accounts of their experience are very valuable for the development of psychological theories surrounding men's mental health and development.

### **SAFEGUARDING**

No severely adverse effects are expected from participating in this study. However, speaking about a potentially sensitive matter, which is one's own sense of masculinity and self, might bring about feelings of anxiety, vulnerability, distress, or distressful memories. If you have become distressed during the interview or are feeling so at the moment, do not hesitate to talk to the interviewer about this.

Feel also free to contact the following mental health services should you require additional psychological support later:

MIND - 020 8519 2122, Samaritans - 08457 90 90 90

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information you provided will be confidential and no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. Any records and details kept in written or audio form will be safeguarded and password protected to ensure data security and thus, confidentiality. Furthermore, mentions of names, brands and locations will be hidden, changed, and silenced out of recordings to ensure that no information will link your person with the recording.

Feel free to ask any questions/clarifications following the interview.

**Interviewer/Researcher: Panagiotis Bouzianis**

**Tel.:** [REDACTED]

**Email:** [REDACTED]

**Academic supervisor: Dr. Susan Strauss**

**Email:** [REDACTED]

## Appendix 4 - INFORMED CONSENT FORM

### Informed Consent Form

Project Title: Men's Experience of Masculinity in the UK

I agree to take part in the above City University London research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I may keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:

- be interviewed by the researcher and allow the interview to be audio-taped

#### Data Protection

This information will be held and processed for transcription, and analysis by the researcher.

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. The identifiable data will not be shared with any other organization.

I agree for the researcher to record and process this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in this statement and my consent is conditional on complying with the Data Protection Act 1998.

#### Withdrawal from study

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project up to one week after my interview without being penalized or disadvantaged in any way.

Participant's Name: .....

Participant's Signature: .....Date: .....

**Interviewer/Researcher: Panagiotis Bouzianis** Email: [REDACTED]

**Academic supervisor: Dr. Susan Strauss** Email: [REDACTED]

**Appendix 5 - DEMOGRAPHICS FORM**

# Demographics Form

We would like to know more about your situation at the moment of taking the interview. Please answer the questions below and feel free to ask for clarifications from the researcher. If you do not want to answer a question for any reason feel free to leave it blank.

In accordance to the confidentiality ethic that binds this research, all data in this form are to be treated equally as confidential. Please refer to the information sheet for more on Confidentiality.

1. **Age:**
  
2. **Ethnicity:**
  
3. **Nationality:**
  
4. **Religion/Faith:**
  
5. **Sexual Orientation:**
  
6. **Education - highest level of education:**
  
  
7. **Current or recent (last 3 years) occupation or employment status:**

## Appendix 6 - INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

### PART I – PERSONAL MASCULINITY

I am interested in hearing about your experience regarding masculinity and what it means to you to be a man.

1. What does “masculinity” mean to you?
  - a. *How would you define a man based on your experience?*
  - b. *I would like to know your view on the ideal man.*
2. How is it for you to feel like a man?
  - a. *What would it take for you to feel like a man?*
  - b. *Do you remember any event in your life related to that?*
3. How is your life as a man different from being a woman, or a boy?
4. How is your way of being a man affecting your life?
5. Would there be any reason or circumstances for you not to feel like a man?
  - a. *How would you feel in this case? How would you respond to those feelings?*
  - b. *Do you remember any event in your life related to that?*
6. I am wondering how significant it is for you to be a man.
  - a. *Do you remember an event where being a man had an impact?*
  - b. *How did you feel about this?*
7. You mentioned challenges and struggles in your life as a man. I am wondering how do you cope with situations like these?
  - a. *What do you do? Whom do you turn to?*
  - b. *How does it feel coping as such?*

[How is the participant finding the interview so far?] (cont'd)

## PART II – ENVIRONMENT AND LIFE EVENTS REGARDING MASCULINITY

8. Has your view on masculinity changed throughout your life, and how?
9. Can you remember an important event that had to do with your masculinity?
  - a. *What was the incident?*
  - b. *How did you feel or react?*
10. Were there any important people in your life to discuss what “being a man” means?
  - a. *Friends, parents, relatives, partners, professionals, teachers, tutors?*
  - b. *Was there any instance where you discussed things related to being a man?*
  - c. *Is there anything memorable about these people in the way they discussed “manhood” with you? What was it?*
  - d. *Do you remember anyone else?*
11. How do you find yourself, as a man, relating to other people?
  - e. *What is the best thing it can happen? What is the worst thing it can happen?*
  - f. *Do you remember any event with your friends where being a man was important? What was the event?*
  - g. *Have you ever discussed the issues we have discussed so far with anyone else? What was the most significant thing you remember about this?*
12. What views have other people had (in your life or in general) on manhood?
  - h. *How do you feel about this?*

## **Appendix 7- INTERVIEW SCHEDULE WITHOUT PROMPT QUESTIONS**

### **PART I – PERSONAL MASCULINITY**

1. What does “masculinity” mean to you?
2. How is it for you to feel like a man?
3. How is your life as a man different from being a woman, or a boy?
4. How is your way of being a man affecting your life?
5. Would there be any reason or circumstances for you not to feel like a man?
6. I am wondering how significant it is for you to be a man.
7. You mentioned challenges and struggles in your life as a man. I am wondering how do you cope with situations like these.

### **PART II – ENVIRONMENT AND LIFE EVENTS REGARDING MASCULINITY**

8. Has your view on masculinity changed throughout your life, and how?
9. Can you remember an important event that had to do with your masculinity?
10. Were there any important people in your life to discuss what “being a man” means?
11. How do you find yourself, as a man, relating to other people?
12. What views have other people had (in your life or in general) on manhood?

## Appendix 8 - CITY UNIVERSITY ETHICS RELEASE FORM

### Ethics Release Form for Student Research Projects

All students planning to undertake any research activity in the School of Arts and Social Sciences are required to complete this Ethics Release Form and to submit it to their Research Supervisor, **together with their research proposal clearly stating aims and methodology**, prior to commencing their research work. If you are proposing multiple studies within your research project, you are required to submit a separate ethical release form for each study.

This form should be completed in the context of the following information:

- An understanding of ethical considerations is central to planning and conducting research.
- Approval to carry out research by the Department or the Schools does not exempt you from Ethics Committee approval from institutions within which you may be planning to conduct the research, e.g.: Hospitals, NHS Trusts, HM Prisons Service, etc.
- The published ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society (2009) Guidelines for minimum standards of ethical approval in psychological research (BPS: Leicester) should be referred to when planning your research.
- **Students are not permitted to begin their research work until approval has been received and this form has been signed by Research Supervisor and the Department's Ethics Representative.**

#### Section A: To be completed by the student

Please indicate the degree that the proposed research project pertains to:

BSc          M.Phil          M.Sc          D.Psych    X    n/a

Please answer all of the following questions, circling yes or no where appropriate:

1. Title of project

Men's Experience of Masculinity in the UK

2. Name of student researcher (please include contact address and telephone number)

[REDACTED]

3. Name of research supervisor

Dr. Susan Strauss

4. Is a research proposal appended to this ethics release form? Yes No

5. Does the research involve the use of human subjects/participants? Yes No

If yes,

a. Approximately how many are planned to be involved?

10

b. How will you recruit them?

Posting flyers around busy Tube stations in central London (appended in Research Proposal).

c. What are your recruitment criteria?  
(Please append your recruitment material/advertisement/flyer)

Males that speak fluent English and that are NOT currently suffering from severe distress that would interfere with the interview process are considered suitable candidates for the study. No consideration will be given for minors (less than 18 years of age) as well as males over 60 years old.

d. Will the research involve the participation of minors (under 18 years of age) or vulnerable adults or those unable to give informed consent? Yes No

d1. If yes, will signed parental/carer consent be obtained? Yes No

d2. If yes, has a CRB check been obtained? Yes No  
(Please append a copy of your CRB check)

6. What will be required of each subject/participant (e.g. time commitment, task/activity)? (If psychometric instruments are to be employed, please state who will be supervising their use and their relevant qualification).

Participants will be interviewed in a City University London-provided room, in Angel, for 60 minutes. The room will be situated in any of the buildings around Northampton square, depending on availability and administration discretion.

7. Is there any risk of physical or psychological harm to the subjects/participants? Yes No

If yes,

a. Please detail the possible harm?

Participants may become distressed as they describe the most personal aspects of their lives and may feel distress by association with unpleasant memories and thoughts as well as by feeling judged. Furthermore, exclusion from the study in the recruitment phase might instigate feelings of rejection. At any rate, the harm from the study will not be more than minimal.

b. How can this be justified?

Interview data will provide valuable information on how men perceive their masculinity and the effects it has on their lives. With these data, research on masculinity will be greatly enriched as we will become more informed on possible sources of daily and chronic distress men of the participant group experience and thus gain understanding on possible ways to manage and treat such distress.

c. What precautions are you taking to address the risks posed?

As to the participant selection process, any distress caused by rejection to participate will be handled by making clear to the participants that rejection to participation would be a matter of the participant quota being filled. If a participant is deemed too distressed or not fluent enough to participate extra care will be taken to clarify that rejection to participation is a protective measure for their well-being.

Should participants become overtly distressed or report feeling as such during or shortly after the interview, the researcher will make sure the participants leave the interview space not in distress.

Furthermore, participants will be offered with contact details of mental health services (ie, Mind) in case they feel the need to seek counselling following the interview.

Finally, if the participant becomes physically unwell for reasons not associated with the research the researcher will contact the City University's front desk, security and/or nurse.

8. Will all subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers receive an information sheet describing the aims, procedure and possible risks of the research, as well as providing researcher and supervisor contact details?

Yes No

*(Please append the information sheet which should be written in terms which are accessible to your subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers)*

9. Will any person's treatment/care be in any way be compromised if they choose not to participate in the research?

Yes No

10. Will all subjects/participants be required to sign a consent form, stating that they fully understand the purpose, procedure and possible risks of the research?

Yes No

If no, please justify

If yes please append the informed consent form which should be written in terms which are accessible to your subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers)

11. What records will you be keeping of your subjects/participants? (e.g. research notes, computer records, tape/video recordings)?

Participant details will be kept in a word file. Interview data will be in audio format. The interviews will be recorded with a digital audio recording device and then transferred to a laptop computer, to be exported as audio files (.mp3). Written transcripts of the audio data will be produced on the same storage device in a word file format, and so will various notes produced from analysis of said transcripts.

12. What provision will there be for the safe-keeping of these records?

The laptop computer used for storage of the participant and interview data (audio and transcripts) will be isolated from all networks to ensure privacy and confidentiality of the data (no risk of hacking).

Furthermore, the audio files of the recorded interviews will be secured in file compressed format (.zip or .rar file format), access to which will require a password known only to the researcher.

Written transcripts of the audio data, participant details and notes from the analysis will be similarly secured with a password (no file compression will be needed), also only known to the researcher.

No other person will have access to the password-protected storage device.

13. What will happen to the records at the end of the project?

All data will be preserved for purposes of peer reviewing and auditing for 5 years after the completion and delivery of the thesis associated with the study.

14. How will you protect the anonymity of the subjects/participants?

Should the audio files of the recorded interviews be requested by peers or the supervisor, they will be edited first to make sure that all mentioned names, locations and other information that could link a particular individual to the file cannot be heard (silences or "beeps" will be inserted to the audio file where appropriate).

To ensure participant anonymity there will be slight alterations to the information given in the transcripts, without rendering the data invalid or unreliable (ie, a "car company" can be changed into a "sportswear company" as can a distant relative's gender, if it is deemed irrelevant information). Pseudonyms will be given to individual names and notations will replace brands, company names and locations.

Audio file names will not be named after the participants' real names, but will be given codenames instead, and the correspondence between names-codenames will be known only by the researcher.

15. What provision for post research de-brief or psychological support will be available should subjects/participants require?

Should participants feel distressed promptly after the interview, or the follow up meeting, the researcher will provide temporary support and emotional containment for a short duration until they return to a more stable state of mind. Moreover, they will be offered contact details of psychological practitioners and counselling services (Mind, Samaritans) which will bear no affiliation with the researcher.

(Please append any de-brief information sheets or resource lists detailing possible support options)

If you have circled an item in underlined bold print or wish to provide additional details of the research please provide further explanation here:

Signature of student researcher



Date

03/05/13

**CHECKLIST:** the following forms should be appended unless justified otherwise

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| Research Proposal    | X |
| Recruitment Material | X |
| Information Sheet    | X |
| Consent Form         | X |
| De-brief Information | X |

**Section B: Risks to the Researcher**

1. Is there any risk of physical or psychological harm to yourself?      Yes      No  
If yes,

a. Please detail possible harm?

Candidates for the study might misuse or abuse the contact details of the researcher disclosed in the advertising flyers (also known as spam, prank calls, harassment) for purposes unrelated to study participation.

Participants may become distressed during the interview or the follow-up meeting. The researcher/interviewer might become the target for acting out a perceived threat of their masculinity, and thus bear the (minimal) risk of being berated. The interview schedule of this study is not constructed to be provocative or insulting, and thus the aforementioned risks are deemed low, but might be nevertheless present.

b. How can this be justified?

