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'How do men who meditate construct their gender identity in talk?'

Portfolio submitted in fulfilment of DPsych Counselling Psychology, Department of Psychology, City University, London.

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Firstly, I would like to thank the men that took part in this study. I thank them for their time, patience, and openness in our interviews.

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Declaration

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Preface

"Men have been in power for so long and have built a world that reflects them so accurately, that masculinity is woven into the very fabric of society".

- Grayson Perry (2017)

<u>**Overview**</u>

This DPsych portfolio presents three pieces of work that highlight my development as a trainee counselling psychologist as well as a researcher. This portfolio is made up of a process report, a research project, a journal article, and a case study and process report. The process of my clinical training on the DPsych programme has been an invaluable experience. My perspective of the world and the people in it have completely changed, and I will always be grateful for the opportunity to undergo this training. A motivation for this study has come from a longstanding personal exploration of what it means to be a man. When starting my undergraduate degree in psychology, I distinctly remember entering a lecture hall with a significant majority of female students. Looking back, I recognise that I was aware of my maleness throughout my undergraduate studies. I later took part in research in masculinity as part of credits required for my undergraduate degree. In the final year of undergrad, my friend took his own life. This was first-hand experience of how enactments of male gender identity or traditional masculinity, (repressing emotions and not feeling able to reach out for help), can be fatal. Whilst on a term abroad in my final year of my undergraduate degree, I took an elective course: 'Mindfulness in Psychology'. This led to my own practice of meditation that evolved to a keen interest in yoga. Similarly, to the demographic of that first lecture during

undergraduate induction, throughout my therapeutic work I have worked mostly with female colleagues and clients. Male clients seemed to be few and far between. Of the men and boys, I have worked with, I noticed the trends and tendencies of pressures to enact expectations of masculinity. Thus, the research study is born out of two personal interests: masculinity and meditation.

A key theme in the case study/ process report as well as the research project is that of emotional regulation as it relates to masculinity. I was humbled by the experiences of the individuals I worked with in my clinical placements throughout the training. As I steadily built my understanding of trauma and attachment theory to draw up formulations of their difficulties, I later recontextualised their difficulties as the way power and oppression operates in society. Meeting with clients in my second- and third-year placements significantly altered my worldview and encouraged me to be more empathetic and patient when working with clients.

Section A: Doctoral Research

In the first section, I present my doctoral thesis, which explores the way male meditators construct their gender identity in talk. In the UK, the suicide rate for men far surpasses those of women (ONS, 2022). Men's suicide rates as well a general tendency for a lack of help-seeking behaviours can be understood by men conforming to dominant models of male socialisation in Western societies (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005; Payne, et al., 2008). Thus, it is imperative to better understand ways that men can self-regulate and engage with their emotions in efforts to improve overall well-being as well as to address the worrying male suicide rates. It has been suggested that adhering to the traditional masculine behaviour of 'emotional repression' is closely linked to negative health outcomes for men

(Robertson, et. al., 2015). Meditation encourages practitioners to engage with their present moment experiences, including emotional states (Shapiro, et al., 2006), with meditation being recommended as a worthwhile healthcare intervention (Mars, et. al., 2010). Thus, a greater investigation of how male meditators construct their gender identity is warranted, which the current study aims to do. To date, no study has investigated the way male meditators construct their gender identity.

Eight male meditators were interviewed, and the data was analysed using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). Four dominant discourses emerged from the analysis, each highlighting the different ways masculinity can be constructed. The discourses showed that the different subject positions allowed by the four dominant discourses provided different ways of being with respect to their gender identity. The participants all constructed the relationship between femininity, masculinity and gender in complex ways. The meditation discourse was drawn upon, particularly in instances where masculinity was being constructed according to feminist/ queer discourse as well as a personality trait discourse. The discourses allowed the men to engage with emotionality without their masculinity being challenged. Interestingly for the current study, the meditation discourse provided a subject position beyond the masculine versus feminine binary, with participants acknowledging that ultimately the binary codes are limiting.

My personal experience of being a man and experiencing the benefits of meditation/ yoga practice are what led to my interest in this area of study. During my yoga and meditation practice over the years, I have experienced greater self-awareness which has extended to my ability to understand and regulate my emotions. The practice of non-judgmental, moment-to-moment experience helped with the carrying out of this study. Particularly with the interview and data analysis

stages. When approaching the interviewees, I had to be mindful about how my own position and preconceptions of a man could impact the research. For example, I found myself expecting the older participants to construct their male gender identity/ masculinity according to more outdated traditional masculine norms. Whilst I did find that the younger participants seemed to have greater access to language in constructing their gender identity; each participant helped challenge my preconceptions and often shared intricate ways they navigated the discourses. I am indebted to the participants in this study, as amongst other things, they have significantly broadened my understanding of male gender identity in our current sociohistorical timepoint. The understanding of the numerous constructions of masculinity according to context, has helped to inform my own clinical practice when working with boys and men.

Section B: Journal Article

The second section of the portfolio offers a journal article on the research study discussed in the first section. The article focusses on one of the subject positions offered from the personality trait and feminist/ queer discourses: '*The observer position'.* This position was chosen because it highlights the way in which the meditation discourse offers a flexible, open position that allows men to be aware of their emotions and both accept and resist dominant discourses on masculinity. I believe this offers novel insights into the way meditation discourse and meditation practice can equip men with skills to help better self-regulate in their lives.

I chose to submit the article to the BACP's *Counselling Psychology & Psychotherapy Research* because it is a highly respected peer-reviewed journal that aims to link research to practice in counselling and psychotherapy. The journal welcomes submissions on various topics, including the applications of mindfulness to therapeutic work, which is relevant to my article. From a research perspective, I am interested in a greater dissemination of qualitative research in therapeutic settings and providing a voice for participants. I hope this article will inspire psychologists and psychotherapists to understand both how masculinity is constructed in various settings, (and the implications this has for the therapeutic work), as well as the benefit of meditation practices for men.

Section C: Case Study and Process Report

The final section of the portfolio highlights the clinical aspect of my progress. I present a case study and process report that outline my work with a client during my final year as a Trainee Counselling Psychologist. The client, referred to as the pseudonym 'John', was referred by a primary care IAPT setting to my placement's step 3 setting. The service operated from an integrated approach offering multiple therapeutic modalities such as cognitive analytic therapy, trauma focussed therapy, CBT, and systemic therapy. The referrer highlighted an early abusive relationship with his father and difficulty in maintaining relationships. John had not worked since 2016 and was living in a small studio flat provided by the council. My role as a trainee counselling psychologist is a split placement, within the developmental trauma pathway as well as the Cognitive Analytic Therapy pathway. My role with John, was to provide a Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT) intervention (Ryle, & Kerr,

2020), which was selected in collaboration with John holding in mind CAT's suitability in exploring reciprocal role procedures (RRPs).

As presented in the case study, what I perceived to be some of the most meaningful work focussed on the therapeutic relationship. John's difficulty in maintaining relationships, also played out in our relationship. The case study presents an example of the way I used the therapeutic relationship to facilitate rupture and repair (Eubanks et al., 2018). When compiling this portfolio, and returning to John's case study, I recognised the way John was refusing to engage with emotionality could also be understood as adhering to traditional masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). John described his father modelling emotional repression paired with instances of uncontrollable anger. In our work, John discussed the way he learned from his father to avoid his emotions. I believe this case study and process report highlight the ways traditional masculine norms as well as systemic oppression can work simultaneously to impact the development of unhelpful masculine identities as well as keep vulnerable men caught in oppressed living conditions.

Personal Reflections

The journey on the professional doctorate in Counselling Psychology has been a long and difficult one. As a clinician, I have learned the importance of continuously reflecting on the role of power in the therapeutic relationship and aiming to meet clients with an open and non-judgmental attitude. Throughout this portfolio, I have tried to communicate the sense of reflexivity and self-awareness and remembering that as psychologists it is an ethical obligation to recognise that we are

not 'experts'; but rather we are taught by our clients. This portfolio aims to showcase

my development as both a

researcher as well as a clinician. I hope that by sharing my experience and personal

reflections I can offer insight for others who will also follow the path towards

qualification on the professional doctorate and beyond.

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Section A: Doctoral Research

'How do men who meditate construct their gender identity in talk?'

Thesis Abstract:

Title: 'How do men who meditate construct their gender identity in talk?'

Objectives: Research in masculinity has suggested adhering to traditional masculine norms has potential implications for the health outcomes for men, their engagement with emotions, help seeking behaviours and suicide. Meditation has been shown to be a promising potential tool for men to develop skills to self-regulate. However, there has been a dearth of empirical work examining how male meditators construct their gender identity. The aim of the study was to explore the discourses that male meditators drawn on when talking about their gender identity.

Design: The study was primarily interested in exploring and understanding the construction of gender identity by male meditators. Therefore, a Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) methodology was used to locate relevant discourses and trace the patterns and consequences of their usage in male meditators' descriptions of gender identity.

Methods: Purposeful snowball sampling was used to recruit eight male meditators, between the ages of 25 to 72. The participants took part in 60-to-90-minute semi-structured interviews that were analysed using FDA.

Results: Four overarching discourses were identified, which made available different subject positions to the men. The four discourses were: a traditional masculinity discourse, a feminist/ queer discourse, a personality trait discourse, and a biological discourse. A meditation discourse, in conjunction with other dominant discourses allowed the men to resist expectations of traditional masculinity in respect to engagement with emotions.

Conclusions: The study highlighted the complicated and multiple ways masculinity is constructed by 8 male meditators. The study offers new developments in masculinity

research. The findings from this study are discussed in relation to implications and applications for the counselling psychology and therapeutic fields.

Chapter One: Introduction

The chapter starts by briefly acknowledging my personal motivations for carrying out this study. I then introduce male gender identity as it is currently understood and theorised. Next, I explore a historical account of male gender identity as explored through a brief genealogical inspired discussion. Meditation and mindfulness are then explored, including how these discourses have been adopted with Western capitalist societies. Contemporary research of male gender identity and meditation is presented, accounting for the gaps in the research field. Lastly, I present the research question my aims for the study.

1.1.   Introduction

In recent years throughout academic literature as well as wider society, there has been growing debates that view men as a cause for concern (Mac an Ghaill, et al., 2012; Gough, 2006). At the time of writing this thesis, Scotland's recent move to amend the age of the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) (2004) highlights the urgency of change in respect to binary identity categories of male versus female and how this has become a politicised tool. Meanwhile, Andrew Tate threatens to 'radicalise' young men, with some UK schools aiming to tackle his influence. In recent years, the rise of terms like 'toxic masculinity' and the #MeToo movement have brought men's gender identity to wider public discourse (Bola, 2020), which have described a 'crisis' of masculinity. A search of 'masculinity' on Google's Ngram Viewer shows an increase from the 1980's, followed by a further increase in the 21st century. But what

does the term masculinity actually mean? This literature review will examine the ways masculinity has been theorised in the psychological research over the years. It will examine the ways in which an adherence to traditional masculine norms can be detrimental to men and women.

Masculinity has been linked to negative health outcomes (Gough, 2006). At the extreme end of men's health, the suicide rates for men (ONS, 2021; 2019; River, & Flood, 2021; WHO, 2018) are higher than those of their female counterparts across many countries (Struszczyk, et al., 2019). Men's suicide rates, as well as concerns of the tendency toward a lack of help-seeking behaviours are closely linked to the conformity to dominant traditional masculine norms which originate from dominant models of male socialisation in Western societies (Seidler, et al., 2016; Pederson, et. al., 2007).

From the start of this literature review, it is important to mention the distinction between sex and gender and why this distinction may help to explain the negative health concerns for men. Sex refers to 'biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women,' while gender is the 'socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women' (WHO, 2012). When considering the difference between sex and gender it has been suggested that the mental health (Pleck, 1995) and physical health concerns (ONS, 2021) of men can be better attributed to their gender identity rather than their sex. Another key distinction in understanding the link between masculinity and negative health outcomes for men is the suggestion that men tend to 'externalise' their distress through risk taking behaviours, substance use and anger (Pollack, 1998), rather than to 'internalise' distress as sadness, which has been argued to be a tendency of women. The externalization can arguably explained by

an adherence to traditional masculine norms (Pleck, 1995). When referring to the argument that men 'externalise' their distress (Pollack, 1998), it is important to note that this is describing how men behave rather than a fundamental aspect of their nature, or how they are (Lomas, 2013). More specifically, this can be explained by a social constructionist approach to gender identity (Connell, 1995; & Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005) rather than an essentialist biological explanation of their sex (Smiler, 2004). Put simply, the negative mental and physical concerns of men is better attributed to their gender identity rather than their biological sex. Similar to the wider debates in society over the last decade, research has also explored the question of whether 'masculinity is a problem?' (Addis, Mansfield, & Syzdek, 2010). The researchers posit that masculinity as a construct is indeed a problem and that research should aim to move away from this construct, i.e. towards a deconstruction of male gender identity (Silverstein, 2016; Addis, et al., 2010; Butler, 1990). This research also critiqued psychological researchers' perpetuation of an essentialist construction that describes innate traits of men, instead favouring a gendered social learning framework that focused instead on "what men are taught to do, under what circumstances, and why" (p84). This introduction will now turn to a historical account of how male gender identity has been theorised since the twentieth century.

1.2. Masculinity: a brief genealogy

A Foucauldian genealogy is a method used for historical analysis and critique of the development of concepts, ideas and/or institutions. This is achieved by analysing how specific knowledge claims and power structures have been constructed and have changed through time. By tracing the historical developments of certain discourses, a genealogy highlights how certain knowledge claims gain

authority over other claims, which can influence the way individuals both perceive and act. A brief Foucauldian genealogy has the potential to critique the authority of the status quo, and to free subjected knowledges from the powerful effects of expert and essentialist scientific discourse (Gordon, 1980). Genealogies are inherently political in that they aim to bring about social change and provide ways of undermining power dynamics, by examining how discourses have emerged, rather than enquiring who is employing discursive power over whom (Foucault, 1988). Holding this in mind, I thought it worthwhile to start this chapter with a genealogical approach to male gender identity.

The aim is to trace what the dominant discourses constructing male gender identity are as well as how they have developed through time to shape the current practice and possibilities for male gender identity in the UK. A genealogy has the potential to challenge and critique the power relations that have come to constitute the practices of male gender identity presently, and to consider what can be different (Tamboukou, 1999). Without deconstructing the way male gender identity has come to be normalised, the status quo of a patriarchal society cannot be questioned in such a way that present practices, discourses and knowledge of male gender identities may be conceived of differently.

For Foucault (1980), discourses represent systems of knowledge and power, which create specific ways of seeing and being in the world (Willig, 2022). Foucault posits that discourses are knowledge that is taken for granted which direct the norms of individuals in society. Of importance to Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA), this literature review aims to provide a brief genealogical inspired review (Carabine, 2001). Due to the limitations of the word count for this thesis of the Professional Doctorate, a full Foucauldian genealogy would not be possible. Nonetheless, I

thought it important to present a genealogical approach to male gender identity

which spans historical, psychological, political and social fields. This would provide a

helpful foundation from which the current study of male gender identity could be

better explored and understood. The dominant discourses that emerged from the

genealogy are then identified in the contemporary literature presented later in this

chapter. Through employing this genealogical approach, I recognise this to be a

deconstructive piece of work: namely in that it considers how and when discourses

emerge, moments of change, struggles with power and institutions involved in

facilitating the production of a discourse constituting male gender identity (Parker,

1992). A genealogical approach seeks to locate the links between the social world

and individual, i.e. a macro-micro interaction which can provide alternative ways of

understanding how we construct and thus experience our worlds (Willig, Potter,

Wickham, Kendall, & Hook, 2005). In analysing how men adopt or resist discourses

in their own constructions of male gender identity, I hope the power relations inherent

in male gender identity may be better understood. Overall, the aim of this review is to

consider the historical developments of the construction of male gender identity and

the way these constructions fit with dominant discourses (Arribas-Ayllon, &

Walkerdine, 2017). By mapping the various constructions of male gender identity, I

aim to provide examples of the changing historical meanings of male gender identity

and how these in turn have shaped current understandings of male gender identity. I

aim to do this by firstly presenting the ways male gender identity has been theorised

within the psychological and sociological literature, then consider how the media and

neoliberalism has also influenced the construct.

It is important to note from the beginning of this brief genealogy some of the

challenges with employing this method in the current study. An inherent challenge in

fully adopting a Foucauldian position with respect to the theories of masculinity and meditation presented in the subsequent sections, may be in part explained through researcher reflexivity. For example, through my own practice of meditation, I have been exposed to theories that would seem to suggest that there are potential benefits of meditation. More specifically, as explained in the methodology chapter, I have a personal investment in meditation practices and what it means to be a man. For example, the potential benefits of adopting a meditation practice as a way of navigating some of the challenges associated with male gender identity. Thus, this may in ways both consciously and unconsciously shape my ability to adopt a fully critical lens or Foucauldian position with respect to the literature presented in the following sections. In that, my own position may increase the likelihood of a confirmation bias favouring the benefits of meditation. In addition to this, through my own previous experience, I acknowledge it may have been easier to problematize (Arribas-Ayllon, & Walkerdine, 2017) 'masculinity' as a construct than it was to problematize 'meditation' as a result. As explained in the methodology chapter, I have tried to be transparent throughout all stages of the study and write up processes.

1.3. How masculinity has been researched: 20th century

In both psychological research as well as wider society, male gender identity has been used interchangeably with the term masculinity. In this study I will do the same. However, I will state my epistemological stance to male gender identity in a later section of this chapter. I acknowledge that the research in masculinity is mostly dominated by a White western middle-class conception of male gender identity (Connell, & Messerschmidt 2005). Reviewing a topic as vast as male gender identity over the last century requires that some limits are established to provide a coherent

narrative. Smiler's (2004) work on the development of psychological theories of masculinity, and the five movements he identified, has helped to inform the structuring of the theories of masculinity in the below genealogy.

I will start this brief genealogy by reviewing how masculinity has been theorised in psychological research. Secondly, I will consider the role of sociology has played in furthering our understanding of gender. Thirdly, I will consider the importance of my own social constructionist perspective on gender. Lastly, I will attempt to touch on how masculinity discourses have been portrayed through mainstream media.

1.3.1. Prior to the 1970s

Masculinity has been through many changes in the last century. In order to understand how contemporary masculinities are constructed and enacted, it is important to retrace the origins of research into masculinity over the last century. Prior to the 1970s the dominant theory and understanding of masculinity was the 'male sex role theory' (Smiler, 2004). From the turn of the twentieth century until the 1970s a biological essentialist approach to masculinity and femininity dominated Western understandings of gender identity. This 'trait' approach to gender was a limiting construction whereby only men could be masculine and women feminine. This essentialist construction of male gender identity viewed masculinity as a singular conceptualisation which was divorced from culture and individual differences, mapping biological sex directly onto gender identity. One of the earliest published inventories of masculinity and femininity codified the constructs as bipolar opposites (Terman, & Miles, 1936). This essentialist construction has implications for the subjectivity of certain subject positions. Namely, the insufficient attainment of this

masculine ideal was argued to predict poor mental health, so men who were identified as feminine (masculinity's 'opposite') or were low in masculinity ('hypomasculine') were identified as problematic (Smiler, 2004; Pleck, 1987; Terman, & Miles, 1936). Being hypomasculine at this time wasn't a problem; however, after World War II hypermasculinity was identified as the source of aggression, juvenile delinquency, and obedience to illegitimate authority (Pleck, 1987).

In the postwar period, 'stress' emerged on both sides of the Atlantic as a focus for preoccupation with the harmful effects of modern lifestyles (Jackson, 2013). Expert discourses of psychiatry were also gaining traction in Western societies. Thus, these essentialist constructions of masculinity, the male sex role theory, had implications for the subjectivity of men. Holding in mind Foucault's view that power (1988b) works through, and not against, subjectivity, we can better understand how individuals are shaped and influenced by the social structures and power relations around them.

1.3.2. By the 1970s

Following the developments in society, such as the civil rights movements in the United States, as well as second wave feminism of the 1960s, the essentialist approach to gender was challenged by androgyny theories (Bem, 1974). These theories suggested that men could in fact score on femininity scales and vice vera with women (Bem, 1974). The androgyny researchers departed from the previous generations by framing masculinity and femininity as distinct, non-opposing entities that men and women could have in varying quantities (Bem, 1974; Spence, & Helmreich, 1978). This feminist scholarship on the psychology of women and gender adopts the perspective that gender roles are socially constructed by gender

ideologies, which are grounded in power differences between men and women (Unger, 1979).This construction of gender as made up of particular 'personality traits' (Bem, 1974; Spence, & Helmreich, 1978) arguably allowed for more flexibility in exercising masculinity, thereby offering less limited subject positions to men that do not meet expectations of masculinity. However, Gough (2018) explains that the trait theories and measures did not account for how society constructed, (de)valued and distributed these gendered roles, and they did not address gendered power relationships.

