

**Understanding modern masculinity in relation to traditional  
gender role change: a thematic analysis of men's lived  
experiences and perceptions**

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## CONTENTS

<b>Table of Table.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Table of Figure.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Attestation of Authorship.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Dedication.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Overview of Dissertation .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Literature Review and Rationale.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Aims of the Research.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Methodology and Method.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Qualitative Research .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Interpretive Phenomenological Research.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Semi-Structured Interviewing .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Thematic Analysis .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Phases of Thematic Analysis.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Data Collection .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Participant Recruitment and Selection .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Ethical Issues.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Gender Issues.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Conducting Interviews.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Data Analysis.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Familiarizing Myself with the Data.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Close-to-Text Coding.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Creating First-Order Themes.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Creating Second-Order Themes.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Creating Third-Order Themes, Sub-Themes and Main Themes.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Chapter 5: Finding.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Main Theme: Relationships.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Sub-theme: Attitude to Fatherhood.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Sub-theme: Experience of Women in Relation to Masculinity.....</b>	<b>47</b>

<b>Sub-theme: Impact of Relationships.....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Main Theme: Identity.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Sub-theme: Self-esteem.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Sub-theme: Values.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Sub-theme: Family and Culture.....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Main Theme: Mental Health.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Sub-theme: Unhealthy Coping.....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Sub-theme: Men and psychotherapy.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Sub-theme: Hope .....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Chapter 6: Discussion.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Hegemonic Masculinity and its Adverse Interrelations.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Fathers: From Providers to Invisible Presence to a Nurturing Parent .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Fear of the Feminine.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Implications for Psychotherapy.....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Cultural Perspective.....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Limitations and Ideas for Further Research.....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Appendix A: Consent Form.....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet.....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Appendix C: Recruitment Advertisement.....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Appendix D: AUTECH Approval Letter.....</b>	<b>92</b>

## Table of Tables

<b>Table 1. Examples of Transcripts and Corresponding Close-to-text Codes.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Table 2. Example of Creating First-order Themes.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Table 3. List of 23 First-order Themes .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Table 4. Three Candidate Thematic Networks.....</b>	<b>39</b>

## Table of Figures

<b>Figure 1. Map of final themes and sub-themes .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Figure 2. Main Theme ‘Relationships’, Associated Sub-themes and Third Order Themes.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Figure 3. Main Theme ‘Identity’, Associated Sub-themes and Third Order Themes..</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Figure 4. Main Theme ‘Mental Health’, Associated Sub-themes and Third Order Themes.....</b>	<b>62</b>

### **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my own knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), or material to which a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institute of higher learning.

Date: 08/03/2017

Signed: 

### *Dedication*

*I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my father, Sergey Porodin. He had been the most supportive and inspiring person, who encouraged me to always stand up for what I believed in. Writing this dissertation took a lot of courage – you taught me that. It seems only fitting that I dedicate this work to you as a gesture of my love and deep gratitude for the guidance and inspiration you provided. I love you and miss you dearly.*

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines men's lived perceptions and experiences of their masculinity in relation to traditional gender role shifts. Three male participants were interviewed in a semi-structured approach to provide an overview of their personal accounts. A thematic analysis within an interpretive hermeneutic framework was critically applied to the interview data, which generated three themes: Relationships, Identity, and Mental Health. Each of these themes was supported by two or more sub-themes. The analysis of the interrelationships between the themes reveals the internal sense of exclusion. The themes are discussed in the context of wider psychotherapeutic approaches and the clinical implications of these findings are considered. Numerous suggestions are offered for future research as well as a critique of the method of study.

*Key words: masculinity, fatherhood, identity, self-esteem, relationships, psychotherapy*



## **Overview of Dissertation**

**Chapter 1** undertakes a review of the literature that provides purpose and rationale for the current research and outlines the research aims.

**Chapter 2** contains details of the methodological framework, method, data collection and data analysis used in the study.

**Chapter 3 and 4** describes in detail how the study was conducted, from the recruitment of participants to data analysis and identification of final themes.

**Chapter 5** outlines and explores the findings of the data analysis (main themes and sub-themes), with illustrative examples from the interview transcripts.

**Chapter 6** discusses the meaning, significance and implications in the context of wider psychotherapeutic approaches. The clinical implications of these findings are considered in relation to mental health as well as the broader socio-cultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand, and illuminates areas for further research.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Literature Review and Rationale

Gender is an ever-changing concept, and according to Fernandez-Alvarez (2014) it consists of the stereotypes, ideologies, behaviours, and approaches associated with masculine and feminine which vary significantly in different cultures and generations. He argues that masculinity is a “set of constantly changing meanings, which are constructed through relationships with ourselves, with others and with our world”, (p. 2). Furthermore, gender differences are being increasingly recognized as important variables in psychotherapy and psychological research. Nevertheless, most of the research in this area explores masculinities from a feminist point of view and focuses on the ideology of power that justifies oppression of women (e.g. Killmartin, 1994; Connell, 1995; Kimmell, 1996; Seidler, 1994). However, there is a lack of research exploring men’s lived experiences of their masculinity as the feminist movement challenges and shifts previous ideas of gender roles.

Connell (2005) provided a theory of masculinities, where hegemony interacts with three other forms of masculinities: subordinate, marginalized, and compliant. Hegemonic masculinity was identified as the masculine ‘ideal’, and was associated with heterosexuality, toughness, control, and authority. Haggett (2014), argued that while hegemonic masculinity is not a prescribed ideal of what masculinity should be, it is the most dominant group to this day.

According to Johansson and Andreasson (2017), structural-functional theory was dominant in influencing family life, parenthood and fatherhood/motherhood in the 1950s and 1960s. This meant that the father was described as the leader of the household and head of the family, while the mother was described as having emotional and expressive functions. However, while our society has somewhat moved away from that ideology, masculinity is still associated with being strong, successful, capable, reliable, and in control (Fernandez-Alvarez, 2014).

There is a dearth of research that looks at traditional gender role reversal. However, Johansson and Andreasson (2017) found that some husbands, who stayed home, while the wife worked, suffered from the 'housewife syndrome'. That is, they experienced depression due to the lack of confidence because they felt like their achievements were invisible and there was a lack of recognition. In fact, Kingerlee (2012) hypothesized that a significant proportion of male psychological distress is partly driven and maintained by 'Male Specific Profile', which adheres to more masculine norms, and consists of these interlocking components (p. 91),

- (a) Status seeking – hyper-vigilant to status in own and others' eyes
- (b) Empathic potential – others perceived as depriving, deprivation of self
- (c) Shame avoiding – being vulnerable to shame during psychological crisis, yet wanting to avoid shame
- (d) Emotional potential – emotional inhibition, reduced emotional repertoire, alexithymia.

Furthermore, Kierski and Blazina (2009) argued that men who identify themselves with more traditional gender stereotype, or 'Male Specific Profile', and feel that their masculinity is threatened (particularly by women), tend to use their masculine physicality, become aggressive, deflect from their personal experience, or work harder as compensation. Additionally, Intidola et al. (2016) suggested that if one has a preference for traditional masculinity in men, it might lead to gender discrimination, aggression, and sexual harassment. However, while we have research on potential 'cause and effect', there is almost no existing literature on exploration of men's lived experience of their masculinity and how it could be applied to therapeutic approaches when working with men.

Previous literature suggests that men's mental health is an underestimated issue that needs attention (Jewkes & Morel, 2015; Kierski & Blazina, 2009; Szabo, 2014). In fact, suicide is the most widely discussed aspect of men's mental health, with men being 3-4 times more likely to die by suicide than women (Patrick & Robertson, 2016). There are also other areas of concern in relation to men's mental health, such as undiagnosed depression, substance abuse and violence. Additionally, Kingerlee (2012) argued that it is now increasingly recognized that men's psychological issues and mental health deserve attention in their own right, especially since evidence suggests that men find it more difficult than

women to request psychological help (Patrick & Robertson, 2012), which combined with other factors can have tragic outcomes in both homicide and suicide.

While there are obvious links between suicide and depression, the question stands around the contradiction that more women are diagnosed with depression and other common mental health disorders, despite the higher rate of suicide in men, which is currently 4:1 (Kingerlee, 2012). Patrick and Robertson (2012) provided a potential explanation to these differences; suggesting that they could be due to women internalizing distress as opposed to men externalizing distress through overworking, substance misuse, violence and suicide. Additionally, it has been suggested that men could be less skilled at identifying and naming their emotions, and furthermore, show greater signs of alexithymia than women (Kingerlee, 2012). I would assume that if one had no language to describe their emotions, a therapeutic process could potentially feel difficult and embarrassing. In fact, Pollack (2005) argues that boys are more subjected to early psychological abandonment, which leaves males more susceptible to difficulties with emotional expression and associated feelings of shame, which could potentially prevent them from seeking psychotherapy in the future. However, when these emotional difficulties are combined with traditional masculinity stereotypes and expectations, the statistics around male mental health are not surprising. For example, according to Lorber and Garcia (2010) traditional masculinity gender norms make it more difficult for male veterans to seek help for PTSD because those norms add an extra degree of avoidance and shame at doing so. Male veterans do not see seek help as therapy could feel emasculating.

Snitow (2015) argued that it is very important to reflect and understand conflicts and dramas of masculinity in order to recognize men's new challenges in the current society. However, on the psychotherapeutic level, according to Kingerlee (2012), special attention should be paid to 'Male Specific Profile' as well as therapy interfering behaviours associated with the abandonment mechanism, which pushes the man to *run away* from psychotherapeutic reflection and the seeking of further help. Clinical experience suggests that if this is not done, both male clients and their therapists – unconsciously guided by the abandonment mechanism – could avoid or prematurely abandon useful therapeutic discussion, as early transference issues could be unconsciously replayed and early experiences of abandonment could be re-enacted (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000).

Furthermore, without awareness, therapists' own preconception and biases can create a double bind of isolation (Lorber & Garcia, 2010).

By giving voice to these experiences, this research is an attempt at increasing awareness and initiating discussion around the needs and experiences of men. The findings of this research will contribute towards expansion of awareness, as well as critical reflection around men's mental health in relation to their experience of masculinity. It is hoped that this awareness would guide and support clinicians, men, women, and society to cease their collusion with the inclination to dismiss, abandon or avoid distressed men.

### **Aims of the Research**

No research currently exists, exploring the perceptions of men's lived experience of modern masculinity as opposed to more traditional views. Hence, as a starting point of enquiry, this research is set out to explore a broad research question: "What are men's lived experiences of change in traditional gender roles in relation to their masculinity?" The original aim of this research was to identify and understand their experiences, which were potentially overlooked in previous research. However, given the broad scope of the phenomenon being pursued, I divided the overall topic into three research questions: (1) What are men's lived experiences of change in traditional gender roles? (2) What meaning do men make of these experiences in relation to their masculinity? (3) How can psychotherapists expand their knowledge and understanding around men's experiences of shame, anxiety, stress and low self-esteem?

The research aims to provide a rich thematic network and description of the data set. The purpose of this type of analysis is to increase awareness relating to issues around men's experience of masculinity, which would help enhance both clinical and social knowledge and understanding.

## Chapter 2: Methodology and Method

This chapter introduces the methodology, the methods of data collection and analysis used in this research, and explores why the chosen framework is suitable for the aims of this study.

This research falls under the paradigm of qualitative research as it uses *words* as data and utilizes a meaning-based form of data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It acknowledges the subjectivities of both the researcher and the participant in the process and emphasizes that those with a first-hand experience of a phenomenon hold both knowledge and expertise.

The study is situated within an interpretative phenomenological framework, focusing on how people make meaning of lived, everyday experiences. The researcher then utilizes a text-interpretation approach, aiming to understand the meaning embedded within participants' narratives and recollections.

Creswell (2013) argues that qualitative research aims to provide a complex and detailed understanding of phenomena, which can only be identified by talking directly with people and allowing them to share their lived experiences. Thus, data were collected using semi-structured interviews, which explored participants' accounts of events, their subjective reactions, perceptions and experiences with the use of open-ended questions, which gave participants the opportunity to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses (Mack et al., 2005). Thematic analysis, based on guidelines provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Attride-Stirling (2001), was then used to identify and describe patterns or themes within the data.

### Qualitative research

The current research aims to look at how men make meaning of their subjective experience of masculinity, and hence falls under the broad paradigm of qualitative research, as it is typically viewed as the most appropriate type of research for investigating phenomena, culture and behaviours. Qualitative researchers study subjects in their natural settings,

attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Mack et al. (2005) suggest that qualitative research is a type of scientific research and, in general terms, consists of an investigation that:

- Seeks answers to a question
- Systematically uses a predefined set of procedures to answer the question
- Collects evidence
- Produces findings that were not determined in advance
- Produces findings that are applicable beyond the immediate boundaries of the study

However, it is important to acknowledge and accept that researcher's values and experience inevitably influenced data interpretation. Therefore, good qualitative research is committed to using critical reflection on how the research process may have been affected and the data that it produced (Morrow, 2005).

It should also be noted that, given the usually small sample size and absence of statistical analyses, qualitative research is not generalizable and it is important for the researcher not to imply that the findings can be generalized to other population or setting (Morrow, 2005).

Overall, the strength of qualitative research is in the ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. When used along with quantitative methods, qualitative research can help us to interpret and better understand the complex reality of a given situation and the implications of quantitative data (Mack et al., 2005).

### **Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology, founded by Martin Heidegger and further developed by Hans-George Gadamer (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004), provides the philosophical foundation for the research method in this study. Van Manen (1990) defines

hermeneutic phenomenology as research that is oriented towards lived experience (phenomenology) and interpreting texts of life (hermeneutics).

Phenomenology, in both its philosophical and psychological senses, is concerned with the lived experience of the events or phenomena, and how humans, as members of the social world make meaning, as well as subjective nature of both (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005). Essentially there are two types of phenomenology: descriptive and interpretive. The aim of descriptive phenomenology is to describe the phenomena's general characteristics rather than the individual experiences (Giorgi, 2008) and, while hermeneutics refer to the tradition and practice of text interpretation (Lopez & Willis, 2004), hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology is interested in interpreting lived experiences (Giorgi, 2008). Interpretive phenomenology is applied to those situations in which we encounter meanings that are not immediately understandable but require interpretive effort (Gadamer, 1976). Therefore, hermeneutic phenomenology is the study of experience together with its meanings.

What makes research phenomenological is not only a rich description of lived experience, but an open attitude from the researcher, which, at least initially, refrains from importing external frameworks and own biases, whilst it also aims to achieve transcendental subjectivity – a Husserlian concept, which means that the impact of the researcher on the inquiry is continuously assessed and biases and preconceptions are neutralized so that they do not influence the outcome of the study (Friesen, Henriksson & Saevi, 2012). However, both Heidegger and Gadamer recognized and articulated the idea of inter-subjectivity as it applies to interpretive research (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Finlay (2008) argued that interpretation must recognize what has influenced our understanding and view of the world. Rather than setting those factors aside, we should recognize them as influences and biases, which would allow us to be open to other people's meanings. Gadamer (1976) used a term 'fusion of horizons', where each horizon represents one's subjective worldview, which is changeable with new experiences. Lopez and Willis (2004) further clarified that the act of hermeneutics involves an intersection of those 'horizons', of both participant and researcher. Therefore, one of the challenges in hermeneutic phenomenological research is for the researcher to remain responsive, flexible and attentive to the meanings that may emerge in the process. As Finlay (2008) explained, researchers need to bring a "critical self-awareness of their own subjectivity, vested interests, predilections and assumptions to be conscious of how these might impact on the research process and findings" (p.17). In the current study, I had to



continuously reflect on my own possible preconceptions and biases around participants' accounts. For example, if the participant expressed something I did not agree with, later during the analysis I had to be critically self-aware to still include the data rather than subconsciously discarding it.