Interview data will provide valuable information on how men perceive their masculinity and the standards they may have imposed on themselves for being "men enough". With these data, research on masculinity will be greatly enriched as we will become more informed regarding possible sources of daily and chronic distress men of the participant group experience and thus gain understanding of possible ways to manage and treat such distress.

The risk of the researcher being harassed remotely in the recruitment phase is far outweighed by the possibility of recruiting participants that would further the study of an important psychological experience, especially after precautions have been taken. For the same reason, the risk of the researcher being insulted is far outweighed by the possible scientific gains of the study.

c. What precautions are to be taken to address the risks posed?

The contact details provided for recruitment will be created exclusively for the purposes of the recruitment/ study, rather than be the researcher's own personal/professional contact details.

A screening procedure will take place for each call received from participation candidates. Should the person's speech be unintelligible or incoherent for an extended period of time they will not be considered for the study.

The City University environment is a safe and predictable one for interviews, for both participant and interviewer. City University campus's front desk will be informed for the researcher's presence in the building, and in which particular room the interview will take place.

To avoid physical harm by the participants, the researcher will notify a colleague via silent text messaging while the participant completes the consent forms, and notify them about their safety. Should the text notify of safety concerns, the colleague will call the City University's front desk and inform them of the issue.

**Section C: To be completed by the research supervisor**

*(Please pay particular attention to any suggested research activity involving minors or vulnerable adults. Approval requires a currently valid CRB check to be appended to this form. If in any doubt, please refer to the Research Committee.)*

Please mark the appropriate box below:

Ethical approval granted ✓

Refer to the Department's Research and Ethics Committee

Refer to the School's Research and Ethics Committee

Signature [redacted] ..... Date 3 May 2013

**Section D: To be completed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Departmental staff member**

*(Please read this ethics release form fully and pay particular attention to any answers on the form where underlined bold items have been circled and any relevant appendices.)*

I agree with the decision of the research supervisor as indicated above

Signature [redacted] ..... Date 9/5/13

**Appendix 9 - MASTER THEME TABLE WITH QUOTE LINE NUMBERS**

Being masculine	Alistair	Bruce	Carney	Donovan	Eames	Faris	Galen
<b>Power</b>	57-60, 76-82, 85-92, 203-209, 199-202, 562-571	300-304		304-311, 324-330, 333-334, 341-346, 362-367, 404-408	47-50, 63-67, 182-192, 236-242, 242-248, 496-500, 505-509, 571-578, 674-678	332-338	625-637, 773-778, 998-1007
<b>Leadership</b>	5-8, 22, 54-57, 82-83, 203-209, 350-359, 425-432	109-113, 254-258	60-67, 92-96		135-140	28-33, 721-734, 741-745	363-370
<b>Independence and Autonomy</b>	98-103, 143-148, 154-155, 418-420, 597-600		466-472, 592-597	381-388, 390-391, 516-521	251-263, 906-919, 921-925	28-33, 721-734, 741-745, 784-790	376-380, 802-807, 822-828
<b>Action Hero</b>	126-136, 231-237, 343-350	109-117	28-36, 44-53, 89-92, 97-104, 177-181, 274-283, 717-722	221-225, 391-398, 410-417, 526-539, 708-710	215-226, 281-289, 752-759, 921-928	166-170, 425-434, 441-448, 445-452, 451-458, 464-474, 474-483	571-580, 685-694, 717-730, 728-738, 738-741, 746-754, 754-761
<b>Good Man</b>	54-56, 67-71, 124-130, 585-589, 700-703	389-395, 634-642	60-67, 115-127, 389-394	78-82, 96-109, 198-204, 202-209, 218-224, 265-273, 286-294, 555-559		146-149, 149-157, 369-377, 377-381, 464-465, 496-504, 518-524, 545-552, 661-664, 664-670, 827-835	45-51, 53-61, 778-787, 813-821
<b>Masculinity through the body</b>	85-91, 370-374, 376-384, 482-484	191-195	28-36, 44-53, 97-100, 177-181, 423-429, 432-439	146-153, 152-158	162-163, 251-263, 267-277, 473-479, 858-862	129-132, 162-165, 166-170, 342-343, 348-355, 425-430	373-380, 390-400, 402-405, 423-431, 571-580, 580-593, 625-637, 738-754
<b>Work as significant life aspect</b>	343-350, 413-415	178-186, 191-195, 309-316	254-256	52-56, 221-225	169-175, 512-517	132-135	
<b>The Self - Towards superiority</b>	<b>Alistair</b>	<b>Bruce</b>	<b>Carney</b>	<b>Donovan</b>	<b>Eames</b>	<b>Faris</b>	<b>Galen</b>
<b>Young Self as Inferior</b>	199-200, 241-245		423-429	404-408	858-862		
<b>The Source of Masculinity</b>	76-82, 38-41, 214-220, 374-379, 381-389	77-85, 90-96, 117-121, 130-133, 135-138, 321-328, 332-343	44-53, 60-67, 79-89, 92-96, 97-104, 146-149, 177-181, 201-205, 241-245, 245-253, 423-434, 432-439, 443-450, 463-467, 643-	153-161, 245-249, 304-311, 324-326, 333-338, 353-359, 404-408, 421-431, 795-806	182-192, 215-226, 473-479, 490-495, 906-919, 957-963, 963-969	28-33, 70-77, 114-119, 124-129, 129-132, 132-135, 162-170, 171-176	323-328, 342-345, 352-360, 373-376, 390-401, 529-535, 535-546, 589-593, 625-637, 1349-1355

			647, 677-685				
<b>Malleable Masculinity</b>	231-237, 425-433	243-252	221-225, 368-380,	52-55, 249-254, 286-294, 773-779	354-359, 430-439, 444-452, 873-884, 921-925, 969-979		
<b>Being an intellectual</b>	9, 180-184, 214-220, 291-294, 543-555, 572-577, 609-611, 650-653, 669-672, 686-690, 690-697, 704-705			20-27, 133-143, 184-187, 333-338, 402-406, 410-417, 431-438, 697-706	5-10, 16-18, 363-368, 476-479, 936-941		10-18, 298-305, 305-309, 668-678, 680-682
<b>Self vs. The world</b>	217-220, 256-262		74-79, 473-477	535-537	281 -284, 567-571, 598-606, 609-616	504-516, 524-528, 557-565, 889-894, 901-902	561-571, 571-580, 580-593, 599-611, 608-624, 625-637, 649-660, 663-668, 764-773, 773-778
<b>The Self as Superior and Privileged</b>	76-82, 256-262, 266-270, 413-415, 614-621, 621-631, 640	241-250, 254-258		713-716, 784-792	623-629, 770-775, 880-891, 936-941, 943-952	63-68, 70-77, 644-650, 721-731, 790-793, 812-815	345-352, 668-678, 680-682, 872-879, 895-907, 908-917, 972-979, 979-986
<b>What is masculinity</b>	<b>Alistair</b>	<b>Bruce</b>	<b>Carney</b>	<b>Donovan</b>	<b>Eames</b>	<b>Faris</b>	<b>Galen</b>
<b>Verbalizing masculinity</b>	104-108, 525-537	148-150, 163-165, 187-190, 352-362, 569-575, 617-618	239-241, 342-346, 495-500, 754-758	542-545	226-229, 466-473, 522-524		475-487
<b>Nature and Nature</b>	300-304, 655-664, 674-680, 669-672	7-13, 77-85, 144-148, 156-163, 169-178, 332-343, 436-443, 473-479		8-12	91-96, 102-104, 114-118, 120-124, 205-209, 379-381, 430-439, 629-632, 643-652, 776-788	405-409, 409-415, 420-422, 632-640	10-18, 319-321, 373-376, 931-937, 940-948, 1336-1340

Questioning Masculinity		101-108, 201-205, 276-284	11-15, 342-346, 698-702, 705-712	12-18, 27-31, 84-90, 396-308, 440-443, 516-521, 736-740, 761-764, 784-792	37-45, 76-81, 144-146, 153-157, 169-175, 207-214, 251-253, 354-359, 401-408, 413-421, 421-430, 623-629, 629-632, 770-775, 724-737	63-68, 70-76, 644-650, 812-815	38-42, 62-71, 74-81, 224-233, 241-248, 433-437, 449-456, 668-678, 828-835, 1149-1153, 1308-1316, 1324-1333, 1333-1336, 1345-1350, 1349-1355
The emotional world	Alistair	Bruce	Carney	Donovan	Eames	Faris	Galen
Emotional Strength	381-389	378-385, 389-395, 397-401	127-136	410-417, 521-523, 666-676	609-616	114-119, 231-235, 245-250, 295-302, 651-661, 875-880	124-129, 224-233
Detachment and Perspective Shift	401-402		127-136, 321-332, 592-593	63-67	588-591, 616-620, 969-979	241-244, 325-332, 332-338, 342-346	209-217
Help-Seeking	143-148		292-303	328-331, 341-346, 381-388		889-894, 897-899, 901-902, 904-905	137-140, 160-167, 179-187
Other Men	Alistair	Bruce	Carney	Donovan	Eames	Faris	Galen
Father as point of reference for masculinity		7-13, 63-68, 473-479	374-378, 397-405	20-27, 617-629, 638-646, 646-655	667-673, 678-687, 687-694	42-49, 50-58, 532-539, 623-627	1258-1276, 1276-1290
The male group	431, 440-443	487-493, 558-569, 589-595	53-58, 191-196, 669-677		770-775, 793-799	790-793, 795-800	86-93, 1061-1067, 1069-1074, 1133-1148, 1163-1175
Idealized Men				36-41, 45-52	444-452, 894-902	106-113	738-741, 746-754
Homosexuality	426-429, 443-446, 441-451, 532-537	211-217, 218-224, 352-362	554-564, 564-572	485-490, 490-495	698-710, 711-716, 705-710, 731-741		1340-1345, 1349-1355
The Other Gender	Alistair	Bruce	Carney	Donovan	Eames	Faris	Galen
The Power of the Female	492-503	261-265, 269-274	677-685	168-178, 304-311, 563-569, 604-608, 795-802	26-31, 114-119, 816-825, 830-842		1025-1031
Partners - Negotiating masculinity with partners	54-57, 584-588, 585-595		635-643, 677-685	795-802		715-720, 752-756	99-114, 169-173, 236-245, 250-263, 264-268, 1100-1104, 1108-1116, 1113-1122, 1210-1221, 1222-1240

Being different from women	483-487	187-190	127-136, 241-245, 245-253, 254-256	187-189, 353-359, 713-716	236-242, 524-529	382-386, 395-400, 409-413	845-856, 972-979
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**Appendix 10 - EMERGENT THEMES BELONGING TO MULTIPLE CONSTITUENT THEMES**

Young self as weaker	199-200	A	Young Self as Inferior	
Limited perspective when young	241-245	A	Young Self as Inferior	
Young self as weak	423-429	C	Young Self as Inferior	The inadequate body
Young self as powerless	404-408	D	Young Self as Inferior	Power
Compensating for body limitation	858-862	E	Young Self as Inferior	The inadequate body
Self-initiation into masculinity	231-237	A	Inventing masculinity	Overcoming challenges
Reality testing masculinity	221-225	C	Inventing masculinity	Adaptive masculinity
Masculinity shaped as contrast to father	368-380	C	Inventing masculinity	
Masculinity shaped as contrast to father	389-394	C	Inventing masculinity	Doing the right thing
Need to reinvent the self	52-55	D	Inventing masculinity	
Self-defined masculinity	249-254	D	Inventing masculinity	Adaptive masculinity
Defining manliness through own principles	286-294	D	Inventing masculinity	Doing the right thing
Compensating with acquired masculinity	873-884	E	Inventing masculinity	
Opportunity to prove self	921-925	E	Inventing masculinity	Masculinity as an answer
Self as alpha male	425-433	A	Adaptive masculinity	
Adapting to male-heavy environment	243-252	B	Adaptive masculinity	
Reality testing masculinity	221-225	C	Adaptive masculinity	Inventing masculinity
Self-defined masculinity	249-254	D	Adaptive masculinity	Inventing masculinity
Gendered emotions/behaviours	354-359	E	Adaptive masculinity	Challenging own masculinity
Idealized strong man	444-452	E	Adaptive masculinity	Idealized Men
Contextually defined/adaptive masculinity	430-439	E	Adaptive masculinity	Masculinity as environmental influence
Overcoming masculine emotional restriction	969-979	E	Adaptive masculinity	Detachment/ Change of Perspective

## Appendix 11- REFLECTIVE NOTES ON QUALITY CRITERIA

(Smith et. al, 2009; Yardley, L., 2000; 2008)

### Sensitivity to context

*relevant theoretical and empirical literature*

#### Vertical generalization (Johnson, 1997)

I have to bring in masculinity literature. First thing that comes to mind is psychoanalysis. Almost no empirical data there, yet there are connections with attachment theories and some common ground with social learning of gender.

I am also aware that the literature has to link back to counselling psychology, yet I feel that a fuller picture might emerge if I engage with sociological, etho-biological and anthropological literature. Sociological literature has a wealth of masculinity research; etho-biological perspectives, though, might take me to paths I cannot afford to cross due to time and word count constraints.