During the 1970s masculinity was also being theorised as an all-encompassing role from the social psychological research on roles (Brannon, 1976). Brannon (1976) identified four traditional masculine norms: 'no sissy stuff': men must avoid any behaviour or characteristic associated with women or femininity; 'be a big wheel': masculinity is measured by success, power, and receiving the admiration of others; 'be a sturdy oak': manliness is predicated on rationality, toughness and self-reliance; and 'give 'em hell': men must balance the 'rationality' of the study oak with daring and aggression, and must therefore be willing to take risks in order to become the big wheel. These four principles of masculinity allowed an 'ideology' of masculinity, which allowed for the critique of said ideology. When masculinity is understood as a social role (Brannon, 1976) rather than an inherited or acquired trait (Bem, 1974), this highlights the limitations that are inherent in masculinity—namely, and of importance to the current study, an encouragement of emotional repression and reduced likelihood of expressing vulnerability and of thus seeking psychological support (Robertson, et al., 2015). The development of the roles approach to masculinity provides room to critique masculinity, where it has potentially negative

consequences for adhering to the traditional masculine norms (Addis, Mansfield, & Syzdek, 2010).

1.3.3. 1980s 'strain' movement

The 1980s was when research in masculinity seemed to increase and interest in the area grew considerably. By the 1980s, psychologists who were influenced by feminism and men's liberation movements became interested in the social construction of gender, and more specifically in the negative effects of masculinity norms on men (and others). Pleck (1981) applied these insights in his seminal volume *The Myth of Masculinity,* where he put forth the (later) gender role strain paradigm (GRSP) (Pleck, 1995). The GSRP views gender roles not as biologically determined but instead as socially constructed entities that arise from and protect the patriarchal social and economic order (Levant, & Richmond, 2016). Traditional masculinity therefore undergrids power differences between men and women by associating masculinity with dominance and aggression and femininity with submission and nurturance (Levant, 1996). According to Pleck (1981; 1995), men are socialised to conform to dominant masculinity ideologies, which has negative consequences, or as Pleck has termed 'gender role strain'. When men can successfully conform to dominant masculine norms this will come at a cost to himself and others. For example, being unemotional and immersing himself in work may compromise relationships at home. On the other hand, when a man doesn't live up to the expected ideals this may lead to feelings of failure and thus negatively impact self-esteem (Pleck, 1981).

1.3.4. 1990s: deconstruction, social constructionist movement, & hegemonic masculinity

Arguably, the most progress in understanding gender has come from outside of psychological research. It has been through the contributions of sociology (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The 'Critical Studies of men and Masculinity' (Gough, 2018; Robertson et al., 2016) has been an interdisciplinary approach to theories of masculinity which have better accounted for social and cultural factors that contribute to the construction and enactment of masculinity. One of the most influential theories of masculinity has been that of hegemonic masculinity (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Carrigan and colleagues (1985) describe the construct as a form of masculinity that generates and legitimatises power inequalities in relationships between men and women as well as among men. The concept therefore recognises that there is a dominance hierarchy among men, as well as male dominance over women. Hegemonic masculinity posits that there are 'multiple' masculinities that exist within each individual with respect to intersectionality. However, this hegemonic view of masculinity (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005) represents historically informed gendered practices that validate patriarchal institutions and thus ensures the ongoing dominance of boys and men over girls, women and marginalized men (Addis, et al., 2016). Similarly to the way feminist studies of gender highlighted the role of power, this theory posits that men have a multiplicity of masculinities that are inhabited and enacted variously at different times based on which hegemony is dominant in the given context (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005).

A strength of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005) is that it addresses the multiple levels of relationships at which male dominance is enacted—this includes face-to-face interactions, organizations and communities—as well as at the societal or national live and even the global level (Silverstein, 2016). The theory posits 'configurations of practice' which explain how power operates through multiple masculinities. For example, in a given context a man can enact and be privileged by the locally hegemonic masculinities whilst women and other men will be marginalized and/or subordinated by these hegemonic masculinities. The same man who was privileged in one context may be marginalized in another. Hegemonic masculinity is therefore a construct which supports the notion of multiple masculinities and is an inherently feminist construct as it addresses the power relations between men and other men as well as women. According to the theory, and of relevance to this study, men can be seen to adopt different subject positions in across different physical contexts and relationships. Hegemonic masculinity better accounts for intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) as well as the distribution of power in society, compared to gender role theories of masculinity which do not account for power and intersectionality (Addis, et. al., 2016). Wetherell and Edley's discourse analysis (1999) identified three main identity positions available to men: heroic, ordinary and rebellious.

Communities of practice (CoP) refers to a theoretical framework for investigating the ways identities are learned and reproduced in various groups and local contexts (Lave, & Wenger 1991). Wenger (1998) offers three criteria for identifying a social context as a CoP: mutual interaction of members, jointly negotiated enterprise and shared repertoire (common discourses/behaviours). The notion that particular CoPs can encourage specific patterns of gendered behaviour is

helpful in understanding how local forms of hegemonic masculinity emerge (Creighton and Oliffe, 2010; Paechter, 2003). Hegemony can have multiple shifting meanings, and men are seen to take up different subject positions in relation to these meanings according to their needs. Thus, various enactments of masculinity represent not different types of men, but rather the ways in which men strategically 'position themselves through discursive practices' according to the dynamics of the social situation (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005,p 841).Of interest to this study, hegemonic masculinity plays a part in health seeking behaviours. For example, is has been theorized that if men accrue sufficient 'masculine capital' (de Visser, et al., 2009) then they can express emotional vulnerability without their masculine identity being threatened.

1.3.5. Contemporary theories of masculinity: masculinity in the 21st century

A large portion of the research considering hegemonic masculinity (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005), as well as most psychological research on masculinity, has tended to focus on the negative aspects of conventional masculinities (Gough, 2018; Robertson, et al., 2016; Robertson, et al., 2015; Sloan, et al., 2010; Robertson). An example of a newer theory which instead focusses on the positive aspects of masculinity is Anderson's (2014; 2009) inclusive masculinity theory (IMT). The theory posits that recent generations of young men are tending to reject traditional masculine values in favour of a softer, more liberal and open version of masculinity. Inclusive masculinity theory has been compared to post-feminism (O'Neill, 2015), in that it emphasizes personal choices and capacities rather than gendered power relations and constraints. IMT introduced the concept of 'homohysteria', which enables an explanation of the social change in gendered behaviours (Anderson,

2014). When homophobia decreases in a culture this allows for a profound change in masculinities. IMT posits that the classification of masculinity becomes less hierarchical and more diverse forms of masculinity become more evenly distributed (Anderson, 2009). Holding this in mind, femininity in men becomes less stigmatized, and the limited set of behaviours that are valued by men become more open and expansive. Here, non-conforming or marginalized masculinities are expected to experience less scrutiny. However, IMT has been critiqued to only have considered the experience of white middle class university students (Ingram, & Waller, 2014), as well as the role of 'masculinity capital' de Visser, et al., 2009). That because of the financial privilege of the participants in studies of IMT, can engage in feminized practices without a threat to their masculine identity (Cleland, 2013; O'Neill, 2015).

1.4. Media representations and neoliberalism

The media as a social institution holds significant power to incite political and social positions that are easily accessible to the general population. Masculinity has been framed as being in 'crisis' by the media since at least the turn of the twentieth century (Gough, 2006), with masculinity being linked to negative health outcomes. 'Lads' mags' in the 1990s and mid-2000s had an impact on constructions of masculinity and femininity in the media and British popular culture today (Tippett, 2023). This 'new lad' symbolized a powerful backlash against second-wave feminism, especially in terms of sexual equality. Lads' magazines have ceased publication not because of shifts in cultural attitudes towards sex, but rather the growth in online pornography (Tippett, 2023). Jumping forward to October 2017, the #MeToo movement created a global dialogue of gender relations, holding men accountable for abuses of power and sexually predatory behaviour (Economist,

2018). In 2020, The Guardian produced an online documentary series titled *'Modern Masculinity'* which investigated contemporary concepts of masculinity in British society. Worryingly, there has been a rise in misogynistic views on social media in recent years. Most notably may be Andrew Tate and his 'Hustler's University', where men and boys pay a subscription to access his content (Sylwia, 2023). On a hopeful note, there has also been more representation of marginalised identities. An example of this is the Netflix Series '*Sex Education'*. *Sex Education* has been praised for its representation of queer relationships, gender presentation, intimacy with a disability and other experiences not commonly shown on mainstream television (Zornosa, 2021).

Neoliberalism and its effects on globalization has shaped modern constructions and enactments of masculinity. Neoliberalism broadly refers to the economic and social agenda that has transformed under the sign of the 'free market' which has dominated global politics in the last twenty-five years (Connell, 2010). What had started as a strategy of deregulation, has led to a strategy of endless commodification of services. Of relevance to men in Western societies today, neoliberalism rejects the notion of 'society and the public good' and instead endorses a competitive, individualist, self-oriented market approach as the way to meet all of a person's needs (Harvey, 2005). Thus, needs that were formerly met by public agencies on the principle of citizen rights, or via personal relationships in communities and families, are now meant to be met by companies selling services in the market (Connell, 2010). There is an intersection between the increased individual and organisational 'well-being' discourses that have gained popularity in the last two decades (Clarke et al., 2015; Gelles, 2016; Smallen 2019). Namely how these 'well-being' practices place the 'onus on individuals to cultivate their own health and

happiness in service of greater productivity and harmony within managerial

organisations, without questioning the social and political structures that impact

individuals' quality of life' (Smallen, 2019, p135). Thus, considering the current study

in the context of Western societies dominated by neoliberal policies, men are

responsible for their own 'well-being'. They are responsible for managing their own

stresses or difficulties in life without always being able to critique the systemic

causes of that stress.

Recent debates have highlighted the pitfalls of disenfranchised young men in

Western societies. These relate to but are not limited to: men falling behind in

education, a rise in men's economic inactivity, falling rates of sexual activity, the

continued rise of suicide, and a loneliness crisis impacting young men that was

accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Rich, & Bujalka, 2023). This

disenfranchisement of young men has lead to a rise in engagement with the

'manosphere' (Sugiura, 2023). The 'manosphere' refers to online support

communities which have developed as a response to feminism, female

empowerment and the alienating impact of neoliberalism (Sugiura, 2023). This has

led to online influencers profiting off the anxieties of young, disenfranchised men. A

dominant presence on the 'manosphere' is Andrew Tate. Tate is a 'self-described

misogynist', and his content has gone viral on social media platforms. This has led to

UK schools challenging the his influence on young boys. The phenomenon of

Andrew Tate and 'incel' (Sugiura, 2021) subcultures on the internet are examples of

how problematic constructions of male gender identity have implications for women

as well as marginalised men. At the heart of the allure of influencers like Andrew Tate

is the attraction to what has been described as neoliberal hegemonic masculinity

(Forbes, 2022). Forbes (2022) describes neoliberal hegemonic masculinity as valuing:

> male entitlement, individualist competition, and hierarchical power over and exploitation of others and of nature. It sanctions aggressiveness and violence as acceptable means of solving conflicts, and material success as the criteria for masculine identity. It values rationality and de-emphasizes and belittles the socialized values of many women and of feminism, such as empathy, emotional expression, perspective taking, caring, sharing, and collaboration in the service of non-exploitative, non-competitive, mutually enhancing relationships (p2)'.

Simultaneously, there have been several contemporary changes in society which have challenged conceptions of traditional male gender identity. Silverstein (2016) outlines several contemporary movements that challenge the gender binary and can support gender equality. These social movements are: changes in heterosexual families with women in the workplace, stay at home fathers and lesbi-gay families; gay men and women entering the military; and the increased visibility of transgender individuals in society (Silverstein, 2016).

The influence of neo-liberalism is having a worrying impact on the constructions of enactments of masculinity in Western societies, with healthcare not being viewed as a right but rather as a commodity (Connell, 2010). Considering the recent social changes in society (Silverstein, 2016) along with the disenfranchisement of young men (Rich, & Bujalka, 2023), and the socio-political divide between adherents to the manosphere versus fourth wave feminism, it is clear that contemporary gender issues are complex and multifaceted. Holding in mind the aims of the current study, it is reasonable to assume that not all men adopt unhealthy

masculine positions in the current influence of neoliberalism. Thus, for the field of counselling psychology, it is important to study men who are engaged in "healthy" practices (such as meditation) (Lomas, et al., 2014b) to explore how masculinity is constructed in this context.

1.5. Clarification: social norms vs social constructionism

For the current study it is important to differentiate social norms versus a social constructionist approach to male gender identity. These are the two broad theoretical perspectives that are commonly used interchangeably in masculinity research (Addis, et al., 2016). It is relevant to clarify the difference between theses meta-perspectives and locate my position as a researcher in the current study. Whilst both perspectives reject an essentialist nature to masculinity, Addis et al. (2016) posit that they differ in significant ways epistemologically, ontologically, & methodologically.

Firstly, the social norms approach to masculinity developed from a traditional approach to social psychology. In particular, this can be considered a top-down perspective, i.e. that gender norms are a set of inherent rules that influence the way men think, feel and behave. The research from this perspective has tended to be quantitative, with positivist ontologies. The social norms perspective has adopted aspects of social constructionism. For example, the social norms around gender are transmitted relationally, e.g. through parents, teachers and peers. Social norms suggest that the cultural and historical period of the present moment dictate what is considered to be a 'normal' male gender role. Many problems associated with traditional ideas of masculinity can be explained by the societal pressure for men to conform to certain norms and expectations (Addis, Mansfield, & Syzdek, 2010;

Sloan, et al., 2010). Adhering to male social norms can lead to negative behaviours for men such as risky consumption of illicit substances and alcohol (Liu & Iwamoto, 2007).

On the other hand, the social constructionist view of gender originated from sociological theory (Berger, & Luckmann, 1967) rather than psychology. The social constructionist perspective, in contrast to the notion of social norms, perceives the top-down approach as inadvertently perpetuating the patriarchal status quo in gender relations (Addis, et. al., 2016). Masculinity for social constructionists is not viewed as a gender role, nor as a set of norms, but instead as socially situated and well-coordinated repertories of activity that create meanings of gender (Addis, et al., 2016; Butler, 1990). It differs from the social norms approach in several important ways. The social constructionist perspective of gender stresses the importance of considering both micro-individualised and macro-institutional social processes of gender. Taking cues from feminist approaches to gender, social constructionists emphasize intersectionality in their study of gender (Brah, & Phoenix, 2004; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989), acknowledging that the construction of gender struggles to be divorced from race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class (Frosh, et al., 2002; Froyum, 2007). Secondly, language is viewed as the main way through which masculinities are constructed. Constructionist perspectives reject positivist epistemologies and instead favour postmodern, poststructuralist critical frameworks which assume knowledge is malleable and is inherently linked to dominant social conventions (Foucault, 1978). Importantly for this study, social constructionists view social learning (top-down approaches) as a less critical option to understand masculinities, favouring instead bottom up approaches (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Bottom-up approaches arguably better highlight

the role of human agency in constructing masculinities. West and Zimmerman (1987) have described this distinction as 'doing' gender as opposed to 'being' a gender—a perspective the present study aims to support. Another key difference is that social constructionist perspectives of gender posit a multiple masculinities model (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005; Addis, et al., 2016). There is potential for a range of masculinities, from subordinated to hegemonic versions (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). On the other hand, the norms-based approach to masculinity assumes there is a single dominant model of masculinity (Addis, et al., 2016).

Having described the history and development of masculinity and gender studies, it is important to state my own approach to gender. I view gender from a poststructuralist (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1978) feminist framework that supports anti-essentialist and de-gendering perspectives (Peterson, & Hyde, 2011; Addis et al., 2010; & Hyde, 2005). I support Courtenay's (2000) argument that men are not passive victims of a socially prescribed role, nor simply conditioned or socialised by their respective cultures, but are active agents, engaged in constructing gender in their interactions. From a poststructuralist perspective, a person's identity and knowledge of the world are constructed from their positions in social situations: race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class. Importantly for this study, poststructuralists have argued that many dominant scientific 'truths' that claim to reflect the natural order (essentialism) are constructed to legitimize power and to privilege dominant groups in society (Foucault, 1970). A poststructuralist approach (to gender) allows for the voices of diverse lived experiences to be heard, thereby deconstructing claims of the essential and universal nature of human experience (Silverstein, 2016). Similarly to Butler (1990), I view gender as a fluid process of 'doing' (West & Zimmerman, 1987),

which is flexible and can be conceptualized across a spectrum. Also, I'm operating

from the assumption that there is a 'physical aspect' of gender identity, i.e. that there

is a 'biological reality' ('male' body) that is not solely a construct. E.g. In the same

way the construction of being a 'mother' can't be divorced from the reality of a

mother's body.

1.6. Bridging the gap: meditation and masculinity

This section will highlight the role of meditation as a worthwhile means of

supporting men in enacting more health-conducive enactments of masculinity

(Lomas, et al., 2014b; 2012; Sloan, et al., 2010). As mentioned earlier in this chapter,

researchers have challenged the narrative of masculinity being inherently linked to

negative health outcomes for men (Sloan, et al., 2010). The medical model of health

identifies physical and mental health as an absence of disease and disability

(Larson, 1999). Whereas the World Health Organisation provides a more holistic

definition of health: 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and

not merely the absence of disease and disability (WHO, 1948, p124). From the

perspective of positive psychology (Ryff, 1989), well-being encompasses flourishing

and optimal functioning. Thus, when viewed from this lens, health behaviours refers

to activities that improve any dimension of well-being. Lomas et al., (2013) presents

four points that account for health behaviours: (1) promote physical health, and/or (2)

alleviate mental illness/distress and/or (3) promote well-being (including

psychological, social and even spiritual dimensions) and (4) strategic emotional

management. They argue that meditation incorporates all four 'aspects' of health

behaviour (Lomas, et al., 2013).

The relationship between masculinity and the potential for 'unhealthy' behaviour or negative health outcomes can arguably be explained by several frameworks relating to how men attempt to fulfill expectations of masculinity. The gendered responding framework (Addis, 2008) suggests that gendered socialisation encourages men to adopt maladaptive approaches to emotional regulation, such as by repressing emotions. In addition to repressing emotions, the consequence of this gendered socialisation pressure is the tendency among men to adopt a restrictive affective style, known as normative male alexithymia (Levant, 1992). Normative male alexithymia refers to how the socialization of gender can lead to a pattern of restrictive emotionality in men. For example, boys and men may be discouraged from expressing emotions which can lead to limited emotional recognition and vocabulary. The masculine depression framework (Pleck, 1995) also helps to explain how an internal strain is created in men due to the pressure of being unable to enact unattainable ideals. A more recent review suggested that emotional repression is the element of masculinity most linked to negative mental health health-seeking, endorsement of mental health stigma and suicidality (Robertson et al., 2015). It has been suggested that therapeutic support programmes should adopt a gender-based approach to working with men because of the strong linkage that exists between traditional masculinity to poorer mental health help-seeking, mental health stigma, suicide attempts and body image concerns (Robertson, et al., 2015). Another recommendation was to strive for programmes that encourage men to become emotionally expressive because the difficulty in expressing emotions is most linked to negative mental health seeking and the likelihood of suicide (Robertson, et al., 2015). Thirdly, a further recommendation is to encourage 'action-based' approaches

that reinforce hegemonic masculinity ideals (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005), such as 'regaining control' rather than 'help-seeking'.

Mindfulness and meditation can be a valuable option for men to address these gender specific recommendations (Robertson, et al., 2015). Negative mental health outcomes associated with emotional repression seems to be relevant across varying ethnic (Hammond, 2012; Bryant-Bedell, & Waite 2010; Bryant et al., 2014) and sexual identities for men (Fischgrund et al., 2012; Bybee et al., 2009; McAndrew, & Warne, 2010). Traditional masculinity norms, like emotional repression, may also be related to suicide (Houle et al., 2007; Payne et al., 2008; Bramness et al., 2010) insofar as men, compared to women, may conceal their emotions (as encouraged by adhering to traditional masculinity) until they become too much to contain them. The studies mentioned above suggest that emotional repression is a key maladaptive enactment of traditional masculine norms, which has negative consequences for the ways men enact their gender identity and thus their subjectivity. By contrast, the practice of meditation has, by its nature, the potential to encourage men to be curious about their emotions and build emotional intelligence (Lomas, et al., 2016), shaping a 'positive' health trajectory (Lomas, et al., 2014).

1.7. Meditation

In the last twenty years, interest and research in mindfulness-based practice and applications have increased tremendously (Goleman, & Davidson, 2018; Williams, & Kabat-Zin, 2013). The Westernization of mindfulness can be traced back to John Kabat-Zinn's 1979 Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which came out of the University of Massachusetts Medical Centre. Kabat-Zinn drew from tenets of Buddhist meditation as a clinical treatment for people experiencing chronic

pain. The research interest in mindfulness meditation has grown significantly since

the development of the MBSR (Goleman, & Davidson, 2018). Mindfulness has been

defined as: 'a kind of nonelaborative, non-judgmental, present-centred awareness in

which each thought, feeling, or sensation that arises in the attentional field is

acknowledged and accepted as it is' (Bishop et al., 2004, p232). Since the

development of MBSR, mindfulness techniques have been incorporated into

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002),

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (Linehan, 1993), Acceptance and commitment theory

(ACT) as well as for trauma-informed interventions (Van der Kolk, 2015).