### **Semi-Structured Interviewing**

According to Braun and Clarke (2013), interviews are the most commonly utilized method for collecting qualitative data, as interviews are well suited for experience-type questions such as the one presented in the current study. Furthermore, Van Manen (1997) explained that in hermeneutic phenomenological human science the interview serves very specific purposes:

- It may be used for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may provide a deeper understanding of human phenomenon.
- It may be used to develop a conversational relation with an interviewee about the meaning of experience.

As Seidman (2013) suggested, “when people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness” (p.7). Hence the interview is a technique designed to elicit a vivid picture of the participant's perspective on the research topic.

Semi-structured interview is the method used in the current study, as it attempts to understand themes of the lived everyday world from the subjects' own perspective. It comes close to an everyday conversation, but as a professional interview it seeks to obtain descriptions of the interviewees' lived experiences of the described phenomena (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Therefore, the researcher prepares a list of indicative questions around what participants experienced in terms of the phenomenon and what contexts or situations have typically affected participants' experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). It is important that the researcher remains open to the participants' responses and explores unanticipated issues.

Finally, Mack et al. (2005) suggested that conducting and participating in interviews could be a rewarding experience for participants as well as for interviewers. For participants

– whether members of the study population or someone related to the population in a professional capacity – in-depth interviews offer the opportunity for the interviewee to express themselves in a way they are not able to in the everyday life. Many people could find it flattering to discuss their opinions and life experiences and to have someone listen with interest.

### **Thematic Analysis**

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a qualitative method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It is a widely used method for recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meaning and imagery of work (Van Manen, 1997). Thematic analysis can be used within essentialist and realist stances, as it examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings and experiences are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can, therefore, be a method, which works both to reflect reality, and to unpick or unravel the surface of ‘reality’.

In Braun and Clarke’s (2006) method of thematic analysis, themes or patterns are identified via a rigorous process of familiarization with the data, coding, identifying themes, reviewing and refining themes until a satisfactory thematic map of the data is achieved. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis at the interpretative level goes beyond semantic content of the data as it identifies and examines the underlying assumptions, conceptualizations and ideologies, which are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data. However, thematic analysis is identified as a flexible method that is not theoretically bound, instead the theoretical assumptions underlying the analysis are clearly stated, and there is an appropriate fit between theoretical framework and research methods (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

As described previously, in the current research, thematic analysis is used within essentialist/realist stances, where language provides direct access to a participant’s inner world or reality. The type of thematic analysis used in this research is data driven, and overall aims to provide a rich description of the themes across the entire data set.

As a novice researcher, I chose to use thematic analysis for my study, as I found this method to be more accessible because of the advantages identified by Braun and Clarke

(2006). I found that thematic analysis was suited for answering questions posed in the current study, which were related to perceptions and experiences in a changing world (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, given the flexibility of the method, thematic analysis is well suited for researchers with little previous experience and relates well to the practice of psychotherapy, as it is not constrained by theoretical or technical commitments.

### **Phases of Thematic Analysis**

Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined the following 6-stage process as a guideline for researchers to conduct thematic analysis in a more rigorous and efficient way:

1. Familiarize yourself with data
2. Generate initial codes
3. Search for themes
4. Review themes
5. Define and name themes
6. Produce the report

The authors suggest thematic analysis rarely proceeds in a step-by-step manner; hence each of these phases may involve multiple steps depending on the research and the data collected.

A brief description of Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis is provided below.

#### *Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with data*

According to the authors it is vital that you immerse yourself in the data to the extent that you are familiar with the depth of the content. Immersion usually involves 'repeated reading' of the data, and reading the data in an active way – searching for meanings, patterns and so on.

As I worked with interviews, I transcribed them into a written form in order to conduct thematic analysis. While the process of the transcription was very time-consuming and daunting, it assisted me to familiarize myself with the data. Braun and Clarke (2006)

suggest that it should be seen as a key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology, and recognized as an interpretative act, where meanings are created, rather than simply a mechanical one of putting spoken sounds on paper.

I found that the time spent on the transcription was very useful, as it began to inform the early stages of analysis in the means of becoming familiar with the data set.

### *Phase 2: Generating initial codes*

Braun and Clarke (2006), suggest Phase 2 begins when the researcher has read and familiarized oneself with the data, and has generated an initial list of ideas about what is in the data and what is interesting about them. Hence coding is used to organize the data in a meaningful manner. This phase then involves the production of the initial codes from the data.

The coding process used by the researcher would depend on whether an analysis is data-driven or theory-driven (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The current study is an example of data-driven analysis, where generated codes were closely linked to the data (as described in Chapter 4). In contrast, in a theory driven analysis, the researcher would approach the data with pre-existing theoretical framework and attempt to code around those frameworks. I decided that theory-driven analysis was not suitable for this research as I was interested in participants' lived experience of the phenomenon, rather than theoretical framework. This also favoured my occupational intention as a psychotherapist.

### *Phase 3: Searching for themes*

Phase 3 generally begins when all data have been initially coded and collated (Braun and Clarke, 2006). At this point the researcher has a long list of the different codes identified across the data set. The goal at the end of this stage is the identification of a set of candidate themes and sub themes that help collate all the coded data extracts. Essentially, I began by analyzing my codes, and considered how different codes could be combined into potential themes.

This is where commenced thinking about relationships between different levels of themes and sub themes, as some codes went on to form main themes, whereas others formed sub-themes. There was also a group of codes, which I called 'miscellaneous' as they did not

fit into any of the themes or sub themes. Attride-Stirling (2001) acknowledged that identifying themes is a difficult process, which requires attention to detail and flexibility, as emerging themes often need to be re-worked to accommodate new codes.

#### *Phase 4: Reviewing themes*

According to Braun and Clarke (2006) phase 4 begins once the researcher has a set of potential themes and starts refining those themes. The task at this stage is to recheck and refine the candidate themes identified. This task consists of two stages, where the researcher first reads all the collated extracts at the code level; then the researcher begins to consider validity of individual themes in relation to the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). At this stage I also utilized Attride-Stirling's (2001) method to construct a thematic network that helped to encapsulate all the different levels of themes. This process led to the creation of thematic networks, which will be outlined in Chapter 4.

#### *Phase 5: Defining and naming themes*

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), phase 5 begins when a researcher has a satisfactory thematic map of the data. At this point, the researcher defines and further refines the themes present in the analysis, and analyzes the data within them. By 'define and refine' the authors mean identifying the 'essence' of what each theme is about, as well as determining what aspect of the data each theme captures. At this stage, the researcher begins to identify what is interesting about the content of the data and why, as the researcher needs to consider how each theme fits into an overall 'story' that analysis speaks about the data in relation to the research question.

Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that it is important that by the end of this phase the researcher can clearly define what themes are, and what they are not. One test for this is to see whether the researcher is able to describe the scope and content of each theme in a couple of sentences. Further refinement may be needed to achieve this.

*Phase 6: Producing the report*

The final phase of the analysis is the writing up of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and is about integrating the themes together, using the data extracts and creating an extensive narrative, which reflects the implications and validity of the research. Findings of the current study are presented in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 3: Data Collection**

This chapter describes in detail how the study was conducted, starting from the recruitment and selection of the interview participants through to the analysis of data and identification of final themes. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews with three male participants aged from 25 to 65. Interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase method of thematic analysis and Attride-Stirling's (2001) third phase of analysis to create a thematic network. Data analysis yielded three main themes, supported by and anchored on a number of lower order themes.

### **Participant Recruitment and Selection**

The first step of the data collection process was to find suitable participants who were willing to come forward and partake in the study. According to Englander (2012), it is crucial in recruiting participants for phenomenological research to select individuals who claim that they have experienced the phenomenon of interest. To this end I used purposive sampling to help identify potential participants who could purposefully inform the research (Creswell, 2007). In accordance, the key criteria for being eligible for participation in the current studies were established as follows:

1. Male, 18-65 years of age;
2. Self-identifying with more traditional views on masculinity;
3. Be willing to participate in a 60-90-minute, face-to-face, audio taped interview at the location of your choosing.

When deciding about participant recruitment and selection, I aimed for as much variability as possible between participants, in terms of ethnical/cultural background and factors such as age, marital and parental status. This aim would prove problematic in quantitative research, where the results are generalized to the wider population. However, as mentioned in chapter two, qualitative phenomenological research, such as the current study, does not aim to discover how many participants have experienced the same phenomenon, but rather identify "what is it like" to have that experience (Englander, 2012). Furthermore, diversity in participants' backgrounds allows the presentation of the researched experience in

wide and rich detail, so that readers may be able to connect with, and deepen their understanding of the phenomenon (Seidman, 2013).

Additionally, Mack et al. (2005) suggested that purposive sample sizes should be determined based on theoretical saturation (the point in data collection when new data no longer brings additional insights to the research questions). However, given the time and word count restriction in the current research, I adhered to Giorgi's (2008) advice of recruiting three participants as it provided sufficient enough number to allow to distinguish the single individual's particular way of living the phenomenon from a more general way that belongs to a one particular 'type'. For example, in the current study three participants were chosen to be from different backgrounds, such as race, age, marital, and parental status to allow for individual experiences to emerge.

Invitation to participate (see Appendix C) was distributed through the researcher's and supervisor's personal network and three participants expressed interest within ten days. When an identified (potential) respondent indicated interest in participating, the researcher made contact with that person and e-mailed him a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix A) and Consent Form (Appendix B) where the participant was advised, as per Mack et al. (2005) and per the standard of Auckland University of Technology (AUT), on the purpose of the research, what was expected of a research participant, including the amount of time likely to be required for participation, expected risks and benefits, including psychological and social, the fact that participation is voluntary and that one can withdraw at any time with no negative repercussions, how confidentiality will be protected, and the name and contact information of an appropriate person to reach with questions about one's rights as a research participant. Ethics approval was sought and granted by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) (see Appendix D).

All three participants who had confirmed interest in participating at this stage agreed to be interviewed. There was diversity in the participants in terms of different cultural backgrounds, i.e. New Zealand European, Pacific Islander and European/Arabic. Men varied in age from 25 to 65, in marital status from single, divorced and married, and in parental status from being a father, being a single father or not having any children. At that point I had stopped the recruitment of the participants.



## **Ethical Issues**

During the process of planning and designing a qualitative study, researchers need to consider what ethical issues might surface during the study and to plan how these issues need to be addressed (Creswell, 2013). Ethics approval for this study was necessary because participants might experience some discomfort and feel vulnerable during the interview, given they are exploring their lived experiences and perceptions. The researcher was aware of these issues, therefore, ethics approval was sought and granted by AUTECH prior to the commencement of the interviews.

When the participants were fully informed of the process and consent forms were signed, we commenced with the interviews. During the interview process, I was attentive to participants' manner and body cues, as well as informing them of their right to discontinue the interview/audio recording at any time. If required, participants were also offered free counseling at the AUT Health and Wellbeing Centre.

One of the most crucial considerations for this group of the participants was maintaining strict confidentiality in order to create a safe, trustworthy space for the participants to share their experiences. Participants were informed about confidentiality and who would have access to the interview or other material, the researcher's right to publish the whole anonymous interview or parts of it, and the participant's possible access to the transcription and analysis of the qualitative data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Through briefing and debriefing, the participants were reminded about the purpose and the procedures of the research project.

## **Gender Issues.**

The interviewing relationship that develops when participant and the interviewer are of different genders can be deeply affected by sexist attitudes and behaviours (Seidman, 2013). I was aware of the gender differences between the researcher and interviewees and how that could potentially impact on the interviews and participants' willingness to disclose their experiences to a female. According to Seidman (2013), women interviewing men can sometimes be reluctant to control the focus of interview, while male participants can be too easily dismissive of female interviewers. Given the nature of the topic, I was aware of the

potential issues that could arise during the interviews. I felt that an open mind, honest attitude as well as naming the issue were important to demonstrate the consciousness of sexism and concern for gender equity.

### **Conducting Interviews**

Participants were contacted via e-mail or where possible by telephone to make arrangements for the interviews, and were informed that the interview would take between 60-90 minutes with preliminary 10-15 minutes allocated to discuss any detail of the research and to provide an opportunity to address any concerns or queries participants might have. All participants were given a choice of time and place for the interviews. As per safety protocol, an agreement was made between the supervisor and the researcher that if the interviews were held outside of AUT premises, the supervisor will be aware of time and place of the interview. All three participants chose their home for the interview process; so, I travelled to the nominated locations. The interviews were audio recorded with consent, and participants were informed of their right to discontinue the interview or audio recording at any time during the process.

According to Englander (2012), the initial phase of the process in phenomenological research should begin with acknowledging that there is a need to understand the phenomena from the point of view of the lived experience in order to be able to discover the meaning of it, thus, the first question one should ask to the participant is: can you please describe as detailed as possible a situation in which you experienced the phenomenon. The remaining questions should follow the response of the interviewee with a focus on the phenomenon being researched (Englander, 2012). Consequently, the interviews were semi-structured in format and a list of open-ended questions was prepared in consultation with my supervisor and AUTEK. It is important to note that these questions were used only when necessary to help guide the interview and probe the participants to talk about their experience fully. So, whilst all the main topic areas were explored in each interview, each participant was not asked exactly the same questions. The following is a sample of questions prepared:

- Please describe your personal definition/experience of masculinity?
- What do you think male roles and responsibilities should be?
- Do your views of masculinity differ from the views of your father?

- What changes have you observed between your upbringing and your own perception? What was it like for you? What were the benefits? What were the struggles?
- What are your opinions/experiences around male/female relationships?

During the interviews, I utilized my occupational skills of empathy, attention, encouragement and non-judgement to provide a supportive and safe space for the participants, so they could explore and describe their experiences. Participants were given an opportunity to freely associate about their lived experiences in their own words. I had additionally prompted the interviewees to provide specific examples of certain experiences they brought up, which allowed the participants to explore the phenomenon on a deeper level.

Additionally, I paid close attention to participants' and my own responses as the interview progressed to maintain awareness of any prejudices and presuppositions relating to the research topic, as qualitative research recognizes that these subjectivities exist and tends not to eliminate them but rather take them into account for analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I kept a self-reflective journal to assist me to engage in reflexivity. I took issues from my reading and the writing of my reflections to supervision. This gave me an opportunity for exploration of any prejudices and preconceptions I may have had.

Once all three interviews were completed, I transcribed the recordings into written format. I have chosen an orthographic style, which means it includes intonation, pauses as well as non-verbal communication, with the aim to retain clear and complete interpretation of what was said. Additionally, the transcripts were anonymized for confidentiality purposes, by removal of any details that could identify the participants, such as names of people and places. Transcripts were stored as password protected Microsoft Word files.

The transcription of interviews was a time-consuming process, as it involved numerous playbacks of same sections to ensure accuracy. However, this process had a benefit of providing an opportunity to familiarize myself with data. This process aligns with Phase 1 of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Through this process I became intimately familiar with the content of the interviews and, when required, could easily go

back to the original script to check the validity of themes identified in further stages of analysis.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis**

The analysis of the data began when all three interviews were completed and fully transcribed, which helped ensure that subsequent interviews were not unduly influenced by any themes, prejudices or biases that arose after interviewing the preceding participant. I then conducted the analysis by adopting the six-phase guidelines from Braun and Clarke (2006) and the third step from Attride-Stirling's (2001) analytic technique to construct a thematic network. A description of each stage of analysis I undertook is described in detail later in this chapter.

It is important to note that in theory this process may appear linear and involve continuous reduction of the data when moving from initial codes to first-order themes to second-order themes. In reality, it was very much a recursive process, which required revisiting earlier stages and re-examining how and why themes were grouped together to ensure internal consistency between codes, themes and overarching themes. This process also guarded against lower order themes being grouped together prematurely to form a higher order theme.