I am having some thoughts regarding linking the data to the literature reviewed. First of all, I have to bring in new literature to account for topics and concepts not originally anticipated to emerge. Second, I am concerned that the data sometimes strongly point towards the hegemonic masculinity model, which might mean that I am most probably fitting the data to the theory. Am I allowed to do this? Isn't this whole section supposed to be like this?

Also, some of the data seem to perfectly align with theoretical, rather than empirical, knowledge, such as Pittman's and Bly's talking about masculine archetypes. I believe this might be fine, especially if I care to provide alternative links of the same data to other literature. Important to also highlight apparent contradictions between

data/theory, an attempt at explaining why that might have happened (contextual factors)

Highlight and query common-sense concepts and assumptions

I noticed that there are two levels of common sense concepts for masculinity: that masculinity has inherent, fixed traits and that many masculinity discourses are based on oppressing the female. There is no fixed common sense, at least in my world, so I feel I have to challenge both ends of the spectrum traditional/liberal (or traditional/feminist).

An assumption of mine that also aligned with Pleck's adherence to masculinity standards perspective was Bruce. Bruce acknowledged the existence of standards, yet he says he can never feel unlike a man. How can this be? If masculinity is conditional, the conditions are theoretically possible to violate, and thus not be a man. Yet Bruce states that he feels like a man, but not necessarily masculine. What might be a good idea to highlight is that masculinity criteria might also be viewed as standards for feeling MORE masculine, rather than minimally masculine – or JUST a man. *Feeling like a man might be a tiered gender identity: Tier 1 might be gender constancy (look for sources again) and Tier 2 might be the ideal male gender identity.*

Grounding on the intellectual history and categories applied to the topic

The literature is much more extensive than I anticipated. Although I did not delve much in feminist theory or social cognitive approaches, I have the sense that the major concepts represented in these schools of thoughts were briefly touched upon (power relations, oppression, vicarious and social learning). I do have to account for the word count as well...

*socio-cultural setting*

awareness of normative, ideological, historical, linguistic and socioeconomic influences of participant and researcher (Yardley, 2000) - awareness of interaction difficulties (Smith et al., 2009)

With the exception of two participants, everyone else seems to have come from a middle-class setting, including me (with some variability – not all grew up with same means). I wonder how this could affect adherence to norms and norms themselves, education opportunities. The latter may be reflected in the involvement of a lot of evolutionary science and sociological observations in talking about masculinity. *The men seem to assert their definition based on their intellect/education and might probably define masculinity around the concept of being smart... whatever that may entail.*

A difference between my context and the men's context might also account for differences in how we perceive masculinity. It might not be the case that describing masculinity as traits or as a construct (depending on the participant) is a derivative of essentialist or feminist thinking, respectively. It might be the case that, since these men grew up mostly as loners in an individualistic society, that masculinity has to be in the forms of traits and/or a problematic construct. These men would either want to keep masculinity in them (so, also thus explain masculinity in terms of evolutionary biology) or, if masculinity has been a problem for them, dismiss it as less real (cultural instead of biological). In my context, both ends of the spectrum have been considered, but most importantly, I am the one posing the questions and having some freedom in not choosing what to believe. It is as if sometimes, during the analysis, I have the luxury of not being a participant, of not having to worry – within that space – on whether masculinity is something fixed within us or not.

The older participants seem to be surer of a gender divide. It might be the case that they are, as Alistair said, "old-school". Cultural standards have changed, yet they grew

up and retained an intuitive sense (which might be hard to explain, or too inflexible to negotiate) of how men were back then. Masculinity traits might be the primary framework for them, instead of social processes. They also seem to fit the “self-made-man” narrative and maybe that might serve as a basis for comparison with other men, and for a philosophy of life: you got to earn your place in the world, nobody will give you stuff for free. Although I respect that, I am aware that my hard work was based on my parent’s money – I am from a different paradigm. If I am to bracket my own reactions and feelings to this narrative (frequently used by older men back home to reinforce their own masculine capital against us) I have to be very attentive to how my participants understand, perceive and interpret their masculinity or masculinity on the whole, within the context of that narrative. Or maybe, there is no such narrative or theme: maybe I am imposing this narrative myself to understand these men.

Our society is also individualistic (at least, the Western part shared between the cultures of my participants). Striving for independence and autonomy should not be taken for granted, as the default way of being. If it emerges, it would have to be treated as any other theme, not as a base upon which other themes are constructed.

I also noticed two blind spots: Eames mentioned something about circumcision and dismissed it as probably unimportant. I followed his example instead of following through, possibly because he did not want to talk about it, and I did not know how to talk about it. I don’t have such an experience, and I have associated that with religion, a topic from which I dissociated at the time. That brings me to my second blind spot: religion. There is too little religion in the interviews. Alistair takes an atheist stance, which I share, so I silently agreed with the little that he said. Other than that, no one else said anything about religion. Although I believe that this might be a characteristic of the phenomenon as shared between the participants, that masculinity may be not directly linked with religiosity or faith for these men, I am wondering now whether the questions themselves did not allow for faith to come into the discussion.

## function of communication

The silences, pauses, fillers and “dunnos” of Bruce were a challenge for me during the interview. I felt the need to jump in and prompt, or maybe suggest something, but thought it would be better to let him try and verbalize his thoughts – I was critical of my need to “rescue” him. However, if I would do it again, I would comment on the silences and pauses and taken it from there: “why do you think you’re not being [X=what he said, e.g. clear]”. Nevertheless I thought it was a good move to reassure him that he is doing great and counter the (possible) sense that he is under examination, or that he was expected to formulate clever or complex arguments.

On the other hand, Galen seemed to have a lot to share both on the personal and on the “general education” side. I got the feeling I was being taken away from the agenda and that is why I kept coming back after a point. I got the sense he is in major disagreement with the concept, something that will sure reflect on the themes, yet I also get the sense that his style tried to communicate an assertion of an intelligent, intellectual, sophisticated masculinity. Donovan may have attempted the same thing but closer to what qualitative interviewers have written before, through self-deprecation.

Smith et al. (2009) also highlight interview skills of putting participants at ease and acknowledging difficulties in communication as an important part of Yardley's (2000) sensitivity to (the interactional) context criterion. Interviews were mostly conducted in a neutral environment that might have inspired trust in me as a neutral, non-biased researcher (but could also reinforce the Master discourse - see below). When participants were interviewed in their own homes they might have felt more at ease to express vulnerability, but for that I cannot be sure. Sample size and a plethora of other factors have to be examined in order to safely conclude that this is the case. However, I can reflect on the fact that entering another person's home might have made me feel more grateful for their opening up and allowing me to enter their world, yet no more

grateful than for the other participants - in the end, appreciation of my participant's lifeworld was built by immersing myself in the data themselves.

*participant's perspectives & ethical issues*

Involve participant in the process, express opinions

Priority to be given to personal experience.

For Discussion: Have the participants potentially **experienced** the theoretical concepts I am linking to? Linking participants and their quotes to particulars of theory.

Participants were prompted often to iterate their own perceptions and experience if the conversation seemed to be too theoretical.

anonymity, confidentiality

Names and locations have been masked to prevent identification of the participants.

acknowledge power imbalance

The premise alone of a man coming in to study the participants' experience of masculinity might already be setting the stage for participants to form their own agenda. This may have come in various forms. I am thinking one in particular: demonstrating opinions or experiences that might have been emasculating for them, or that can be characterized as less than masculine. Expressing doubt as to the very concept or their own manliness might be communicating a wish to be accepted as men by the researcher as well -what Lacan termed the "Master discourse". Even the physical context - meeting in a university setting - might reinforce this discourse.

The people referring the participants in the first place might have set the stage for an agenda to take place: female partners, relatives and friends who might have thought "my partner/ friend/ relative has a strong sense of masculinity, he is an ideal candidate" or "he has had life experience of struggling with the concept". If this is the case, the participants may have come with a strong agenda already in place - either to prove or to share their questions, their struggle.

### **Commitment and rigour**

#### *thorough data collection*

##### data saturation, adequateness of sample and data

Although initial plans involved 8 participants, time restraints prompted me and the supervisor to revisit the sample size issue. Seeing that literature suggests rough estimates, 7 participants were deemed both adequate for data saturation (as also indicated by the analysis conducted at the time) and more appropriate for the schedule of the research. Although the snowballing sampling was convenient for recruitment, schedule conflicts due to both parties (researcher, participants) work load greatly stretched the time needed for each interview to be conducted.

##### (Smith, 2011; Yardley, 2000) Completeness of interpretation, ideally address all variation and complexity observed

Interpretative analysis was conducted addressing all parts of the transcripts. A rough estimate of the average times a transcript was read lies between 8-10. Notes on variations around a theme were made and privileging divergence was made explicit in both Analysis and Discussion sections.

#### *depth/breadth of analysis*

-privileged intuition and imagination as well as formal analytic procedures

The first 5 analyses were re-done as they were deemed as possibly too descriptive. Some of the themes produced in the first "run" were also produced in the second, yet the latter themes produced felt they were more in-depth and more in-line with Smith's examples as well as with other theses' analyses. At the same time, privilege was given to my own interpretative style.

During analysis I also realized that one participant's description of masculinity (or one of its aspects) was another participant's interpretation. In the light of new themes emerging, I went back to older analyses to "scout" for the theme: when Donovan spoke more explicitly about the female desire, I went back to earlier participants in order to explore the possibility that they could also be talking about the female desire. While this may have entailed the danger of "seeing faces on the clouds", or fitting the data to pre-conceived categories, it turned out that scrutinizing my own analytic process was evident in the frequency this exploratory process produced new themes: not all participants were deemed to talk about the female desire, for example, or not in the same way: some talked more about negotiating their masculinity with their partners rather than the female desire on its own.

#### *methodological competence/skill*

Reviewing other theses as well as consulting with the supervisor gradually gave me more confidence and know-how in approaching the subject matter with a more tentative stance than the one I was used to in quantitative research.

#### *in-depth engagement with topic*

\_\_\_\_\_ prolonged engagement with topic not only as a researcher but also in other capacities

As a practitioner I have had experience with male clients experiencing explicitly or implicitly psychological issues linked with their gender and "how they should be".

Personal experience of therapy also tapped into issues with my own masculinity and the assumptions brought into my relating to myself and others - how I "should" be in order to "be a man". Personal struggles with the concept made the topic more relevant to me and highlighted the idiographic nature of the concept for each man.

immersion in data, theoretical or empirical

By reviewing as much of the literature as I could within the time constraints of my research I formed a picture of the theoretical and empirical context within masculinity has been studied. I noticed my personal preferences in theory - which theories seemed more grounded or more relevant to my experience of masculinity, or to my clinical experience of masculinity. Yet I bracketed most of the assumptions before delving into the analysis early on - early discussions with my supervisor regarding this helped me understand how I could bring my assumptions into the analysis by talking about "masculinity standards", which reflected a particular position (Gender Role Strain).

**Coherence and transparency**

*clarity and power of arguments*

to construct a version of reality, not to describe reality, which readers find meaningful to them

The biggest challenge to this was tiredness and the language barrier that in times made my presentations less than sharp. Clarity of presentation was assisted by the supervisor who provided me with enough corrections early on that modelled how the analysis and discussion sections must be written in order to be able to clearly and convincingly communicate my arguments, while at the same time being tentative enough and allowing for the reader to form their own opinions.

*fit between theory and method*

The ontological, epistemological positions and methodology were explored throughout the research in order to make sure that they were in line with each other. A relativist approach was deemed appropriate early on, which gave rise to a phenomenological stance, yet, after feedback from the supervisor it was deemed as too general, and more philosophical rather than scientific. Further reading allowed me to refine my approach to a contextualist position.

*transparent methods and data presentation*

A paper trail has been created to allow for careful examination of my thought and research process. Theme lists, analysis notes and reflective notes have been kept and will be kept for an appropriate amount of time in a secure location.

*reflexivity*

\_\_\_\_\_ openly reflect how assumptions, intentions and actions affected the product of the investigation (experiences, motivations, external pressures or constraints (time, recruitment, safety))

The Constituent theme Power has some appeal to me, and I feel critical towards including it because it appeals to my own desires and my own, admittedly, probably more psychoanalytic views, of masculinity. Both my therapy and my supervision exposed me to the concept, so how do I know I am not imposing this category on the data? After careful analysis I noticed that, even though I am partial to the theme, not all of the participants' data could be interpreted in a grounded way as "power". Another factor was that the participants' talked about or implicitly indicated a sense of powerlessness or power being vaguely present in other themes, like Leadership or Body.

I may have been also partial to the conditionality, or precariousness, of masculinity because I have experienced it this way. This might be why I arrived rather late to the

initially labelled Conditional Masculinity theme, later to be merged with others into The Source of Masculinity. I wanted to make sure I was grounded on the data. Quotes like this one from Bruce, listing "this, this and this" as prerequisites for masculinity, helped me ground the theme to the data, as well as suspicious inquiry, as Carle notes, into statements that seemingly did not support the conditionality concept - Alistair's "every day I feel like a man" prompted me to seek why he feels so, and question whether not feeling in control might actually affect this feeling.