There are many different types of meditations, from different traditions, and

thus different definitions of meditation. Walsh and Shapiro refer to meditation as:

> 'a family of self-regulation practices that focus on training attention and
>
> awareness in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control
>
> and thereby foster general mental well-being and development and/or specific
>
> capacities such as calm, clarity, and concentration'(p228-229)

Meditation can refer to both formal and informal practices, such as sitting, walking, or

daily activity from a mental and attitudinal framework whereby a state of mindfulness

may be established (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Mindfulness can be understood as distinct

from outcome-oriented self-management strategies. For example, in relaxation

exercises there is likely an aim or endpoint to reach. On the other hand, mindfulness

employs a 'beginner's mind' where the practitioner engages in a curious, embracing

observation, cultivating an acceptance of all experience without striving to or

attaching to any goal (Mars, & Abbey, 2010).

During a meditation discourse (e.g. a discussion or teaching about

meditation), individuals are able to take on different subject positions (i.e.,

perspectives or identities) that allow them to engage with their emotions in a productive way. Meditation is a 'practice', thus it is something that is done continually over time and has been linked to progress—namely, progress in relation to psychological and/or spiritual growth (Lomas, et al., 2014b), which are key components of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989). Mindfulness meditation, through its Buddhist roots, is aligned with a philosophy of non-violence (Olendzki, 2011).

Interest in mindfulness has increased exponentially in the last two decades (Kee, et. al., 2019; Wielgosz et. al., 2019; Mars et al., 2010) due to the benefits in reducing distress across a range of presenting difficulties. Of particular interest is the ways mindfulness has shown to be conducive to health and psychological outcomes associated with masculinity: anxiety and depression (Segal, et. al. 2012), substance use and addictions (Garland,et al., 2019), improved diet/ body image (Torres-Pagan, et al., 2016), and intimate partner violence (Voith, et al., 2020).

Whilst holding in mind hegemonic masculinity (Connell, & Messerchmidt, 2005), along with the argument that men tend to externalise their distress (Pollack, 1998) and may cope with distress in more traditionally 'masculine' ways, such as through substance misuse (Lomas, et al., 2012). The Mindfulness Oriented Recovery Enhancement (MORE) has shown promising results in supporting people with substance misuse and alcohol dependence difficulties (Garland, et al., 2022; Garland et al., 2016; Garland et al., 2012). Qualitative interviews and a grounded theory analysis suggested that the MORE intervention helped clients to develop an enhanced self-awareness and allowed them to use mindfulness techniques to better cope with emotional distress as well as addictive impulses. The researchers argue that the benefits of mindfulness meditation techniques as part of the MORE

intervention can be explained by the re-structuring of reward processing. Namely, MORE aims to enhance processing of natural rewards, including nonharmful hedonic pleasures, health-promoting behaviours, aesthetic appreciation of natural beauty, prosocial engagement, and the sense of accomplishment and eudaimonic meaning in life' (Garland, 2016, p29).

Research has suggested that mindfulness self-efficacy shows positive outcomes for intimate partner violence for men adhering to batterer intervention programmes (BIPs) (Voith, et al., 2020). It is worth noting, however, that the research employed a self-reported mindfulness efficacy questionnaire without noting the capacity or efficacy of men practicing mindfulness meditation. I acknowledge from the current study's social constructionist epistemology; participants will be drawing on constructions of masculinity and meditation. Whereas positivist epistemological studies like the one mentioned above (Voith, et al., 2020), refer to 'self-reports'. Nonetheless I think it is important to consider how long and how men are taught (e.g. formal vs informal meditation) to meditate. The research indicated that mindfulness self-efficacy was significantly associated (univariate analyses) with decreased self-reports of psychological IPV perpetuation and victimization frequency and severity among men, and they therefore suggest mindfulness as a skill worth developing for men who are victimized or perpetrate IPV (Voith, et al., 2020).

Mindfulness meditation and mindfulness-based constructs like 'self-compassion' and 'mindful eating' were positively associated with healthier eating and body related perceptions among gay and bisexual men, where eating and body-related concerns have been a concern (Regan, et al., 2023). Similar to the studies with IPV (Voith, et al., 2020) Regan, et al. relied on positivist questionnaire data and significance testing. Meditation has been adapted as a clinical intervention for

anxiety and depression (Teasdale, et al., 2000) and has been recommended by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (2022). However, these areas of research may be limited in their quantitative methodologies, insofar as they rely on questionnaires and statistical significance testing; nonetheless, they provide support for mindfulness meditation as being a worthwhile technique in ameliorating the potentially negative health outcomes that are associated with adhering to traditional masculinity. Though mindfulness meditation is both widely used and researched (Kee, et. al., 2019; Wielgosz et. al., 2019; Mars et al., 2010; Segal, et. al. 2012), there has been a lack of research considering how male meditators construct their gender identity. Robertson et al., (2016) highlight two streams of research in masculinity that consider subject positions: an area referred to as 'men's studies' (which they argue are analogous and at times oppositional to 'women's studies'); and 'critical studies on men', which is an approach that is feminist and aims to attend to power relations between men and women. The current study aims to contribute to the field of critical studies of men and masculinity (Robertson, et al., 2016) by investigating how male meditators construct their male gender identity.

1.8. Contemporary Literature: What the research has found for male meditators

For this literature review, I used both the City, University of London library and the search engine https://scholar.google.co.uk to find relevant sources. The search began by gathering articles that covered gender theory, which I then narrowed to male gender identity, and lastly I collected research that combined mindfulness/meditation and masculinity. In order to source articles in relation to gender theory the terms 'gender identity' and 'gender theory' were used. In then narrowing this to focus on masculinity, the term 'masculine identity' and 'masculinity'

were used. In searching for articles that included meditation and/or mindfulness and masculinity, the search term 'Meditation masculinity' yielded 16,300 results on Google scholar and 7,574 results on City, University's online library. These were then narrowed to the year range 2010 to 2023, as well as specifying that the articles had both 'mindfulness/meditation' and 'masculinity/men' in the titles. As the current study is interested in the constructions of male meditators' gender identities, I excluded the articles that were not in some way focused on masculinity and meditation. In an effort to gather more research, the search engines SCOPUS and Web of Science were used for Citation and Reference tracking for articles already included in the literature search. The City, university library was also used to seek grey literature, including news articles and magazines. In the literature search, I was unable to locate any studies that specifically investigated how male meditators constructed their gender identity. Thus, the current study aims to fill this gap. The current study was informed by a project carried out by Lomas and colleagues which lead to several articles being published (Lomas et al., 2016; 2014a; 2014b; 2013; 2012).

Though there has been a lack of research thus far in considering how men who engage in mindfulness meditation construct their gender identity, mindfulness has been shown to increase emotional intelligence in men (Lomas et al., 2014a), improve the de-centring capacities of male meditators (Lomas, et al., 2015), facilitate new communities of practice that are conducive to wellbeing (Lomas, et al., 2016), and use mindfulness meditation to reclaim agency and control of dominant masculine norms during the pressures of adolescence in boys (Lomas et. al., 2020). This research can be developed further by investigating the ways men who engage in meditation talk about the ways they construct their male gender identity.

In an attempt to measure an increase in emotional intelligence through meditation, Lomas et al., (2014) conducted a mixed methods study combining qualitative narrative interviews with neuroscientific data of male meditators. The researchers refer to Mayer and Salovey's (1997) hierarchical model of 'emotional intelligence'. This model of emotional intelligence is made up of four branches: emotional awareness/expression, emotional facilitation of thought, understanding emotional patterns, and the ability to moderate one's emotions (Mayer, & Salovey, 1997). Bearing in mind that this was the first research project to combine narrative data with cognitive neuroscience in men's mental health, and though the researchers acknowledge the model did not allow them to corroborate any of the assumptions of causality, this is an exciting step forward in supporting the argument that mindfulness has the potential to improve unhelpful emotional regulation in men that has been associated with traditional masculinity.

Another strand of this research sought to understand how men accounted for their turn to meditation (Lomas, et al,. 2012) by using narrative semi-structured interviews. The findings support research presented earlier in this chapter regarding the tendency for traditional masculinity to encourage toughness, with this toughness being linked to problems with emotional regulation (Pleck, 1995; Sullivan, Camic, & Brown, 2015; Primack, Addis, Syzdek, & Miler, 2010). The participants discussed previously trying to manage their stress and emotional difficulties through unhelpful coping behaviors like alcohol and psychoactive substances. These narratives identified mindfulness as a way for these men to 'do' gender (masculinity) better (West, & Zimmerman, 1987), supporting the notion that mindfulness may be a healthier way for men to manage emotions and improve well-being. An interesting theme from the data analysis of the interviews was that men reported an emotional

pressure to conform to hegemonic masculinities during adolescence. This suggests that adolescence is a critical time where boys negotiate the pressures of constructing their gender identity according to various environmental influences. This research also suggested a critical period of the social learning of gendered behaviours and expectations, and I understood this to also highlight the adolescents communicating gender role strain (Pleck, 1995). An important critique of this study is the insufficiency of understanding masculinity from the analysis of gender identity alone. More specifically, there was a high number of homosexual men in the study who described difficulties in meeting traditional masculine norms whilst also navigating their sexual identity; this aligns with previous research suggesting added pressure for queer men to enact hegemonic masculinities (Williams, et al., 2021; Sanchez, 2016). Another critique of the study was the participants were mostly white British, having attended university.

These studies (Lomas, et al., 2014a; 2014b; 2013) support the notion that meditation may offer a valuable approach for men to enhance their emotional regulation and empower them to actively engage in the expression of their gender identity. A strength of these investigations is that the researchers were approaching male gender from a social constructionist perspective of gender (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005), accounting for multiple masculinities according to context, and acknowledging the role of power. However, concerning the research question of the present study, these studies do not specifically address how male meditators view their gender identity. Research has also suggested that there are complex social processes that influence the positive change in male meditators (Lomas et al., 2016), which suggests that male meditators are also subject to pressure to conform to dominant masculinity expectations which may be less conducive to health when

they are outside of the meditation context (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005). The research question of this study aims to build on this research (Lomas, et al., 2012; Lomas et al., 2014a, 2014b) by accounting for the ways men construct gender and how this contributes to the way they enact emotional intelligence. The aim and key difference of the research question is to account for how men construct their gender identity *following* their engagement with meditation, rather than *before* engaging in an ongoing meditation practice.

A more recent study (Lomas, et al, 2020), aimed to account for the ways adolescent boys renegotiate their gender identity whilst engaging in a school-based mindfulness program, again approaching gender from a social constructionist stance. The qualitative interviews suggest that when boys are navigating the threshold of 'pressure' to enact more traditional masculine behaviours, mindfulness provides the opportunity to reclaim agency and self-control. Four weeks of practice is usually insufficient for developing proficiency in mindfulness meditation(Segal et al., 2002). The study is also limited by the performance aspect of the interviews (performance of masculinity as well as students potentially over reporting their individual practice). However, this is the first study to consider, by attending to the language used in interviews, how constructions of masculinity are enacted during an ongoing meditation practice. This study builds on those that were previously mentioned (Lomas et al., 2012; 2014a; 2014b; 2015; 2016) by attending to the more current enactments of masculinity, rather than focusing on how masculinity was constructed in the past prior to an ongoing meditation practice. The current study can build on this further by considering how this enactment of masculinity (in the context of meditation practice) occurs in adulthood whilst allowing for the myriad

constructions of masculinities according to intersections between race, culture, ethnicity, sexuality.

1.9. Relevance to Counselling Psychology

Adopting a Foucauldian perspective allows trainee counselling psychologists to consider the wide range of discourses that interweave to produce constructions of male gender identity in male meditators. This study aims to challenge the assumptions of masculinity that are taken for granted. Practitioners in the field of counselling psychology are encouraged to reflect on their understandings of male gender identity and how their personal values may impact and shape the therapeutic relationship with their male clients. For example, by adopting the position of 'therapist' (i.e. 'expert') counselling psychologists may unintentionally be positioning men as 'weak' for accessing therapeutic support, which serves to perpetuate an unhelpful adherence to traditional masculinity. I posit it is also important for counselling psychologists to be aware of the concept of 'masculine capital' (de Visser et al., 2009) and how this influences the likelihood of men accessing therapeutic support. Psychologists leaning to a social constructionist perspective would benefit to hold in mind the role of discourse, practice, subjectivity and experience (Willig, 2000). This study therefore aims to allow Counselling Psychologists to consider how men are positioned in society, as well as to consider how these subject positions impact their sense of self. Counselling psychologists are encouraged by this study to explore how institutional power and social and marginalized forms of masculinity can contribute to men's distress. Holding in mind the worrying suicide rates for men (Struszczyk, et al., 2019) as well as the way adhering to traditional masculine norms can negatively impact health seeking behaviours (Seidler, et al., 2016; Pederson, et.

al., 2007) it is a pressing concern to better understand ways to reach men.

Meditation has proved to be an activity that is valuable in promoting health, thus this

research aims to consider how men who meditate construct their masculinity with an

interest in emotionality. This study contributes to the field of counselling psychology

by exploring how male meditators, who may have greater emotional intelligence

(Lomas et al., 2014a; Mayer, & Salovey, 1997), construct their gender identity. By

examining the subject positions that are made possible through the adoption of a

meditation practice or through drawing from meditation discourse, this research aims

to shed light on the potential benefits and challenges of using meditation as a tool for

personal growth.

1.10. Research aims

- The research question is: 'How do men who meditate construct their gender
  identity in talk?'

The study aims to explore how men who have an established mindfulness

meditation practice construct their gender identity. It aims to explore how male

meditators integrate their understanding of their gender identity ('masculinity') into

their views of themselves and the of world in which they live. These aims will be

achieved through analysing discourses of eight men, concerning their meditation

practice, their lives and their social worlds.

A motivation of this study is for the findings to add to the literature on the

understanding of psychologists that work with men who either engage in or are open

to adopting a meditation practice. An aim of this study is for the findings to better

understand the ways that male meditators enact their 'masculinity', as well as a

secondary aim of how their gendered identity interacts with other dimensions of

intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). An aim of the current study is to carry out a meaningful study that promotes social change on a micro level, enhancing practitioners' understanding of the myriad potential for constructions of masculinity, and, at a macro level, for services and commissioners to consider more meditation alternatives for men experiencing mental health difficulties.

2. Chapter Two: Methodology and Methods

2.1. Introduction: Reminder of the research aims and research question

In this chapter I will expand upon the epistemological and methodological approaches that have informed this study's design. Firstly, I will present a rationale for these methodological choices, followed by an explanation of the philosophical underpinnings and methodological considerations that were eventually chosen to address the research question most appropriately. Lastly, methodological reflexivity will be presented along with a conclusion.

The study aims to explore how men that have an established meditation practice construct their gender identity. It aims to explore how male meditators integrate their understanding of their gender identity (used interchangeably with the term 'masculinity') into their views of themselves and the world they live in. A motivation of this study is for the findings to add to the literature in men and masculinities within its Western context. It is the hope that this has implications for psychologists and therapeutic practitioners that work with men who either engage in, or are open to adopting a meditation practice.

Considering the high suicide rate of men (Struszczyk, et al., 2019; Robertson et. al., 2015), and the lack of engagement in therapeutic services by men (Seidler, et al., 2016; Robertson, et al., 2015; Pederson, et al., 2007), it is important for the field of mental health to consider gender-specific ways of supporting men. Considering this in mind, this study aims to better understand the ways male meditators enact their masculinity, whilst considering the secondary aim of understanding gender

identity with other identities they occupy, viewed from an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 2023; 1989).

The research study aims to address the aims of the research by asking the following research question:

- How do men who meditate construct their gender identity in talk?

The research also aims to address the secondary question of:

- What subject positions do their constructions permit them to occupy?

2.1.2 Rationale for a Qualitative approach

Most psychological research employs quantitative research methods, rooted in positivist epistemologies. Positivism, the leading paradigm in scientific research, employs deduction to test hypotheses. This research lens operates under the assumption that research can be used to describe and explain objective reality (Wong, & Horn, 2016). Masculinity research has also been dominated by quantitative studies. Content analyses (Whorley, & Addis, 2006; Wong, et al., 2016) have shown the trend towards quantitative studies in journals like the *Psychology of Men & Masculinity.* Bearing in mind the research aims, a qualitative approach to the research was deemed to be the most suitable. A qualitative approach is better positioned to focus on the importance of meaning making and viewing meaning in the context in which it is constructed, which fits with the research aim: constructing gender identity (Willig, 2022). An important distinction is that the research is not concerned with cause and effect relationships, which tend to be associated with quantitative research.

Qualitative research includes a focus on researcher reflexivity, allowing for understandings to emerge from the data (Willig, 2022). I thus make the argument

that a qualitative study, specifically using semi-structured interviews, is better positioned to account for the numerous constructions of male gender identity.

A quantitative study would prevent the participants being able to describe their individual subjectivities in relation to discourses of masculinity. The qualitative approach aims to provide more room for the participants to tell their own story (Paulson, & Willig, 2008). The qualitative approach enables participants to describe, in their own language, their constructions of gender identity. A qualitative approach also accounts for participants' agency in the research process, as well as allowing for descriptions of multiple masculinities (e.g. intersectionality of race, ethnicity, culture, class) and therefore providing a more holistic understanding (Wong, & Horn, 2016) of their subjective masculinities subjectivity in relation to discourses of masculinity and how these are enacted in specific contexts (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005). Given that this study approaches gender from a social constructionist perspective, a qualitative study supports this epistemology. Lastly, an important component for best practice in a qualitative methodology (Wong, & Horn, 2016), is that of locating the researcher in the research (Morrow, 2007), which I present later in this chapter.

2.2. Theoretical framework

2.2.1. Social constructionism

A social constructionist perspective requires a critical approach to our commonly accepted ways of understanding the world and ourselves. (Burr, 2015; Gergen, 1985). As the researcher, I acknowledge that the knowledge produced through the discourses shared by interviewees is historically and culturally contingent (Burr, 2015). Social constructionism rejects the view of essentialism, whereby the nature of the world can be revealed through attempts at unbiased

observation. Social constructionism favours constructions and the role of language over much of mainstream psychology's essentialist aim to discover universal principles of psychological functioning. An important distinction of social constructionism is that it argues that our ways of understanding the world do not come from objective reality but rather from social processes, both past and present. Burr (2015) outlines how we are born into a world where conceptual frameworks and categories used by people in society already exist. Thus the categories we use for thought and to give meaning to our experience as humans, for example 'what it means to be a man?', have already been well established prior to one's birth. According to social constructionism, these categories and concepts, the way a person thinks, is provided by the language that a person uses. Thus, in social constructionism, language is a necessary precondition for thought (Burr, 2015). In its most extreme form, social constructionism claims that all the objects of our consciousness—e.g. everything we talk or think about, including identities—is constructed through language, constructed out of the available discourses (Burr, 2015). Social constructionism permits a critical perspective about the world as a result of the historical processes between people. Further, According to social constructionism, meaning is the product of the prevailing cultural frame of social, linguistic, discursive and symbolic practices (Cojocaru, & Bragaru, 2012).

2.2.2. Social constructionist view of gender identity

In maintaining a social constructionist perspective, identities are constructed from the discourses that are culturally available to a person depending when and where they live, and discourses drawn upon in communication with other people (Burr, 2015). To understand an individual identity is an incredibly difficult process as

each person subtly weaves their identity through different intersections of their ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, sexual orientation etc. Gergen (1973) posits that all knowledge, including psychological knowledge is culturally and historically relevant.

The role of subject positioning helps to explain how people can resist or accept certain discourses when considering identity. People are in the constant process of claiming or resisting the identities offered in prevailing discourses (Burr, 2015). A relevant example, for this study is the work of Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990). Butler (1990) posits gender and sexual orientation as being constructed from the dominant discourses of the time. Butler (1990) argues for the performative nature of gender: i.e. rather than 'being' masculine one instead 'does' masculinity. Butler views gender to be a performative construction, whereby masculinity is repeatedly conjured up in the contexts of social interactions. Returning to the concept of subject positions and identities, Willig (1999) argues that individuals cannot choose to avoid the subject positions that discourses offer. Rather, the only choice an individual has is whether to accept or resist the subject positions; and if one accepts or is unable to resist a subject position then one can be locked into the system of rights, speaking rights and obligations that are carried in that position (Burr, 2015).