### **Familiarizing Myself with the Data**

As previously noted, the 'immersion' process of data familiarization began during the process of transcribing the interview verbatim. However, to get a fresh sense of content, I re-read each interview transcript (raw data) from the beginning to end in a "curious and questioning" manner as prescribed by Braun and Clarke (2012, p. 211). Thus, I started to engage with the data in a more active way, noticing sections that I found interesting and any surface level patterns I started to see. I was also conscious of not reading too much into these initial readings, given that they potentially either reflected the most evident features of the data or what we were bringing to the data ourselves (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I also noted sections of transcripts, which did not seem relevant to the research topic and set them aside for re-examination at the later stage.

## Close-to-Text Coding

This next stage of analysis aligns with Braun and Clarke's (2006) phase 2 of thematic analysis and involves generating initial codes from the data. This essential phase "facilitates deep engagement with the data and the production of the analysis that goes beyond the immediate and obvious" (Braun & Clarke, 2015, p. 234). Since I had decided on inductive thematic analysis, codes were required to be generated in a 'data driven' way (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, I decided on a type of 'close-to-text' coding, which would allow me to stay as close as possible to what the interviewee had said, as well as minimize my own interpretation. However, in practice, I found that difficult and I followed Braun and Clarke (2012) statement that codes "will almost always be in the mix of the descriptive and interpretive" and "can be done at the semantic or the latent level of the meaning" (p. 61). That is, it is not possible to completely eliminate my subjectivity and it inevitably would influence how I selected the codes.

With my research topic in mind, when approaching the data for coding, I thought of questions such as "what should I be coding for?" and "how should I determine what is relevant and what is not?" Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest it is crucial to be systematic during coding to ensure that equal attention is given to the data set. Additionally, data-driven analysis requires that the researcher remains open to the possibility of unexpected discoveries, as well as potential challenges of existing preconceptions or biases. Therefore, during the coding process I needed to be both inclusive and appropriately selective in determining relevancy. However, when unsure of the relevance of particular data, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested to 'inclusively' code it by including appropriate surrounding data to provide context, so the codes could be recoded, reviewed or discarded later. Thus, my coding process involved looking at phrases with substantial meaning, rather than single words alone. Furthermore, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendation, I coded for as many potential themes and patterns as possible. For instance, I coded for any descriptions related to masculinity, identity, sense of purpose, relationships, importance of connection, role modeling, fatherhood and issues around mental health.

Coding was undertaken using Microsoft Word. I created a table with two columns on a word document and placed the interview transcripts on the left-hand column of the table. I began by selecting and highlighting a small section of the transcript related to the

description related to a single idea, and recorded corresponding codes in the right-hand column. I worked systematically through each transcript in this manner. I used numbers and two different highlighters to mark sections of the transcript and corresponding codes, so I could keep track of which codes belonged to which data items. I realized that the codes could be modified to better fit what participant was saying, so I adjusted the codes accordingly as I worked through the text. It was a tedious but worthwhile exercise to revisit the codes and see if they still fitted with the research question. An example of segment of this process is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.***Example of Transcript and Corresponding Close-to-text Codes*

Transcript	Codes
<p><b>Interviewer: Could you tell me what is your personal definition or your personal experience of traditional masculinity?</b></p> <p>597. So my personal experience of that would be, I guess, closest to home would be looking at my father. 598. Um when we moved to this country, my father was a rather educated man, but had to make a call, as he wasn't able to provide for his family by that education, he had to do a job that he, at the time had no choice about. 599. So yea he got stuck in, worked hard and I didn't see him for a lot of my youth, as he was always working. 600. Like he'd be living in a different city to us, so he could provide for us. 601. So my definition I guess to be somebody who goes out and provides, even if you don't have a lot of contact with them, but they are still there in terms of you have a roof over your head, food on your table and an opportunity to go out and do something, be it education or sports or whatever it is when you grow up.</p>	<p>597. My personal experience of traditional masculinity, closest to home, would be looking at my father.</p> <p>598. When we moved to this country my father was an educated man, but had to make a call, as he wasn't able to provide for the family by that education. He had to do a job he had no choice about.</p> <p>599. My father got sucked into his job, worked hard and I didn't see him a lot of my youth, as he was always working.</p> <p>600. My father would live in a different city to us, so he could provide for us.</p> <p>601. My definition of masculinity is somebody who goes out and provides, even if you don't have a lot of contact with them but they are still there in terms of you have a roof over your head, food on the table, education etc.</p>



As shown in Table 1, data were essentially coded on a word-by-word basis, and generated codes closely represented the participant's language and ideas. While this was an overwhelming and time-consuming task, this sort of rigorousness was necessary in order to minimize researcher's bias at this early stage of analysis. However, at times I went beyond description of the participants' use of language and interpreted the underlying meaning of data extracts using an analyst's frame of reference. For example, when the participant described the biggest failures as: "647. Right, (*pauses*), that's actually a really tough question...actually no it's not. I'm just bullshitting myself. (*laughs loudly*). Probably the ones for me would be relationships," a level of interpretation was required to label the experience as of "importance of success in relationships." This way interpretation fitted more into the context, as the participant later spoke more about importance of success, rather than failures and what it meant to him.

Ultimately, the aim is to attain a "comprehensive set of codes that differentiates between different concepts, issues and ideas in the data, which has been applied consistently to the dataset" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 211). This process generated 906 codes. Data extracts that were marked for relevance at this stage were re-examined, which resulted in the exclusion of small sections of transcripts that I found as not being relevant to the topic. For example, one of the participants described the difference based on separate marriages and the mothers' approaches. While these descriptions contained interesting and idiosyncratic information, on the close examination they did not directly relate to the participant's experience of masculinity.

### **Creating First-Order Themes**

This stage aligns with Braun and Clarke's (2006) phase 3 of thematic analysis. Once all 906 codes had been established on a single spreadsheet, I could begin collating and analyzing codes generated in the previous stage, and sorting them into first-order themes based on commonalities and patterns between them. Because of my familiarity and immersion with the data after having transcribed the interviews, and having listened to audio-recordings several times, I started to have a feel for broad themes and categories. These broad categories were formed based on common use of participants' language during the interviews, and they were generally related to issues involving participants' experience of masculinity, identity, impact of relationships, connection to others, self-esteem, coping

mechanisms, family and values. At this point I aimed to maintain proximity with the original data, saving the interpretive analysis for later stages.

I found it more comfortable to perform the analysis manually rather than on the computer. I began the process by collating all the codes on a word document, increasing the font size to assist readability, printing them out and then separating codes into strips using a guillotine. This way the codes were more visible to me and I was able to sort and re-sort them into theme-piles. Each pile was identified using a short phrase or a word that captured the essential meaning of the codes it contained. These short phrases or words made up the first-order themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Initially, I worked quickly through the codes placing them in piles based on my immediate sense of similarities and differences between them. Codes that did not seem to fit in any theme-piles were kept in a separate pile that I labeled 'miscellaneous'. I re-examined each pile after this process to help me determine if any codes assigned to one pile would fit better within another, needed to be separated into a different theme, or discarded all together due to lack of relevance or supporting material. On occasion where more than one meaning in a code was significant, these codes were assigned to more than one theme. An example of broad first-order themes and their associated codes is shown below in Table 2.

**Table 2.**

*Example of creating First-order Themes*

Associated Codes	First-order Themes
<p>I am somebody who has boxed emotions away for a very long time.</p> <p>No woman would be interested in a guy that is weak, vulnerable and falling apart.</p> <p>Women are expected to be vulnerable.</p>	<p>Feeling vulnerable</p>

<p><b>If guys start feeling vulnerable and share what's going on for them, if the audience nods along and tells: "I know how it is" and give a message that it's ok and normal for you to experience that.</b></p>	
<p><b>If guys start feeling vulnerable and share what's going on for them, if the audience nods along and tells: "I know how it is" and give a message that it's ok and normal for you to experience that.</b></p> <p>Guys feel really isolated and feel so much pressure, they don't know what to do and that's why they kill themselves.</p> <p>We aren't designed to operate by ourselves. We really need that connection and those kinds of bonds.</p> <p>A lot of guys don't even have the language about feelings, so they can't connect to others on that level.</p>	<p>Connection to others</p>

As demonstrated in Table 2, the code "If guys start feeling vulnerable and share what's going on for them, if the audience nods along and tells: "I know how it is" and give a message that it's ok and normal for you to experience that" was assigned to the group "Feeling vulnerable" and to the group "Connection to others" as I decided that the meaning of the code was relevant to both of these groups.

Upon completion of this step where I re-examined and re-assigned the codes (906) and the theme-piles, a total of 23 broad first-order themes were established (see Table 3). My familiarity with the data helped in this process, as I often had to go back to the level of the original data to check the validity of themes and codes identified. This was the first rudimentary sorting of the large data set.

**Table 3.**

*List of 23 First-order Themes*

<b>First-order Themes</b>
1. Need to be challenged
2. Feeling of control
3. Fear of failure
4. Feeling of vulnerability
5. Connection to others
6. Isolation
7. Providing for family
8. Self-esteem
9. Sense of purpose
10. Role-modeling to other men
11. Values
12. Fatherhood
13. Relationships with fathers
14. Experience of women
15. Experience of gender
16. Experience of masculinity
17. Impact of relationships
18. Anger
19. Violence
20. Substance use
21. Psychotherapy relevance
22. Hope
23. Family and culture

## **Creating Second-Order Themes**

This next stage of analysis aligned with Phase 4 of Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-phase thematic analysis. It involved further consolidation of the data by considering patterns and relationships between first-order themes identified in Table 3, and grouping them together to form second-order themes. This involved a deeper level of interpretation, which was based on semantic content and, where relevant, theoretical and topic based knowledge.

As a result of the review and refinement of themes at this stage, some codes were judged as being irrelevant and were discarded. As an example of the type of codes discarded at this stage – one of the participants spoke about upbringing in a close community and the challenges/benefits around that. Some of this material related to nuclear family versus communal upbringing, as perceived by the participant, which did not directly relate to the participant's experience of masculinity and was hence discarded at this stage. However, some of the codes were combined into a second-order theme, based on the relationship between those themes, as I needed to consider how themes would work together in telling an overall story about the data and form a satisfactory thematic map that would accurately summarize and represent the underpinning meaning of the data. For example, I combined "Fatherhood" and "Relationship with fathers" into one second-order theme "Attitude to fatherhood", as participants clearly spoke about how their own upbringing and their relationship with their fathers influenced their attitude to fatherhood and their relationship with their own children. Out of this exercise, 13 second-order themes were identified.

## **Creating Third-Order Themes, Sub-Themes and Main Themes**

From this point of analysis, according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) Phase 4, the goal is to establish a satisfactory thematic map to represent my data. Although this process seems fairly straightforward, once I got to this stage, I felt stuck and found it difficult to proceed with the analysis. I became aware that I was resistant to merging and generalizing the data and, therefore, losing the richness of participants' stories. While I was cautious not to pre-define themes, which would negate the purpose of analysis, I was determined to present the analysis that captured the main story and ideas, but also preserve all the layers

and complexities within the themes, as they contribute to understanding of the experience explored in this research. I then found the guidelines from Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic network analytical method helpful for creating my thematic map. This technique seemed a better fit with how I wanted to proceed, as it allowed for the creation of a network via clustering groups of themes.

According to Attride-Stirling (2001), thematic networks aim to “explore the understanding of an issue or the signification of an idea, rather than reconcile conflicting definitions of a problem” (p. 387). Furthermore, what thematic network offers is a web-like network as a way to organize the data, and it makes the employed procedures around going from text to interpretation more explicit. I found this concept very useful as it helped facilitate the structuring and depiction of the themes in an organized manner. I followed the guidelines from Attride-Stirling (2001), outlined below, to create my thematic network.

1. Previously identified themes are clustered into coherent and similar groups: themes about X, themes about Y, etc. These groups became the thematic networks. As mentioned earlier, some themes had enough issues to fit under one network. These themes are now re-named ‘basic themes’ (i.e. third-order themes described below).
2. Groups of basic themes are re-arranged and assembled together based on larger shared issues to create ‘organizing themes’ (i.e. sub-themes in current analysis).
3. The final step of this process is to deduce ‘global themes’, that is to “summarize the main claim, proposition, argument, assertion or assumption that the organizing themes are about” (p. 393). Thus, each global theme would produce a thematic network, supported by organizing themes and basic themes.

Table 4 shows the result of my first attempt at clustering themes to create thematic networks. This attempt resulted in the identification of three candidate networks, each containing a main theme, supporting sub-themes and third-order themes, which were temporarily defined as shown.

**Table 4.***Three Candidate Thematic Networks*

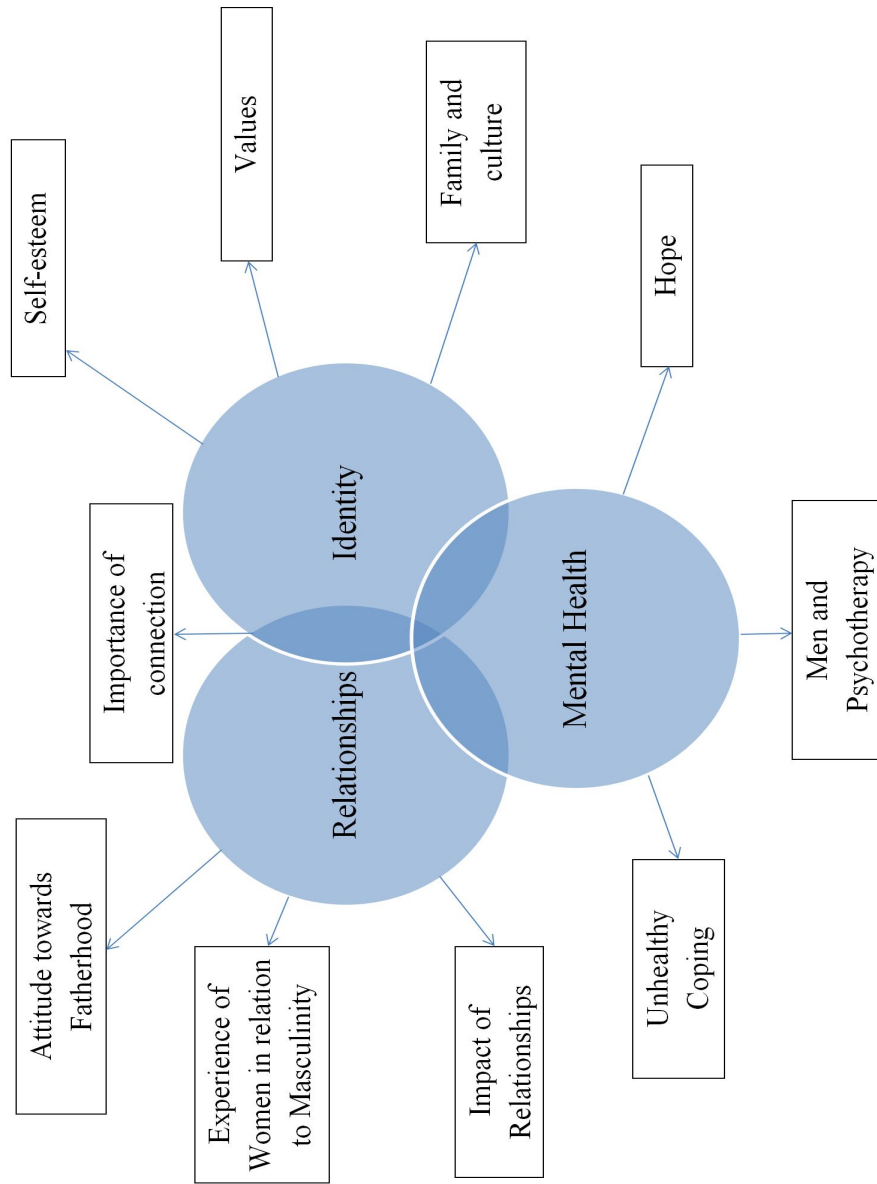
<b>Third-order themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Main themes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fatherhood</li> <li>• Relationship with fathers</li> </ul>	Attitude to fatherhood	Relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience of women</li> <li>• Experience of gender</li> <li>• Experience of masculinity</li> </ul>	Experience of women in relation to masculinity	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connection to others</li> <li>• Isolation</li> <li>• Impact of relationships</li> </ul>	Impact of relationships	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear of failure</li> <li>• Feeling of vulnerability</li> <li>• Self-esteem</li> <li>• Sense of purpose</li> <li>• Feeling in control</li> <li>• Need to be challenged</li> </ul>	Self-esteem	Identity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role modeling to other men</li> <li>• Personal values</li> </ul>	Values	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family and culture</li> <li>• Providing for family</li> <li>• Connection to others</li> </ul>	Family and culture	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anger</li> <li>• Violence</li> <li>• Substance use</li> </ul>	Unhealthy coping	Mental health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychotherapy relevance</li> </ul>	Men and psychotherapy	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hope</li> </ul>	Hope	

Upon reviewing the theme combination, sub-themes and third-order themes, I was aware that some sub-themes only had one or two supporting third-order themes. However, I felt that those third-themes were important on their own and could form their own sub-theme, as they were directly related to the thematic network. For example, ‘hope’ did not fit

into any other sub-themes and had crucial data, which was directly related to the research question. Therefore, it formed its own sub-theme, which fell under ‘mental health’ basic theme. I would also like to note that I felt that third-order theme ‘connection to others’ belonged to ‘identity’ as well as ‘relationships’ main themes. Therefore, I decided to include it in both of those themes.