Word limit also prompted me to merge the initially 36 Constituent themes into 26 and some were discarded as less relevant to the research question, or not adequately represented. A Family-related theme was discarded, for example, as it sometimes only vaguely referred to the experience of masculinity and could not be merged with another theme, not even the theme relating to the Father. The merging of the themes added to the time needed to construct the themes but turned out to be a productive endeavour, as it helped me abstract themes like Responsibility and Values into "Good Man", which feels a more evocative and a more in-depth exploration of the phenomenon.

As to the recruitment process, being new to London I had not networked myself around that much as to find the participants on my own. I was glad I got help from others, and snowball sampling turned out to be the best, and safest, route to recruitment. In consultation with the supervisor, I explored why flyers spread around London made me feel a bit uneasy. Quite insightfully, the supervisor pointed out that due to the potentially sensitive topic covered I may not have felt safe enough to come in contact with people for which I had no referral from a trusted other. Exposure to a less-safe context might have invoked anxiety that might have "seeped" into the whole research process.

### **Impact and importance**

*practical/applied & theoretical*

I had doubts from time to time how this research might contribute to our understanding of masculinity. However, after examining other research, qualitative methodologies and after discussions in supervision, I came to realize the potential of this research. Being a contextualist qualitative research, this research may further illuminate how categories of meaning might become interconnected in particular sociocultural contexts.

Individuals within the same contexts, as Smith et al. and Willig suggest, might tend to also experience masculinity in similar ways, or on similar grounds. Second, IPA allows also to challenge categories of meaning. This became more apparent to me as I reached Discussion, where linking the literature to the findings created an opposite effect: that of challenging my own categories (themes), e.g., why not Power be a Master theme in itself, following the hegemonic masculinity paradigm? Yet this is exactly the point: if we ground ourselves in the data, we privilege the idiographic nature of experience - if participants do not seem to refer to a perception of a hegemonic masculinity, or to any other theoretical concept, then the concept might not be as salient from a phenomenological perspective. Pleck suggested that future masculinity studies might benefit from challenging the assumption that another construct, gender role strain, might be salient for every man, every time.

Grounding interpretation on the data allows us to be closer to the experience of men while at the same time privileging our own perception of said experience, which is close to how we work as Counselling Psychologists. Professionals in the clinical/counselling/therapeutic context might have access to similar contextual factors that I had during the research process and may benefit greatly from my demonstrating of how I constructed knowledge in the way I did. Moreover, becoming more aware of factors that are already met as salient in other research (e.g., Power, Body) might further focus our attention to these in the context of informing policies around mental health in general, psychological theory or therapeutic practices in particular: it might be

of interest to explore these factors further with our male clients, or at least to be aware than, e.g., Power might be an underlying anxiety behind presenting issues.

### *socio-cultural*

Possibly my political agenda might lie in my motivation to help men become less negatively impacted, and more free of socially-imposed gender expectations that might clash with their personalities. Awareness of how socially imposed meaning might overshadow our own capacities to make meaning out of our experience might help us men choose more freely who we want to become and how we want to experience our lives.

### **Willig (2008)**

*(Smith, 2011; Willig, 2008) Clear and appropriate research question and type of knowledge attempted to be generated from the epistemological position. Clear research focus.*

I discussed within supervision whether the focus of the study is clear and specific enough. I think I was more concerned than worried because of all the studies that have passed through my hands, so to speak: research foci tend to associate masculinity, as a concept or phenomenon, in relation to something else, a specific developmental or life area. Nevertheless, masculinity is a phenomenon specific enough in itself. I also had to refer back to my original interest for masculinity standards and how these are linked to psychological well-being. Although my analysis was not guided by this original interest, my original conceptualization of the research does return my focus on how the phenomenon of masculinity is relevant to Counselling Psychology, and how by studying this specific phenomenon, we can start thinking about it within the context of our discipline.

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The epistemological position of the present study presumed the ability to produce an interpretation of how the participants' experience was contextually produced. Experience was presumed to be always constructed rather than determined and assumed to be 'real' for the persons that had it. The aim was to 'give voice' to what the

men said and interpret their accounts in order to attempt to explain the reasons behind what they said (Willig, 2008)

*Outline methodological assumptions about the world.*

The ontological stance in this research unavoidably brought in some assumptions about the nature of the world - "what is there to know" (Willig, 2008, p. 13). The relativist ontology of this research privileged the diversity of interpretations around masculinity by those who experienced, both from the side of the participants and from the side of the researcher.

*The role of the researcher in the research process as conceptualized by the methodology.*

IPA highlights the role of the researcher in the research process and the interpretation of the data, although never more than the role of the participants themselves (Langdrige, 2007; Smith et al., 2009). The researcher is essentially participating in a construction process for meaning (Willig, 2008). Reflections on how the research may have been implicated in the process are also offered in the Personal Reflectivity section of Discussion.

**Smith (2011)**

~~(1) clear research focus,~~

[check above]

(2) strong interview data,

Interviews were conducted along the lines and guidance of relevant literature, reviewed in Methodology. A couple of points emerged, as reflected in Appendix 1 - Reflective Extracts from Interviews and Analyses, yet they pertain to questions which might always emerge with interviews: have I asked enough? Why did not ask about X, Y? Instead, it was more useful to stay with the text as it was or to interpret this very

function of the participant's descriptions: to invoke questions. The function of the communication is as important as the data themselves. In addition, many of the quotes used in Analysis received very good feedback in terms of how good a choice they were. The data themselves seem to be substantial and to beg for analysis.

(3) rigour (prevalence of themes, representation of data)

Careful monitoring for what quotes support and substantiate which themes is indicated by Appendix 13 - Master Theme Table with Quote Line Numbers. In this table, prevalence can be demonstrated. Several quotes "made it" into more than one Constituent or Master theme because they could be interpreted in different ways. Representation of data was expressed by setting a threshold of 4+ participants representing a Constituent theme (more than half of the participants).

(4) elaboration on theme analysis

analyze directly on Discussion

(5) focus on interpretation rather than description,

After 40 hours of initial analysis into the first participants I decided that my themes were more descriptive rather than interpretative. At that point I decided to start again, discarding all the old analysis. Some of the themes re-emerged yet the second time around I felt that the text was more "alive" and that I was relating to it in a deeper way than the first time. A very simple example is that whereas themes of the first time could read "masculinity as strength" and "masculinity as decisiveness", the next time they could read as "masculinity with elements of leadership" or "masculinity as positive characteristics". I re-read other analyses and referred back to Smith's and Willig's texts to re-understand their way of analyzing, and after having done my first one, I could understand their examples better.

~~(6) demonstrate divergence and convergence on themes~~

[check above]

(7) good writing

Text might be given for proof-reading. After revising and following supervisor's comments, writing seems to be on a Doctoral level. Pattern: first part of chapters reads excellent, second part looks sloppy. Possibly related to either fatigue, or to partial engagement/ engagement in different times. Analysis was engaged in a continuous fashion, the result was much less the same. Discussion has to be addressed in the same way to achieve similar effect.

The prose also supports a consistent, sustained narrative. Some additional resources have been used for the discussion that could not have been used in the Critical Literature Review.

## Appendix 12- THEME MAPPING TO EARLIER LITERATURE

<b>PRESENT STUDY'S THEMES</b>	<b>Mahalik's (2005) male-specific cognitive distortions and The Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI; Mahalik, et al., 2003)</b>	<b>Brannon's (1976) masculine socialization prescriptions (US)</b>	<b>The Male Role Norms Inventory (MRNI; Levant &amp; Richmond, 2007) - Traditional Norms</b>	<b>The Gender Role Conflict model (GRC; O'Neil, 2008)</b>
<b>1. Being masculine</b>				
<b>Power</b>	Winning, Dominance, Pursuit of Status	the big wheel	Achievement/Status	Obsession with achievement and success, Socialized control, power, and competition issues
<b>Leadership</b>	Winning, Dominance, Pursuit of Status	the big wheel	Achievement/Status	
<b>Independence and Autonomy</b>	Self-Reliance		Self-Reliance	
<b>Action Hero</b>	Risk-Taking, Violence, Physical Toughness	give 'em hell		
<b>Good Man</b>				
<b>Masculinity Through the Body</b>	Physical Toughness	the sturdy oak		
<b>Work as Significant Life Aspect</b>	Primacy of Work			Obsession with achievement and success
<b>2. The Self Towards Superiority</b>				
<b>Young Self as Inferior</b>				
<b>The Source of Masculinity</b>				
<b>Being an Intellectual</b>				
<b>Malleable Definition of Masculinity</b>				
<b>Self vs. the World</b>	Winning	give 'em hell	Aggression	Socialized control, power, and competition issues
<b>The Self as Superior and Privileged</b>	Winning, Dominance	the big wheel	Achievement/Status	Obsession with achievement and success
<b>3. What is Masculinity</b>				
<b>Verbalizing Masculinity</b>				
<b>Nature and Nurture</b>				
<b>Questioning Masculinity</b>				
<b>4. The Emotional World</b>				
<b>Emotional Strength</b>	Emotional Control	no sissy stuff, the sturdy oak	Restrictive Emotionality	Restrictive emotionality
<b>Detachment and Perspective Shift</b>				
<b>Help-Seeking</b>	Emotional Control, Self-Reliance	no sissy stuff		
<b>5. Other Men</b>				
<b>Father [...] Reference for Masculinity</b>				
<b>The Male Group</b>				
<b>Idealized Men</b>				
<b>Homosexuality</b>		no sissy stuff		Homophobia
<b>6. The Other Gender</b>				
<b>The Significance of the Female Desire</b>	Playboy			
<b>Negotiating Masculinity with Partners</b>				
<b>Being Different from Women</b>		no sissy stuff	Avoidance of Femininity	Homophobia

## SECTION C

Socratic Phantasy and Conflicts of Independence:

A Client Study on Integrating CBT and Brief Dynamic  
Therapy for Panic Attacks



Socratic Phantasy and Conflicts of Independence:

A Client Study on Integrating CBT and Brief Dynamic Therapy for Panic Attacks

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City University London

**The Professional Practice Component of this thesis has been  
removed for confidentiality purposes.**

**It can be consulted by Psychology researchers on application at  
the Library of City, University of London.**

## APPENDICES

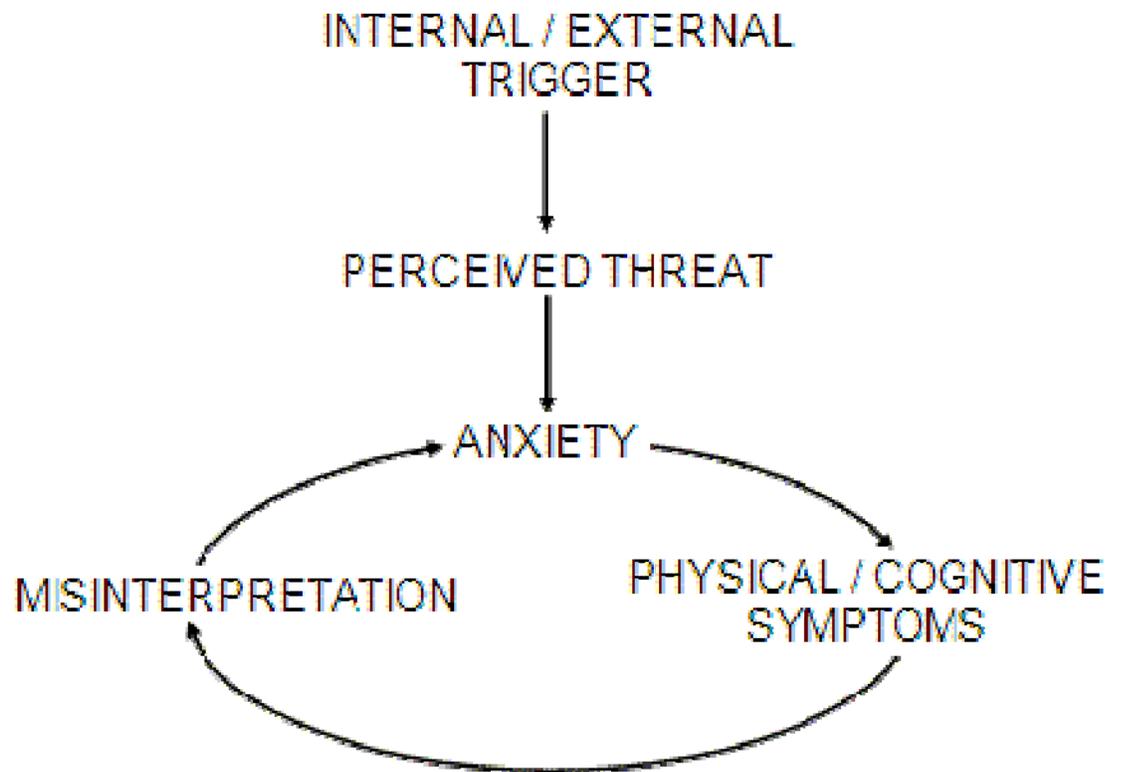
Appendix A - Clark's Cognitive Model of Panic