The social constructionist view considers the top-down approaches to gender (biological essentialism) as inadequately reinforcing the status quo in gender relations, such as patriarchy (Addis, et al., 2016). The social constructionist view of gender adopts a bottom-up approach of constructing masculinities through the various micro- and macro- social processes (such as in language, and through economic and other cultural practices) as explained by the theory of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005) The formation and maintenance of male gender identity is thus viewed as a dynamic and process in

which the man is actively engaged (Shields, 2008). Therefore, it is argued that men

are not 'recipients' of an identity position, but instead 'practice' each aspect of

identity as informed by the other identities that the individual claims (Christensen, et

al., 2014).

2.2.3 Critical Realism

Whilst it is common to adopt the relativist ontological stance when using a

social constructionism approach to research, I instead decided on a critical realist

position to approach gender identity. In critical realism, language is still understood to

construct social realities. However, these constructions are theorized as being

constrained by the possibilities and limitations inherent in the material world (Sims-

Schouten, Riley, & Willig, 2007). To be more specific, critical realists posit that

material practices are not reducible to discourse, and are devoid of meaning, unless

they are interpreted discursively; instead, material practices are given an ontological

status that is independent of but related to discursive practices (Sims-Schouten,

Riley, & Willig, 2007). Critical realism can be understood as a combination of

constructionist and realist positions, insofar as it argues that, while meaning is made

in social interaction, non-discursive elements also impact on this meaning (Sims-

Schouten, Riley, & Willig, 2007). For this study, I am assuming that there is an

'embodied' nature to being male: i.e. existing within a male body. For example,

constructions of masculinity may be tied to the male body for some of the

participants. A man can exist within a body, with male genitals, which can be

understood to be extra-discursive. Willig (1999) outlines the role of non-discursive

elements, arguing that phenomena which can be observed and experienced can be

drawn from underlying structures that may be biochemical, social or economic. Thus,

I adopt a critical realist stance to the research as I assume there is more to gender identity than strictly the discourses drawn on by the participants. I reject the totalizing version of relativism. I aim to use a critical realist ontology, paired with an epistemology of relativism, in an effort to respond to the challenges of unquestioned relativism, whilst still not being stuck in a realism versus relativism debate (Burr, 2015).

2.3. Theoretical account of the methodology

I now shift focus to the methodological approach of the present study, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA), and the rationale for this choice. I was interested in FDA because of its focus on meaning making, but also because of its consideration of discourse in wider social processes of legitimation and power (Willig, 2022). Specifically, I am interested in the ways in which this kind of analysis can illuminate how it is that the dominant discourses privilege versions of social reality that legitimate existing power relations and social structures: e.g. the role of hegemonic masculinities (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005; Connell, 1995). The ways of being a man can be so entrenched within society that to question them seems difficult. This is because society has a lot of expectations about what it means to be a man, and these expectations can be difficult to break. This approach fits well within my epistemological and theoretical stance, including the concern Foucauldian Discourse Analysis has with what people think or feel, what they may do and the material conditions within which such experiences may take place (Willig, 2022).

In line with my research aims is a desire to understand the constructions of participants' gender identities through their own use of language. I am also interested in how wider societal discourses of masculinity inform the identities

constructed by the participants, e.g. how you 'ought' to act as a man, including how these prescribed behaviours may not serve the individual (Pleck, 1995). Thus, FDA was deemed the most suitable methodology to approach the research question.

2.3.1. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

FDA was developed in the 1970s, influenced by the poststructuralist ideas of Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1980). Foucauldian discourse analysis was a way for psychological researchers to explore the relationship between language and subjectivity and thus its implications for psychological research (Willig, 2022). Adhering to its social constructionist view of knowledge, FDA is concerned with language and its role in the construction of social and psychological life (Willig, 2022). From a Foucauldian perspective, discourses facilitate and limit, as well as enable and constrain, what can be said by whom, where and when (Parker, 1992). The wider societal discourses that are available in a culture, and the implications for those who live within it, can be focused on through Foucauldian discourse analysis. Thus, these wider societal discourses—or constructions—create ways of seeing the world as well as ways of being in the world (Willig, 2022). There are several key assumptions put forth by the Foucauldian perspective that will be outlined and explained: subject positions, positioning, and counter-discourses.

According to FDA, discourses offer subject positions, which, when adopted, have implications for the subjectivity and experience of individuals. Subject positions are a vital part of discursive practice and everyday talk which can dynamically change according to the context in which a person is speaking (Davies, & Harre, 1990). For example, from the traditional Western 'masculinity' discourse, those men who experience and express their emotionality, e.g. vulnerability occupies the

position of 'feminine', which locates them as potentially open to criticism from other men. The benefit of mapping the subject positions in this study is that it allows for an exploration of how subject positions may be limiting according to the discourses available and can unknowingly place men in positions of harm which in turn can be detrimental to their sense of self (Davies, & Harre, 1990). An interest of this study is the way in which men may bring challenges to their subjective well-being by the pressure to enact expectations of masculinity. The concept of positioning (Van Langenhove, & Harrè 1999) helps to explain the role of discourse in wider social processes of legitimation and power. Dominant discourses privilege the versions of social reality that give legitimacy to existing power relations and social structures (Willig, 2008), e.g. dominant discourses of the way a man is expected to act, such as by repressing emotions. The nature of language also means that is possible for alternative counter-discourses to emerge. I am interested in the potential counter-discourses adopted by male meditators that challenge the dominant discourses of traditional masculinity. For example, that it is acceptable for men to non-judgmentally examine and express their emotions without adopting the subject position of femininity. The Foucauldian perspective also attends to historical discourses and considers how these may change over time (Rose, 1999; Foucault, 1978). I'm interested in how constructions of what it means to be a man have changed through time. Part of the rationale for adopting a FDA was to account for these changes of constructions and the role of power in legitimizing enactments of male gender identity. According to Foucault, power is not possessed by a single individual but rather is produced and transmitted by discourses (Foucault, 1990). The role of power, from a Foucauldian perspective, also assumes that there are conflicts and power struggles between dominant discourses. An important distinction with an FDA

approach to discourse is that dominant discourses work to perpetuate a status quo that satisfies the values of dominant social groups. Furthermore, these values and the institutional practices associated with them are taken to be 'truths'. Foucauldian thinking highlights the socially constructed nature of knowledge (Foucault, 1978;1980). Lastly, Foucauldian versions of discourse analysis attend to the relationship between discourses and institutions. To be more specific, Foucaulidan perspectives view discourses more than as a means of communicating, but as ways of organising and administering social life (Willig, 2022).

2.3.2. Rationale for FDA

As outlined above, my research question is concerned not with the experience of the participants but rather in the meaning-making about the construction of their gender identity. A discursive approach to the analysis of the data was deemed to be most suitable due to the focus being on language and from a social constructionist perspective. Both discursive psychology and FDA are concerned with language and the subjectivity of individual participants. However, the differences in how the two approaches deal with questions of agency and subjective experience will be described to show why FDA was deemed more suitable for the research aims of this study—specifically, that Foucauldian discourse analysis's interest in language takes it beyond the immediate contexts in which language may be used and also considers the role of wider societal influences, power structures and how these may influence subject positions (Willig, 2022).

Discursive psychology views the individual as an active agent that uses discursive strategies to manage stake in social interactions (Willig, 2022). Foucauldian discourse analysis on the other hand, considers the way the power of

discourse constructs the individual himself. The individual's subject positions can constrain the way someone speaks, their behaviours and emotional experiences. FDA considers the relationship between discourse and how people think or feel (e.g. about their masculinity), what they may do (how they enact this masculinity) and the material conditions within which such experiences may take place (Willig, 2022).

The research question approaches masculinity from a social constructionist perspective, and it has been influenced by hegemonic masculinity theory (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005; Connell, 1995) which assumes there are multiple "masculinities" that are enacted according to the dominant (hegemonic) context. Foucauldian discourse analysis is better situated to account for the 'macro' approach to consider the structures which, through language and discourse, make up versions of the world and create an array of subject positions and locations that permit or prevent particular ways of being (Willig, 2022; Parker, 1992). Discursive psychology fails to consider the wider sociocultural systems and structures that are imbued with power and knowledge (Foucault, 1980). It is also worth pointing out the role of power as described by the theory of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Connell, 1995). By adopting FDA, this allows for more space to understand the subject positions adopted by the participants and how they enacted hegemonic masculinities in different contexts. FDA also allows the study to account for the potential intersectionality between male gender identity and race, ethnicity and class.

2.3.3. Doing FDA

Considering the above-mentioned rationale for FDA, and of particular interest to the Foucauldian analyst are the workings of power and their histories, and the way in which the subject makes use of discourses whilst also managing the conflicts in

and between the discourses. Specifically, this relates to how someone positions themselves in response to a particular discourse and how they make sense of themselves (in this case their gender identities) and the subsequent subjectivities that are available to them by a particular discourse (Burr, 2015).

Willig (2022) has proposed a framework for engaging in FDA. This framework includes six stages whereby the text is scrutinised for discursive constructions, discourses, action orientations, subject positionings, practices and subjectivities (Willig, 2022). Willig acknowledges this does not arguably fulfil a full Foucauldian analysis (Willig, 2022). Another approach would be Parker's (1992), which includes 20 steps, arguably amounting to a more thorough analysis. Willig's six stage framework felt appropriate to my study considering the time constraints of the analytic process. In addition, Willig's framework aligned well with my research aims in attending to discourse's construction of male gender identity and the implications that has for the positioning of men and the available subjectivities. I will expand on how I worked through the six stages in the below section 2.8. Analytic Strategy.

2.4. Limitations of FDA and other methodologies considered.

Foucauldian discourse analysis conceives of texts containing networks of meaning (discourses) that construct social and psychological realities (Willig, 2022). A common critique of Foucauldian discourse analysis is that subjectivity cannot be theorised on the basis of discourse alone (Willig, 2022). Some researchers have argued for the adoption of a psychoanalytic approach to FDA in an effort to provide insight into particular emotional investments in certain subject positions and discourses (Frosh et al., 2003; Frosh, & Young, 2008). Davies and Harré (1999) argue, on the other hand, that there is no need to account for the emotional

meanings attached to specific positions in regards to participants' life stories. Another critique of Foucauldian discourse analysis is that it does not sufficiently address the relationship between discourse and material reality (Parker, 1992; Sims-Schouten, Riley, & Willig, 2007). It is important to note that the relationship between discourse and material reality is a complicated issue that has resulted in debates amongst discourse analysts, particularly with reference to 'realist' vs 'relativist' ontological stances. Willig (2022) highlights how one's position in this debate has implications for the conceptualisation of 'power'. Namely, one holds the view that discourses are produced within a particular set of material conditions and that they can only construct the versions of reality that are compatible with these said conditions. Then power is maintained through discourse, but it is not where power originates. On the other hand, some discourse analysts do not assign importance to either material reality or discourse, but rather stress the interdependency between discourses, social practices and institutions. From this stance, power is produced through discourse; here, power is an aspect of discursive relations rather than a resource that is controlled by a specific group of people (Willig, 2022). In the present study, I lean more to the second position in that I view discourse and material reality as interdependent on the relationships of discourses, social practices and institutions.

Prior to arriving at the chosen analytic strategy, I considered other methods. Firstly, due to my interest in personal life stories and how meaning is derived from significant events, I considered a narrative analysis (Reisman, 1993). The narrative analysis would have carried out semi-structured narrative interviews following the Life Story Interview (Atkinson, 1998), which would have aimed to further masculinity research by addressing how participants discuss and perform their stories (Wong, &

Horn, 2016; Cassell, & Symon, 2011). The rationale for the narrative interview was to account for the ways the male participants constructed their masculinity throughout their life. This was to build on previous research that accounted for men's turn to meditation (Lomas, et al., 2012) after using more gender conformist strategies to manage challenges in their lives. However, after further reading, refining my research question, and consultations with my supervisor, it was deemed that discourse analysis would have better accounted for the ways that gender identity is constructed through the participants' use of language.

Discursive psychology views the individual as an active agent who uses discursive strategies to manage stake in social interactions (Willig, 2022). Foucauldian discourse analysis, on the other hand, considers the way the power of discourse constructs the individual himself. The individual's subject positions can constrain the way someone speaks, their behaviours and emotional experiences. Foucauldian Discourse analysis considers the relationship between discourse and how people think or feel (e.g. about their masculinity), what they may do (how they enact this masculinity) and the material conditions within which such experiences may take place (Willig, 2022). Foucauldian discourse analysis is better situated to account for the 'macro' approach to consider the structures which, through language and discourse, make up versions of the world and create an array of subject positions and locations that permit or prevent ways of being (Willig, 2022; Parker, 1992). It is also worth pointing out the role of power as described by the theory of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005; Connell, 1995); adopting FDA allows for more space to understand the subject positions adopted by the participants, and to better understand how they enacted hegemonic masculinities in

different contexts. FDA also allows the study to account for the potential intersectionality between male gender identity and race, ethnicity, and class.

2.5. Methods

Research Design

As stated above, this study employed FDA (Willig, 2022) as its research methodology to outline how male meditators drew from dominant discourses that emerged from the genealogy to construct their gender identity.

Eight semi-structured interviews were carried out with male meditators and recorded via video calls on the application Zoom.

Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria was any adult male (over the age of 18) that engages in meditation practice. The participants were based anywhere in the UK. The participants were required to have been meditating for at least one year; this is in an effort to provide better scope for the meditation practice to be established within the participant's life. Of the eight participants, all had been meditating for at least five years.

Any participant that had experienced clinical levels of distress and had received therapeutic support would need to have been out of therapy for at least three months. This was in an effort to minimise the likelihood that participants would experience clinical levels of distress when speaking about their constructions of masculinity. The interviews would not expose participants to any greater risk than in everyday life. Of the eight participants, none of them reported having ongoing therapy, nor did any describe any recent instances of psychological distress for which they had sought therapeutic support.

Recruitment

Prior to recruitment, when thinking about the age range and demographics of potential participants, I aimed for my study to be as diverse as possible, in terms of age as well as ethnicity and sexual orientation. This was in an aim to recruit a wide variety of ages and types of men. For the recruitment, I aimed to use snowball sampling. Thus, participants that had taken part in the study contacted other men they knew and provided them with the study details and my own contact email. These participants then contacted me via email to share their interest in taking part in the study.

I shared my study with my cohort at university, as well as previous colleagues in psychological services, and enquired if they knew any male meditators. If so, I asked if they could share the study recruitment flyer, which had my email address. After prospective participants were in contact to share their interest, I then forwarded the study information sheet via email.

I also shared the Recruitment Flyer (Appendix 1) with City, University of London's Centre for Excellence in Mindfulness Research. A member of the research team kindly forwarded information of my study to members of a weekly mindfulness meditation group, and provided my contact email address.

The eight semi-structured interviews were via video call on the program Zoom.

Participant demographics

Of the eight participants, six identified as white. Two of these six participants were not born in the UK: one identified as Greek and one identified as German. Two of the participants identified as Black British. Two of the participants identified as homosexual/ queer. The ages of the participants ranged from 25 to 72. The

participants demographics are described below. The names used are pseudonyms used to ensure the participants' anonymity:

1. *Rupert is a 54 year old white British man. He works in business. He is married and has two adult daughters. Rupert shared that he had been meditating regularly for about five years. His introduction to Buddhist practices was at a Buddhist centre in London. At the time of interview, he was also meeting for an online meditation group several times a week on Zoom, sometimes practising Tonglen meditation, as well as using a meditation app. He shared that he likes to 'vary' his meditation practice.*

2. *Roger is a 25-year-old white European man. Roger grew up between Germany and Guatemala. Roger identifies as queer and lives with his husband. He shared that he was introduced to meditation through a guided meditation app approximately 5 years ago. He shared that, at the time of the interview, his meditation practice tended to take place in the mornings, lasting ten to twenty minutes from either guided or unguided meditation.*

3. *Bill is a single white 45-year-old man, who lives in London. He is an artist and runs a wellness centre that offers meditation and yoga classes. Bill shared that he has been meditating on and off since being at art school in the late 1990s. He has been going to a retreat at least once a year since first being introduced to meditation. At the time of interview, his meditation practice consisted of doing mindfulness of breathing in the mornings and evenings, going on retreats with the London Buddhist Centre, and he is also training to be a Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapist. He also uses an app which*

monitors his heart rate variance whilst meditating. He shared he 'likes to keep it simple with mindfulness'.

4. *Daniel is a 45-year-old Black British man. He works as a bartender as well as an actor. He described his meditation practice as consisting of formal meditation as well as informal meditation. His daily formal meditation, ranging from five to 20 minutes on average in the morning, consists of breath meditations, body scans, Taoist spiritual practice and healing modalities, such as quantum touch. He shared that his meditation consists of 'mixing different things'. He also described having informal practices of meditation where he tries to bring meditation into day-to-day life. At the time of the interview, he spoke of running as an example of informal meditation. He has had a long-time interest in martial arts and sports.*

5. *Winston is a 51-year-old Black Afro-Caribbean man. He identifies as gay and lives with his partner. Winston works as a social worker and psychotherapist. Winston uses prayer beads to meditate for 15 to 20 minutes every evening. He has been meditating for approximately ten years.*

6. *Max is a 72-year-old white British man. Max is a yoga teacher; however, he shared due to the COVID pandemic he had seemingly retired. Max shared he has been meditating for approximately 50 years. He shared he is not aligned to any particular method, and that he has somewhat come 'full circle' in having a very loose definition of what he considers meditating to be. Previously, he had been a Western Buddhist and would meditate for 10 to 12 hours a day.*

7. *Joe is a 52-year-old, who identifies as white (other) and works in a finance firm. He is Greek, and lives with his wife and teen-aged son. Joe described*

having both formal and informal definitions of meditation. His formal

meditations include seated meditation, breathing meditations and body scans.

He describes his practice as rooted in mindfulness. He described his informal

practice as a continued effort to bring present moment awareness into his

daily life. He has been meditating for approximately 'nine years in a dedicated

way'.

8. *Mark is a 26-year-old white British man. He lives with his girlfriend and other*

    female flatmates. Mark has been meditating daily for approximately four

    years. He practices his meditation for approximately fifteen to twenty minutes

    in the morning. He described trying different forms of meditation but that he

    most consistently practices a form of transcendental meditation.

Data Collection

Introductory call

Prior to the semi-structured interviews, I scheduled brief Zoom video calls with each participant. This was in an effort to build initial rapport prior to the interview. Bearing in mind that I would be asking them personal questions, I hoped this initial call would help to create a safe space in which they could share as much or as little as they felt comfortable. I also used this call as an opportunity to invite the participants to ask any questions they had regarding the study and their participation. I reminded them of confidentiality and that they could withdraw at any point prior to when I had started the analysis in the summer of 2022. They were reminded that the research was concerned with the language they used in the interviews, rather than their own subjective experience. I also explained that for the interviews the videos

would be recorded to help with the transcription process. Their consent to participate (Appendix 3) was obtained following this introductory call.

2.6. Interviewing

Reflexivity on formulating the Interview Questions

From a reflexive perspective, it is important to note that the interview questions were formulated with an interest in the ways the participants may use their meditation practice as a way of managing difficult emotions. This was in an effort to expand upon research that suggests that meditation is a way for men to increase emotional intelligence (Lomas et al., 2014a)

The research findings of Lomas et al., (2014a; 2015), as well as my own experiences of the benefits of meditation, reflect my own positioning within the discourse that suggests that meditation is beneficial for men regarding emotional awareness and regulation. Whilst personally and as a researcher I'm interested in the potential benefits of meditation, I wish to acknowledge that I do not wish to suggest a causal elationship between meditation and reduction in adhering to the emotional repression in traditional masculinity (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Conducting the Interviews

The questions were prepared before the interviews (see Appendix 8). Participants were allowed to express themselves freely and were invited to elaborate where necessary to clarify what they meant. The interview questions set the framework for each of the interviews. However, each semi-structured interview was a unique between participant and me. The interviews' duration ranged from 60 to 90 minutes. My goal was to ensure high-quality interviews, drawing on strategies like using shorter questions, encouraging elaboration and spontaneity in responses,

clarifying meaning and interpretation during the interview, and paying close attention to detail during transcription. These approaches are supported by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) and Gilbert et al. (2003).

Throughout the interviews I constantly monitored any signs of distress in the participants, being sure to debrief each interviewee afterwards. However, as the interview questions did not address any specific difficult times in the interviewees' life (Appendix 8), the interviewees did not express any distress during the interview nor in the debrief afterwards. I tended to discuss the potential for further recruitment with interviewees via snowball sampling when their interview was finished.

The video, audio and transcript from the interview were automatically uploaded to my password-protected Zoom online account. For each transcript, I re-listened to the audio from the video recording to correct grammatical errors. This is because the transcripts generated from Zoom contain many errors. When re-listening and correcting the transcripts, the linguistic details of the interview were not included. The interviewees were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. The recordings that are stored on the online Zoom account will be destroyed within one year after the research has been submitted. The Foucauldian Discourse analysis followed the guidelines of Willig (2022).