This process of reviewing and refining led to the final creation of three thematic networks – that is three main themes, ‘Relationships’, ‘Identity’ and ‘Mental health’, each supported by sub-themes and third-order themes. The final pictorial representation of three networks, represented by three overlapping perceptual and experiential spheres and their supporting sub-themes, is shown as a thematic map in Figure 1.





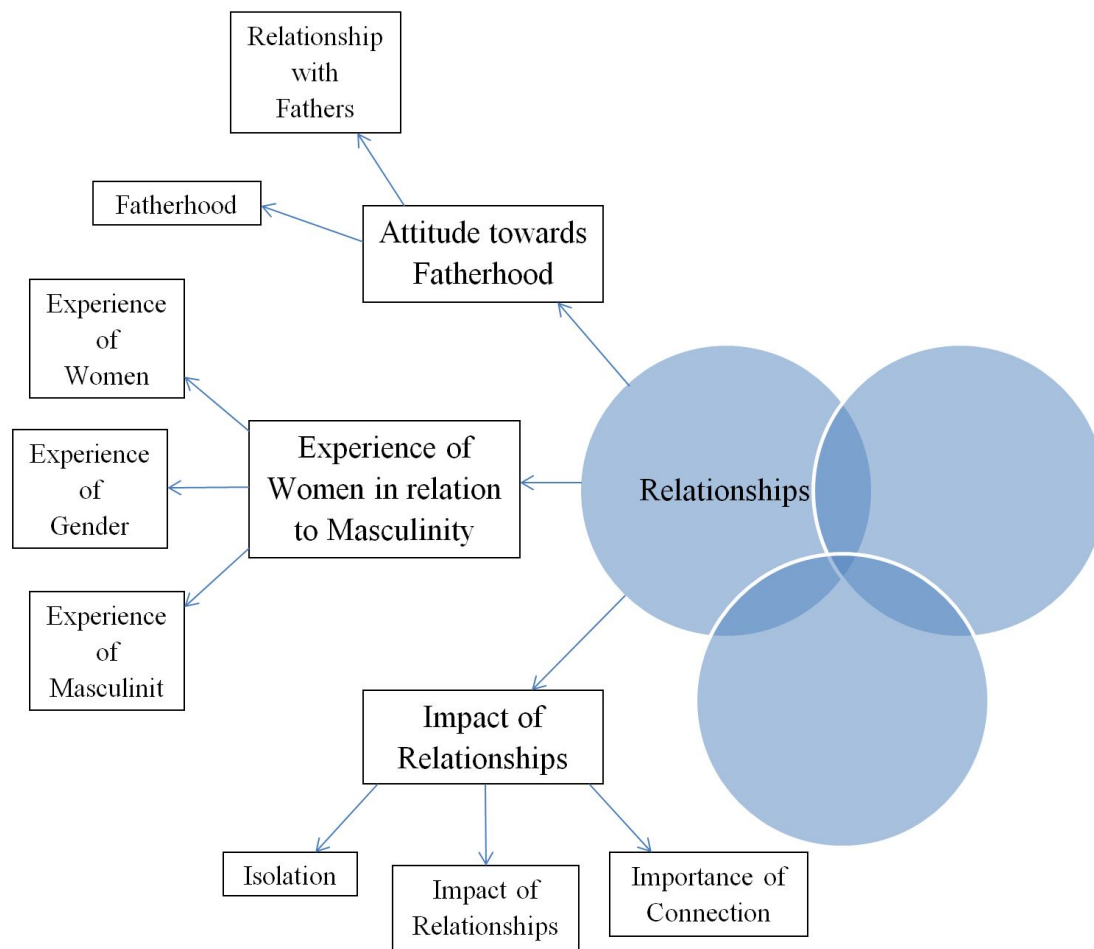
**Figure 1.** Map of final themes and sub-themes

## **Chapter 5: Findings**

In this chapter I will describe in detail the three themes and associated sub-themes identified via data analysis in the previous stage. These themes will provide an overview of thematic network and description of the participants' perceptions and experiences.

I will be using quotable data from the original interview transcripts to illustrate men's lived experience of modern masculinity in relation to shifts in traditional gender roles. The words of the three interviewees are evidence of real experiences and are used in an attempt to answer my research question. As per Green (2013), I would like to acknowledge that even the rich descriptions of the participants would inevitably entail a range of judgements on the part of the researcher about evidence in the data. However, I hope that the detailed examples from the verbatim will provide a balance in perspective throughout the analysis. I would like to note that I have not changed any participants' words except to delete identifying information and, where appropriate, meanings and grammatical corrections are provided in square brackets for the benefit of the reader.

### Main Theme: Relationships



**Figure 2.** Main Theme ‘Relationships’, Associated Sub-themes and Third Order Themes

“Relationships continually influence, and are influenced by, their component interactions and thus by the individual participants and by the diverse psychological processes within those individuals; the groups and society in which they are embedded; the socio-cultural beliefs, values and so on; and the physical environment. The influences involve behavioural, affective and cognitive processes in the individual concerned mediated by the meanings attributed to events and situations. Each level, including that of the individual, is thus to be seen not as an entity but as evolving processes of continuous creation, change or degradation through the relations within and between those levels” (Hinde, 2014, p.10). Thus, the first theme I would like to explore, which emerged during the analysis, is men’s experience of relationships.

In the context of this analysis, the theme ‘Relationships’ captures, as a whole, participants’ experiences of themselves and others. As mentioned above, the influences of relationships are complex and consist of various components. The experiences of those influences are highly individualized by a myriad of contextual factors such as age, race, cultural background, family background and so on. This was certainly true with the regards to the experiences of the interviewed participants. It was my original aim to recruit participants with various backgrounds to allow exploration of possible common themes despite those individual backgrounds. As per my anticipation, there were important commonalities that I identified across participants’ recollections of their experiences, which are represented by the three separate but interrelated sub-themes: fatherhood, experience of women in relation to masculinity, and impact of relationships. All three of these sub-themes also reflected the participants’ experience of self in relation to these issues. The following sub-themes are described in detail below.

**Sub-theme: Attitude to fatherhood.** “Fatherhood is a key signifier of masculinity”, according to Westwood (1996, p. 25). During 1950s and 1960s the father was described as the instrumental leader and the head of the household. However, while traditional and often gender based boundaries and family patterns are becoming increasingly blurred, resulting in emergence of new fathering practices and family dynamics (Johansson & Andreasson, 2017), Biddulph (2004) argued that less than 10 per cent of men he interviewed were able to say they had a good relationship with their fathers. There were 30 per cent of men who claimed their relationships with their fathers were non-existent, another 30 per cent described it as ‘awkward’, while the other 30 per cent said their relationship was “involved but boring and dry” (Biddulph, 2004, p. 41). In fact, in the current study all three of the interviewed participants described their fathers as being absent,

Dad went out and made all the money. I never saw him, he was always working, and I never talked to him. The only time you ever heard from him is when you were in trouble and were told what to do.

Another participant also shared his experience, “A lot of men don’t know who their dad is. Let alone who their granddad is.”

This sense of disconnect was very evident in the data, as the participants described their experiences. However, a second pattern of experience I identified in participants' accounts was the reconnection with their fathers during their adulthood. Interestingly enough, all three participants identified that the shift in the relationship was due to their fathers' emerging fragility due to illness, age and so on. In fact, one participant spoke about his experience of his father's degenerative illness,

I went from witnessing my dad being in a powerful role to then becoming completely opposite and vulnerable. It was a strange feeling.

Another participant explained his experience of developing a connection with his father,

As I spent more time with my father, I got to see what went behind all his hard work. We developed a sense of connection, which has been quite nice.

The participants spoke about their sense of "longing" and "missing out" when it came to the relationship with their fathers. They all admitted that they wished their fathers were more present and nurturing. According to Hanser (2015), the social construction of fatherhood has shifted from the patriarchal father figure to a more nurturing one. In fact, in Biddulph's (2004) opinion, fathers today are very driven and desperate to get it right with their children, simply because their experience with own fathers was so inadequate and painful.

As mentioned earlier, the interviewed participants varied in their parental status, however they all acknowledged the difference between their relationship with their fathers and their current view on fatherhood. For example, one participant explained,

So, in terms of my father, is realizing how much he has missed out on, and how much his kids missed out on, in terms of him and to be able to apply that to my life and try and do my best to be a better father. He should have done that but he never did. I do it, I do a lot more of it for my kids and for myself.

Also poignant was another participant reflecting on his experience of fatherhood,

Whilst I was working a lot, I was still nothing like my father. I spent more time with my kids working those 100 hours a week, than my father spent with me my entire life.

While participants named their difficulties in their relationships with their fathers, they were also able to reflect on their challenges as well as achievements in their own experiences of parenting,

The challenges are is that you are a lot more emotionally invested. To be honest, when I was around them 24/7, I felt trapped. I felt like I had no life, and everything was based around kids. That wasn't necessarily the truth but that's how I perceived it, that's how I interpreted it all.

The participant later stated,

I was heading towards being like my father: being angry, unavailable, growling at my kids all the time.

Two of the participants also admitted regret in their attitude towards parenting, which was related to their own experience with their fathers and lack of knowledge around parenting. One of the participants confessed,

If I could do it again, I would change my attitude towards the marriage, family and kids. My attitude is a huge factor in my failures in life.

While the other participant felt that he only truly understood the meaning of fatherhood after a third child,

I personally know how rewarding it is, and how neat of an experience it is to get a bond with a little child and how you see them grow up and you had some input.

Overall, it became evident that all three participants struggled with the idea of fatherhood, whether it was around their relationship with their fathers or how they saw themselves as fathers. However, the strongest commonality in the current sub-theme was that the participants wanted to do things differently to their fathers.

According to Johansson and Andreasson (2017), while many men express the desire to be different to their own fathers in terms of many key aspects of their relationships with their partners and children, they also realize that they must be different in order to maintain a relationship with their partners. In fact, Dowd (2000, p.181) argued that "fatherhood is connected to two gender intersections: the concept of masculinity and the relationship

between fatherhood and motherhood. Men's identities as fathers do not exist in isolation from their identities as men." Therefore, this brings me to the next interconnecting sub-theme of participants' experience of women in relation to masculinity.

**Sub-theme: Experience of women in relation to masculinity.** This sub-theme combines three lower themes, which I felt were mutually dependent: experience of masculinity, experience of gender and experience of women.

The first pertains to an important experience of masculinity, which was voiced by all three participants, and describes the challenges the participants feel they face every day in the society. Kirkman et al. (2001) argued that men who identify with traditional masculinity tend to think they are supposed to be strong, aggressive, achievement-oriented, non-relational, and not emotionally expressive. They view their role as the provider of income and goods for their family. However, what happens if that idea is challenged? I questioned the participants about their idea what masculinity is and what it looks like to them. All three participants were not able to answer the question. In fact, one of the participants stated,

We [men] are overexposed to all these mixed messages about what it is to be a man, and what it is to be a man nowadays. I don't know how any guy can define this. I actually have been asking a lot of my male friends how do you define your masculinity and no man can give me an answer! I don't know how to define my masculinity either. I don't know how to define what it is to be a man.

Furthermore, another participant expanded on the idea of masculinity and the difficulties some men face,

I know guys who see themselves as a 'typical man' and they are confused as fuck. Thinking they are doing the right thing because they did how they were told by their father...the way they were raised is to harden the fuck up, you know, all that macho bullshit, which we don't necessarily believe, but just too headstrong to hear it.

During a different interview another participant explained in a similar vein, the challenges inherent in navigating conflicting shifts in masculinity,

Once upon a time a man had to be a man, because he had to protect his family. He also was the one who would go out hunting, and doing that sort of stuff, because he was the one who could protect himself from that stuff. Now we are in the society, where the society looks after the person. We have police everywhere, we have the army to look after the country, so the need for 'the man' is no longer there. I think a lot of dudes are terrified by it because all the chicks are like "well you are already emotionally very unfulfilling and disappointing in the way that you behave and speak towards me, I no longer need your protection, so I'm out"...you know what I mean?

Jarrell (2008) argued that we still live in a society divided along male-female gender lines, which determine who we are and how we make sense of others and ourselves in the world. As I was particularly interested in men's experience of their masculinity, given the complexity of the subject, I began to wonder about how men experienced not only self but also women and other men in relation to their masculinity. It was interesting to find that all three participants voiced fear and confusion around their experience of women, particularly around the feminist movement. One of the participants summed up his experience,

With all the information and feminists around, you get made aware of actual perceptions [about males] out there. It's affecting a lot of male population out there. It's making us afraid of things we shouldn't be afraid of. It's an attack on you as a person.

This participant then described an incident, which happened to him few years ago, where he attempted to help a female in distress, only to get verbally attacked by her female friends. The participant described this experience as confusing and terrifying. He continued to say that if he walks at night, and there is a female walking towards him, he would consciously cross the road to the other side, as he is worried about the portrayed stereotypes of males and get perceived as an attacker. The distress in the participant's story was evident during the interview. He expanded further on his experience,

I, as a man, am not able to say to a group of feminists that they make me feel uncomfortable. Because they turn around and go "well that's male privilege, now you know how we feel". I'd rather be quiet. I know that I won't get hurt, if I don't speak up, 'cos I'd just get drowned in 'male privilege'. Funny enough, I don't feel privileged...I feel disposable as a man.

He then added,



We live in a society where we are about empowerment and equal ideas. But there is a power imbalance in that, as men can't question that. If one of us [men] came out and asked for empowerment of men population, it would just be laughed at and ridiculed!

Another participant stated,

I support feminism but from my perception it went too far. There are a lot of disadvantages for men that aren't recognized by the society. I think the world was a bit simpler place before feminism.

Finally, the third participant added,

We've gone from males being chauvinistic pigs, to women heading that way.

All three participants stated that they struggled with male/female relationships these days. In fact, Kierski and Blazina (2009) argued that men experience multiple fears, related to the feminine in connection to their masculine gender roles. These fears include relationships, health, life, death, their place in society and issues of power within a perceived male hierarchy, which can potentially trigger psychological defenses. One of the participants stated, "a lot of men have issues with women now, and don't find relationship with women as safe". This finding inspired my curiosity, given my preliminary wonderings around men's attitude towards the development of feminism and how it is impacting on their experience of masculinity. It was interesting to notice that the participants voiced their fear of "speaking up" or "standing up for themselves or other men", if they witnessed an attack on a man by a woman. In fact, one participant expanded on the issue by stating,

If a guy is getting beaten up by his wife and goes to police station, he is told to harden up and control his woman.