Appendix B – My Panic Attacks

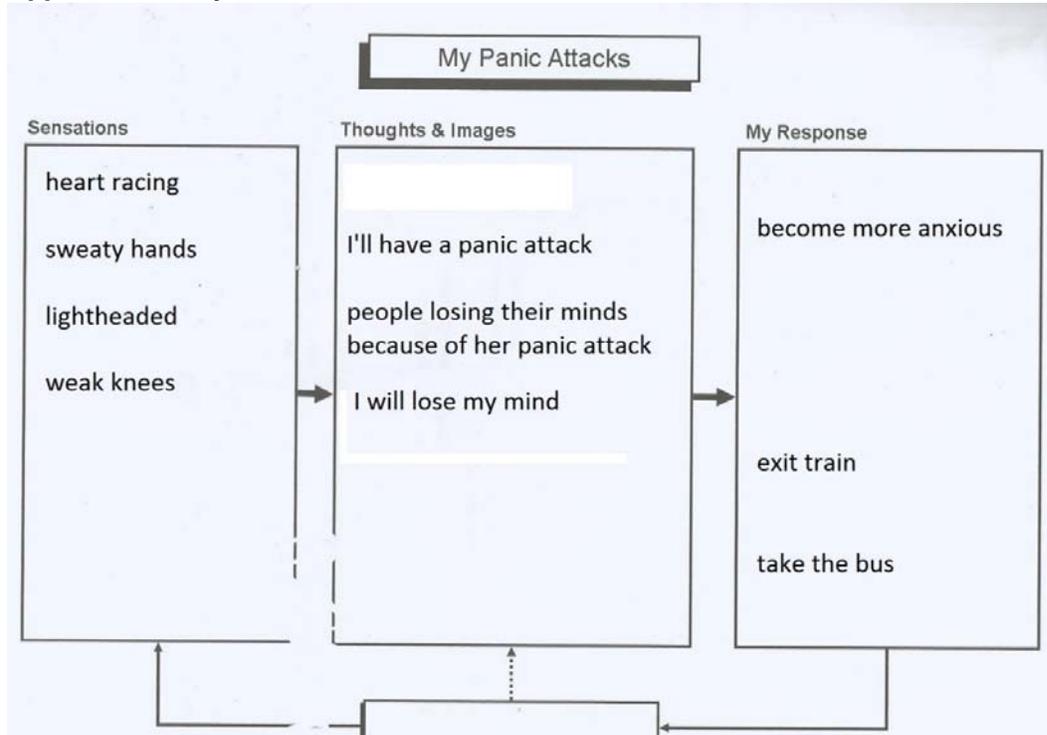
Appendix C – Panic Attacks Worksheet

Appendix D – The IPAF

Appendix A - Clark's Cognitive Model of Panic



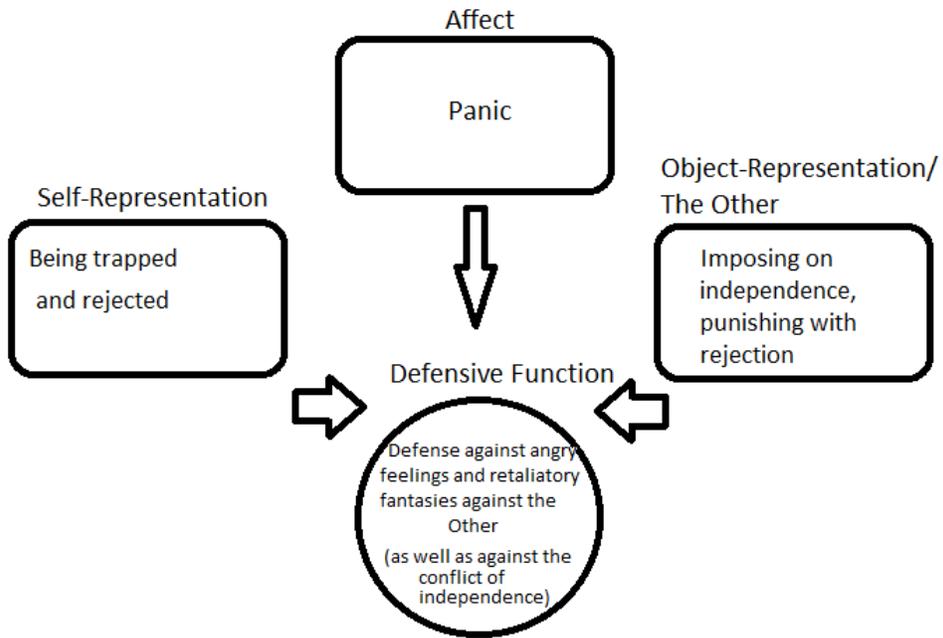
## Appendix B – My Panic Attacks



## Appendix C – Panic Attack Worksheet

Panic Attack Worksheet			
Choose a recent, specific attack (preferably a severe one)			
Sensations "Right in the middle of the attack, when it was at its worst, what did you notice was happening to your body?"	Thoughts & Images <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "At that moment when you were feeling [sensations summary], what was the worst thing you thought could happen? What went through your mind?"</li> <li>• Any images?"</li> <li>• Use downward arrow</li> <li>• If thoughts of escape, ask, "What would have happened if you could not get out of there?"</li> </ul>	How much do you believe each of these thoughts right now?  Rate 0 - 100%	How much did you believe each thought in the middle of your panic attack?  Rate 0 - 100%
heart racing	there is too little space	95%	100%
sweaty hands	I will become trapped here	50%	90%
heaviness on chest	I will have a panic attack	90%	100%
weak knees	and this will be terrible	90%	100%
short breaths	I will go crazy	50%	100%

Appendix D – The IPAF





## SECTION D

Publishable Paper

### The Experience of Masculinity: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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*Psychology of Men & Masculinity*



The Experience of Masculinity: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis



## Abstract

The present research investigated men's experience of masculinity. The participants were seven men between 29 and 59 years of age. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to produce analysable transcripts of the men's experience. The transcript data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Six Master themes emerged that illustrated the contexts within which the experience of masculinity: Being Masculine, The Self Towards Superiority, What is Masculinity, The Emotional World, Other Men and The Other Gender. These themes represent interpretations of the men's experience addressing structural, functional, developmental, personal and interpersonal aspects of experienced masculinity. Of particular interest was the pervasiveness of the concept of power throughout the Master themes and through many of their Constituent themes. Illustrative accounts are quoted in order to illuminate how the men experienced the impact of masculinity upon their lives. It is also argued that the new and rich understandings gained from this study might enable Counselling Psychologists to better help their clients address masculinity-related issues and to accept and define their own way of being men.

*Keywords:* masculinity, gender roles, interpretative phenomenological analysis, Counselling Psychology

## Introduction

Defining masculinity seems to be a complex task the result of which seems to never be a stable consensus. Masculinity has been defined variably as a gender role, as a set of personality traits, as a product of human evolution, as an ideology and as a structure shaped by social norms and power relations (Addis, Mansfield, & Syzdek, 2010; Hammond & Mattis, 2005; Thompson & Pleck, 1995). Literature has also defined masculinity as a set of coping strategies for socio-political inequality that communicate personal qualities such as pride, strength, power, aggressiveness and self-respect (Lazur & Majors, 1995; Mosher & Sirkin, 1984). However, the concept of masculinity still eludes a clear or comprehensive definition (Connell, 1998; Englar-Carlson, 2006; De Visser & McDonnell, 2013; O'Neil, Good & Holmes, 1995; Thompson & Pleck, 1995; Whitehead, 2005).

Males, at least in the Western world, may employ various, potentially harmful, defences in order to cope with the perceived distance between themselves and an ideal of masculinity. Research indicates that conflict stemming from conformity to masculine norms is linked with psychological distress (Clatterbaugh, 1990; Good, Heppner, DeBord, & Fischer, 2004; Liu, Rochlen, & Mohr, 2005; Sharpe & Heppner, 1991) and maladaptive correlates, such as reluctance to seek psychological help (Benenson & Koulkazarian, 2008; Blazina & Watkins, 2000; O'Brien, Hunt & Hart, 2005; Szymanski & Carr, 2008), which may explain the prevalence of suicide in male populations around the world (World Health Organization, 2011) as well as other, arguably dysfunctional, defence mechanisms (Chuick, Greenfeld, Greenberg, Shepard, Cochran, & Haley, 2009; Levit, 1991; Lobel & Winch, 1986; Krugman, 1995; Pittman, 1993; Vaillant, 1994), greater relationship dissatisfaction and romantic relationship difficulties (Blazina & Watkins, 2000; Burn & Ward, 2005; Jakupcak, Lisak & Roemer, 2002) and increased health and behavioural risk (Cohn & Zeichner, 2006; Jakupcak, 2003; Liu & Iwamoto,

2007; Oliffe et al., 2007; Parent, Moradi, Rummel & Tokar, 2011; Verdonk, Seesing, & de Rijk, 2010).

The topic of masculinity is an extensive one. The very definition of what masculinity is has been at the core of the development of masculinity studies. This section aims to provide a summary of how masculinity has been studied in psychological and sociological literature, what limitations each framework has met in understanding and explaining the phenomenon of masculinity and how Counselling Psychology research can further our understanding of the experience of masculinity.

### **Essentialist Masculinity**

The essentialist masculinity paradigm is the earliest psychological model in literature to describe and explain masculinity. The basic premise of this paradigm is that masculinity is intrinsic for every man and is characterized by unalterable, fixed traits, deviation from which results in anxiety, depression and low self-esteem (Pleck, 1995; Smiler, 2004), such as heroism (Oliffe et al., 2007; Whitehead, 2005). Essentialism was re-instigated in the Men's Rights Movement, which claimed that the cause of psychological health problems for men lies in the disconnection from male archetypes in contemporary society (Bly, 1990; Moore & Gillette, 1990). Although emphasis on the individual experience of masculinity has been added, the Movement seemed to interpret male distress more in terms of mythology and unalterable archetypes rather than in terms of relative and fluid contextual factors.

Essentialism has also been said to be linked with biological conservatism and can reduce gender differences to biological factors and universal qualities found within members of each gender (Clatterbaugh, 1990; Petersen, 1998). Several lines of such inquiry have produced some reliable evidence for sexual dimorphism having a significant impact on several key psychological processes (Becker et al., 2008; Cahill, 2005; Kenrick, Keefe, Bryan, Barr & Brown, 1995; Lippa, 2007). Still, the inquiry for

biologically and evolutionary rooted sex differences has been controversial and in need of further research (Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei & Gladue, 1994; Schmitt, 2003; 2005).

### **Psychoanalytic Theory**

Sigmund Freud formulated the first psychological explanations of masculinity upon which many future theoreticians would build their own theories. Freud postulated the Oedipal phase of development, during which the boy has to resolve a conflict between himself and his father. Having primarily formed his masculinity through identifying with the mother, the boy begins in fantasy to stand in for the father and later confrontation with reality becomes the first narcissistic wound to the boy's self-esteem and sense of masculinity (Clatterbaugh, 1990; Kimmel, 1997). The father consequently facilitates the development of the boy's masculinity by having it identify with him (Mander, 2001).

The psychoanalytic movement post-Freud posited various intrapsychic and interpersonal models with regard to the normative process of development for boys. The Other, a significant psychoanalytic concept, describes a person's perception of another person as one of unique function towards the self in terms of desire and with whom interaction patterns are bound to be repeated throughout life with other individuals encouraging similar discourses (Evans, 2005; Greenson, 1981). Boys are expected to dis-identify from the mother at any cost in order to be able to identify with a male role model, thus departing from safety and avoiding symbiosis and incestuous engulfment with the mother (Abelin, 1971; Clatterbaugh, 1990; Greenson, 1968; Horner, 1984; Mahler & Gosliner, 1955; Meerloo, 1968; Mitscherlich, 1963). Although psychoanalytic theory incorporates contextual factors in attempting to explain the formation of masculinity, it seems to still place primacy on the male sex as a point of origin for contextual factors to merely accentuate inherent tendencies. Moreover, psychoanalytic theory possibly focuses more on normative development rather than on inquiring into the experience of male development as it is, without imposing a priori categories of meaning on it.

## **Adlerian Theory**

Alfred Adler (2011) posited the masculine protest as a psychic phenomenon present in both genders that stood as paramount to gender differentiation. Because all traits associated with vulnerability also become associated with femininity, children of both genders very early express masculine protest by assuming masculine (non-vulnerable) traits, and carry this phenomenon into their adult lives. The masculine protest becomes a vehicle for acquiring the psychic means for independence and normal development is defined as an eventual compromise between power and vulnerability (Connell, 1998). The neurosis in men, Adler posited, was founded on a conflict between the (inferior) "feminine foundation" and the "masculine protest" (Hirsch, 2005). Adlerian theory seems to have shifted the theoretical focus more on the social and political factors affecting the phenomenon of masculinity. Nevertheless, even in Adler's critical view of gender, deviation from gender roles is still a source of psychological distress - an assertion shared with the essentialist view of masculinity.