Reflexivity of conducting the interviews

Reflexivity requires that semi-structured interviews can be viewed as a gendered performance. Men being interviewed may perform their gender differently according to whether the interviewer is a man or woman (Sallee, & Harris, 2011), meaning theoretically that male participants perform their gender on the basis of expectations of being male one way for male researchers and another for female researchers. I recognise I am also caught within the maze of sociohistorical and cultural

discourses, and that my understanding is inevitably influenced by them (Lyons and Coyle 2016). However, the importance lies in my own transparency during the process.

I have also paid attention to my own beliefs and assumptions about mindfulness and masculinity; this is because meaning is always given to data and never simply identified or discovered within it (Willig, 2022). I practice mindfulness. I also had a friend that took his own life. This is what first brought my attention to the risks of some of the social constructions of male gender identity, like emotional repression. It is not possible to completely suspend my own beliefs and assumptions about masculinity and mindfulness; I kept a reflective diary throughout the process. The diary will be an effort to increase my awareness of the ways in which my own positioning shapes my interpretations of the data.

2.6.1. Interview experiences and transcription mode

The interviews were both a rewarding and at times challenging process. There were some common themes worth mentioning to help bring the interview process to life in the write up of this thesis.

A common theme across most of the participants was the challenge with speaking about masculinity and/or gender identity. Namely, that it was not something that the participants shared they spoke about often and at times explicitly shared that they were finding the process slightly challenging. They found it much easier, (less breaks in speaking and consistent flow to conversation) to speak about their meditation practice rather than masculinity. Participants both explicitly shared it was difficult as well as implicitly communicated their challenge by at times asking for me to repeat certain questions. I managed this, by re-phasing questions, or using

summarizing techniques to re-locate participants to their previous line of thought and/or contributions. I found that the participants in their twenties had more access to language to discuss the nuances of gender identity e.g. terms such as cis-gender, 'fluidity' between masculinity and feminine in comparison to the older participants. There was also a theme for some participants whereby though they could explain what was considered to be masculine, it was then challenging for them to explain exactly what it was they identified with or rejected according to this masculinity. They often used anecdotes from their own lives and relationships to help explain how they identified or rejected a position. The length of the interview, as well as the number of questions was helpful in allowing the participants adequate time to explain/share their constructions. Throughout the interviews, there was never a point where we ran out of time or a participant could not finish a point they were speaking about.

Another challenge for myself in facilitating the interviews, as well as analyzing the transcript, was locating previous constructions of masculinity with more current constructions. For example, the participants would often speak about different periods of their lives, and what it was like for them being a man in certain situations across time. I had to ensure I was also directing the prompt questions back to the present moment of how they view themselves and masculinity at the time of the interview. This was particularly challenging for the eldest participant in his seventies, who had been through many changes of how masculinity is constructed for himself as well as within wider society.

An exciting and unexpected finding with the interviews were with the questions combining masculinity and meditation. Interviewees were able to provide thoughtful accounts of how they thought their (male) gender identity impacted/influenced their meditation practice as well as the opposite in their meditation

practice influencing ways of being a man. I think a benefit of the structuring of the interview schedule helped in employing what I consider to be a funneled approach. Starting with meditation, moving on to masculinity/ gender identity, then how the participants themselves identify. Lastly having explored how they identify with their gender identity, considering how these two influence one another. I perceived this to be a new and exciting contribution to the research.

I chose to employ a denaturalized transcription method. As explained by Oliver et al., (2005), denaturalized uses a verbatim depiction of speech however it differs from that of naturalized transcription. Denaturalised transcription is less concerned with including as much detail as a naturalized approach e.g. stutters, pauses. The approach is more concerned with *what* is said rather than *how* something is said. I am using an FDA framework; thus I am interested in what is being communicated in terms of how the participant's language will shed light on how male gender identity is constructed. A denaturalized transcription style allows the capture of the meanings and perceptions that construct reality. A potential drawback of the denaturalized rather than naturalized approach would be that the involuntary / voluntary vocalizations are not captured in the transcript. This may be a drawback in highlighting how participants may have been stressing a certain identification or rejection in their constructions of gender identity.

2.7. Philosophical and theoretical understanding of FDA

At the beginning of the analysis, I recognised the importance of developing my understanding of the challenging epistemological issues involved in social constructionist research. More specifically, how the research is attentive to participant's subjectivity and experience. My supervisor helped me to understand

that adopting the discursive perspective meant I had to significantly alter my perspective when considering the social construction of reality and the construction of meaning. Learning the discursive paradigm was a substantially different world view than what I was used to. I aimed to overcome this challenge of understanding and applying the philosophical underpinnings of the FDA approach through patience, reading and much reflection in supervision. In particular, the challenge of pure relativism versus critical realism, and holding this in mind with relation to the participants language and lived experience of meditation and gender identity.

Throughout carrying out the analysis, I had to consistently and consciously be committed to shifting my perspective away from the familiar phenomenological lens to that of the discursive. I did this by continuing to return to the language on the transcript pages. I reflected in supervision, that as I continued to practice this shift in perspective from the phenomenological to the discursive, by working through each transcript, I felt more comfortable and confident in the process. I found that this was an interesting new way to view the world, and a lens which has also informed my clinical work when considering discourses and subject positions.

2.8. Analytic Strategy

I began analysing each interview transcript by reading the entire transcript twice. Then, I added my reflections and reactions to the text in a reflective diary. These entries included my emotional responses and mental associations that I experienced whilst reading the text. This was in an attempt to explore how I engaged with the discursive activities affected by the text, though they had not been yet defined. I recognised during this period of reflexivity I was aware that common cultural representations came to me in response to the transcript. For example,

instances where a construction of a traditionally masculine gender identity was apparent. Throughout the analytical process, supervision was vital to how I structured and systematically carried out the analysis.

Applying Willig's 6 Step approach to FDA

Once I had read through the transcript twice, I returned to the text and methodically followed the six stages as suggested by Willig (2022). I carefully went through the text line by line, highlighting instances in which the discursive object of male gender identity appeared, or instances where something could be inferred as a determinant or an effect of male gender identity (See Appendix 9). At this early stage of analysis, as recommended by my supervisor, with each reference to male gender identity, I asked myself questions of the text that only accounted for the first three stages of Willig's (2022) approach:

1. Discursive Constructions: how the discursive object (male gender identity) is constructed in language, paying attention to implicit and explicit references.

2. Discourses: considering the various discursive constructions of male gender identity within wider discourses, linking to Foucauldian frames of power, psychology, gender and sexuality.

3. Action orientation: The discursive constructions that I identified were considered in terms of their function. This stage involved asking questions of what was being gained by constructing male gender identity in a particular way at a particular moment in the text, and thus considering how this related to the other constructions surrounding it.

The process of moving along these three initial stages was not linear as I read through the pages. I became aware of certain patterns or themes that became more present after identifying multiple related constructions or action orientations. My recognition of the themes and/or the ability to recognise patterns was likely influenced by my own location within macro-level discourses that may have also been available to the interviewees (Willig, 2022). This points to the need for reflexivity.

While continuing to return to the highlighted portions of the transcript from the first three stages (Willig, 2022), I also held in mind particular attention to subject positions. I wrote in a reflective diary when subject positions and practices became apparent to me in the first three stages as mentioned above. After I had completed each transcript, highlighting, and making notes on the pages, I began to transfer the themes from each stage to a table. I then used the table along with the transcripts to carry out the next two stages of analysis: subject positioning and practice.

4. *Subject positions*: the subject positions offered by the constructions of the discursive object within the text were considered. Namely, the subject positions made available by discourses that individuals can take up or resist, and place others within. Considering how constructions of male gender identity created positions for the men were identified at this stage.

5. *Practice*: how the discourses and subject position created and taken up inform practice – what can be said and done from particular positions that have been made available - in terms of masculinity, and the subsequent everyday practices of men.

For each stage, I returned to the transcripts to search for the words and phrases I had highlighted regarding the discourses, subject positions and transferred these to

the tables as well (Appendix 10). For each of the participants/ transcripts, I wrote separate summaries where I tried to focus on the main discourses and constructions in an effort to understand how key themes were arising both for each participant as well as across the eight transcripts (Appendix 11). As discussed with my supervisor, I saved the final stage, subjectivity, until I had moved through the five stages of FDA for each of the eight participants. The analytic strategy laid the foundation for the analysis that will be presented in Chapter Three; however I also acknowledge that much of my thinking and synthesis of the analysis happened whilst writing the analysis chapter.

2.9. Reflexivity

2.9.1 Reflexivity on identifying discourses

It seemed important to share my position as the researcher in identifying discourses located within the talk of the participants. As I myself am a man who engages in meditation, I was interested in this participant group of men that meditate. I acknowledge that I have a shared experience to that of the participants. Namely, identifying as a cis-gendered man that has an active meditation practice. I am also English speaking and have been raised in what can be considered a Western society, the island of Barbados. I have used a reflective diary throughout the interview and analysis process to try to locate how my own constructions of gender and those of the participants may intersect. I share certain experiences with the participants, including but not limited to those relating to my gender, biology, being influenced by a Western society and neoliberalism, as well as having an active meditation practice. My most consistent practice is yoga, which I practice several times a week. Though I also engage in sitting meditation and breathing exercises.

On a personal note, I have experienced great benefits from my yoga and meditation practice. I feel that my experience has helped in my personal life, particularly with navigating difficult interpersonal dynamics and managing emotions. My experience of the benefits of meditation align with the findings that have been presented in my introductory section: increased emotional intelligence (Lomas, et al., 2014a). In addition to the benefits I have experienced through my own meditation practice, I also had a friend in university that took his own life. This experience had a profound effect on me, and it alerted to me the potential pitfalls of adhering to the expectations of traditional masculinity, namely emotional repression (Robertson, et al., 2015).

My preparation for conducting this study, namely the critical literature review, informed the discourses I identified within the transcripts. The discourse which seemed to be most apparent to me during the analysis was traditional masculinity. I suspect this was because of the articles and theory that were close to my awareness following the literature review as well as my own experience of traditional masculine expectations in my own personal life. My position of a trainee counselling psychologist likely also influenced my identification of discourses, namely the theme described as 'biological/physical discourse'. As is described in the secondary research question, 'What subject positions do their constructions permit them to occupy?', I'm interested in emotions and subjectivity available from certain positions according to how gender is constructed. I think that my experience of learning psychological theories and working in therapeutic settings enabled me to situate discourses under the umbrellas of psychology and emotionality.

2.9.2 Methodological reflexivity

It is important in qualitative research to attend to reflexivity, both personally and methodologically, throughout the research process. I acknowledge the impossibility of being 'outside of one's subject matter' while conducting research (Willig, 2022). I understand that in carrying out the qualitative research in this study, I must acknowledge being a 'subjective researcher' (Frost, 2021). I have completed the 'reflexivity interview' with a colleague (Appendix 11) (Langdridge, 2007). The interview allowed me to explore my motivations for conducting this research in more detail, as well as considering how I may position future interviewees, and how I view my own self in relation to them. I used my reflexive journal to record the thoughts, ideas, and potential tensions that arose during the research process. In line with the social constructionist (Burr, 2015) stance of this research, I began from the premise that all human behaviour is context dependent. This context may be from the historical, cultural and/or political histories of the interviewees. I am aware that I am a man, and research has suggested male interviewees may perform their gender differently according to whether the interviewer is a man or woman (Sallee, & Harris, 2011). One participant explicitly shared that he was happy I was a man, as he felt he couldn't be as open about a certain part of his gender identity if the interviewer/researcher was a woman. I recognise I am also caught within the maze of sociohistorical and cultural discourses as the participants, and that my understanding is inevitably influenced by them (Lyons and Coyle, 2016). However, my own transparency during the process was of great importance.

I am aware that there may have been an implicit power imbalance between me and the participants. By using supervision, as well as keeping the reflexive journal, I aimed to flatten this hierarchy by being self-aware, open and honest in my interactions with the participants.

Analytic Results

Through the analytic process, I identified four overarching categories of discourses: traditional masculinity (heteronormative) discourse, queer/ feminist discourse, personality trait discourse and biological/physically male discourse. These will be expanded upon in Chapter 3: Analysis.

Ethics and permissions

The study received ethical approval (See Appendix 5) from the Psychology department of City, University of London. No approval from outside agencies was required. The research complied with the HCPC guidance on conduct and ethics for students (HCPC, 2016), BPS ethical guidelines (BPS, 2018), Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2014), and the BPS guidelines for internet-mediated research (BPS, 2013). During the interviews I aimed to act in accordance with my researcher role rather than using counselling type techniques (Gilbert, et al, 2003).

Demonstrating quality

My theoretical position indicates that I cannot claim to 'discover' a 'reality' or 'knowledge' about male gender identity through this research, rather I can only 'author it' (Willig, 2022).

Sensitivity to context

With respect to the context of theory that has informed this study throughout the process of preparing for the project as well, as through the analysis and the written stages, I have done my best to develop a sophisticated understanding of masculinity research and Foucauldian Discourse analysis. This is so as to be informed on the research that has come before this study and to thus consider how the current study will add to the specific area of male gender identity. The process of multiple

assignments throughout the doctoral training has also informed my understanding of the context of theory for this study, insofar as the assignments have allowed me to develop my understanding of the philosophy of the approach and the intellectual histories of male gender identity. Regarding sensitivity to the linguistic and dialogic context: with my supervisor's support, I was able to pay close attention to utterances from participants, both during interviews as well as when working methodically through the interview transcripts. I aimed to flatten the hierarchical dynamic as the researcher or 'expert' through my responses to the interviewees. Namely by using techniques from my therapeutic training, such as summarising, to ensure I had understood their response. At times this allowed them to correct me if I had not understood them. I also tried to make the interviewees feel comfortable, or to try to build rapport between us. One way of doing this was by scheduling the screening video call prior to the interviews. This was to allow participants to ask any questions, as well as providing the opportunity for an informal introduction to each other, which I do hope helped participants feel more comfortable during the actual research interview.

Commitment, rigour, transparency and coherence

The commitment (i.e. 'prolonged engagement with the topic') to the research process has been steady over the course of the doctoral training, particularly in the final year and into the fourth year as I wrote up the thesis. Through the research modules of my training, and in discussions with my supervisor, I gained competence in the methods selected for this study. I paid attention to rigour throughout the analysis—namely, to aim for a completeness of the interpretation and by addressing the variation and complexity observed in the interviewees' transcripts. My supervisor was integral to this process. With respect to transparency and coherence, I appreciate as

a qualitative researcher that I am constructing a version of reality through the 'telling' of the story of this thesis (Bruner, 1991). I have attempted to demonstrate the alignment between the research question and the methodology's underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions, which supports the appropriateness of the methodology. In efforts to be as transparent as possible, the reflexivity presented throughout the methodology and analysis has aimed to address the transparency of the research process.

Impact and importance

Yardley (2000) posits that the value of any research 'can only be assessed in relation to the objectives of the analysis, the applications it was intended for, and the community for whom the findings were deemed relevant' (p223). An aim of the present study is for the findings to contribute to the field of counselling psychology. However, a wider aim is for the research to contribute to the ongoing discourses of gender identity in society. Of particular importance I hope is the contribution of this study to men's mental health and well-being, as well as providing a challenge the traditional constructions of masculinity. It is a hope that as a society we can continue to move to a place where men can talk about their gender identity and well-being, moving past a place where masculinity and or gender norms contribute to ways men do not reach out for help.

2.10. Methodology conclusion

In conclusion, this methodology chapter has outlined how the study is informed by FDA. FDA embraces a macro approach, which allows for the focus of wider contexts in relation to power. The study takes a critical realist position, which recognises the importance of subjectivity produced by subject positions. An important aspect of FDA

is that it aims to gain an understanding of the link between discourse and power by exploring subject positions. The value of qualitative validity, reflexivity and ethics have been outlined. By employing semi-structured interviews, the study observes how male meditators draw on dominant discourses to construct their male gender identity.

Chapter Three: Analysis

3.1 Introduction

This study aims to better understand the construction of male gender identity by critically evaluating the discourses of gender identity that are taken for granted. More specifically, it aims to identify the ways in which the interviewees drew from different discourses to construct gender identity and how through this talk different subject positions were made available. In this chapter, the results of the selected analytical approach used on the eight interview transcriptions will be presented. The research question that informs this analysis is 'How do male meditators construct their gender identity in talk'? The sub question is 'What subject positions do their constructions permit them to occupy?' The analysis found that participants moved dynamically between subject positions. These varying subject positions offered different 'ways of being' and 'ways of seeing' the world (Willig, 2022), showing how some discourses

restricted personal agency, whereas others permitted personal agency and access to affect.

The intention of tracing the discursive patterns identified throughout the transcripts is to locate the dominant discourses of male gender identity and to identify where the points of resistance to these discourses are, thereby seeking to highlight how discourses position men that meditate in relation to gender identity. The wider intention of the analysis is to identify and understand the subject positions available to male meditators, and to consider the way they may adopt subject positions and dynamically move between them. This is done with the hope that a more thorough understanding of male gender identity, and the experience of male meditators and their potential subjectivities, may be brought to light. Thus, with this knowledge, the present study aims to contribute to the field of counselling psychology by showing the potential ways meditation may allow for men to enact different ways of 'being a man' or of performing their gender.

As previously described, the eight participants identified as men and identified with the gender they were assigned at birth. The structure of the findings will be presented while holding in mind four dominant discourses. These discourses have been used as a foundation to map out how the dominant discourses position the men in relation to male gender identity. Within each of the four discourses, subject positions will be presented to indicate how these are intertwined within the wider discourses. This also emphasises the dynamic way in which the men adopted or rejected the positions that are afforded to them, showing the myriad ways they construct and enact their gender identity according to the discourses being drawn upon. I appreciate that narrowing the analysis to four overarching discourses might

be viewed as limiting, yet this is a pragmatic decision. I also acknowledge that my selection of the four overarching discourses have been influenced by my own labelling of the positions, and that there can always be the potential for many more readings of the interview data. I acknowledge in the analysis process I am a co-constructor (Potter, & Wetherell, 1987), that the analysis presented is only one reading of what is being performed in the analysis (Willig, 2022). My reading of the analysis is informed and shaped by my experience of being a man, as well as by my pre-existing knowledge of my motivation to carry out an FDA study that challenges taken-for-granted discourses of male gender identity. I appreciate that my own analysis could also be deconstructed.

In this chapter, I use direct quotes from the transcripts to provide evidence of how the themes that are produced are not entirely derived from my own subjective position as analyst but rather have recurred throughout the analysis procedure.

The first and most apparent subject position for the men, when drawing from a dominant discourse of heteronormativity, was that of 'traditional masculinity'. The heteronormative discourse male gender identity is constructed as a set of expectations of behaviours and ways of being that can be linked to traditional masculinity or traditional male gender roles. In this position, as noted in the brief genealogy, gender identity is constructed in a way whereby men are expected to enact certain expectations or meet conditions in order to be considered 'man enough'. The majority of the participants opposed the notion of traditional masculinity and instead, utilised a discourse centred around personality traits, feminism, and/or queerness, which facilitated a wider range of emotional expression and behaviours

that were previously considered "feminine" and discouraged according to heteronormative principles.

3.2. Discourses

The below table presents the four discourses identified, as well as the subject positions offered by these discourses.

Table 1: Overview of the discourses presented in this chapter:

Discourses
3.3. **Heteronormative/ traditional masculinity discourse**   *3.3.1. 'Not man enough' position*   *3.3.2. 'Man-enough': (Heterosexual) position*   *3.3.3. Emotionally repressive position*   *3.3.4. Provider / Stabiliser*
3.4. **Feminist/ Queer discourse**   *3.4.1. Gender as fluid*   *3.4.2. Deconstructing masculinity*   *3.4.3. Privilege, power and intersectionality*
3.5. **Personality trait discourse**   *3.5.1. Emotionality*   *3.5.2. Masculine & feminine traits*
3.6. **Embodied / Biological discourse**   *3.6.1. Capable of violence*   *3.6.2. 'Physically' male*   *3.6.3. Aging male body*

3.6.4. Body of colour

3.3. Heteronormative/ traditional masculinity discourse

All of the men in the study drew on the taken-for-granted heteronormative discourse, namely a traditional masculinity discourse, to construct gender identity as a set of expectations of behaviours. The traditional masculinity discourse encourages masculine ideals and perpetuates the outdated sentiment that homosexuality is considered feminine. I have framed the traditional masculinity discourse as a sub theme to that of a heteronormative discourse. The traditional masculinity construction of male gender identity positions men as responsible for meeting the prescribed expectations of masculinity. As highlighted in the introduction chapter, these expectations of masculinity consist of, but are not limited to, proving one's strength and stoicism, repressing emotions as otherwise they may be considered 'feminine' and weak, and striving to reach hegemonic masculinity (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005). By using Willig's (2022) stages, paying particular attention to stage four, subject positions, it's possible to see the power dynamics between a man being considered 'masculine' and a man being considered 'feminine' in line with the hegemonic masculinities theory (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005; Connell, 1995). My analysis also found that two participants that identified as gay/queer were 'othered' by the traditional masculinity discourse. From the subject position of traditional masculinity, the men drew on traditional gender roles and the conventional language of masculinity as a way of constructing male gender identity. For example, expectations of men being the 'provider', masculinity characterised as 'exerting power', of 'dominating', or of 'not showing emotions'. Throughout this discourse, and

the entire analysis for that matter, the participants drew upon a life stage discourse. The life stage discourse affords the subject position of a differently aged man, whereby male gender identity can be open to change according to a man's age and/or stage of life. It's important to note at the outset of this analysis that the subject position granted by a traditional masculinity discourse comes with inherent privilege and power.