With further analysis, I began to wonder about the unnamed emotions around the statements made by the participants. It appeared to me they were able to vocalize what was happening to them and name their experiences but struggled to talk about the emotional side of things. One of the participants explained his experience,

I think there is a difference between logic and emotion. I've tried to have a logical debate [with women] to show a different perspective and it becomes very emotionally invested very quickly! I just noticed that it's hard to keep it logical, to

get them to see it from the other person's perspective. The biggest difference between women and men is that women are emotionally charged – men aren't.

I became interested in this phenomenon around emotional differences in the genders and men's perception of it. One of the participants explained his view on the matter,

Women talk about feelings and experiences from an early age. Men don't. We grow up with no emotional vocabulary. So women grow up being a lot better at psychological abuse and bullying. A lot of guys don't even understand the psychological abuse on an intellectual level. They can feel the emotional pain but don't know what's going on.

In fact, Biddulph (2004) argued that women receive the verbal skills to navigate life and relationships from day one, as they spend a lot of time with their mothers and other women. Boys, however, receive such little contact with their fathers, their masculinity is such an unfamiliar field – it's almost non-existent. Furthermore, Kinderlee (2012) suggested that men's ability to self-regulate, which includes tendency to suppress emotions, is also likely to be influenced by the nature of the early maternal care. That is, boy infants that are exposed to early abandonment are more likely to present with avoidance of close personal relationships in adulthood. Therefore, there is potential abandonment for boys from paternal and maternal side, which would explain difficulties with emotional development and expression in boys. Interestingly enough, while all three participants spoke about relationship difficulties with their fathers, only one participant mentioned his mother – a relationship, which he described as "close",

I can count on one hand the amount of conversations I've had with my father my entire life. Like actual conversations, you know. Not being told to cut grass and to suddenly do it. I just felt that it was wrong. I mean, I was raised by my mum to be open, communicate, to be honest, that sort of stuff and that's how I am with my kids. I'm very hands-on, very open, very honest. We talk every day about all kinds of dumb shit, and all kinds of good stuff as well. I think I'm like that because I was raised by my mum...

I became curious around the topic of boys' relationships with their mothers, and while there is a significant amount of literature on fatherhood and boys' relationship with their fathers, there is not much research available on mothers' relationships with their sons. Unfortunately, I did not have much data to work with in my analysis either, so while it is an interesting discovery, perhaps, future research could explore the topic further.

Overall, this sub-theme captured participants' experiences around self and others in relation to masculinity. At this point we can observe that all three participants are impacted by male/female relationships and do not show much support or connection to other men. The next sub-theme represents closer exploration of participants' experience of relationships with others and how it impacts them.

**Sub-theme: Impact of relationships.** Many ideas presented in this section overlap with those that are described in the section before and could potentially fit under the notion of experience of gender, women and masculinity. Nevertheless, I organized them under a separate sub-theme as they describe more specifically participants' experience of relationships. This section provides an insight into how participants perceive connections to others, impacts relationships made on them, and, finally, the idea of isolation.

Importance of connection was relevant to all three themes (as shown in Figure 1). For all three of the participants, connection was significant when it came to their relationships, identity and mental health. However, I would like to explore it under this sub theme, as this analysis suggested that experience of connection was a direct impact of the relationships for these participants. As one participant stated,

Our strength comes from those feelings where you are a part of something a bit bigger than yourself.

Another participant expanded on how he perceived connection to others,

As animals, humans are not really loners. We aren't designed to operate by ourselves. We really need that connection and those kinds of bonds.

However, all three participants admitted that they found building connections with others very difficult. In fact, according to Biddulph (2004), isolation is a very big part of manhood. For example, many men, who come to therapy or men groups, confess that they never had friends who would listen to their situations. Additionally, one of the participants stated that, when it comes to men and women, the needs for the connection are different,

I don't know how it reflects on the male/female, but I just know, in terms of the guys that I talked to, and they complain about their sex lives and wishing their women being more there physically. I also know from female friends' perspective, it

always comes down to an emotional side of things. That includes guys not being very good fathers. That to the point where the partners are so put off by that, they are no longer attracted to them.

He expanded further that the biggest challenge in his previous marriage was the emotional side and he did not fulfill his wife's emotional needs.

Participants' accounts indicated that the experience of connection with others (male or female) felt significant and emotionally moving, and in many ways, could set the foundation for ongoing connection with that person, as it provided a bond and sense of security. However, it was evident that building connections felt like "an awkward and fearful" experience for all three of the participants, even when they understood the connotation of those bonds, as well as the risk of isolation. For example, one of the participants explained his view on relationships,

I live at minimal emotional contact with women just so I don't get it wrong, or come across wrong, or say something silly, which can be over-interpreted or whatever. It's easier to avoid contact all together, than it is to even think about it. When I think about this, it's really concerning, because a lot of us [men] are becoming closeted and closed off and we don't know how to deal with that. It's quite frightening actually.

Another participant added,

If your head is in a bad space, your life is turning into turmoil, and you are isolated, you tend to make bad decisions, and that's where guys are their own enemies. That's when they kill themselves, because they don't see a way out.

In fact, isolation appears to be a significant factor in the meaning of the manhood. An Australian study recently found that males were at a much greater risk of developing severe depression and suicidality during a marital separation, even after modifying age and employment variables (Kolves et al., 2010). However, interestingly enough, Kingerlee (2012) found that there is some evidence that "when children tell make-believe stories, boys' narratives tend to focus on lone characters in conflict, whereas girls' narratives focus on familial and social relationships" (p. 86). Therefore, I wonder, whether isolation is a learnt strategy that is being taught to boys or if it is an innate behaviour. Nevertheless, it was evident that all three participants saw the importance of bonds with other people, even if they struggled to develop or maintain those bonds.

All three participants emphasized the importance of communication in order to build the connection, and one of the participants recounted,

The biggest thing I took away from my past relationship is learning to communicate. If you are going to start to communicate how you connect emotionally to somebody, make sure you do that clearly.

However, it is worth noting that participants also saw clear communication as a vital part of establishing the balance in the relationship. As one of the participants claimed, “the couples, which I know, who are actually happy, had found that medium”. He then added that,

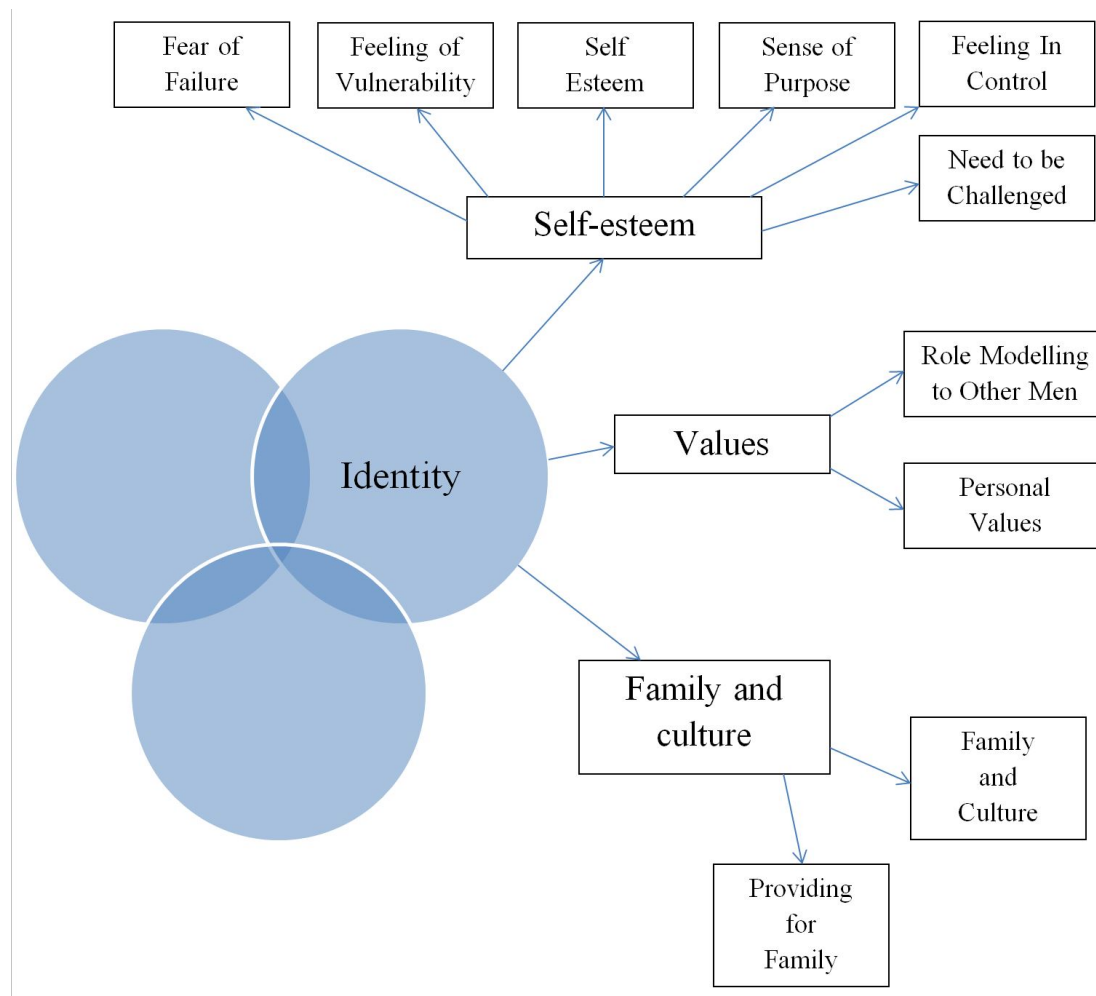
Men need to sit down and connect with women. They need to step up and balance that swing.

Additionally, another participant stated,

You have to learn to stand up for things important and fight but not in a violent aggressive way. You have to learn to connect and negotiate. You can’t just be a doormat. Some guys take that stance and won’t argue or engage, not resolve any problems, which drives women bananas, because men don’t talk.

From these findings it is evident that idea of connection is a very complex process for all three of the participants. The main theme described represents participants’ experiences of relationships overall and how it impacts their view of self and others in relation to masculinity. Many of these experiences were characterized by connection (and isolation) and how, perhaps, men are trying to shift the idea of a ‘lonely wolf’ man, which was created by traditional masculine narratives.

## Main Theme: Identity



**Figure 3.** Main Theme ‘Identity’, Associated Sub-themes and Third Order Themes.

“Most men today don’t have a life. What they have instead is an act. When a man is deeply unhappy, desperately worried, or utterly lonely and confused, he will pretend the opposite, and so no one will know. Early in life little boys learn – from their parent, from school and from the big world outside – that they must pretend. And most will do this for the rest of their lives”, (Biddulph, 2001, p. 7). From the previous theme it became apparent that the participants were longing for connection, which came at a difficult cost to them and often resulted in feelings of isolation. Furthermore, those feelings of isolation were often minimized in the interviews by participants claiming that they are “fine now”, or that they “don’t dwell in the past and focus on the future”. Masculinity is usually associated with being strong, successful, capable, reliable, and in control, and ‘true man’ lacks any

femininity (Fernandez-Alvarez, 2014). Therefore, in the process of the analysis, I became curious around male identity, or men's experience of self as this theme emerged.

This second major theme describes participants' experiences of their identity as men, and the perceptions and understandings of their identity in relation to their masculinity. Encapsulated under this main theme are three sub-themes, each of which focus on and describe different elements, such as self-esteem, their values and attitude towards family and culture.

**Sub-theme: Self-esteem.** According to Malcom (2004), the idea of self-esteem has been previously linked to theories about self and self-will, and is now used to “understand human behaviour and for treating negative thoughts, inner feelings of incompleteness, emptiness, self-doubt and self-hatred (p. 3)”. The current sub-theme describes participants' observations and critical reflections about their perception of self-esteem. These reflections include their fears of failure, feeling of vulnerability, sense of purpose, feeling of control, and the need to be challenged.

One of the first patterns that were noted during the interview process was participants' reflection on their fears of failure. When they were asked to define what failure meant to them, one of the participants stated,

Failure to me is when you strip away what defines us in certain categories, like status, career, finance, friendships and relationships, right? So, for me failure is those categories. As leading down aspect of those characteristics, so have I failed in my career? Have I challenged myself enough? Am I growing? How am I with my relationship? Am I constantly bouncing from one person to the other? Have I been in stable relationships? Am I single? Whatever. For me failure is not being able to meet one of those characteristics.

He then added,

For me it still comes down to a sense of masculinity. In the past, where I've always been averse to failing, so I didn't even try. There is an overwhelming fear, what if I fail? What if I can't rise to the challenge itself?

These findings suggest that the participants' fear of failure is directly related to their self-esteem and sense of masculinity. Latshaw (2015) argued that while very few men

achieve the hegemonic male ideal, all men are measured against it, which is evident in participants' definition of failure. That is, they appear to compare themselves quite harshly on every scale of achievement, and perception of others becomes extremely important. In fact, according to Huyesse-Gaytandjieva et al. (2015), boys and men tend to externalize their failures and work even harder in order to demonstrate their capabilities, while women tend to internalize and are more likely to withdraw. This was also true in participants' reflections, where 'success' was measured by working harder, whether it was in the workplace, gym or other areas in life.

What was noticeable in the interviews is that all three participants associated failure with vulnerability. There was a notable feeling of shame when the participants discussed their fears of "not being good enough". For example, one of the participants explained his perception on relationships,

I feel like when you come across somebody who is able to be transparent and open that box [of emotions], you're like it's a whole lot of shit there. Suddenly you have to face it. You have to face your fear of inadequacy, fears of attachment, fears of people leaving you... It makes you face what a failure you potentially are. It leaves you vulnerable.

The participants explained that men do not really talk to each other. Instead they would "go to a pub and drink or box their emotions away". They then compared the difference between men and women when it came to vulnerability. One of the participants explained,

Women are great at reaching out and listening to other men, whereas men have the basic thing from back in our cavemen days, where the guy wasn't in any way vulnerable or weak. Guys, who were seen as weak, were actually a liability, whereas women are still expected to be vulnerable, like if they are pregnant, and you gotta look after them.

Another participant referred to his vulnerability as loss of control,

The moment I'm not in charge, I feel vulnerable. When I'm in charge, it's the only way I feel a sense of control over my life. If I don't, I end up feeling distraught or all over the place. But if I'm in control, there is nothing that's grey. It's black and white. It keeps me calm, because I know what needs to be done. Especially you can't worry about losing control of emotions!



In fact, according to Connell (2005), while there is a small number of men practicing and embodying hegemony, most men have a complicated, dependent and ambivalent relationship with control and power. In addition, Stapleton and Pattison's (2014) research showed that men with terminal diagnosis struggled the most with previously being in control of themselves and others and then losing that ability due to diagnosis. It appears it is quite distinct that men's experience of vulnerability comes from the loss of control.

Another pattern of experience I identified in participants' accounts, which was related to self-esteem, but also interconnected with fear of failure, feeling of vulnerability, and loss of control, was a sense of purpose. All three participants struggled to identify what a man's purpose is. In fact, one of the interviewees proclaimed,

It feels like, and I guess, it's probably both biological and psychological, that males should have some kind of role, like that level of education, should be providing this amount and to be able to do this and that, and now that kind of thing doesn't exist anymore. There is no need for that. So apart from creating an offspring, what else is a use for us [men]? Men now can get discarded like yesterday's news. So why should we even bother?