## **Masculine Ideology**

Brannon (1976, p.12) observed four masculine socialization prescriptions operating in the US: to avoid presenting as feminine ("no sissy stuff"), to gain status and respect ("the big wheel"), to appear invulnerable ("the sturdy oak"), and to seek violence and adventure ("give 'em hell"). Brannon thus outlined masculinity as a belief system, or ideology, and sparked a new line of research pertaining to men's conflicts with said ideology (Pleck, 1981; 1995; Smiler, 2004).

## **Gender Role Strain and Gender Role Conflict**

According to Pleck's Gender Role Strain (GRS, 1981) model, a parallel to O'Neil's later conceptualization of Gender Role Conflict (GRC; 1981), gender roles offer standards of conduct that can put great psychological and physical strain to the individuals striving to meet them. Discrepancy from or even adherence to established gender norms is said to have negative consequences for self-esteem and psychological well-being in

general (Pleck, 1995). For O'Neil, GRC is one aspect of Pleck's GRS and defines it as the state in which "socialized gender roles have negative consequences for the person or others" (2008, p.362). Men typically experience GRS and GRC when conforming, trying or failing to meet masculine norms and ideals and when said norms induce restrictions to, violations of, and devaluation of themselves or others (Bosson et al., 2009; Englar- Carlson, 2006; O'Neil, 2008).

Pleck categorized GRS into Discrepancy strain, Dysfunction strain and Trauma strain. Discrepancy strain is defined as the negative psychological well-being effects produced by continuous exposure to the discrepancy between actual and ideal male self. Dysfunction strain is defined as the outcome of adhering to male ideology that has only negative effects on men and those close to them, for example, aggression and disconnection from relationships. Trauma strain refers to the distress produced by experiences associated with being male that are traumatic, like separation from the mother, conflicts around sexuality or returning from war.

O'Neil's parallel investigation of masculinity focused more on the cognitive appraisal of any stress that might be produced by perceived gender role discrepancies. O' Neil's Gender Role Conflict model described 6 patterns pertaining to male gender role socialization: "(a) restrictive emotionality; (b) health care problems; (c) obsession with achievement and success; (d) restrictive sexual and affectionate behaviour; (e) socialized control, power, and competition issues; and (f) homophobia" (O'Neil, 2008, p. 361).

The GRS and GRC paradigms constitute a strong line of research that highlights the relationship of masculinity with psychological well-being and the contextual factors within which it manifests. There is still however a need for a qualitative investigation into whether and how GRS and GRC may be experienced as related to men's

understanding of masculinity and what common or varied features this experience may have across different men.

### **The Social Constructionist Paradigm**

The social constructionist paradigm highlighted variations in ideology endorsement across individuals and defined dysfunctionality in terms of insufficiently or overly endorsing hegemonic masculinity - Connell's model (1998) suggests a hierarchy of masculinity based on exerting power over women and other men, modelled after and by the powerful few (Moller, 2007). Researchers have suggested that a need for power, while equally met in both genders, can reinforce traditional male gender roles and norms and patriarchal social structures (Hofer et al., 2010). Whereas earlier paradigms framed masculinity as existing exclusively within the individual or as a result of individual reactions against imposed ideologies, this new paradigm posited a more active and varied construction of masculinity (Addis & Cohane, 2005; Smiler, 2004), where masculinity is framed as a set of practices engaged by individuals (Schippers, 2007) and highlighted the link between masculinity and power (Moller, 2007).

Connell's work sparked a research movement that may have focused more on the function of power structures rather than on ways these are experienced in men's everyday lives. Nevertheless, Connell's work has further highlighted the importance of qualitative inquiry into how each man may experience masculinity differently from others and the significance of power structures as a contextual factor influencing said experience.

### **Identity and Gender**

Bergman (1995) suggests that men "[become] fixated on achieving a separate and individuated self" (p. 71) and refers to Pleck's (1981) male sex role identity as a manifestation of such a fixation. The very concept of identity is not less challenging to define than masculinity, yet there seems to be a link between the two (De Visser &

Smith, 2006). In the case of males, there seems to be a consensus that men are more strongly inclined their gender identity (Willer et al., 2013).

Breakwell (1993; 2010) in his Identity Process Theory (IPT) defines identity as a dynamic product of the interaction between idiosyncratic and context factors. By assimilation-accommodation identity adds to and locates in the existing structure new personal and social elements (e.g., attitudes, group memberships). Assimilation and accommodation are said to be motivated by the maintenance of (a) self-esteem (primarily), (b) continuity of the self across contexts, (c) distinctiveness of the self and (d) efficacy (competence and control). Qualitative studies have found that with age, consistency and adaptability of the masculine identity increases (Johnston & Morrison, 2007).

The theory of Exclusively Masculine Identity (EMI; Kilianski, 2003) posits two influential factors in male self-identity. While the highly valued ideal self (for some men, the stereotypically/ traditionally masculine) is abstract and open to future change and corrective effort driven by aspirations, the undesired self seems to be a more concrete accumulation of undesirable behaviours and affects (for some men, the stereotypically feminine) which have to be avoided. Discrepancy between the two selves predicts the presence of negative emotional states. The EMI was tested and found to be valid when addressing the construct of the ideal self.

Both qualitative and quantitative research into gender identity might facilitate better understanding of the potentially adaptive nature of the concept of masculinity. Answering both why men adapt their ideals around being a man and how they experience this change may help us better understand in clinical settings how a man can address his psychological well-being in relation to his concept of his male self and how his motivation to change can be a function of the fixity of his identity.

### **Common Factors in Measuring Masculinity**

A meta-analysis by Walker, Tokar and Fisher (2000) addressed the issue of validity of masculinity-related measures. Analysis indicated that four underlying dimensions of masculinity largely accounted for variability in the 18 scales that were examined: Masculinity Ideology, Liberal Gender Role Attitudes, Masculine Gender Role Stress and Comfort With Emotionality - Affectionate Behavior Between Men. Issues of validity, reliability and representation in measuring aspects of masculinity have risen in virtually all quantitative studies because college, Caucasian, middle-class and/or heterosexual men were overrepresented (Blazina & Watkins Jr., 2000; Moradi, Tokar, Schaub, Jome, & Serna, 2000; O'Neil, 2008; Levant & Richmond, 2007; Mahalik, et al., 2003; Szymanski & Carr, 2008). What could be of additional value with these findings in the future is a meta-comparison with common themes that emerge from phenomenological studies on masculinity and mapping them against a transtheoretical framework that would help us better understand the common and idiosyncratic features of the experience of masculinity.

### **Therapy and Gender Role Conflict**

Researchers suggest a need for therapists to address GRC with their clients and to focus on its consequences on the therapeutic process. O'Neil (1981) and Brooks (2010b), among others (Blazina & Watkins, 2000; Hayes & Mahalik, 2000), have suggested that assessing and increasing awareness of GRC for male clients is vital. Doing so allows for a healthy alternative to suppressing psychological distress and puts issues into an expanded perspective, allowing for a re-evaluation of gender roles, a critical re-examination of assumptions linked to GRC and increasing empathic understanding of the issues addressed by men in therapy. In therapeutic contexts, the GRC seems to provide a framework through which male clients may address core mechanisms behind their distress, yet there is a risk of imposing a priori understandings before we allow the client to uncover their own meanings.

### **Therapy and Emotional Control**

Emotional restriction and suppression, and containment of pain, have been emerging consistently in various studies of masculinity. Men tend to retain expressive control over their emotions and assume a stoic position (Mahalik, 2005a). Courtenay (2000), in line with Connell (1998), argues that such emotional containment is a product of hegemonic masculinity and it signifies strength, while disclosing pain is perceived as weakness. Kingerlee (2012) points out that there is emerging empirical support of the thesis that male emotional regulation is closely tied to early maternal care that encouraged detachment as a coping strategy (Mak et al., 2009). Exceptions to restrictions of help-seeking behaviours, as O'Brien, Hunt, and Hart (2005) noted in their Scottish sample of men, pertain to such behaviours that aim at restoring other masculinity enactments, such as sexual functioning. Such exceptions may beg the question of how men may experience and adapt to or compensate for what literature has dubbed "dysfunctional" attitudes and behaviours of the masculine self.

### **Healing the Fragile Masculine Self**

Proponents of Self-Psychology (Blazina, 2001; Kohut 1977; 1980; 1984) have suggested that therapy should begin with a therapist allowing themselves to be experienced as corrective self-objects to male clients and should continue with expanding the client's male socialization. The therapist is called to mirror the client's inner world, correcting for the early significant others' lack of empathic understanding and explaining to the person what is going on in their minds -and admiring the client for the present striving. The therapeutic work is one of a relational nature, with the therapist also increasing awareness but also being acceptant of the GRC as experienced by the client.

### **Positive Masculinity/ Positive Psychology**

Kiselica and Englar-Carlson (2010) emphasize the strengths cultivated via traditional masculinity as a starting point for therapy with men. They have introduced the Positive

Psychology/Positive Masculinity (PPPM) framework with the goal being to help males promote in themselves the healthy and constructive aspects of traditional masculinity, namely, "male relational styles; male ways of caring; generative fatherhood; male self-reliance; the worker-provider tradition of men; male courage, daring and risk-taking; the group orientation of boys and men; fraternal humanitarian service; male forms of humor; and male heroism" (p.277). The authors acknowledge that these aspects are socially constructed rather than invariable universals exclusive to men, nevertheless, research has shown though that focus on strengths decreases depression and increases happiness (Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010). Although the authors' goal is based on valuing the experience of masculinity there might be a risk of discouraging men from becoming aware of "non-masculine" strengths and values they may have and thus eventually possibly discredit more idiosyncratic ways of "being a man", especially if the men's "less-masculine" aspects cannot be mapped against the proposed "healthy and constructive aspects of traditional masculinity".

### **The Integrative Problem-Centred Therapy Model**

Brooks suggested (2010a) that the best way to render therapy male-friendly would be to combine existing approaches using the Integrative Problem-Centred Therapy (IPCT) model. The IPCT is an aggregate of interventions from different approaches (behavioral, experiential, family of origin, psychodynamic, and self psychology) that are applied in three different contexts (family/community, couple and individual) and sequentially. The IPCT is "failure-driven" (Brooks, 2010a, p.143) and assumes the client is capable of solving his issues without major interventions and that the maintenance mechanisms for these problems tend to be superficial rather than deeply rooted. This way interventions are employed from less complex to more complex, starting with here-and-now behavioural interventions and, should these prove ineffective, moving towards more elaborate, introspective interventions (closer to psychodynamic therapy).

### **A Transdiagnostic Model for Male Distress**

Kingerlee (2012) proposed a transdiagnostic model for male distress that would address male mental health while acknowledging masculinity differentiation and challenging essentialism. Kingerlee integrated earlier transdiagnostic work with personality disorders with schema theory to conceptualize a male-specific-profile (MSP), a constellation of specific schemas that tends to be present in many men across spectra of psychopathology. According to the model, men under distress function under meta-cognitive beliefs that deem the distress as shameful, in need of concealment, and a threat to their status. Avoidant behaviours that detach from sources of distress are engaged and the distress is externalized into more recognized but maladaptive masculine behaviours, such as aggression (Jakupcak, Tull, & Roemer, 2005). The end goal, even in the form of suicide, is to retain masculine control and avoid reflecting on emotions. The latter, conceptualized as instigated by a Reflection Abandoning Mechanism (RAM), has also been said to be responsible for men's reluctance to seek psychological help. Kingerlee suggests that increasing awareness of the schemata of MSP for the clients will help them better reflect on their cognitive-behavioural patterns and on their much avoided psychological distress.

### **Rationale of the Present Study**

Counselling psychology and psychotherapy literature has made good use of early and contemporary psychoanalytic thinking and of case studies in informing practice for male clients. Masculinity literature consists largely of sociological research of both a quantitative and qualitative nature. Psychological research was initially focused on quantitative measurement of masculine traits and associated measures of mental health and has now been enriched by qualitative studies of men's experience of particular aspects of their masculinity in relation to their body, their health and their environment. There is still a need for qualitative research to highlight idiographic

elements in the experience of masculinity and how much impact the concept of masculinity may have upon a man's life, consciously or unconsciously.

Further qualitative research is needed in order to privilege the phenomenology of masculinity (Kierski, 2013). Qualitative research can contribute to exploring new topics and phenomena, to linking these with the temporal and contextual factors that shape them and to creating new understandings (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003).

Qualitative methodologies privileging meaning making, depth of meaning and the idiosyncratic nature of masculinity - as does Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis - might help in understanding how men relate to masculinity in different ways. The phenomenological ethos of Counselling Psychology can lend itself to qualitative methods (Cooper, 2009).

Counselling Psychology research might help men, both practitioners and service-users, make meaning out the experience of masculinity and empower them to allow their sense of being a man to contribute positively in their lives. Further qualitative research in masculinity might help the public and institutions tightly linked with specific male groups (e.g. prisons, drug and alcohol services, veteran mental health services) better understand how men make meaning out of their sense of being a man. Similarly, policy makers may be better able to understand how men negotiate their manhood in significant life transitions, like when becoming a father. Counselling Psychologists could support such services by increasing awareness of and inviting change in the ideologies that perpetuate unhelpful beliefs and behaviours.