3.3.1. Not man enough

The subject position of a masculine man, afforded by the traditional masculinity discourse permits men to act in accordance with traditional gender roles. However, if one does not meet the expectations of masculinity this may lead to scrutinization, by both oneself and by other men. The example below from Roger highlights how being a queer man prevents one from being considered 'masculine'.

Jackson: [...]If you're thinking [...] of how it fits with how you see yourself. Can you say perhaps what you mean by that? What is it that you identify with about your gender? (231-232)

Roger: I also listen to a podcast and I love it so much it's called "man enough". The title it's given is kind of ironic because it's about: it brings in guests, very often it's male guests, sometimes females and transgender, non-binary guests. But it talks about this idea that in our society we're constantly told that we need to do 'this' in order to be men. So it's talking a lot about the fragile masculinity. [...] How a lot of men grow up with the idea of not being 'man enough'. So these are the these are definitely

issues that I've had growing up. I've always thought like oh "I'm not man

enough because I don't like football" or "I'm not man enough because I

don't look as tough as this guy" or because "I'm not strong enough" or

"because of my sexuality". However, learning about the fact that other

men also struggle with that, it makes me identify with men, even more,

because I think it's a part of being man [...] that you don't feel man

enough, regardless of how society tells you a man should be (234- 245).

In this segment, Roger is drawing on traditional discourses of male gender identity.

For example, there is a set of conditions that a man needs to meet in order to be

considered 'man enough'. Roger shares that listening to a podcast named *Man

Enough* has helped him to locate the expectations of men. Roger then shares

experiences from his own life of the times he was made to feel that he was not 'man

enough'. Of particular interest to me is where he shares that he is not 'man enough'

because of his sexuality. This indicates how the construction of traditional male

gender identity is anchored within a heteronormative discourse. For example, being

a queer or gay man is a limiting subject position, whereby one needs to guard

against behaviours that may be considered gay or queer at the risk of not meeting

the expectation of being 'man enough'. The subject position of a gay man within a

heteronormative discourse significantly limits the possibilities for the actions Roger

can take. From this subject position, the heteronormative and traditional masculinity

discourses arguably constrain any constructions or enactments of a queer male

gender identity. In terms of subjectivity, Roger mentions how the examples of himself

not being 'man enough' are 'issues that [he] had growing up'. This subject position of

'not man enough' (as a gay man) within the heteronormative discourse might be

argued to lead to feelings of inadequacy and/or guilt. I understood Roger to be using language to describe negative emotional states and a negative view of himself because he did not meet the expectations of traditional masculinity. Interestingly, Roger shares that it is through learning that other men also experience feelings of potential inadequacy of not being man enough that he is able to identify with being a man and thus connect with other men further.

3.3.2. 'Man enough'

According to the heteronormative discourse, masculinity is synonymous with heterosexuality. Mark identifies as a straight man. The potential subject position of a heterosexual man affords a level of comfort or safety from scrutiny—the opposite to what Roger described.

> Jackson: And I just wondered kind of you identifying as being a cis gendered man, ... what parts of that come to mind that you think of that "I can identify with that part of myself"? (163-164)

> Mark: Yeah I guess. It's tough because I've never really been [...] I've felt so settled in in who I was, I never really questioned, questions never really arose as to for me to sort of think about. Yeah I guess my body, I feel comfortable in my own skin. To, to a large degree. I don't think of myself as necessarily, a particularly macho kind of guy, but I still feel comfortable calling myself a man. Yeah I feel comfortable in the clothes, that I would wear that would be outwardly um masculine in the general sense and

yeah for the most part, just relatively comfortable with what's going on

(166-170).

From these segments, I understood Mark to be illustrating two different subject

positions available to him through the heteronormative/traditional male gender

identity discourse. Firstly, he doesn't position himself as a *'macho kind of guy'*;

therefore he is acknowledging that male gender identity is traditionally constructed

as being 'macho', and that he does not meet this expectation. However he is still

'comfortable calling [himself] a man'*.* This fits with the 'ordinary' position as explained

by Wetherell and Edley (1999), whereby space is created between the self and

traditional masculine ideals. This suggests a similar subject position to Roger in that,

whilst he is constructing male gender identity through the expectations of traditional

masculinity, he is resisting this subject position. He is adopting a subject position

which may be provided by the counter discourse of a personality trait discourse (as

expanded upon below in section **3.4*). Mark shares that his gender identity is

something that he was 'never really thinking about it, to a large degree'. This could

be understood through his identification with heterosexuality. Namely, Mark may

have felt 'man enough' because he identifies as a heterosexual man, i.e. that his

sexuality satisfied the necessary conditions to be considered masculine. In contrast

to Roger, Mark's heterosexual position was not under the same threat as that of a

gay man in the heteronormative discourse. Put simply, Mark may not meet the

expectations of a macho hegemonic masculinity (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005);

however, his sexuality sufficiently satisfies the dominant heterosexual discourse.

This does not restrain his practice or limit his personal agency of this part of his

gender identity, as, within the heteronormative discourse, he is part of the majority.

He can enact his heterosexual gender identity more flexibly. Considering subjectivity in this instance, being heterosexual may permit feelings of ease or indicate a lack of resistance in comparison to that of a homosexual or queer position. The subject position of heterosexual man, within the heteronormative discourse, provides a position of power over that of a homosexual man; it is, therefore, a more privileged position.

3.3.3. Emotional repression

Emotional repression, as encouraged by the traditional masculinity discourse, was drawn on by all the participants. All the participants resisted the emotionally repressive position from the traditional masculinity discourse. Joe constructed male gender identity in this way as outlined in the following segments:

> Jackson: So those are the parts of maybe [...] your gender identity that you identify with whereas when it comes to communicating emotions you feel like you don't identify with that stereotypical male? (233-238).

> Joe: I would say stereotypically, it is even though I don't identify with it, I would still say culturally the way I've been brought up is that stereotypically with male emotion, it's common not to open up with your feelings. (241)

In the above examples of Joe's construction of masculinity, when drawing from a traditional masculinity discourse emotions are expected to be repressed. When referring to the repression of emotions in his upbringing ('the way I've been brought

up'), Joe is also drawing on a conditioning theory discourse. Joe describes himself as a 'stereotypical old fashioned male'. However, he describes that, though male gender identity is associated stereotypically with 'not opening up with your feelings', he does not identify with this part of being a man. From this position of resistance, and the fifth stage of practice, Joe describes elsewhere how he is able to communicate his emotions more openly with his wife, particularly when it comes to parenting their twelve-year-old son. Whilst Joe claims he does not identify with the emotional repression which is stereotypically male, he does indeed identify with other parts of his gender identity which would be considered that of a 'stereotypical old fashioned male' —namely, his interest in boxing and being more 'adventurous […] risk taking' *(207)* than his wife.

Bill also alluded to how emotional repression is conditioned in men. Namely, when boys are told not to cry. Similarly to the other participants, Bill rejected this emotionally repressive position.

> Jackson: I was wondering [...] So some of the stuff we talked about before you know, in terms of how you see yourself in how you think and feel and do, the different areas of your life. So friendship and relationship to your body your interests or your hobbies, friends and family is anything, how you see yourself as a man, that you can perhaps recognize comes into those different areas of your life?. (293-296).

> Bill: [...] Men grew up you know, being told they're "a sissy if they cry". I say, no wonder you're going to get men and boys growing up not knowing

how to deal with their feelings and then, on the other side, you have

women being called a princess when they're little and that if they cry it's

going to be all right [...] I saw my brother once kind of berating his son,

because he was trying to climb a tree and and couldn't so he just kept

crying. And my brother was kind of saying "don't cry!" *change of tone of

voice* you know, all the time. And it just came to mind that that kind of

behaviour is going to, the kid's going to grow up thinking that crying is a

bad thing. When actually it's releasing tension.' (313-331).

In this segment, I perceived Bill to be critiquing the expectation of the traditional

masculinity discourse to repress emotions. Bill also seems to be using the discourse

of conditioning theory to help explain how this kind of interaction can impact the way

gender identity (in this case, repressing emotions) can be learned. I perceived Bill to

be drawing from a meditation discourse, which challenges emotional repression and

instead reframes the act of crying as a way of 'releasing tension'. I also understood

Bill to be suggesting the possible implications this has with the relationships between

men and women, namely how emotions are managed differently in relationships due

to the different ways their gender has been learned.

3.3.4. Provider/ Stabiliser

The participants drew on the gender roles associated with traditional masculinity and

expressed how this impacts men's relationships with women. I understood these to

be two subject positions permitted by the traditional masculinity discourse: the

provider (financially and physically) and the stabiliser (supporting women with their

emotions). Rupert describes his previous 'abuse' of a gender role in the following excerpt:

> Jackson: [...] With things changing can you think of ways, perhaps, of how you see yourself be a man, say earlier in your life versus now? Is there anything that you think of, and if you're holding in mind the changes that you're thinking about in society, that you notice in yourself in a different way? Perhaps you do something differently, think differently? Feel differently? (372-375)

> Rupert: [...] I felt the responsibility as the male to be the provider, the main breadwinner [...] responsibility [...] slightly resented that [...] It was a bit like, well I just worked really hard for 70 hours this week you know, I'm just going to go out tonight and I'm just gonna [...] That was almost like probably an old fashioned male: "you stay at home with the children and I just need a rest and a break" [...] I was probably abusing like a gender kind of role at that time [...] Which is probably quite an old fashioned male, masculine kind of thing to do, but I don't do that anymore. (380- 396).

In this excerpt Rupert was reflecting on a previous stage in his life, prior to his engagement with meditation, when he was using arguably more gender conforming behavioural strategies to manage stress, such as alcohol and drugs (Lomas, et al., 2012). A heteronormative discourse may promote a subject position of *'the provider'* or *'breadwinner',* which when considering Willig's stage five practice, justifies the behaviour of leaving his children to be cared for by his partner whilst he went out

drinking. From this position, subjectivity may be inferred as perhaps a lack of remorse and/or a sense of entitlement for not taking joint caring responsibilities of the children. Holding in mind stage three, action orientation, I understood Rupert's statement of 'I was probably abusing, like, a gender kind of role at that time' as a reflection on his previous behaviours at a different stage of his life. His use of the word 'abusing' suggests that he is critical of his past behaviour, signalling that this is something he no longer finds acceptable.

Daniel described what I considered to be the 'stabiliser' position, that of by being a unemotional, stable man he is able to support the emotions of his female partner.

> Jackson: I was wondering if you know how you see yourself as a man, how else does that come into maybe the interests that you have or your relationship with your family? (280-281).

> Daniel: [...] The ability to hold a space for her because I think generally speaking, her emotional ups and downs tend to be the sort of the what's the word? Amplitude, the amplitude of those ups and downs is is is more intense than mine [...] To me a man's ups and downs are like this, and a woman's tend to be more like that (*physically demonstrating an up and down motion with his hand*)[...] And he said, if you go up and down with her like that it will just it will mess you up. And I think there's so much truth to that. I think that part of my role is to to be able to hold that space, by not being up and down. Instead so when she needs to she can you know

speak to me, and I think I helped to ground her sometimes about and I

help to get her to look at things more logically. (292-299)'.

From the subject position of a stabiliser in a relationship with a woman, Daniel is not being taken on the 'up and downs' of the emotions of his partner. Willig's sixth stage stood out to me when I considered this extract, as Daniel is describing the potential of being 'messed up' by following the emotional patterns of his partner. The practice of being the stabiliser allows Daniel to support his partner through difficult emotional times without himself being overwhelmed by emotions. This subject position echoes the power dynamic of men over women as permitted by the traditional masculinity discourse. Namely, the traditional masculinity discourse suggests that women are more emotional and less logical than men.

3.4. Feminist/ Queer discourse

The participants also acknowledged that the construction of gender is changing. Several participants spoke about the #MeToo movement. All of the participants referred to a change in the way gender is constructed in society, with most of them using the word 'fluid'. From the feminist or queer discourse, the notion of fluidity allows more open and flexible ways of thinking, feeling and 'doing' (West, & Zimmerman, 1987) gender identity. A Feminist approach to masculinity suggests a nonlinear, fluid gender identity, which is a move away from the gender binary (Silverstein, 2016). The feminist approach aims to deconstruct the gender binary. When compared with the other participants, the two that identified as gay/queer drew language from more of a feminist discourse in constructing male gender identity. The participants described the fluidity of gender in the workplace and in schools, as well

as some expressing concerns about the ways in which this change in the way gender is being conceived of has been politicised, thus having negative implications for boys and girls.

3.4.1. Gender as fluid

Rupert references how the fluidity of the representation of gender in the workplace is simultaneous with more representation of women in these contexts. In the context of business, a feminist discourse has allowed for more stereotypically 'feminine' traits to be valued. This reflects a shift toward the greater prioritisation of emotional intelligence in contemporary societies. A queer discourse enables subject positions with more fluidity between masculine and feminine ways of being. For example, whilst leadership is considered masculine, a man needs 'softer' or feminine traits to enact his leadership.

> Jackson: And I know you were mentioning [...] things changing and the
> #MeToo movement and embracing diversity in these things; and I was
> wondering if you're thinking about your life, perhaps, considering gender
> and how it, however, it applies to you to be a man [...] What do you think
> some of those changes are and perhaps maybe some changes you've
> noticed in yourself? (191 – 194).

> Rupert: 'Well, I think changes around gender in the workplace are i'd say
> quite fluid at the moment. And you know, obviously, in the last three to four
> years we've seen the gender pay gap [...] You know, there is more of a

discussion, more figures backing it up. Even though there's been good

progress, women are still pretty massively underrepresented in senior

positions in in organizations. And So I think there's been some change but

not not much change. And I think i've become more pro women, in a way.

I think that they have, the female gender in business, I think business is

changing in terms of leadership and what leaders' skills and abilities kind

of need to be. [...] I think emotional intelligence and some of the softer

skills that leaders need are probably more prevalent. (196 -201)

Holding in mind Foucault's (1978) perspective of knowledge and discourse being

inherently socio-historical, I understood Rupert describing that he had 'become more

pro women' as a way of him drawing on a feminist discourse. The subjectivity from

this subject position of a businessperson with both feminine and masculine ways of

being may allow a wider range of emotions than those of a traditional masculinity

discourse.

The acknowledgement of a changing construction of gender in wider society was

also met with some critique. Daniel described masculinity as being 'under attack',

with feminism and gender being politicised, which is having an impact on men and

boys' ability to develop emotional intelligence.

Jackson: Thinking of the term masculinity, how it may be described in

wider society versus how you yourself see it. Is there anything that you

can kind of pull to mind that is either the same for you as wider society

versus maybe different? (383-385).

Daniel: 'I would say masculinity in wider society unfortunately seems to be viewed through the lens of feminism. Which is on I don't even know which wave it's on now. Fourth? Fifth? I'm not sure. And I think that's unfortunate because it sort of masculinity, it's toxic masculinity, it's the patriarchy. So it's all of these things to me are quite political. And Again i've already expressed how I see it, it's not it's not how I see at all. I think masculinity is, there's some qualities to it which again, as I say, it's not about it's not even about gender and I think it has been. I think it has been made about gender and I think sadly it's used politically in a way to put men into a certain box or to be bashing men. Or to advance something political aims when, in reality, I see it as a more almost like a neutral thing you know. It's just its masculinity. It's not positive and it's not negative. Masculinity, it's just masculinity. And the same for femininity, but I think it's unfortunate that the wider lens seems to always want to put it in this negative light. Now we've got the whole #MeToo movement as well and for me it's really a shame, because then you have boys and men, who are almost ashamed of expressing certain parts of themselves. And it's a bit of a weird one because I would say most boys and most men than lack the emotional intelligence to understand the feminine side of themselves and then have some healthy relationship with that. Or the masculine side. And it's a weird place to be. Like who's who's teaching them how to do that? (387- 399).

In this instance, masculinity is being constructed as a 'neutral thing' but is being politicised, which is having an impact on men developing emotional intelligence. The subject position here is one whereby one must be careful of how one enacts their gender identity for fear that their masculinity might be labelled as 'toxic'. From this subject position, practice could be acting in a way that is very mindful of being criticised or ridiculed. Subjectivity may be one of anxiety and tension. The above 'expressing certain parts of themselves' may be understood, in the context of the queer discourse, as having the effect of othering boys and men, whereby boys that perhaps enact behaviours that are more closely aligned to those of traditional masculinity may be subject to scrutiny. Something that stood out here was the concept of 'cancel culture' and how boys and men may fear 'being cancelled'.

Roger described how identifying as a gay man also offered counter discourses to heteronormativity. The following extract exemplifies how, within his marriage to his husband, the queer discourse offers Roger different options to those provided by heteronormativity:

> Jackson: I know you mentioned your husband there so thinking about
> your relationship can you think about how you know, in terms of you,
> being a man how that might come into your relationship? (480-481).

> Roger: It's always portrayed like obviously in the heteronormative society,
> it's always portrayed where the guy who provides and the guy who keeps
> the girl safe. And he's the hero. Um whereas, then I guess in my
> relationship both of us being the men, I love the fact that we have the

freedom to choose whichever role we want to play at all times. We can

both be the vulnerable one that needs to be saved in that sort of scenario,

whereas we can also be the hero that helps the other [...] We kind of get

rid of all these things that have been assigned by heteronormative society

[...] Then I allow myself space to be vulnerable. I allow myself space to be

helped. And to be seen the way I am. And I can do the same with my

partner as well. (503-505).

I understood the function of the way Roger is constructing his male gender identity in

this part of the text as that of providing an alternative to the limiting position offered

by the traditional masculinity discourse. To be more specific, by adopting a queer

discourse, this allows the participant to be 'vulnerable' with his partner, whereas in

traditional discourses on masculinity it is not encouraged to be vulnerable. To be

vulnerable in heteronormative discourse is outside the possible conditions of

masculinity. This may be one explanation of why emotional repression is enacted in

traditional masculinity. The queer discourse serves as a way of empowering the

participant when he experiences feelings of vulnerability. This position, as a gay man

in the queer discourse, permits feelings of pride and joy.

Mark acknowledged the change in society in the way gender is constructed, with it

being more 'open' and 'fluid' compared to when he was at school.

Jackson: [...] Was there was there anything else in terms of perhaps you

know how how you see masculinity and society at large? I know you what

what you said comes to mind is kind of like that traditional macho and very

physical and you know, perhaps less in your head, as you say, is there anything else you can think about with you know us here in 2022 masculinity how it is in society and what comes to mind? (344-347)

Mark: Yeah I mean certainly progression of society as a whole, and I mean if you look at the way my girlfriend's cousins are in school now, when it when it comes to gender identity. It's a it's a lot more fluid than it was. Everything's a lot more open than it would have been when when I was in school. So I think as a whole I would of, as we progress in that direction, I would have felt more contemplating it wasn't necessarily conforming to my traditional ideas of what the two genders would be. So yes i've definitely absorbed a level of that, where I feel more comfortable with things that do not comply with that. And But I dunno, I think generally it's just primarily me just being comfortable with who, I am as I get older. And I would say. A large portion of me, being more comfortable in my own head would be through meditation. (349-354).

In this extract, in reflecting on 'masculinity in society' as well as his relation to his own gender identity, I perceived Mark to be drawing from a queer discourse, a life stage discourse and a meditation discourse. This is another example of the complicated interweaving of multiple discourses that are related to the construction of gender identity. From the subject position of masculinity being subject to change according to age, afforded by the life stage discourse: this position permits Mark to 'feel more comfortable' with who he is as he ages. In this instance, he is describing

being more willing to identify with the parts of his gender identity that weren't complying with what may have been considered gender conforming. This may be interpreted as Mark using language to describe less strain on his gender role (Pleck, 1991), with his gender identity by drawing from a life stage discourse. Mark also employs a meditation discourse to further describe feeling more 'comfortable in his own head'. The subject positions allowed by a life-stage, meditation, and queer discourse, in combination with one another, may allow the practice of a gender identity that is more open and less confined by that of the traditional masculinity discourse. The implications for subjectivity may be the possibility of feeling less anxious or worried about conforming to gender norms.

3.4.2. Deconstructing masculinity

Roger adopted a more critical lens when it comes to the classification of what constitutes being considered masculine versus feminine. Roger also located what is deemed feminine versus masculine as prescribed by society. I understood this to also highlight an interplay between the personality trait discourse approach to male gender identity with that of conditioning theory (as described in the traditional masculinity section above) and gender identity as located or prescribed through societal expectations, i.e. gender norms.

> Jackson: What would be some of those things you think that might you would see as more masculine parts of yourself and what are some of the things you'd see as perhaps feminine parts of yourself? (290-291).