The experienced attitude was around feeling unwanted and disposable. Another participant shared his difficulty around his divorce,

It was very depressing, the best way I can describe it is very painful. I've never been through so much pain in my life. I wouldn't wish what I went through on my worst enemy. Having a person that you loved for 10 years, the person you thought you were gonna face the rest of your life, completely betray you. The feelings that come from that are almost indescribable...you can't describe it like...I can't.

Another participant added,

There is no need for a man to do anything they had to do in the past. I don't feel like there is any purpose for us at all now. The shift in need for a man is affecting my idea of purpose.

All three participants shared that they were overwhelmingly confused as to who men are supposed to be. They stated they felt the need for a man was no longer there and that men are terrified by it. However, interestingly enough, a pattern of experience emerged

in the process of discussing their sense of purpose and feeling disposable, which was around the need to be challenged, particularly around females. One of the participants stated that it is “more of a challenge when it’s coming from a female”. I began to wonder if the sense of competition was around validation, which provided the missing sense of purpose. One of the participants stated that in a relationship, to connect fully, he needed someone who challenges him and that he finds it exciting.

Nevertheless, the participants also admitted that the need for competition and challenge is not always healthy. As one participant explained,

Guys get into relationships for wrong reason sometimes. It will often be with a good-looking woman, that makes all other guys envious, that creates a sexual competition and challenge.

This discovery made me wonder whether ‘unhealthy’ challenges were impacting on men’s self-esteem as they were potentially trying to fill in the void of sense of purpose as well as regain their sense of control. Jarrell (2008) linked the need for power and control in men to emotion of anger. He stated that “power is the ability to get what you want: anger is the means to exercise power when faced with the loss of or the threat of losing what you have” (p. 27). Such assumption could provide a potential insight into men’s anger and the link to domestic violence, which will be discussed in more detail in the third theme.

Overall, this sub-theme explained how participants related various factors, such as vulnerability, loss of control, fear of failure, and sense of purpose did not only reflect on their self-esteem but also represented part of their identity in relation to their masculinity.

**Sub-theme: Values.** The second sub-theme summarizes participants’ reflections on their values, which are around their personal values and the importance of role modeling to other men, as well as having role models themselves. While there was not much literature or participants’ discussion around this topic, when participants spoke about their values, they spoke very strongly of them. Consequently, I organized the idea of values under a separate sub-theme as it describes participants’ experience of their identity, which could potentially be linked to the previously mentioned pattern of sense of purpose. I believe this sub-theme could be useful for further research in relation to masculinity, pride and identity.

The participants viewed the idea of values in several ways. The two participants, that had children, felt it was extremely important to pass on their values, while the participant with no children felt that showing his values to his family and friends was just as important. These values included honesty, integrity and loyalty.

However, one common value that participants felt was crucial is role modeling to each other as men. One participant stated,

I feel responsible to make other men to think correctly about what messages they are putting across.

While another said,

We are all part of the male subculture, so it's like a bystander effect, if we don't do anything. All of us just sit there and none of us take action.

The participants viewed the role modeling as a form of support. For them it was even a form of support they have not experienced from their fathers. One of the participants said that some men have no role models in their environment about what dads do or what fathering is about and "how a good man behaves". However, according to Biddulph (2004), a father with sons (even if he is present) needs to not only role model to his sons, but also have groups of male friends. He argued that, while the father and son might share some interests, other males would widen the range and prevent the son being limited to what the father could offer, but also help the son feel accepted into the adult male world.

In saying that, I was curious to find that two out of three participants claimed that they had more female friends and struggled to develop a bond with other men. Yet, Stapleton and Pattison (2014) found that several men, who were diagnosed with terminal illness, reported the importance of friendship and role modeling from other men when dealing with the illness and treatment. They felt that other men who had been through the same experience were able to guide them and support them, which made a difference as opposed to not having that support. Furthermore, Biddulph (2004) suggested that men's violence groups should be led by other men who faced and acknowledged their own capacity for violence, as those men know the difficulties as well as justifications in those situations.

The importance of role modeling values is vivid in this sub-theme, and should potentially be explored further in the research. However, it was also evident that the participants viewed family values as extremely important, and being a big part of the identity. While the third participant did not have any children, he still highly valued his family views and approaches. Therefore, I would like to explore the next sub-theme around this topic.

**Sub-theme: Family and culture.** The pattern in the previous two sub-themes showed the importance of family and connection for personal values and self-esteem in participants. While the sub-theme of family and culture is interconnected with the previous two sub-themes, I felt that it should also be organized under a separate sub-theme, as it represents participants' experience of family and being a provider, as well as socio-cultural components in relation to identity and masculinity.

According to Hanser (2015), men take care of their families financially as a means of expressing closeness with their wife and children. Furthermore Doucet (2004) found that the link between providing for the family financially and fatherhood is very strong even from men who provide a higher level of childcare. Additionally, one of the participants identified the ability to provide as a definition of masculinity,

My definition of masculinity is somebody who goes out and provides, even if you don't have a lot of contact with them but they are still there in terms of you have a roof over your head, food on the table, education, etc.

The importance of being a 'breadwinner' was definitely evident in two of the participants, while the third one could stay home and look after his daughter when she was born and, therefore, had a different view on it,

It's sad about traditional masculine ideas that guys respond to a newborn baby by going away and working really hard. Guys think when they have a new family, they need to provide and because their identity is tied up so much with making money and being successful.

Stapleton and Pattison (2014) found in their study that most men they interviewed discussed the role of the breadwinner in the family and found that it was their role to provide financially even when they were terminally ill. In fact, one of the men talked about

the difficulty of deciding to hand over the ‘provider’ role over to his wife as he accepted his cancer diagnosis and impending date. These findings were supported by one of the current study participants, who stated,

I identify strongly with the concept of that if you are going to have any sense of establishment, you have to have an ability to provide.

On the contrary, another participant admitted that working overtime and focusing on providing rather than his family had destroyed his marriage,

I didn’t see my wife turning off from the marriage, because I was caught up in work. I was working over 100 hours a week because my wife wasn’t working. To be honest I didn’t need to work that much. But I was so busy with work, I didn’t see the signs in my marriage. By the time my wife left, I was working a lot less, but the damage was already done. That whole time I was tired and stressed. I was the worst father and parent as a result of effects of working more.

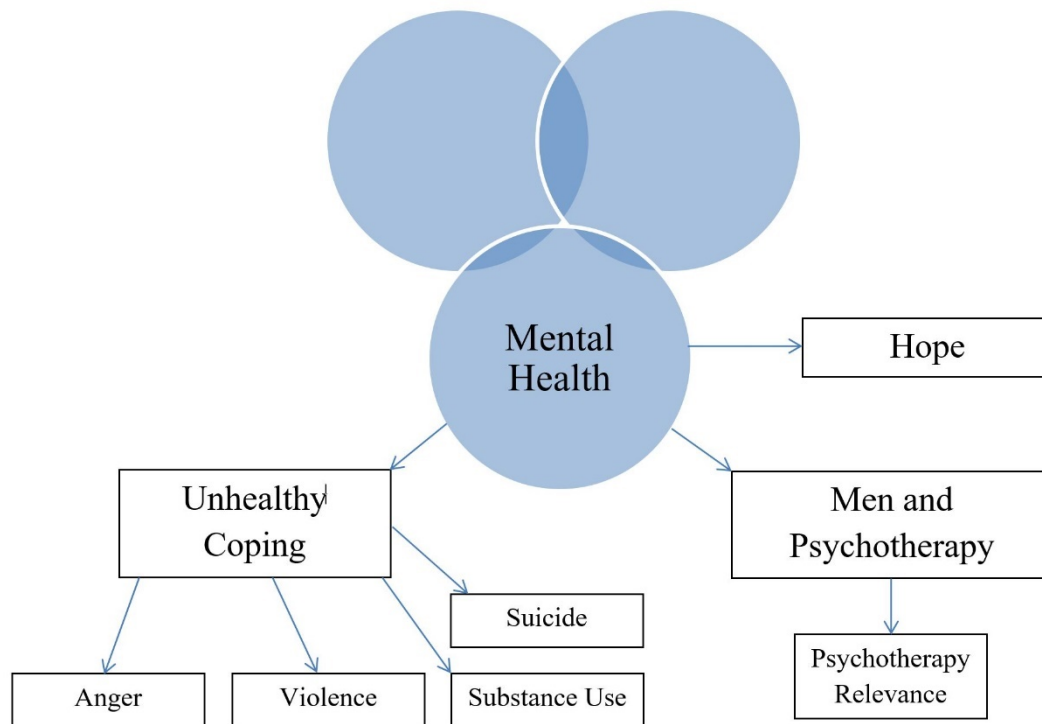
The experience of these participants regarding their need to provide, and how strongly it was associated with their identity as men, raised my curiosity. It appears that ability to provide is tied into sense of achievement and fear of failure, discussed earlier. As one of the participants explained,

I felt I haven’t worked as hard as I should have so I could get to a certain [financial] level. I blamed others and blamed my father for the lack of my own achievements. Admitting it as your own failure is hard.

Finally, one of the participants also admitted that he found it very difficult when his partner earned more than him. He described that experience as emasculating and that it made him feel “completely incompetent”.

In summary, the main theme described represents participants’ experiences of their identity in relation to their masculinity. It was discovered that the participants put a strong emphasis on a sense of achievement, and that fear of failure evoked great anxiety in them. The participants explained that the idea of a man being a provider was embedded in them, and that is what society expects from them.

### Main Theme: Mental health



**Figure 4.** Main theme ‘Mental health’, Associated Sub-themes and Third Order Themes.

Previous literature suggests that men’s mental health is an underestimated issue that needs attention (Jewkes & Morel, 2015; Kierski & Blazina, 2009; Szabo, 2014). In fact, suicide is the most widely discussed aspect of men’s mental health, with men being 3-4 times more likely to die by suicide than women (Patrick & Robertson, 2016). There are also other areas of concern in relation to men’s mental health, such as undiagnosed depression, substance abuse and violence.

Furthermore, Kinderlee (2012) found that there are evidential sex differences in early help seeking. For example, 6 years boys are significantly less likely than girls to express hurt or distress. He also discovered that this difference in help-seeking largely persists into adulthood, as men fear being seen as incompetent and/or not ‘masculine’.

However, Kingerlee (2012) suggested that psychological distress is more shaming for men who identify with a strong ‘male-specific’ profile. That is, men who adhere to more masculine norms and present with a set of (conscious and unconscious) beliefs, such as ‘I

must not be weak (or vulnerable), ‘I mustn’t show my feelings’ and ‘I shouldn’t be feeling like this’.

This third and final theme pertains to how the current study participants experience their mental health in relation to their masculinity. The three sub-themes encapsulated under this main theme represent different areas of participants’ experiences of mental health, such as unhealthy coping, men’s attitude to psychotherapy and hope.

**Sub-theme: Unhealthy coping.** According to Patrick and Robertson (2016), some of men’s unhealthy coping mechanisms divide into ‘acting in’ – which involves strategies such as avoidance (overworking), and numbing (through misuse of alcohol and drugs); and ‘acting out’ – exhibiting violence and aggression, risky behaviour, and obsessive physical activity – gym, sport, etc. Furthermore, Kinglerlee (2012) stated that such behaviours are seen as maladaptive self-soothing behaviours, and are much more common in men than in women. This sub-theme represents the personal struggles the participants experienced with their coping mechanisms, which include anger, violence and substance use.

It is argued by Patrick and Robertson (2016) that men, who identify with hegemonic masculinity, are more likely to associate negative emotions, such as loss, sadness and loneliness with a sense of shame, which in return could lead to isolation. One of the participants observed that there is an increasing number of men who disengage from society because they have been poorly treated and shamed.

However, what became evident was that all three participants admitted to anger being a problem in their experience with self or other men. One participant stated,

Anger is my coping mechanism, my cop out.

While another claimed,

The problem for some guys is that they can see they are sitting on all this suppressed rage, anger, hurt and pain.

However, as mentioned earlier, some men use unhealthy coping mechanisms to deal with negative emotions such as anger and shame. While some use ‘acting in’, such as

working too much, as one of the interviewed participants did; some use ‘numbing’, through substance use – two participants admitted to drug use in the past; and ‘acting out’ by displaying violence and aggression – all three participants admitted to ‘snapping’ at their families, which is usually followed by a sense of shame and further isolation.

Furthermore, participants explained that their ‘unhealthy’ coping mechanisms are often used when they experience psychological abuse from women. One participant said,

Women are just better at screwing with your head. Men might get into a punch up and go back to being best mates five minutes later, but women dwell and don’t let go. Half of the time I don’t know what she’s on about, so I get angry.

Corbally (2015) argued that women’s abuse of men still remains a taboo subject, which receives minimal recognition in research and media. All three participants admitted to being subjected to some form of psychological abuse from women in the past. One participant stated,

Domestic violence is a feminist thing. It all gets blamed on men...woman’s violence gets minimized or justified. A lot of men are victims of domestic violence physical or psychological, but nobody talks about it. There are shelters and supports for women but not for men.

All three participants agreed that there is not enough support for men to help develop healthier coping strategies, which brings me to the next sub-theme representing men’s experience and attitude towards psychotherapy.

**Sub-theme: Men and psychotherapy.** According to Kingerlee (2012), boys might be more vulnerable than girls to feelings of shame when they are distressed. He argued that, if early internal working models develop poor coping strategies of affect regulation and are later used to regulate distress in attachment related situations, men would be impacted if they learn to associate distress with shame. Kingerlee (2012) further stated that this early association could explain men’s later abandonment or avoidance of psychological help-seeking. Additionally, some of the traditional psychotherapeutic approaches are used to facilitate emotional disclosure, dependence and ‘intimate’ therapeutic environment, which might feel counter to men with more traditional masculine views of self-reliance and control of emotions.



Kingerlee (2012) argued that due to early conditioning towards strength and toughness, when men face difficult emotions, they often deny them, which leaves them intolerant of their own vulnerability. For example, one of the interviewees stated,

I think this is why I limit myself [in relationships]. That's why I create artificial constructs, because as long as I have those artificial constructs in place, then I'm in charge. The moment I don't, all of a sudden, I am vulnerable. I don't like being in vulnerable situations so I box my emotions away.

Another participant shared his experience,

When you are in that [conflict] state with your partner, both of you become vulnerable. You know exactly where you can push the button and how to get a reaction and you might not be doing it consciously unless you are aware of yourself and your emotions. It's pretty easy to get hurt, so showing vulnerability isn't something many men are keen on.

According to Kingerlee (2012), this intolerance of vulnerability can lead distressed men to push themselves harder – notably at work – rather than seek care. In fact, one of the participants expanded on this idea,

She [wife] asked why didn't you go to the [counseling] sessions, why didn't you deal with all your shit, why wasn't it important enough for you to go and work on yourself. I said it wasn't. I just didn't realize how much it was going to affect me and by the time I realized, I felt like I didn't have a choice. We were struggling from week to week. I was like where is a \$100 a session gonna come from to cover psych? That was my justification. So, I focused on the business instead.

All three participants later admitted that going to therapy would have significantly improved quality of their relationships. One participant stated,

She [ex-wife] was right, I needed help. But I only realized when my relationship ended. If I went to counseling and dealt with the problems years ago, I would have had a much better chance with my wife.

However, there was an evident resistance towards psychotherapy in the participants, particularly around female therapists. One of the participants admitted that female psychotherapists working with men could be a potential issue. He expanded,

If there are women around, guys are less likely to show their anger. In my opinion, female therapists aren't perceived as friendly to men. There needs to be a space provided where guys do feel safe to talk where women aren't around. You know, it's less likely that women will see a male therapist if they had male trauma, so it's similar to men. For people who have been traumatized, single gender support is what they need until they get themselves back together.

Additionally, participants were ambivalent about therapy as they felt that they would be given the messages that their experiences "are not ok" and that they would be shamed for how they feel. One participant added,

What I think makes a safe [therapy] environment is when someone else is modeling. Typically, when someone comes for the first time into support group, they might sit there for a while, and others, who have been coming regularly, will talk about where they are up to in their process.