## **Method**

### **Research design**

Seven (7) semi-structured interviews were carried out, using a semi-constructed interview agenda was constructed beforehand according to guidelines provided by IPA literature. The agenda consisted of open-ended, non-directive questions as suggested

for IPA (Willig, 2008). The questions encouraged the participant to elaborate upon their experience pertaining to masculinity, thus staying close to the research question without dictating the interview process (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Willig, 2008). The structure of the interview allowed for the participants to introduce issues that might not have been predicted by the questions themselves, but still followed the research question (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The IPA was the method of choice because it would allow me to enter the frame of reference of the participants while retaining my own and thus better understand and interpret their experience. In contrast with quantitative methods, no hypothesis is tested in this study; rather, the aim is to generate data particular to the phenomenon explored in the form of a common thematic structure that captures the essence of the phenomenon.

### **Participants**

The participant sample of the present study was seven (7) Caucasian, heterosexual males aged 29 to 59 varying in cultural, educational and socioeconomic backgrounds.

### **Ethics**

The research project was started following approval of the proposal from the University ethics board.

#### **Informed consent & confidentiality.**

The participants were fully informed of the research aims, methods and procedures by means of an informative flyer and an Information Form (Appendices A, B). Participants were also given Informed Consent forms before the interview. The Informed Consent form (Appendix C) summarized the purposes towards which the recorded data would be used and the terms of their protection (anonymization and confidentiality), as well as the right to withdraw participation and data retention any time up to one week following the interview without penalization of any kind. Participants were assured that all their

personal details would remain confidential, that details that would lead them to identification would be masked or removed and that any tape-recorded data would be destroyed once the project was complete.

### **Debriefing.**

At the end of their interview participants were thanked for their involvement and given a Debriefing form (Appendix D) which included the researcher's contact details if they required further information about the study and contact details of mental health services should they have become distressed from the process.

### **Procedure**

Convenience sampling, such as snowball sampling used in the present study, has to be approached with consideration. Participants were recruited by advertising the study to people within the academic setting offering for help in recruitment. These individuals brought me in contact with the candidates who in turn became my participants. This specific sampling was considered by both researcher and supervisor as a safer route to recruitment.

Although access to participants came from convenience sampling, there was care to have an adequate range of views represented relevant to the phenomenon (e.g., partnered and single, age range, varied cultural origins) (Yardley, 2008).

After consent to communicate with the participants was given I used their e-mail address or telephone number to let them know that I was interested in interviewing them. During initial contact with the candidates I assessed suitability in consultation with the mediator and ensured that participants were within the age limit and not currently under severe distress. No candidates were non-suitable for the study.

The seven participants attended a semi-structured interview, lasting from 45 to 90 minutes, in safe and quiet environments within a university campus setting. The transcripts of the recorded interviews were then used for analysis.

### **Data analysis**

For the present study the data were analyzed by employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in order to describe and interpret the phenomenon of masculinity as experienced by men themselves. My purpose was to better understand how the participants experienced masculinity in their lives, how important masculinity is for them and what impact it had in their lives, as well as to attempt to understand the contextual factors that shaped their experience. The IPA was the method of choice because it would allow me to enter the frame of reference of the participants while retaining my own and thus better understand and interpret their experience. In contrast with quantitative methods, no hypothesis is tested in this study; rather, the aim is to generate data particular to the phenomenon explored (Langdrige, 2007; Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2008).

## **Results**

### **Overview**

The analysis produced a comprehensive organization of the interview data consisting of six (6) Master themes and 26 Constituent themes. Table 1: Master Theme Table Outline summarizes the aforementioned themes. As Smith (2009) suggests this organization of data describes both how participants' accounts converge towards an organizing principle and how they diverge from each other in idiosyncratic ways. The first Master theme, or organizing principle, Being Masculine, refers to traits, behaviours and concepts experienced by the participants to be associated with masculinity. The second Master theme, The Self Towards Superiority, organizes Constituent themes

pertaining to the development of the self in a structure spanning from a variably disadvantaged social position towards a status of superiority. The third Master theme, What is Masculinity, refers to how the participants reflected on the concept of masculinity, where it comes from, and their conceptual doubts about it. The fourth Master theme, named The Emotional World, describes the most common features of the participants' experience of coping with difficult emotions. The fifth Master theme, Other Men, describes how the participants relate to other men. Finally the sixth Master theme, The Other Gender, reflects how the participants experience themselves and their masculinity in relation to women.

Of particular interest was third Master theme, presented here, named "What is Masculinity", which may reflect the participants' experience of reflecting upon and manipulating the concept of masculinity. This Master theme is comprised of three Constituent themes: Masculinity Beyond Words, Nature and Nurture, and Questioning Masculinity.

The aim of this section is to produce a compelling account of how the data were analysed and organized yet due to the quantity of the data that emerged only one Master theme is presented here.

### **Master Theme: What is Masculinity**

This Master theme describes the participants' awareness, conceptualization of and objections to the phenomenon of masculinity.

#### **Constituent theme: Masculinity beyond words.**

This theme describes the participants' experience of having trouble articulating, in different contexts, their understanding of masculinity. These contexts include the interview itself, communicating masculinity to others, or introspective inquiry into the phenomenon.

Bruce felt the gender differences between him and his sister were “obvious” growing up, possibly meaning assured beyond any doubt. Maybe this is why he “never thought about it that much”. This might imply that it was not necessary for masculinity to enter awareness since it was a given, like breathing or walking, and thus putting it into words might have been difficult for him:

Quite young there was like an obvious sort of, yeah, like, div- like male female divide between me and my sister, ehm, and.... Yeah, I would... Yeah, I guess I never thought about it that much... (Bruce: 187-190)

Donovan probably experienced becoming more aware of the concept of masculinity by addressing a feeling of its absence (“its reverse, being emasculated”). By addressing this feeling in therapy he probably found a way to give it a name and thus began an articulation of meanings associated with masculinity:

Because, um, as I said at the start of this conversation, I haven't thought much about masculinity except, perhaps, in my therapy, when I thought about mostly the concept of its reverse, being emasculated (Donovan: 542-545)

Eames confabulates as he attributes to me the words “grey thing”, possibly referring to an earlier reflection of mine that defining masculinity might be a difficult task. Through this misattribution we might infer a struggle in articulating masculinity, possibly a lack of clear distinctions (“grey” instead of black and white, for example). In order for a distinction to be made, his current experience has to be contrasted with an experience he has not had and cannot have, namely, to be a woman. Eames seems to be struggling when he pauses to reflect and loses his train of thought:

I'm still struggling a bit, with the whole, by what you mean feeling like a man, um you're right, it's a bit of a grey thing, you mentioned that before. Um... for

one, I don't know what it feels to be a woman [laughs] and then [pause]  
yeah! (Eames: 226-229)

**Constituent theme: Nature and nurture.**

In this theme participants describe their perception of masculinity as a product of either biological or cultural factors, or both, and how that may affect their experience of the phenomenon.

Alistair seems to experience a strong link with a long evolutionary heritage that should be validated. Others seem irrational for dismissing a long biological history of gender differences and may be almost disrespectful for someone to “throw [evolution] out the window”, like trash. For Alistair masculinity seems to be validated as a concept with a fixed meaning by an authority of logic and science - dismissal of masculinity on these grounds may be experienced as inherently wrong:

We've got three million years of evolution and these people just take it and throw it out the window. And it's illogical. And you just don't do that, evolution isn't something that, that, uh you can throw away. (Alistair: 669-672)

Bruce frames growing up as a man as something that comes from outside and acts on the self (“being channelled into”). Although his narrative here seems to be referring to a 'nurture' aspect of masculinity, the term “channelled” itself may refer to a natural flow, akin to a river, possibly lending a sense of naturalness into how culture shaped him into a man:

I guess you kind of, you kind of feel slightly channelled into a certain, you know, as you're growing up and I guess if you grow up as a girl you could if you asked a woman she might feel the same things, you kind of uhm feel slightly channelled into being a certain way (Bruce: 169-178)

Galen's experience of himself as a man seems to be grounded on his biological sex. While Galen has been critical of the socially constructed concept of masculinity throughout the interview, his feeling of being a man seems to be rooted in biology. Manhood is in having male genitalia, possibly the common denominator of all forms of masculinity. His understanding of what being a man is seems elegantly simple and solid - he begins and ends his sentence demonstrating assurance, while the middle of the sentence contains the simplest reason for that assuredness:

Um... I don't feel unlike a man and, and I guess it comes back to what my definition of a man is and that is I have male genitalia, that makes me a man. (Galen: 319-321)

**Constituent theme: Questioning masculinity.**

This theme describes the participants' experience of questioning, challenging or disagreeing with the concept of masculinity in general, with their own definition of masculinity or the definitions of others.

Carney, in attempting to articulate masculinity comes up a few times with a concern over sounding sexist. It would seem that the interview gave him a chance to verbalize his intuitions and upon trying to "conceptualize" masculinity into a few simple definitions he deemed the outcome as out of touch with the social reality ("mad") or unfairly gender-specific ("sexist"). The fact that we both laughed might indicate my identification with his puzzlement in defining masculinity. It would seem as if Carney is being critical of his own intuitions about masculinity:

Some of the questions, I'm just, em, it's just things I've never really considered, I suppose, and I kind of, I've never verbalised a lot of this stuff before so it's quite difficult to kind of conceptualise it and, eh, put it in a way that doesn't sound mad or sexist [both laugh], so, yeah. (Carney: 342-346)

Eames paints a picture of physically tough, aesthetically raw men, and then contrasts this with what he perceives as their hidden sensitivity. The "big guys" with the "bald heads and [...] tattoos" is the picture that contradicts their "sweet[ness]". The contradiction is so strong for Eames that he uses Mike Tyson to highlight it. For Eames, this contradiction is a possibly suspicious sign that this 'tough' masculinity has no substance:

[W]hen you go to the gym, and you see the big guys and they have got bald heads and they got tattoos, when you talk to them they are often the sweetest in the world. Why? Because they are often afraid of the world, they haven't learned to cope. Have you ever heard Mike Tyson talk? (Eames: 401-408)

Faris similarly becomes critical of hypermasculine displays, the "lads mag loaded version of [...] masculinity". The word "caricature" is possibly used to dismiss this type of masculinity as lacking in depth - caricatures are exaggerated images, highlighting some aspects but only across two dimensions. The caricature "takes" masculine traits and "leaves" them, as if its description of masculinity never arrives at a real point. While he links this "lad's" masculinity with a root, "acceptable" version he nevertheless differentiates them and thus may imply that the caricatured one is unacceptable.

I would probably describe it as the lads mag loaded version, of uh masculinity, which is really a sort of caricature of it. I think it takes, um... characteristics which-which might to a point have been acceptable and it takes them to the point of caricature, which I think, it- it then leaves it, um. (Faris: 70-76)

## **Discussion**

The review of existing literature on masculinity has indicated a long history of broad examination of the concept, yet qualitative research into the phenomenon as experienced by men is only recently budding (Kierski, 2013). The following discussion aims to provide a contextualised understanding of the lifeworld of men and constitutes an integration of the present research findings with existing literature, thus deepening our understanding of the data (Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2008).

It would seem that the experience of masculinity takes place within multiple interrelated contexts. Perceptions regarding "Being Masculine" inevitably overlap with developmental struggles regarding being or becoming "Superior" as a person. Reflecting on the concept of masculinity (What is Masculinity) seems to also overlap with the aforementioned developmental journey. These three contexts seem to also have an impact in the emotional realm and to inform how one relates to men and women. In turn, the emotional context and interpersonal relationships seem to influence the perceptions of being masculine, the developmental journey to superiority and reflections upon the concept itself.

Part of the men's developmental journey towards feeling Superior, as described by the second Master theme of this study named "The Self towards Superiority", was to adapt the concept of masculinity in order to better accommodate for their strengths. In order to do so, the men reflected on their life experience as men and attempted to establish or challenge the validity of the concept, as seen in the third Master theme of this study - What is Masculinity.

### **Masculinity Beyond Words**

Bussey and Bandura (1999) assert that social learning of gendered behaviour is greatly reinforced by societal structures and that adhering to gendered behaviour feels rewarding, even from a young age, to both men and women. Following this framework

it may be assumed that the men's focus might have been primarily on how to be men rather than on a meta-analytic level that would allow them to "step out" of their gender and examine the phenomenon rather than just experience it - thus explaining the difficulties the men had in answering some of the questions that required a broader perspective, like "How significant is it for you to be a man?". Another common thread in the men's experience was the realization that one has never been a woman in order to become aware of how masculinity may be affecting their lives. Eames makes that explicit:

Um... for one, I don't know what it feels to be a woman [laughs] [...] (Eames: 226-229)

This contrast might be linked with the observation that masculinity can mainly be perceived and defined through its antithesis with femininity (Hornsey, 2008; Pleck, 1995; Smiler, 2004). This aspect of the theme links with the experience of the men of this study as being different from women in general, which is part of the sixth Master theme, "The Other Gender", and might introduce difficulties in the definition of masculinity should the comparison fall with women that seem to bear the characteristics of masculinity as defined by the men in this study: being powerful, independent and autonomous, or in a position of leadership.