> Roger: No, I guess that's that's also the moment that you say it is the moment that I realized that I am part of the society that plays the game

that puts things into boxes of what masculine and feminine is. That's why also sometimes like putting it in quotation marks, but then again I feel like having this conversation it's just easier to use those boxes as a tool to describe what other people might see as masculine or feminine (294-298)

Roger goes on to explicitly share the difference between how he would like to construct masculine versus feminine traits compared to how society classifies them:

Roger: Whichever trait does not have to be classified masculine or feminine however society does that, and then we learn those behaviours and we learn to call them the masculine or feminine and even though I know it's not correct. I kind of still use them in order to justify that it's okay, not to put them in those boxes [...] In order to consciously make the decision that it's okay to have feminine traits as a man because it's part of being a man as well to embrace your feminine traits or being vulnerable, not being emotional. It being a feminine trait, which is actually so ridiculous to call it a feminine trait because it's part of being human that you're emotional that you go through emotions that you've talked about them. That you cry. It's it's incredibly silly to call something like that a feminine trait but that's how we learn it that's our learned behavior [...]So yeah, I guess that's why I still kind of stick to the masculine and feminine thing, because otherwise it's very difficult to talk about. (299-307)'

I understood this as Roger also drawing on conditioning theory to explain how individuals in society perpetuate or legitimise the classification of what is considered

masculine versus feminine. Roger also shares that he views society's classification of masculine versus feminine as 'not correct', showing that he is identifying with the feminist deconstruction of gender binaries. From a queer discourse, allows for a certain subject position such as a queer man. From this subject position it is more acceptable and/or permissible to engage in behaviours that do not conform to traditional gender norms.

The third stage of action orientation stood out to me in this segment from Roger. Namely, he finds it particularly difficult to describe to other people what is masculine and feminine without using the same classifications that he opposes. Put simply, whilst Roger disagrees with the way society puts masculine versus feminine into specific 'boxes', he still uses these *'boxes'* as a way of communicating how he identifies with his own gender identity. This language, associated with the dominant classification of what constitutes masculine versus feminine, can be viewed as a limitation, in that Roger is having to communicate about gender in a way with which he does not agree regarding classification. However if he does not use the masculine versus feminine trait discourse he acknowledges it becomes 'very difficult to talk about'.

Winston also drew from a queer discourse in challenging notions of masculinity. However, Winston comments on the added complexity of being a Black man. Namely, the racist stereotypes that are projected onto Black men in society, such as Black men being dangerous.

Jackson: If you think about what it means to you to be a man or how you see yourself as a man. What comes to mind?' (106-107).

Winston: [...] There's also, I'm a black man, so there were other dimensions to that being a black man, where there are vulnerabilities for me as a black man. With my height, my size, all of those sorts of stereotypes that projected onto black men, so that there's a vulnerability there [...] That there's gender, but then there's also that whole thing of where we are, as a society in terms of gender not being so fixed [...] I recognise there are feminine sides to me, If I was to use the binary codes. And it's allowing I allow myself to be the feminine if that makes sense, so what is the feminine? The feminine I guess, then, is the caring nurturing that that softer side of who I am. And allowing myself to have those umm. In spaces, where I need to have them, so if I need to be the strong man, and I can do that, if I need to be the softer man, the more approachable man. Then I can do that and I don't really believe in the male - female I do believe there's a space in between. So I feel that I exist in the in-between quite often. (114-119).

Whilst this enables the fifth stage of practice for Winston to enact both masculine and feminine sides of himself as needed, from the subject position of a man with a fluid gender identity he nonetheless states that he does not 'believe in male vs female', i.e. the 'binary codes'. Winston offers an explanation in that he 'exists in the in-between quite often'. Whilst it may be a bit of a stretch, and I do not intend to posit causality, I understood this to represent that meditation in part offers a subject

position or way of being beyond the masculine versus feminine binary code. For example, meditation discourse permits the construction of experiences that are located outside the confines of a binary gender construction. Meditation permits language such as connection to one's body, environment, as well as to a spiritual connection that may be located beyond humanity (and, therefore, genders).

3.4.3. Privilege, power and intersectionality

The poststructuralist perspective on gender cannot be fully understood without considering the intersectionality of other social identities, such as ethnicity, class, and sexuality. Traditional masculinity favours white, heterosexual and able-bodied men. Participants drew from an intersectional discourse as an alternative to the traditional masculinity discourse. Namely, the regarding the role of social class and ethnicity and how these locate men in society along a spectrum of privilege which informs the exercising of power. Winston reflects on two subject positions in the following segment. The subject position of a Black man without money, which has implications for how an individual is treated in society. On the other hand, when a Black man has more financial means, this enables a subject position further along the spectrum of privilege, a position which allows Willig's fifth stage of practice: to be 'assertive'. However, Winston is still negatively impacted by being a Black man in a systemically racist society. This is exemplified in the excerpt below where he claims he 'confidently assert[s] [him]self, without it being overly intimidating towards others'*;* as a Black man he needs to be careful not to *'*intimidate others'*.* This is something which a white man would not have to experience. This exemplifies how the subject

position of a Black man suggests needing to take caution in the fifth stage of
practice. A Black man must be conscious of how his behaviour is being interpreted
by others. Winston also describes what I understand to be an enactment of
hegemonic masculinity (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005), namely how his access to
privileges, such as employment and education, can create distance between him
and other Black men. This is highlighting the intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1989) of
multiple masculinities, and how a marginalised (Black) man may inadvertently and
unintentionally marginalise other marginalised (Black) men. Masculinity cannot be
understood outside of the context it is being constructed in, including the wider
societal systems within which it is nested.

Jackson: [...]How you see yourself as a man comes into different areas of
your life. You know you've mentioned with your partner, you've mentioned
with work and I was wondering, in terms of you know what other areas, it
might come into? (186-188)

Winston: [...] I was just thinking about the place of money and wealth and
privilege, in that way, as well, so as a black man who has moved out of
poverty from from childhood into a different social setting. I'm aware that
in many ways I get cushioned by my positioning in my social groups. With
that there's a level of privilege, I know that I have or access privileges
through education and employment and money, you know that the
salaries i've had. Which which on some levels creates a distance between
me and my and other black men that I have known (218- 221) [...]I know
what it is to be a black man without money and to feel it so like don't have

a voice and then to be a black man with money, knowing, I have a voice

and I have a different range of choices, because of that. And also the

black man, with a level of education and work experience, so I think the

range and breadth of my vocabulary, possible experience allows me to

confidently assert myself, without it being overly intimidating towards

others yeah.' (226-240).

Daniel also drew from an intersectionality discourse and indicated how a meditation

discourse may act to mediate the oppressive impact of a traditional masculinity

discourse.

Jackson: I wondered [...] how your identity of being a man comes into

other parts of your life or other parts of your identity, you know, so your

cultural identity?' (420-421).

Daniel: [...] Because I realized how once you put yourself in a box this is a

double edged sword. Because once you say "Okay, I am a black man" or

"I am a man"[...] As soon as you're in that box, on the one hand, you have

the security of an identity [...] and also you have other people to identify

with, the other Jamaicans I'm one of them, we can all celebrate what the

sprinters are doing, and this, and that. This food and this music, and the

rest of it right. But on the flip side of it you're now tied into those things [...]

and the limitations of that and I saw that so much growing up. I was quite

lucky, because I was exposed to different things. I went to like a posh

school, so I was around a lot of like middle class white kids. But then I

was around kids on the council estate. I saw both, and I saw the

limitations of that. And what I noticed is like a lot of people buy into this

cultural identity. So I think there are some people who have shame around

their identity and then you have other people would go the complete

opposite extreme whether like Okay, I must do this, that and the other.

And I think for me, I just feel like a being first and foremost, I'm just

consciousness. And what's interesting is when I interact with other people

sometimes I can see them looking at me as that cultural identity and I can

see them reacting to whatever concepts or preconceptions they might

have [...] I just I genuinely don't think about my race a lot of times until I

see other people, acting in a certain way. And it could be that they're being

racist, or I see them getting uncomfortable or something like that. And

then it kind of reminds me, it's like oh I'm a black man. I'm the only black

man in this group.' (430-450).

Daniel seems to identify with a meditation discourse. He shares that he is 'just

consciousness'. Holding in mind action orientation, I understood Daniel as drawing

from a meditation discourse as a way of constructing his gender identity beyond the

limitations of a cultural identity located in a traditional masculinity discourse. From

this position of 'consciousness', Daniel does not have to position his gender identity

in a certain box that has limitations as well as advantages of a shared community.

3.5. Personality trait discourse

All eight of the participants drew from what I refer to as a personality trait discourse. Here, personality traits refer to clusters of socially desirable attributes that were stereotypically considered to differentiate males and females and therefore defined the psychological core of masculine and feminine personalities (Spence, & Helmreich, 1978) with these 'attributes' being personality traits (Lenney, 1991). From this discourse, male gender identity is made up of both masculine and feminine traits. Whilst the personality trait discourse is similar to the feminist/queer discourse, in that masculinity is consisting of both masculine and feminine traits, it differs in the sense that the personality trait discourse is not as critical about what constitutes a masculine versus feminine trait, i.e. adopting less of a feminist position. Masculinity is made up of both masculine as well as feminine traits, thus this offers a more open and flexible construction and enactment of gender identity. The participants described their masculinity as consisting of both masculine and feminine traits, and that this was separate from sex. From this discourse, it is permissible to be a man and also be emotional. Thus, I have used this discourse to highlight the ways the men discussed their emotionality and how they manage their emotions. With particular attention to Willig's fourth stage of subject positioning, I ask: in terms of the language he is using, what ways of being emotional are being made possible by being a man who meditates. As expected the participants drew from a meditation discourse, which permitted tools and language in practising being an emotional being, which permitted ways of observing their emotional experience. All the participants drew on a personality trait discourse in constructing gender identity, and they communicated how they practised this in their lives. Something that stood out in the analysis was the apparent subject position of 'the observer'. As will be further explained below, the subject position of the observer afforded by a personality trait

discourse, in congruence with a meditation discourse, allowed the men to observe their emotional states, which brought greater awareness of these states and had implications for how this impacted their life and relationships.

3.5.1. Emotionality

> Jackson: As a bartender, as you say, different people with different energies and you notice that that's the way that you can do something that might be a difficult situation. I was wondering, are there any kind of, are there any other difficult situations, if you can think of that perhaps it may you may you may lean into your meditation in those instances and and perhaps what it might do? (34-36).

> Daniel: 'One of the great things about meditation is, I think it creates this baseline for me where I know what relaxation feels like. So I know what it feels like to be relaxed physically and mentally. To be present and aware, focussed but relaxed [...] So whenever you're far from that baseline you notice it quicker. But if you don't have that frame of reference, you might just live in stress and I think that's one of the problems for a lot of people they don't really realise (37- 42).

In stark contrast to the theme of emotional repression that a traditional masculinity discourse posits, when male gender identity is constructed in terms of the possibility of being emotional, and as ways of being emotional, this greatly opens possibilities for practising and experiencing gender identity. Daniel describes his meditation

practice as creating a 'baseline' which acts as a reference point for his emotions, i.e. at this baseline he feels 'relaxed'. His meditation practice allows him to create a baseline as well as the subject position whereby he observes when, for example, he has drifted away from this baseline and has become stressed. Daniel's meditation practice affords the subject position of an observer. From the observer position, one can know and identify a range of emotions and can thus construct the experience along a range of emotions on a continuum, from 'baseline, relaxed' to 'not relaxed'.

Later in his interview, Daniel discusses how the observer subject position afforded by a meditation discourse has implications for his relationships with other people.

Jackson: I know we touched on this quite a bit in the last hour or so, but how, how does your meditation practice translate into the way that you are as a man?(467-468).

Daniel: Yeah I think as I said before. I think in infinite ways really. It makes me much more emotionally intelligent. Because I am more aware of my own emotions. And I think, I haven't said this before, so this is something. But I think one of the most beautiful things is is. the more you understand yourself, the more you understand other people. So if I can, for example, be in a situation where I see someone get triggered. And they snapped at me or I can see someone who overreacts to certain situation or maybe they're being super controlling or bossy. Like I had an example, like I was speaking to someone they started talking to me, but it was it was in a way where it was just kind of like

condescending do you know what I mean? And because of the

awareness, I have now, I was able to kind of step back from it and go

Okay, what is happening here? And I thought, maybe this person in this

situation, feels like they have some agency, where they feel like you know,

agency, they work in this place I've just you know I'm there for the first

time and they're in a position to show someone else what to do. And it

makes them feel yeah maybe that makes the ego feel good or something

do you know what I mean? You know, I think it gives me a lot more

empathy, compassion, awareness. And yeah a lot of a lot of qualities

which which help navigate the world in a healthier. way. (470-481)

This example shows, how the subject position of observer extends beyond Daniel's

own psychological state to observe how another person he has encountered may

also be feeling, thereby adapting his behaviour in accordance with this observation. I

understood this excerpt to exemplify the fifth stage in Willig's FDA, that the observer

subject position provides Daniel the space to practice compassion towards others.

Joe spoke of the way meditation practice has influenced how he relates to his

gendered identity:

Jackson: [...] Can you think of any ways that perhaps your meditation

practice and the different facets of that, maybe impact the way you are as

a man and how you how you see yourself?' (545-546)

Joe: [...] The fact that I'm more aware of in my life, everything is happening in high resolution you know every micro moment is happening in micro you know in higher resolution it's that, for example, has made me aware. That I have masculine and feminine qualities. And you know, within my state and there's the fluidity so what I it's my meditation practice helped me remember, it's identified all the things that I was telling you about. And I believe before that, I would just simply say just tell it it's just saying that I'm a bloke. And I'm masculine. Full stop. So, I would say it's given me great it's given me greater clarity of my masculinity (548-552).

I understood Joe's response as highlighting the interplay between the personality trait discourse along with the practice allowed by a meditation discourse. Namely, permits behaviours that may be understood as observing one's thoughts, emotions and behaviours. In this case, Joe shares that if he did not have his meditation practice, he would 'simply say [...] that I'm a bloke, I'm masculine. Full stop.' Here it seems that Joe is communicating that he had previously constructed his gender identity as simply masculine, that he did not have feminine traits. Whereas the construction of a personality trait discourse of gender identity, in conjunction with a meditation discourse, permits the subject positions of the observer, and of a man with masculine and feminine traits. This has implications for practice. Joe shares at another stage of his interview that he has noticed an aversion to 'feminine ways of movement. [...] [F]eminine dancing (370-372)' and that he feels 'disappointed' in himself that he feels this way. These two discourses permits someone to recognise when they feel uncomfortable about something that may be considered 'feminine',

whilst also allowing the practice to behave in this way without being scrutinised for not being 'man enough'.

Rupert also spoke of how constructing male gender identity as ways of being emotional, and drawing from a meditation discourse, can allow for better connection with the world around him:

> Jackson: [...](R)esearch is looking into mindfulness and meditation and obviously the benefits of it, and if you're thinking about it from a male or gender identity perspective, it seems that some of the research is suggesting that it's you know, it's helping men to perhaps better manage emotions, increasing awareness of the emotions, providing a safe space and groups of practice. And I think you've touched on pretty much all of that, from what you've shared. And I guess the final point or question is: would you say that in your life that you've felt that your meditation practice has supported you in those things? (488-492).

> Rupert: 'I think it's it it's definitely opened me up to my emotions more, yeah. And that's daily kind of emotions and it's it's made me more give me more emotional awareness. It's helped me with my my self-management of you know, maybe like so when you get into triggers and it's helped me manage those. It's definitely as i've said, you know numerous times it's it's given me greater awareness. Not just about myself but of outside events. Situations, other people. So it just it just yeah it gives it gives you a greater, I think it gives you a greater ability to navigate life. It gives you a greater ability to navigate others. It gives you a greater ability to navigate

yourself. So it's a superpower! [...] I just see you know benefits for me, but

benefits to the world because I then interact with the world and I interact

with other people around me [...] I think it gets more out of it than if I

wasn't doing it and that's like I want to be this more unselfish person,

because I have been quite selfish in my past. I have been quite you know,

yeah I have been and that's not really a place I want to be. Still have to

have self-compassion. Still have to make sure that I'm all right, because if

I'm not then I'm not going to be able to take good things into the world. So

it's the old analogy of the airplane and the the oxygen mask comes on

you've got to put it on yourself first to make sure you can help others (495

-510).

This example shows how, by his use of language, Rupert is drawing from a

meditation discourse. For example, through phrases like 'self-compassion' and

'awareness'. Rupert reflects that he 'gets more out of [life] than if [he] wasn't doing

[meditation]'. This line is quite significant in that I understand Rupert to be describing

how meditation allows him to get more out of life. More specifically, I understood

Rupert sharing how the meditation discourse (and practice) has allowed him to hold

other people's perspectives in mind, to be less selfish. Rupert is also bringing in the

previously mentioned life stage discourse, whereby he reflects that he was

previously a 'selfish' person but that the subject position of the observer allows him

to practice unselfishness and enact more generous behaviours.

3.5.2. Masculine and feminine traits

Max drew from the personality trait discourse to share how he constructs his gender identity.

> Jackson: Bringing it back to you again, you know how. know how do you see yourself as a man? What is it you identify with being about a man?' (226-227).

> Max: [...](B)ecause it still doesn't seem to be very well known that that that we are you know, a mix, you know of male and female characteristics, You know, it's like, and so there are very masculine women and very feminine men. You know, and and whilst being completely comfortable in my manliness you know, I am also aware that I'm very much a probably a quite high on the feminine scale, you know. I actually cry very easily you know. I uh things you know emotional I'm very you know, emotional and and I have strong feminine characteristics' (237-241).

The above excerpt shows how the personality trait discourse of masculinity allows for more feminine behaviours. Max shares that 'it isn't very well known that we are [...] a mix of male and female characteristics'. I understood this as Max sharing the dominance of a traditional masculinity discourse, i.e. that it is unacceptable for men to be feminine. The personality trait discourse allows for Max to have feminine characteristics or traits whilst still identifying as a man, being 'completely comfortable in [his] manliness'. From the subject position of a man with a mix of feminine as well as masculine traits, Max may be more able to enact behaviours to regulate his emotions without his masculinity being threatened.

Winston shared how his meditation practice comes into his life in particularly

challenging times as a children's social worker. This also shows how, in contrast to a

traditional masculinity discourse which encourages the avoidance of vulnerability,

Winston can be aware of and manage his vulnerability through meditation:

I firstly asked Winston the question 'what do you think about the term masculinity?'

(285). I followed this by asking 'how do you find yourself kind of managing difficult or

stressful times?' (306). He answered as follows:

> Winston: [...] So I have to really focus myself and hold myself in that
>
> moment as a professional who is representing a child who is being
>
> problematised, but who is actually really, really vulnerable and at risk. So
>
> so breathing is important, really really important for me when I leave that
>
> meeting. Those sorts of meetings, quite often I just feel really tearful
>
> because I've had to hold back so much emotion in that context and space.
>
> But I have to discharge it somewhere, so I have to find the safe spaces
>
> and quite often, where I am on. We we're pretty near to water and I love
>
> the water so in those instances I just go outside and I'll walk and just
>
> breathe in the air fresh air the clean air. And just breathe out. So it's really
>
> deep breaths in and then out, and I have I'm very mindful of doing that, as
>
> my way of getting through those incredibly challenging situations which
>
> come up often as a children's social worker.' (329 - 334).

Winston draws on the language of meditation discourses which in turn informs his practice of emotional regulation. Though Winston does not seem to be drawing on any gendered practice in this example, the above example followed on from the original question of what he thought about the term masculinity (285). Nonetheless I understood the above excerpt to be exemplifying how a meditation discourse (and practice) is helping him to enact self-regulating behaviours. For example, he firstly describes language to communicate strong emotions, then enacts behaviours to presumably facilitate self-soothing, which he describes as a 'safe space', and practices being 'mindful' when enacting breathing meditations. This is an example of how the subject position of observer allows Winston to manage the demands of working with vulnerable children. This also points to how the subject position of the observer permits Winston to negotiate his personal and professional emotional states and assess where is suitable to manage or communicate these. Considering subjectivity, this example suggests Winston may be able to feel a sense of control (of difficult emotional states and vulnerability), of autonomy in his profession and/or personal life. It seems that the personality trait discourse, was the discourse most closely intertwined with the meditation discourse. The personality trait discourse allows both masculine and feminine traits to exist outside of one's gender. Thus, the traits considered to be feminine according to a traditional masculinity discourse, are encouraged by a personality trait discourse. The language and practice of a meditation discourse then provides further opportunities for meditators to use language and thus practice their emotions more freely or less constrained than when gender identity is constructed according to expectations of traditional masculinity.