This finding coincides with importance of role modeling, discussed earlier.

Overall, this sub-theme covers participants' attitude towards psychotherapy and it is evident from the findings that there is a lot of ambivalence and hesitation, particularly around vulnerability and shame. I believe these findings are very important for further research and implications of the findings will be discussed in the next chapter.

**Sub-theme: Hope.** I was very surprised to discover a sub-theme of 'hope' in the data. A lot of experiences that participants shared contained very difficult emotions, such as shame, anger, incompetency and so on. However, it came through that these men were hopeful that things will improve and the negative mentality towards masculinity will shift,

The answer isn't in demonizing men and making it their fault.

Nevertheless, the participants agreed that males need to improve in relation to themselves and women, particularly around emotional availability. One participant said,

Dudes need to step up their game, to better themselves, we need to improve ourselves, we need to open up more emotionally, we need to be more invested in women emotionally. Not just physically...I'm talking about sitting down and really connecting with them. That's where men need to step up so we can find a happy medium...

In summary, this main theme underlines issues around men's mental wellbeing and their perception of it. It is clear that all three participants experienced challenges around their tolerance of emotions and vulnerability. However, it is also evident that these participants had an insight into their perceived weaknesses and would like to improve their overall existence. As one participant stated, "men need direction".

Overall, the findings of this chapter point at important and missing information on men's experience of masculinity. While there is a lot of literature attempting to interpret masculinity/masculinities, there is clear evidence from this research that the participants are not able to define what it means for them to be a man. Additionally, the three themes identified in this chapter have separate information and evidence in the literature; however, current study shows that all three themes have the commonality of exclusion, which suggests that participants' view of self and others in relation to masculinity is excluded and isolated. Finally, the most unusual finding was the sense of hope that participants are experiencing. That is hope for connection, closeness, nurture and true equality. This finding contradicts previous definitions of masculinity where a man is distant, dominant, emotionless and non-nurturing (Kirkman et al., 2001; Connell, 2005; Johansson & Andersson, 2017; etc.). The benefits and gaps as well as implications for psychotherapy discovered in this chapter reflect issues that are very much part of wider debates around masculinity, and will be discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 6: Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of this research and highlights any important points that present an interpretation of experiences and perceptions of men in relation to their masculinity. Data analysis in the current study led to the identification of three overlapping themes, 'Relationships', 'Identity' and 'Mental Health'. Each of these main themes was supported by sub-themes and lower order themes, which together created a thematic network. While overlapping of the themes was difficult to separate and interpret, it was also helpful to understand that taken together, these three themes provide an overall sense of men's lived experience of their masculinity as characterized by these participants.

### **Hegemonic masculinity and its adverse inter-relations**

Badinter (1992) described the traditional figure of the male as lacking any femininity, repressing his capacity for affection, judged by his success, power and admiration, having a requirement of superiority over other people, being strong, independent, powerful and autonomous, and finally using violence if necessary to prove his strength. Additionally, hegemonic masculinity was referred to as the 'ideal' by Connell (2005) and as the type that gets measured against by other masculinities (Haggett, 2015). However, recent research shows that the traditional stereotypical idea of masculinity is changing (e.g. Baily, 2015), but the new definitions are often confusing as to how men should be or how they should behave. From current findings it was clear that the participants felt confused about their identity as men. Interestingly enough, while all three participants claimed that they did not feel like they fit, and did not want to fit into the traditional stereotypes of masculinity, aspects of hegemony were visible in the narratives. This suggests that, while the participants were embracing possible change, they still held the traditional stereotypical views on masculinity, such as being the provider, having emotional control, and being successful.

Zeglin (2016) argued that masculinity is just one potential expression of gender and remains difficult to define. However, the aforementioned behaviours, values, feelings and cognitions tend to represent the male identity. In the current study, the main themes showed that participants had an integrated view of their masculinity, which applied to their

relationships, parenthood, their idea of self, identity, interactions with others or others' perceptions. This concurs with Fernandez-Alvarez's (2014) finding that masculinity is a set of constantly changing meanings, which are established through relationships with ourselves, with others and with our world. However, the above-mentioned confusion was evident in the participants' accounts,

My experiences as a male just made me question who I am and what the purpose is a lot more. Like why am I talking to somebody? Why am I attracted to somebody? If I am attracted, I question, what are we doing? What is the mindset behind this? What are we getting out of it? What's the purpose? I relate these questions to my masculinity.

He also expanded on his confusion as a man, when he felt his masculinity was challenged,

I felt disarray. In terms of her profession, her life...she had it all together. Who was I compared to her? I'm a man and I should be the provider. I mean, I'm happy for her but it made me question myself and who I was as a person. It made me feel fucked up all over the place. I didn't know why her earning more than me bugged me so much. It's embarrassing.

This finding reflected on the participant's confusion and struggle around his sense of masculinity, because on one hand he claimed to be "progressive" with his views, on the other he seemed to find it difficult to let go of the traditional masculine ideals, such as "male provider". Kingerlee (2012) suggested that psychological distress appears more in men with a strong 'male-specific' profile, which adheres to the masculine traditions and norms, and also does not believe in weakness or showing any feelings. Despite none of the participants identifying [strongly] with the 'male-specific' profile, the distress was evident in terms of their self-esteem and sense of purpose. Perhaps the reason for this is the lack of definition on what 'new' masculinity should look like (Baily, 2015). While we already know that some men who strongly identify with hegemonic masculinity present with unhealthy coping strategies, such as avoidance, substance use, violence and so on, I am curious if men who find themselves in the middle of old and new masculine views actually find it more distressing as they have more internal dissonance around their identity. However, Schmitz (2016) argued that the men, who successfully challenge views on hegemonic masculinity, could possibly encourage other men to explore their own views on masculinity. That, therefore, leads to a question on how can we help males construct new ways of being men?

In the participants' accounts it was evident that they valued role modeling from other men, but struggled to build those connections and bonds. In fact, Biddulph (2004) wondered whether men's inarticulateness comes from a lack of sharing opportunities with other men. One of the participants admitted that "women learn to share from day one, men don't have that opportunity". The reason behind this raised my curiosity around why that was the case. The findings of the current study reflected that there was a strong sense of competitiveness in men around their sense of masculinity. In fact, Peters et al. (2015) suggested that some men do not feel like they measure up to other men in terms of their masculinity. For example, they found that men who felt that they were not 'man enough' to succeed were more likely to avoid more 'macho' professions, such as marines, medics and so on. This suggests that just being a man is not enough to protect individuals from the damaging 'macho' stereotypes and expectations, which are driven by the ideology of hegemony. Therefore, the implication of these findings is that men are struggling with their bonds with other men and, perhaps, require assistance in learning how to communicate and bond with each other. In fact, Biddulph (2004) proposed that if men develop a strong, emotionally open male friendship, they would be less emotionally dependent on their wives, which would ease and relax their relationship. As one of the participants said, "men don't know how to communicate and it drives women bananas".

### **Fathers: from providers to invisible presence to nurturing parent**

Biddulph (2004) suggested that the reason men do not have the same communication skills as women is because women receive the verbal skills to navigate life and relationships from day one, as they spend a lot of time with their mothers and other women. Boys, however, receive such little contact with their fathers, their masculinity is such an unfamiliar field – it's almost non-existent. In the findings of this research it was evident that all three participants felt disconnected from their fathers. There was a deep feeling of sadness in the participants, as one of them even stated that fathers are seen as optional.

Schmitz (2016) argued that men might be more likely to internalize feelings of being an incompetent parent through wide spread societal messages, and therefore detach themselves from parenting. Furthermore, they might even come to view themselves as unnecessary to the parenting process. However, in the participants' accounts it was

reflected that they wanted a different experience of the fatherhood than what they encountered with their own fathers. So, there is an evident shift in fatherhood attitude, which is happening alongside the change in views on masculinity. The fathers were seen as providers in the 1950s and 1960s and that attitude shifted in the 2000's where fathers became invisible, to fathers now potentially adapting their attitude and becoming more nurturing and involved. Changes in men's involvement with children, according to Schmitz (2016), have the potential to shift current unequal dynamics within families as well as workplaces.

Furthermore, Robb (2004) proposed that if men became more involved in the care of the children, they might begin to articulate some of the conflicting emotions around fatherhood. This is an important finding in this study, which implies that men feel deprived of their relationship and bonding with their own fathers and would like to change that, however there is present confusion to how they could do it, as they never had any modeling from their fathers. In fact, it seems that to this day we live in a society that views fathers as less capable parents than mothers. However, my research backs up the idea that fathers are now placing much more emphasis on parenting, that potentially is different, but not less important than that of mothers.

### **Fear of the feminine**

One of the gaps that I had noticed in the current research is the lack participants' reflections on their relationships with their mothers. It was mentioned earlier that boys tend to be more emotionally abandoned paternally and maternally, while girls tend to develop bonds with their mothers. However, I noticed that the participants vocalized their fathers' absences and yet the reflections on their mothers were almost absent. Perhaps, while the fathers were absent emotionally and physically, the mothers fulfilled the basic nurturing needs and it potentially created a cognitive dissonance effect, where a person has a conflict due to holding two or more contradictory beliefs. These beliefs could potentially be around the struggle with the abandonment, yet still having the basic needs met. In fact, in my own practice I have worked with men who struggled with the conflict of love and hate towards their mothers, which has impacted on their relationships with women in the future and often involved insecurity and fear. This finding supports Kierski and Blazina (2009) argument that men experience multiple fears related to the feminine in connection to their

masculinity. The participants in the current study stated that they felt inadequate and insecure when it came to women, and often withdrew and isolated themselves. Snitow (2015) argued that currently there is alienation between the sexes, which made men and women unhappy strangers. This was evident in the data analysis, as the participants spoke about a different need to connect (i.e. physical for men and emotional for women) and that it was difficult to connect at all because of those differences.

Kierski and Blazina (2009) argued that men who are more ‘intimidated’ by women tend to have more uncomfortable experiences such as vulnerability, dependency, helplessness, loneliness, lack of certainty and so on. It was notable that participants did not consider a female psychotherapist as ‘safe’, which made me wonder about the implications of gender differences in psychotherapy. As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the participants stated that for some males going to a female therapist is equivalent to a female rape victim seeing a male therapist. Such statement potentially indicates a much deeper embedded trauma, which psychotherapists and other mental health professionals need to pay close attention to. Particularly, as Kingerlee (2012) argued, on the health care level special attention should be paid to men who adhere to more masculine norms, as they are less likely to seek help and might even find therapeutic process emasculating. Furthermore, Maltby and Day (2003) found that when men experienced a threat to self-esteem regarding their male identity, typically they would enhance self-regard towards men and would tend to view women more negatively. This finding could provide further insight into not only why men avoid seeking help, but also why they avoid seeing a female therapist.

### **Implication for psychotherapy**

In the final part of this chapter, I would like to discuss why the findings of this research are important in the psychotherapeutic field. Previous research, combined with the current results, indicate that men are much less likely to seek help, as they might perceive it as a sign of weakness and an attack on their masculinity. In fact, according to Kierski and Blazina (2009) many men are likely to view psychotherapy as counter to the stereotypical idea of masculine success. However, this does not just apply to men who identify with hegemonic ideals, as I originally hypothesized. None of the men I interviewed identified with traditional stereotypical masculinity views, yet all of them were ambivalent about



psychotherapy, particularly around how it was structured and how it was not ‘male friendly’.

Stapleton and Pattison (2014) suggested that for men non-reliance on the medical help was seen as a measure of health. Furthermore, they found that non-disclosure of health issues for men was a way to maintain the protective role within the masculine identity, which potentially could explain the lack of health seeking and underreporting in men. However, from previous research (e.g. Patrick & Robertson, 2010), it is evident that contrary to seeking help, a lot of men would use unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as overworking, substance use, violence, aggression and suicide. In fact, statistics show that men are four times likely to kill themselves in suicide than women. These statistics are terrifying and yet potentially preventable if the therapeutic approaches are adjusted to suit the men’s needs.

However, the question remains around what can be done differently and how can we as psychotherapists create that change? According to Lorber and Garcia (2010) traditional approaches to masculinity present challenges in psychotherapy, for example, by decreasing the likelihood of help seeking and by making emotional content more difficult to address. They argue that perspectives, such as the experience of expression of emotions other than anger being perceived as ‘weak’, can create avoidance, reluctance and unwillingness to experience those emotions. Furthermore, restrictive emotionality and emphasis on emotional control may make men less willing to address emotional content during the sessions. Lorber and Garcia (2010) suggested, that a whole new approach is needed in the psychotherapeutic approach, to help destigmatize men’s help-seeking.

According to Patrick and Robertson (2010), the traditional psychotherapeutic approaches, which use emotional dependence and emphasis on an ‘intimate’ therapeutic relationship, might feel counter to men who are dependent on self-reliance and control of emotions. Additionally, they argued that if the health professional, such as a therapist, has his/her own preconceptions or biases around masculinity, it could lead to the professional failing to witness or attend to the symptoms of distressed men, or base their treatment on own countertransference, which could potentially damage the therapeutic relationship and send the person into further isolation.

Several studies (e.g. Patrick & Robertson, 2016; Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010) proposed different approaches to psychotherapy with men, such as positive psychology or using strength-based models. Patrick and Robertson (2016) suggested that words associated with action and behaviour seem to better capture men's experiences of distress. They argued that the standard assessment tools for depression often miss depression in men because of the more feminized language used. As witnessed in the current study, the participants struggled with their emotional expression and even stated that men do not have the vocabulary for their emotions, as they never learn that as boys. If that is the case, it makes me wonder how accurately current psychological and psychotherapeutic assessments and treatments represent the male population, and how many men go undiagnosed due to the lack of emotional language. Through my own clinical practice with young children, I have observed the frustration due to the language limitation, as they are not able to express their needs. Furthermore, as a non-native English speaker, I understand the frustration around not being able to verbalize or comprehend something. If men do not have the emotional vocabulary, could it be that the unhealthy coping, such as violence, substance use, withdrawal, suicide, are the expressions of frustration? Perhaps, developing a different therapeutic approach, particularly around non-verbal language, would create different results.

Jewkes et al. (2015) argued that a lot of work needs to be done with girls and women to help them understand the changes men are experiencing, and to support them as partners through those changes. Furthermore, if female therapists could explore their masculine side through wider understanding, perhaps men would be more inclined to seek help and not feel emasculated or intimidated by the feminine.

### **Cultural perspective:**

I would like to identify a gap in the current study, which is very important in the nature of this research, regarding cultural differences in relation to masculinity. While I attempted to recruit participants, who were as diverse as possible and had different cultural (parental) backgrounds, all three participants were born in the Western society. Previous research shows that men from cultures that do not fit into 'white male privilege' sub-category tend to perceive masculinity (particularly hegemony) differently (e.g. Mataira, 2008; Hokowhitu, 2008; Lu and Wong, 2014). As this research was data-driven and not

literature driven, and participants' accounts had no reflections on cultural differences, I did not have any data towards the matter. Therefore, I decided to explore this topic separately from the findings, as it is a crucial component of this research, particularly for psychotherapeutic practice in the bicultural settings of Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Research shows that views on masculinity vary from culture to culture. For example, Intindola et al. (2016) found that male Hispanics tend to score higher on masculinity scale than any other male groups. That is, they tend to identify very strongly with the 'Male Specific' profile. However, they also discovered that those men scored lower than other male groups in self-esteem and self-acceptance. Furthermore, Lu and Wong (2014) found that young U.S. – born and immigrant Latino men experienced even more stress and identity issues in relation to their masculinity. Some strongly identified with hegemony, while some felt conflicted between assimilation to the Western culture and traditional expectations from their family, friends and local Latin communities. Lu and Wong (2014) argue that the masculine identity crisis in Hispanic men in U.S. is correlated to the levels of violence. In fact, Sukhu found that in the United States, Mexico and Guyana acts of violence, especially towards women, are an expression of masculinity among peers. He, furthermore, discovered in the Caribbean literature the foundation of masculinity is also strongly associated with violent behaviour, particularly towards women.