This Constituent theme might alert us of the difficulties men might have in articulating the concept of masculinity even though they might be perfectly able to reflect upon their experiences as men. This may lead to retaining possibly problematic assumptions regarding gendered behavioural prescriptions that cannot be readily challenged. The case might be that whatever aspects of the experience cannot be articulated are not readily available for reflection, as seen in the other Constituent themes of What is Masculinity, below. For this reason, a therapeutic environment that allows space for exploration and articulation might greatly enhance a man's available material for self-reflection.

## **Nature and Nurture**

There is significant literature on either side of the 'nature vs. nurture', and on the more inclusive 'nature plus nurture', debates regarding masculinity (Connell, 1995; Kingerlee, 2012; Levant, 1995; Lippa, 2007; Willer et al., 2013). Cultural practices may also in turn define the context through which knowledge of biology, evolution and sociology are used to explain masculinity (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1988; Madill et al., 2000). The men acknowledged both factors (nature and nurture) as affecting the concept of masculinity yet they variably favoured one of the two as the primary force that shapes it. Favouring a factor almost always came in the form of scientifically-informed arguments either informed by evolutionary biology or sociology. The function of scientific knowledge establishing the validity of what is masculinity and how it came to be can be considered to be one of validation and protection of the men's gender identity (Breakwell, 2010) or a rationalization defense mechanism used to conceal motivations to maintain the self's status-quo (Clark, 1998). We have to consider Alistair's statement (655-664) about chromosomes: "we've got X and Y, they've just got Y, whatever the fuck it is" where possibly the importance of accuracy is superseded by the importance of attaching scientific credibility to the claim that masculinity is innate and thus cannot be challenged. Another function of scientific knowledge was to establish a relativistic approach to masculinity and to highlight its precariousness, again in order to protect the self's status-quo by maybe trivializing the concept in order to neutralize the pressure to conform to masculine norms (and therefore, to defend against experiencing Discrepancy Strain). In this regard, scientific knowledge was the basis upon which to question and doubt the concept of masculinity, as seen in the Constituent theme below.

## **Questioning Masculinity**

The men's motivation to question masculinity might lie with engaging the competitive aspect of masculinity within a hegemonic structure (Connell, 1998; Good & Brooks,

2005; Smiler, 2004). Yet doing so could also constitute an attempt to reduce the perception of GRC (O'Neil, 2008) or Discrepancy Strain (Pleck, 1995). An aspect of this theme is questioning the concept of masculinity itself without necessarily referring to hegemonic structures. The men may have instead experienced the processes of accommodation and assimilation (Breakwell, 1993; 2010) of the concept by having doubts regarding their own intuitive sense and definitions of masculinity.

Eames became critical of physically 'raw' displays of masculinity as being overcompensatory in nature, possibly referring the phenomenon Willer et al. studied (2013). It might be the case that Eames uses that phenomenon as a way to challenge these physically dominant masculinities in order to validate his own. However, this does not necessarily mean that Eames is trying to reinforce his position in a hegemonic structure of masculinities (Terry & Braun, 2009). Instead, he may be attempting to bring it on par with others, attempting at a horizontal inclusion of masculinities (De Visser & McDonnell, 2013) and thus possibly make himself feel more included in the greater group of men.

The function of challenging the validity of the concept of masculinity might bear significant interactions with becoming "superior" as part of a man's life. The second Master theme, named "The Self towards Superiority", incorporates the experience of the self as an intellectual man. Questioning the concept of gender might allow for men to exert power over the societal structures that in turn exert power over them and doing so is reinforced by the part of the men's identity that bears intellectual prowess. It might be important to try to discern whether dysfunctional assumptions about masculinity are addressed by the men with an agenda for changing aspects of their gender that contribute to problems or, rather, in order to further perpetuate a claim for power (Terry & Braun, 2009). It might be useful to interrogate, within a safe therapeutic space, the deeper meaning and motives for challenging one's gender prescriptions and whether men that perceive themselves as intellectually superior wish to genuinely challenge

aspects of their gender that contributes to Gender Role Strain or to turn the concept of masculinity on its head, so to speak, in order to paradoxically establish their own masculinity

## **Conclusion**

Questions around masculinity, from verbalizing intuitions, to the origins of masculinity and questioning the concept on a personal or a societal level was another aspect of the participants' experience. It has been illustrated that participants have been critical of various definitions of masculinity, which has in turn affected their own definitions as well as their own experience.

An initial reluctance on the part of the researcher to engage interpretatively with the data, as noted by Smith et al. (2009) to be the case with first-time analysts, led to the reiteration the analysis in order to allow more depth in understanding. Multiple, alternative meanings emerged in order to allow for the possibility of other interpretations, which also led to Constituent themes to become interconnected by sharing common Emergent themes.

## **Implications and Future Studies**

The present exploration of the men's contextually embedded experience of masculinity aimed at providing a broader perspective on the phenomenon in particular contexts (Smith et al., 2009). This way, this study also aimed to support the reflective and humanistic ethos of Counselling Psychology (Cooper, 2009) when working with male clients by inviting practitioners to challenge possibly imposing preconceptions about masculinity - as I did throughout this research - even if said preconceptions stem from well-evidenced theoretical models of male psychological well-being (Kingerlee, 2012) and to privilege the clients' experience before theory.

Grounded on present findings linking the questioning of masculinity with its adaptation of definition to the person's strengths and capacities, practitioners could support their clients' inquiries by challenging assumptions and dysfunctional beliefs, using interventions such as those found traditionally in CBT (Wells, 1997) and then allowing for more personal, genuine definitions to take their place (Mearns & Thorne, 2007; Rogers, 1961), with an aim for psychological flexibility (Smith & Hayes, 2005; Strosahl et al., 2004).

Good qualitative research must instigate new research questions and expand our understanding of phenomena (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003). The findings of the present study cannot be generalized to the general population due to the sample size characteristics (size, representativeness), however they can inspire new research questions pertaining to masculinity.

Research biased towards middle-class, Caucasian, heterosexual males might be illustrating phenomena and measurements that indeed refer to individuals within these cultural and racial contexts. However, more qualitative research with culturally and sexually diverse masculinities might be needed in order to further illuminate thematic structures that can emerge from the experience of masculinity and that could possibly indicate which aspects of the experience may transcend certain contexts, and which may not. Samples sharing a different cultural heritage or alternative sexualities might help researchers address the phenomenology of masculinity beyond the contextual factors of this study's sample.

It might also be useful to explore further whether and how a wish for being 'superior' might motivate questioning and re-defining masculinity. Of particular interest would also be to further explore how self-esteem and the perception of GRS and GRC are affected by this process of assimilating and accommodating the concept of masculinity.

## **Summary**

Following the interpretative phenomenological analysis of interview transcripts from men describing their experience of masculinity several thematic commonalities emerged and were subsequently presented in this study. Moreover, integration with previous research findings may have led to new perspectives on and research questions regarding the subject matter as approached within Counselling Psychology.

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## APPENDIX

Table 1

*Master Theme Table Outline*

<b>1. Being masculine</b>	<b>2. The Self Towards Superiority</b>
<b>Power</b>	<b>Young Self as Inferior</b>
<b>Leadership</b>	<b>The Source of Masculinity</b>
<b>Independence and Autonomy</b>	<b>Being an Intellectual</b>
<b>Action Hero</b>	<b>Malleable Definition of Masculinity</b>
<b>Good Man</b>	<b>Self vs. the World</b>
<b>Masculinity Through the Body</b>	<b>The Self as Superior and Privileged</b>
<b>Work as Significant Life Aspect</b>	
<b>3. What is Masculinity</b>	<b>4. The Emotional World</b>
<b>Masculinity Beyond Words</b>	<b>Emotional Strength</b>
<b>Nature and Nurture</b>	<b>Detachment and Perspective Shift</b>
<b>Questioning Masculinity</b>	<b>Help-Seeking</b>
<b>5. Other Men</b>	<b>6. The Other Gender</b>
<b>Father as Point of Reference for Masculinity</b>	<b>The Power of the Female</b>
<b>The Male Group</b>	<b>Negotiating Masculinity with Partners</b>
<b>Idealized Men</b>	<b>Being Different from Women</b>
<b>Homosexuality</b>	

## Appendices

Appendix A - Poster and Flyer

Appendix B - Information Form

Appendix C - Informed Consent Form

Appendix D - Debriefing Form

**Recruiting **men** as research participants for a study at**

**City University London.**

Masculinity has been a very important and controversial issue for men and we are interested in hearing your personal experience regarding the matter.

You will have a friendly and safe environment to enlighten us with your experience of growing up as a man: the possible challenges you have faced, the important lessons you learned, cherished and memorable moments, the people you have met, your unique journey through life in general!

**We firmly believe that your experience is invaluable, and we would be honoured if you would share it with us!**

If you are male, between the ages 18 and 60 consider participating in a 60-minute interview in an academic environment in Angel.

This is part of a doctoral thesis in Counselling Psychology. Your thoughts would greatly help enrich our understanding of how masculinity affects our lives as men.

Contact the researcher at:



Contact the academic supervisor at



## INFORMATION REGARDING THE STUDY

Dear participant,

Thank you in advance for taking the time to read this, as well as for the time volunteered by you in order to participate.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to gather interview data regarding the experience of men currently residing in the UK of their masculinity. Specifically, the focus of the study is how participants consider themselves as men and how they have experienced masculinity throughout their lives.

### **THE INTERVIEW**

You will be required to participate in a 60-minute interview in a safe, academic environment near the Angel tube station, at City University London. The interviewer will ask you a set of open-ended questions, to which there is no right or wrong answer – just your own personal experience. The interview will be recorded in audio format.

### **SAFEGUARDING.**

If at any point you feel distressed or cannot carry on with the interview, feel free to ask to leave. This will not penalize you in any way. You will not be asked to provide a rationale for such a decision.

No severely adverse effects are expected from participating in this study. However, speaking about a potentially sensitive matter, which is one's own sense of masculinity, might bring about feelings of anxiety, vulnerability, distress, or distressful memories. If

you become distressed during the interview brief psychological support from the interviewer will be provided. Feel also free to contact the following mental health services should you require additional psychological support:

MIND - 020 8519 2122

Samaritans - 08457 90 90 90

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information you provide will be confidential and no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. Any records and details kept in written or audio form will be safeguarded and password protected to ensure data security and thus, confidentiality. Furthermore, mentions of names, brands and locations will be hidden, changed, and silenced out of recordings to ensure that no information will link your person with the recording.

Feel free to ask any questions/clarifications at any point before or after the interview.

**Interviewer/Researcher: Panagiotis Bouzianis,**

**Email:** [REDACTED]

**Academic supervisor: Dr. Susan Strauss**

**Email:** [REDACTED]

**Informed Consent Form**

Project Title: Men’s Experience of Masculinity in the UK

I agree to take part in the above City University London research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I may keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:

- be interviewed by the researcher and allow the interview to be audio-taped

**Data Protection**

This information will be held and processed for transcription and analysis by the researcher.

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. The identifiable data will not be shared with any other organization.

I agree for the researcher to record and process this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in this statement and my consent is conditional on complying with the Data Protection Act 1998.

**Withdrawal from study**

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project up to one week after my interview without being penalized or disadvantaged in any way.

Participant’s Name: .....

Participant’s Signature: .....Date:

.....

**Interviewer/Researcher: Panagiotis Bouzianis** Email: [REDACTED]

**Academic supervisor: Dr. Susan Strauss** Email: [REDACTED]

## DEBRIEFING

Dear participant,

Thank you for your time and co-operation with which you helped make this study more valuable.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study aims at exploring the experience of masculinity for men currently residing in the UK and how has it affected their lives. In order for research to produce a deeper understanding for phenomena such as masculinity, in-depth interviews are conducted, like this one, and participants' accounts of their experience are very valuable for the development of psychological theories surrounding men's mental health and development.

### **SAFEGUARDING**

No severely adverse effects are expected from participating in this study. However, speaking about a potentially sensitive matter, which is one's own sense of masculinity and self, might bring about feelings of anxiety, vulnerability, distress, or distressful memories. If you have become distressed during the interview or are feeling so at the moment, do not hesitate to talk to the interviewer about this.

Feel also free to contact the following mental health services should you require additional psychological support later:

MIND - 020 8519 2122, Samaritans - 08457 90 90 90

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information you provided will be confidential and no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. Any records and details kept in written or audio form will be safeguarded and password protected to ensure data security and thus, confidentiality. Furthermore, mentions of names, brands and locations will be hidden, changed, and silenced out of recordings to ensure that no information will link your person with the recording.

Feel free to ask any questions/clarifications following the interview.

**Interviewer/Researcher: Panagiotis Bouzianis**

**Tel.: 07583 771 673**

**Email:** [REDACTED]

**Academic supervisor: Dr. Susan Strauss**

**Email:** [REDACTED]