Hokowhitu (2008) suggests that non-Western men view masculinity and hegemony differently, as they never experienced 'white male privilege'. In fact, he argues that male domination in other cultures (such as those of African, Islamic or Maori) is often interpreted as a signifier that the culture is 'unenlightened', 'untransformed' and 'frozen in time', which reaffirms the superiority and power of the West. Hokowhitu (2008), furthermore, specifies that unlike some other cultures that embrace their traditions, many Maori practices, which persist today, are consequences of colonization by the British culture. However, he argues that to this day Maori culture and interpretation of masculinity remain incomprehensible to Western epistemologies, yet neither are they relatable to a 'traditional Maori masculinity', where a man was perceived as 'physical prowess', 'nobleness', and a 'warrior spirit'. Therefore, Maori men are potentially trying to define themselves by a colonized masculinity, which would have a significant impact on their identity and self-esteem.

Although cultural issues in relation to masculinity did not appear in my data, it is evident that cultural practices are an important part of a man's identity. The above findings have a significant implication to the psychotherapeutic field in biculturally driven Aotearoa, New Zealand, as different approach and understanding is needed when working with Maori men. Matarai (2008) argues that a strong emphasis needs to be placed primarily on inner workings of Maori men – their wairua (spirit), tinana (body), hinengaro (mind), and whanaunga (family) relationships. That is, we need a more holistic approach when working with Maori men, and include all aspects of their environment. Furthermore, Matarai (2008) argues that we need to enhance our practice and develop a new approach to decolonization, to masculinity and to the validation of indigenous ways.

Overall, this chapter provided new findings and gaps in the current research. While there is a lot of literature that attempts to define masculinity/masculinities (e.g. Connell, 2005), it was evident from the participants in this study that they were not able to define masculinity for themselves. It is an important finding as it identifies the gap in the existing literature and suggests that more studies are needed on men's lived experiences. It was also identified that the current participants showed a mutual theme of male exclusion. That is, there is a clear feeling of abandonment by their fathers, which excludes them from masculinity role-modeling; there is also potential trauma from the mothers, who might attend to their basic needs, but do not teach them about masculinity either (potentially due to the absence of their own fathers), therefore a boy might feel frustrated growing up as he does not learn how to communicate with other men or women. In fact, all the participants emphasized their difficulties around communication and bonding with either gender. During the interviews, there was a clear sense of despair, confusion and distress, as the participants described their experiences. However, the negative feelings around masculinity were followed by a sense of hope, an unusual finding that contradicts current literature, in which a man is described as distant, dominant, emotionless and non-nurturing (Kirkman et al., 2001; Connell, 2005; Johansson & Andersson, 2017; etc.). Finally, I identified the gap in the current study around cultural perspectives, as they were not included in the current data set. This is an important gap which should be addressed in further research as it would help us develop a much better understanding of masculinity from different angles as well as develop better practice as psychotherapists.

## Limitations and ideas for further research

Data analysis in the current study focused on providing a rich thematic overview of the entire (relevant) data set. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis is useful when investigating an under-researched area, or when examining participants' views about an unknown topic. Both of these conditions were applicable as, while there is a vast amount of research on masculinity in general, there is a dearth of investigation into men's lived experiences of their masculinity in relation to shifts in gender roles and traditional approaches. However, this type of analysis does not provide for a lot of depth and complexity, as it attempts to cover an overall description of predominant themes. Therefore, in the current research there is scope for further and much deeper investigation on the topic.

Due to the qualitative nature of the research and the small sample size, one could argue that these results should not be generalized to the entire population. However, Stapleton and Pattison (2014) opposed that there could still be validity in qualitative studies and in the current research rigor can be seen through a detailed description of the methods and interpretation of the data. However, the small sample size did impose limitations on the findings I generated from this study. For example, certain themes, such as cultural perspective, respect or shame, could emerge from a larger sample size. However, as this analysis was data-driven and not literature-driven, the themes were identified through close-to-text coding of the interviews, so certain topics/themes were not discussed and, hence, potentially missed. Therefore, I propose further research with a larger sample size, as it would allow for better appreciation of the variation of the phenomenon of interest (Englander, 2012).

In addition to a larger sample size, applying quantitative method to the future research would provide more insight into the current themes, expand on their connections but also allow evidential application within mental health professionals. That is, quantifying the data by targeting specific populations, applying statistical methods and hence analyzing possible correlations and probabilities, would allow further investigating the links between the themes in the current research. For example, in the current results there appeared to be a connection between fatherhood and self-esteem. However, due to a small size and lack of statistical evidence, the data cannot be applied to clinical practice. Another example, as mentioned earlier, men are statistically four times more likely to kill themselves in suicide

than women. It is still unclear around the reasons and quantitative approach to the current topic could provide a better understanding of this difference, which could positively influence current clinical approach.

Furthermore, statistical evidence could influence current psychotherapy training. In my personal experience during my own training, I had noticed the male:female ratio, which in my class was 1:16. Also during the interviews I had noticed the hesitation of participants towards therapy. Therefore, we could potentially argue that psychotherapists receive training that does not cover awareness around male identity and masculinity. Quantitative research could identify those gaps and provide applicable evidence to the matter, which would benefit current and future mental health professionals.

There was a further limitation in participant selection, as all three participants were heterosexual. This was a premeditated requirement during the recruitment process, as I did not want to broaden the results even further by adding in the sexuality factor in the scope of this dissertation. However, it would be interesting to widen this topic to LGBTQI community to see a potential further expansion on masculinity experience, which could have a significant implication for psychotherapeutic practice.

Additionally, another limitation in this study was that the interviewer was female. While all three participants voiced that they did not mind and even preferred it, it is a potential limitation given the overarching influence of gender discourses in society (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000) as well as evidential data in the current study. That is, the findings showed that participants “feared and avoided” females in an environment where they should disclose personal experiences. As one of the participants laughed, “you should hear the conversations behind closed doors, where it’s only guys”. It would be interesting to conduct similar interviews with a male interviewer and compare the findings to note potential similarities and differences.

Furthermore, in carrying out research driven by own experience, researcher may be partly motivated to look for particular results. Robb (2004) suggested that this unconscious desire could influence the way the study is organized and how the participants are recruited and interviewed. While I remained reflexively aware of my own and participants’ potential unconscious motivations and how those could influence the interview process, as well as

interpretation and analysis, it is important to acknowledge that these unconscious processes are inevitable and cannot be eliminated from the research processes (Robb, 2004). A suggestion for further research would imply a potential cross-analysis of the data by several other researchers to attempt to identify and minimize possible researcher's biases and preconceptions.

The final limitation to this study was that none of the participants identified with traditional views of masculinity, which was a requirement on the participants' recruitment sheet. This information did not come out until mid-interview process with each participant. However, it was an intriguing factor that participants still wanted to share their experiences. I decided to proceed with the interviews and the analysis, as the participants identified their fathers as traditionally driven and how they have observed the change. Over and above, this occurrence expanded my original limited hypothesis that men with traditional masculine views would experience distress. As evident in all three themes, distress was present despite participants' shift away from traditional masculine views. In addition, there was also evidence of hope regarding future approaches to masculinity from the participants. This is a significant gap in the current literature, which mainly focuses on potential definitions of masculinity. Furthermore, current literature focus is based on the negative aspects of masculinity experience, while this research showed that a different approach could potentially change the well-being of men. Exploring this topic further could provide awareness and insight for psychotherapists and other mental health professionals on how to work with men who are struggling with their masculine identity.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, this qualitative study explored men's lived experience of masculinity in relation to traditional gender role shift. Three male participants were interviewed in a semi-structured format that explored their personal experiences of self and others in relation to masculinity. Themes identified via thematic analysis in this research led to three thematic networks, which together provided an experience of masculinity as characterized by these participants.

Generated findings suggest that these men face several struggles around their masculine identity, such as exclusion by both parents. That is, there was a clear feeling of

abandonment by their fathers and potential exclusion from their mothers, due to lack of their own understanding of masculinity. This exclusion resulted in further isolation in adulthood for these men. They felt they were not able to connect to men or women. Furthermore, the lack of connection led to unhealthy coping such as working harder, isolating themselves more, anger outbursts, and relationship fall-outs.

However, these participants also voiced hope for change and recognition, which contradicts current literature on masculinity. It was evident in the findings that all three participants missed the connection with their fathers and would approach fatherhood differently themselves, as they recognized the pain behind the abandonment. Additionally, they spoke about role-modeling to other men and considered that extremely important. Furthermore, different needs in male/female relationship were also named, such as men's need to connect to women on an emotional level. Finally, while there is clear evidence that men are less likely to seek help (e.g. Kingerlee, 2012), all three participants in this study were much more open to attending psychotherapy, if it was more 'male-friendly'. Therefore, during the interview process and data analysis I observed a lot of insight from the participants into how they experienced themselves. So, while they may not have been able to identify what masculinity meant to them, they were able to identify their needs.

These findings have the potential to grow our awareness and broaden our knowledge when it comes to understanding masculinity and men's experience of it. Through my interaction with these three thoughtful individuals who participated in the interview, I gained crucial understanding and a snippet of an insight into their inner world. My conclusion is that it is an important issue to confront current conflicts and dramas of masculinity so we can recognize men's old and new challenges. Furthermore, as psychotherapists, we need to adapt our current therapeutic approaches, provide support and educate in a way that is not rejecting or emasculating, which could destigmatize psychotherapy for men and encourage them to safely explore their own definitions of masculinity. Therefore, much more in-depth research is needed to explore different angles on this topic.



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## **Appendix A: Information Sheet**



## Participant Information Sheet

**AUT**

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI  
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

### Date Information Sheet Produced:

5/05/2016

### Project Title

Understanding modern masculinity: men's lived experiences of traditional gender role change and its implication for psychotherapy.

### An Invitation

You are invited to take part in a research project exploring men's lived experience of traditional gender role change and its implication for psychotherapy. My name is Yulia Porodina, and I am undertaking this research study for my Masters in Psychotherapy Dissertation. Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary, and should you choose to participate, you may also choose to withdraw your participation at any time during the process. You will not be identified in any writing up of the findings.

### What is the purpose of this research?

There is a shortage of research exploring men's subjective responses to change in traditional gender roles driven by the feminism movement in relation to their experience of masculinity. I hope that the information gained in this study will help give voice to the experiences of men, and also contribute towards expanding current knowledge and understanding regarding masculinity. You may also find that participating in this research will provide you with an opportunity for self-reflection around this topic. The final research output will be in the form of a dissertation. The dissertation will be available for access in hard copy and digital format through AUT University library. The findings of this study may also be used for further research in the future.

### How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You are being invited to participate in this research, as you are a male who self identifies with more traditional views on masculinity. You would have been identified by word of mouth by someone who knew about the study and thought you might be interested. You would also have been identified as you have responded to the general advertisement.

### What will happen in this research?

The study involves interviews with men. These interviews will be audio recorded. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to spend up to 90 minutes being interviewed about your lived, every day experience of being a man in the current society. You may choose to discontinue your participation at any time.

### What are the discomforts and risks?

Experiences related to masculine identity can be deeply personal. Hence you may experience some discomfort and vulnerability when discussing this topic.

### How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

You may choose to have the recorder turned off at any point during the interview and withdraw from the interview/research process at any time. You can also utilise the services of a counsellor at AUT Health, Counselling and Wellbeing Centre, which offers counselling to research participants. The centre can be contacted on (09) 921 9999 ext 9928 (Akoranga Campus) and (09) 921 9999 ext 9992 (Wellesley Campus).

### What are the benefits?

Participation in this research will give you an opportunity to reflect on your experiences as a man and the impact your masculine identity has had on your wellbeing. The findings will be beneficial to the psychotherapy profession in terms of creating awareness around men's subjective experience of their genderedness, and deepening the knowledge and understanding regarding the impact of gender variables on psychotherapy. I will also benefit from this research, as it will add to my understanding as a psychotherapist and the completion of this study will enable me to obtain my Masters in Psychotherapy.

### How will my privacy be protected?

Only I will transcribe your audio-recorded interview. Only my dissertation supervisor and I will have access to the data. Your identity will be kept confidential by the use of pseudonyms. Any potentially identifying information will be excluded from the final report as well as from any verbal presentations of the material. Identifying

demographics with participant identification numbers will be stored separately from the research data, as will signed consent forms. All material involved in the research will be secured in a locked filing cabinet and destroyed after six years, as per protocol.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

The only cost involved in your participating in this research is your time. As indicated earlier, if you choose to take part, this will involve an interview of up to 90 minutes. I will meet you for the interview at a place of your choosing.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

I would find it helpful if you could let me know within a week whether or not you wish to participate in this research. If I do not hear from you after one week, I will make one follow up phone call.

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

You will need to complete a consent form included with the participant information sheet to participate in this research.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

I will post or email you a copy of the summary of the research findings if you would like to receive this information.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Warwick Pudney, [warwick.pudney@aut.ac.nz](mailto:warwick.pudney@aut.ac.nz)

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext 6038.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

**Researcher Contact Details:**

Yulia Porodina  
Email: [julzth@gmail.com](mailto:julzth@gmail.com)

**Project Supervisor Contact Details:**

Warwick Pudney  
Phone: (09) 921 9999 ext 7729  
Email: [w.pudney@aut.ac.nz](mailto:w.pudney@aut.ac.nz)

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *type the date final ethics approval was granted*, AUTEK Reference number *type the reference number*.

## Appendix B: Consent Form

### Consent Form

*Project title: Understanding modern masculinity in relation to traditional gender role change: A thematic analysis of men's lived experiences and perceptions*

*Project Supervisor: Warwick Pudney*

*Researcher: Yulia Porodina*

☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2016.

☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.

☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.

☐ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.

☐ I agree to take part in this research.

☐ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐


Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Date: .....

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 02/06/2016 AUTEK Reference number 16/182*

*Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form*



**AUT**  
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI  
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

2 July 2015

page 1 of 2

This version was last edited in July 2015

## Appendix C: Invitation to Participate

The logo for AUT (Auckland University of Technology) is displayed in white text on a dark grey rectangular background.

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI  
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

### **Modern masculinity: How are men experiencing changes in traditional roles between men and women?**

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring:

**Men's lived experience of masculinity in relation to traditional gender role change, and its implication for psychotherapy.**

My name is Yulia Porodina, and I am conducting this study for my Master of Psychotherapy Dissertation. If you meet the following criteria and would like to participate, please contact me at:

Mobile: 021 905 729

Email: [julzth@gmail.com](mailto:julzth@gmail.com)

Participants will need to meet the following criteria:

- 1. Male, 18-65 years of age;**
- 2. Self-identifying with more traditional views on masculinity;**
- 3. Be willing to participate in a 60-90 minute, face to face, audio taped interview at the location of your choosing.**



## Appendix D: AUTECH Approval Letter

**AUTECH Secretariat**

Auckland University of Technology  
 D-88, WU406 Level 4 WU Building City Campus  
 T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316  
 E: [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)  
[www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics](http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics)



12 June 2016

Warwick Pudney  
 Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Warwick

Re Ethics Application: **16/182 Understanding modern masculinity: men's lived experience of traditional gender role change and its implication for psychotherapy.**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 1 June 2019.

As part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTECH:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 1 June 2019;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 1 June 2019 or on completion of the project.

It is a condition of approval that AUTECH is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTECH approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

AUTECH grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to obtain this.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, please use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz).

All the very best with your research,



Kate O'Connor  
 Executive Secretary  
 Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

CC: Yulia Porodina