3.6. Biological discourse: being 'physically male'

The physical aspect of maleness was the discourse and position that the participants seemed to identify with the most. None of the participants rejected this discourse in constructing their masculinity. The participants drew from a biological discourse in constructing their gender identity—namely, that male gender identity was bound up with the physical experience of being a man, i.e. having a male body. This discourse permitted several subject positions. The subject position of being physically strong and powerful came with the responsibility, for example, to assert dominance over or offer protection for women. Some of the participants acknowledged a moral responsibility here: of being strong and capable of abusing the power of the male body over women, for example.

3.6.1. Capable of violence

Considering Willig's third stage of action orientation: Bill spoke about how, in the wake of Sarah Everard's murder, he recalled being in a concert with many male bodies and empathising with the women there who may have been feeling unsafe around men.

> Jackson: [...] Some of those things that you've mentioned, you know, like being around the a lot bodies [...] Or hearing a lot from the media. And [...] discussions about men in the media and the way that the news has been shared with us and really violent acts that we're hearing about and these like predatorial activities of uh spiking drinks, so these recent things that you've mentioned I wonder, like again bringing it back to you and how you

see yourself [...] How do you see yourself? how do you view yourself responding to this, or what comes up for you?' (214-219).

Bill: 'As men we're all capable of of all of those things that I've mentioned. And that it's it's not actually that far-fetched to think that my life could have gone a different road. And I might have done one of those things. And, obviously I wouldn't condone you know the behavior like that, but there is a sense that, because of that realization. Just the fact that I haven't done those things doesn't mean I'm not responsible, in some way. For the entirety of the male race, as it were, because and I think that's kind of what I felt a little bit in that gig I felt that. I'm one of these, you know, I got you know, a penis and hairy chest and muscles and. You know it's and I have urges I mean, you know, it's it makes you aware that these things are really happening by your own kin really. You don't know, it could have been someone you went to school with. You were in the same classes you know, you know that, listening to the interview of Sarah Evarards killer. You know, it's horrific to think that he he he would he did that. Then you think he he's a he's a he's a human man you know he's like he's he's one of us. It's really scary thing that so I'm not complacent because it scares me to think that. You know, and I think it in a sense, it strengthens my mindfulness practice because I think we have a responsibility not to become like that (223-232).

This excerpt shows how Bill uses his meditation practice as a way of managing the moral implications of also having 'urges' and of being a man with 'a penis and hairy

chest and muscles'. This suggests that whilst the subject position of physically strong man permits a position whereby one can assert dominance over less powerful men or women, in this case Bill is describing an inherent responsibility and moral responsibility to not behave in a way that abuses this power. It appears the meditation discourse permits a recognition of acts of violence being committed by males. From this position may bring subjectivity whereby one is worried or in a state of anxiety of abusing the power of the physical male body. More specifically, Bill shares that the potential subjectivity of committing a similar violent act strengthens his meditation practice. This is in line with the position of non-violence afforded by a meditation discourse. Non-violence is a key tenet of Buddhism. When holding in mind that many secular practices/discourses like Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002), have been derived from Buddhism, this may be a way of understanding how non-violence may be encouraged from Western mindfulness/ meditation discourses.

3.6.2. Being 'physically' male

Mark also drew from a biological discourse in his construction of male gender identity. Interestingly, Mark drew from a biological discourse, namely diagrams of female versus male bodies. From this discourse, the male body is constructed as more muscular and less 'curvy' than that of the female body. This implies how the biological discourse serves to perpetuate ideas or expectations of male and female bodies.

Jackson: What do you think about the term masculinity? (307).

Mark: [...] when you're looking at a diagram and the GP where there's the female body and the male body, the male guys ripped. And the female is a lot more curvy. That's kind of where that's the kind of the starting point, but then, at the same time I realised that that isn't what's necessarily makes the two genders that's not the be all end all that's not where it yeah. (317-319).

Jackson: [...] any other times in your life, where you, you know how you express the masculinity? (502).

Mark: I guess physical activity going to the gym and stuff. That's kind of where I feel probably most masculine. Just because you're pumping weights and stuff. And you've got the testosterone going and everything (508-509).

I understood the second of the above segments as highlighting how Mark identifies with the biological discourse, e.g. that by getting the 'testosterone going' and feeling muscles from lifting weights may be experienced as 'masculine'. This shows the dominance of the biological discourse on gender i.e. with testosterone being produced in the testes, and the muscle mass of men indicating what can be understood as male gender identity. The subject position of physically male permits the practice of strengthening exercises such as lifting weights.

3.6.3. Aging male body

Another theme that arose from several of the participants was how the male body changes through time. This highlighted the interweaving of a biological discourse with that of a life stage discourse. Max for example, spoke about how he still runs each week in his seventies; however, he experiences mixed emotions when seeing a younger, more 'vigorous' man.

Jackson: [...]masculinity is that a term that you identify with? And if it is what is it perhaps you do identify with that? I guess, if you don't what is it that you perhaps reject? (388-389).

Max: Being an older man. In that things get easier. You know, as a young man my God, I had so much energy and anger flowing through me, you know that I had to burn off that I had to deal with you know it's like. And and, and so there's a mixed feeling when when you know because I'm still running I run every every week. You know, and so, when I see a young vigourous man, I have mixed feelings about this, you know part of this is like whoa that is awesome what you know what a powerful you know image, that is, and the other is you know this comes with downsides (401-405).

This shows that the subject position of an older man permits physical activity; however there may be a limitation to what can be achieved physically in comparison to younger men. This allows the practice of an appreciation for the capacities of a younger man, whilst on the other hand exhibiting a kind of sympathy for the decline in one's physical abilities as the male body grows older. The subjectivity of this from

the latter position may be feelings of sadness, nostalgia for previous bodily abilities, and/or disappointment. I also read this as Max describing the complications that come with being a younger man; for example, in addition to the physical benefits it comes with 'so much energy and anger flowing through me'.

Daniel criticised the accepted expectation in society for men to become less fit as they age.

> Jackson: [...] thinking of you, being a man [...] if you're thinking, bringing it back to you again, is there anything that comes up with you know your relationship to your body? (318-320)

> Daniel: [...] this acceptance of being out of shape. Especially as you get older right this isn't, this is a kind of an unspoken thing but it's generally a kind of acceptance that you know go downhill from 40. And all this kind of bullshit and I think that again if you go back to the role models. A lot of times when you see people on TV and you see what the middle age that or wherever he will be he will have a bit of a paunch you know what I mean, will be a bit out of shape. And I think my role models from quite early on, because of martial arts and Kung fu movies, and all this kind of stuff was like Bruce Lee I used to think that's the physique! Because he was just like lean and ripped and like really quick and explosive and so I have certain standards for myself as a man I'm not saying everyone else should do this. And it's just it's interesting to me how many people don't do

you know mean? They just like accept for example being overweight (325

-331).

I understood this to be an opposition to the previous excerpt of Max, whereby Daniel

is drawing from a biological/ life stage discourse to reject societal expectations of

accepting one's body is going 'downhill from forty'. Daniel has 'certain standards for

[himself] as a man', which can be understood as the fifth stage practice of staying

physically fit in order to stave off the decline of his physical body.

3.6.4. Body of colour

Jackson: [...] if you think about what it means to you to be a man or how you

see yourself as a man. What comes to mind?' (106-107).

Winston: Okay, as as a man, I am, I am strong physically strong. I, yeah okay.

There's physical strength and then there's power but power is it different than

(physical) power. It's about being aware of my power as a man, but then

there's also I'm a Black man, so there were other dimensions to that being a

Black man, where there are vulnerabilities for me as a Black man. With my

height, my size all of those sorts of stereotypes that projected onto black men,

so that there's a vulnerability there. (109-112).

In the above excerpt, Winston spoke of how being a Black man, i.e. having a 'Black'

body, can come with added complexities. For example, the subject position of the

powerful/ strong man is available; however, as a Black man one needs to be aware

of the 'vulnerabilities'. I understood this as being linked to what I highlighted in the above section (3.2.2 Feminist discourse: deconstructing what is 'masculine'), that the 'stereotypes that are projected' constrain the enactment of physical power, i.e. the stereotype of Black men being dangerous limit Winston's enactment of masculinity through his body in comparison to the other white participants.

In summary, it seemed that the men in the study identified most with the physical aspect of being a man, i.e. having a male body. None of the participants rejected the physical aspect of being a man. Whilst the participants acknowledged the complexities that come with inhabiting a male body, they nonetheless all used language which seemed to solidify their identification with the physical aspect of their male gender identity. Of interest to the current study is the way a meditation discourse has been drawn upon in congruence with a biological discourse. The position offered by a meditation discourse is that of nonviolence.

3.7. Reflective Summary and Conclusion

The process of carrying out this analysis provided a new challenge, drawing on my own male gender identity as a male meditator, and particularly on my position as a trainee Counselling Psychologist. Supervision helped me to remain focussed on the aims of the study whilst also recognising when I was being pulled into my trainee position. For example, there were instances where I found myself being pulled into formulating the stories of the interviewees. In the early stages of the analysis, for example, my thoughts were being drawn to attachment theory. In the early stages of analysis, I had to remind myself to return to the words in the transcript rather than my memories of the participants, i.e. if a comment stood out to me during the interview. I

feel proud to have completed the analysis, especially in the way Willig's (2022) FDA has allowed me to more clearly understand the different roles I have occupied throughout this research process. It took a significant amount of time to reach the final write-up of this analysis, as I was new to the analytical framework.

The study found that all of the men drew from a traditional masculinity discourse in their constructions of male gender identity. However, most of the interviewees rejected the subject position provided by the traditional masculinity discourse. Instead, participants favoured adopting a queer/feminist discourse construction of male gender identity, which allowed them to also acknowledge the ways in which the construct of gender is changing in society. The men adopted subject positions afforded by queer/ feminist discourses as well as subject positions from a personality trait discourse. Alternative subject positions afforded by the meditation discourse allowed the men to be more aware of and/or engage with their emotions and, for example, enact vulnerability without feeling like their masculinity was threatened. The subject position of 'the observer' allowed by a personality discourse, in congruence with a meditation discourse, justified men to engage with their emotions. Interestingly, most of the men were critical of the traditional masculinity discourse in that they critiqued the limitations/constraints of the subject positions of this discourse. This study also found that the men drew from meditation and emotional discourses in making sense of their male gender identity. The personality trait discourse permitted men to locate themselves along a spectrum of masculine and feminine traits. The two participants that identified as queer most clearly drew from the queer feminist discourse in deconstructing the 'binary code' of masculinity and femininity. They highlighted what I perceive to be an important observation whereby

it seems as though the subject position of fluidity afforded by the queer discourse

provides a more open and wider potential for enacting male gender identity;

however, the dominance of what is considered masculine versus feminine is still

pervasive throughout the participants' constructions. To be more specific, it seems

the participants (and perhaps wider society) has not collectively reached the point

whereby what is considered masculine versus feminine is a neutral concept. Wider

society may not have 'caught up' to the theorists and researchers that aim to

deconstruct gender constructs as a way of bringing about greater equality.

Chapter Four: Discussion

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss my methodological approach, FDA, and consider

what it offered to the study, as well as summarising the findings of my analysis, and

evaluating these findings in the context of existing literature. I will also explore the

implications and applications of the research findings for the field of counselling

psychology. Specifically, I am exploring the potential for the discourses used by men

to talk about their meditation practices to alleviate the strain that gender has placed

upon them.

FDA offered a useful framework to understand male gender identity, providing

a critical lens that reveals the taken-for-granted truths in the dominant discourse,

including those of traditional masculinity. Employing FDA (Willig, 2022) to research

how male meditators construct their gender identity has not yet been carried out, as I did not find another study which has done so in the literature search. The current study analysed how discourses position men and shape their sense of their identity and personal experiences. A benefit of FDA was the opportunity to explore the power relations between different enactments of masculinity of the participants, as well as the relations between them and other men and women. The FDA offered in this study found that male gender identity is a fluid construction which is embedded in psychological, sociological, biological and meditation discourses. How participants identified or rejected the traditional masculinity discourse impacted the subject positions which were available to them. The men in this study drew from meditation discourses in interesting and dynamic ways to resist the constraining subject positions of a traditional masculinity discourse. The participants' shifting between subject positions allowed them to exercise personal agency and reclaim their gender identity, which had implications for their subjectivity. Here, the subjectivity I'm referring to is in relation to gender role strain and pressures to meet expectations of Western masculine ideals (Pleck, 1995), and normative male alexithymia (Levant, 1992. I wanted therefore to understand how, by accessing language from their meditation practice, men were enabled to regulate their emotions and overcome this strain.

4.2. Summary of analysis

The participants' constructions of male gender identity highlighted the complicated interweaving of multiple discourses. As presented in the analysis chapter, I understood the men to be drawing from four overarching discourses. These were: a traditional masculinity discourse (which I conceptualised as a

subtheme of a heteronormative discourse), a feminist/queer discourse, a personality trait discourse, and an embodied/biological discourse. Each of the four discourses afforded men different subject positions, with the men dynamically moving between these subject positions. The current study was interested in how meditation discourse(s) can be drawn on, in conjunction with other discourses of gender identity, to offer subject positions that are less constraining and more open than that of the dominant discourse of traditional masculinity. Whilst the participants drew most consistently from a heteronormative/traditional masculinity discourse in constructing male gender identity, this was also the discourse that they most consistently questioned. The participants instead drew from feminist/queer discourses and personality trait discourses when describing how they identified with their gender identities, as these offered subject positions that allowed more open enactments of gender identity; particularly when it comes to how they engaged with their emotions and expressed their vulnerability.

The personality trait discourse, which allowed men to construct and enact their gender identity along a spectrum of masculine and feminine personality traits, seemed to be the discourse that was most interlinked with a meditation discourse. I traced a subject position labelled 'the observer', as allowed by a personality trait discourse, in congruence with a meditation discourse. The subject position of observer also provided a position of resistance to the social learning of traditional masculinity, particularly, for example, with crying. Multiple participants described themselves by using language afforded by a meditation discourse, like 'consciousness', as well as 'allowing' themselves to exist beyond the binary codes. Overall, it seemed that whilst the meditation discourse permitted traditional masculinity discourses to be present, it also permitted subject positions that were not

as constraining as traditional masculinity. This brought to mind the practice of 'allowing' in meditation and mindfulness whereby one does not try to change their present moment experience. Through a lack of resistance to unpleasant experiences, the intensity of experience is reduced, and it is therefore less restraining (Shapiro, et al., 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). The current study shows that the construct of 'decentring', present in mindfulness practice, can also be located ibn the meditation discourses used in constructing male gender identity (Shaprio, et al., 2006). In that the same way mindfulness meditation allows people the opportunity to surrender to difficult emotions, which leads to a reduction of suffering, meditation is changing the way meditators respond to their discomfort (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). This may also be the case for the way meditation discourses allow male meditators to resist the traditional masculinity discourse.

4.3. Key findings

In the introduction chapter, I stated my own positioning to masculinity/male gender identity; I feel is relevant to reiterate this here. I have been influenced by the construct of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005), namely the role of power in what is deemed hegemonic, as well as the perspective of multiple masculinities. Thus, in this chapter I aim not to highlight an essential masculinity of a male meditator, but rather to indicate how the participants have constructed masculinities according to the different contexts in their lives. I have approached gender from a poststructuralist (Butler, 1990) and de-gendering perspective (Addis, et al., 2010; Silverstein, 2016). I share Courtenay's (2000) view that the men in this study are active agents in constructing and enacting their gender identities, and I refuse to view them as passive victims of socially prescribed roles. In this discussion

chapter, I will present the ways in which the participants constructed male gender identity by highlighting the subject positions they resisted and adopted according to their race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and socioeconomic class. I aim to do this by once more presenting the four discourses, and the subject positions that are offered by these, in highlighting how they align or depart from previous masculinity research.

4.4. Traditional masculinity discourse

4.4.1. Not man enough vs man enough

The analysis highlighted the ways in which heterosexuality versus homosexuality has implications for subjectivity when masculinity is constructed according to the traditional masculinity discourse. The men described instances in their lives in which they experienced gender role strain (Pleck, 1995), which was described as 'not man enough'. The sexual orientation of the participants seemed to foretell how sexuality impacted upon the strain that was placed upon the participants by their gender roles (Pleck, 1995). This distinction between the sexuality of the participants brought to mind the theory of 'masculine capital' (de Visser, et al., 2009; de Visser et al., 2013). Masculine capital (de Visser, et al., 2013) is a transactional system whereby men gain points to their masculinity score, with points being awarded for being masculine and points being deducted for being feminine. Thus, when this theory is applied to the language used by the participants, this might explain how the heterosexual participants did not experience the same gender role strain as that felt by the men who identified as queer. As the traditional masculinity discourse is rooted in heteronormativity, the heterosexual participants were afforded a more privileged position than that of the queer participants. The participants in this study highlight the ways heterosexual men do not need to think about their sexuality

as a cause for concern, because, according to the theory of masculine capital (Visser, et al., 2009; 2013), their sexuality satisfies a basic score of masculinity. The current study highlights the way a traditional masculinity discourse has significantly different implications for subjectivity based on one's sexuality. This supports research which suggests that the LGBTQI+ community are at higher risk for mental health and suicide than cisgendered heterosexual peers (Williams, et al., 2021), which can potentially be explained by the subject positions offered by traditional masculinity and heteronormativity.

4.4.2. Provider and stabiliser positions

The dominance of the traditional masculinity discourse was exemplified in the adoption of the subject positions of provider and stabiliser. Inherent in these positions is the upholding of unequal distributions of power between the men and other men and women in their lives. I see these positions as upholding notions of systemic patriarchy (Forbes, 2022), and they can thus be understood to be halting progress towards a more equal society that can be achieved through the deconstruction of gender (Deutsch, 2007; Silverstein, 2016).

I understood the provider position as being similar to that of the traditionally masculine role of the 'breadwinner' in relationships. On the one hand, the provider position may bring about the subjectivity associated with feelings of pride for providing for one's family/significant others. On the other hand, the provider was also a position from which participants described feelings of pressure and anxiety, whereby they are expected to provide for their partners, thus highlighting another example of gender role strain (Pleck, 1995). This position was adopted by both the heterosexual and queer participants, suggesting the dominance of the traditional

masculinity discourse. The provider position implies that it may legitimise behaviour whereby because a man is a provider he is allowed to engage in selfish behaviours that disadvantage the people in his life that are the recipients of financial provision. The provider was adopted in intimate relationships, parental relationships, as well as in sibling and/or familial relationships.

Another subject position offered by the traditional masculinity discourse I coined the 'stabiliser'. This echoes the traditional masculine positioning of men as more logical and less emotional, with women being positioned as the opposite and thus in need of support. Across cultures, gender stereotypes of emotionality frame women as more emotional than men (Brody, & Hall, 2000). This position was only adopted by the heterosexual participants, which may suggest that the stabiliser position was more likely to be adopted in heteronormative relationships. Some of the men in the current study used language from meditation discourses that enabled behaviours to support their partners through their emotional distress. The stabiliser positions women as more emotional—and thus reliant—on men to support them through their distress. Despite this inequality with respect to emotionality between the sexes in this construction of male gender identity, this also represents a generational shift in society, whereby men are more willing to emotionally engage in their relationships. This is similar to the findings of McQueen (2017), who found that whilst men were willing to engage in emotions with their partners, they did not wish to be 'too emotional'.

4.5. Personality trait discourse

4.5.1. Emotionally repressive vs emotionally expressive

The first chapter of this thesis discussed the link between adhering to traditional masculine norms and emotional repression, as informed by the work of Robertson, et al. (2015), highlighting the potential negative health consequences that this adherence has for men (Robertson, et al., 2015; Sloan, et al., 2010). The relationship between meditation discourses and their implications for the construction and enactment of male gender identity was of significant interest to me, and thus a motivation for carrying out the present study. In this study, men constructed masculinity as a lack of emotional engagement and an expectation to suppress emotions. However, all the participants resisted the emotionally repressive subject position of a traditional masculinity discourse. Instead, they drew from personality trait, feminist/queer, life stage and meditation discourses to justify their engagement with their own emotions. The participants' language suggested a complicated interweaving of the meditation discourse with personality trait and queer discourses of gender identity.

The way in which the men constructed the expectation to be emotionally repressive was in line with a gendered social learning of masculine norms (Levant, & Richmond, 2016). The men in the study used language to describe how they learnt to be expected to repress. The men were critical of how adhering to this norm has implications not only for themselves but also for the people in their life. By instead adopting the subject position of the observer, as allowed by both the personality trait discourse as well as that of the feminist/queer discourse, the men justified an engagement with their emotions. In comparison to the previous discursive work of Wetherell and Edley (1999), the men in this study also seemed to adopt what they termed the 'rebellious' position. The observer subject position of this study can be understood as being similar to the rebellious position (Wetherell, & Edley, 1999)

insofar as the participants were creating a distance between their own gender

identity and the expectations of traditional masculinity. The current study adds to this

line of research, which aims to understand how men are moving away from a

'macho' masculinity. The participants aknowledged that male vulnerability was not a

threat to their gender identity. This had implications for the way the men navigated

the relationships in their lives with partners, colleagues and children. The men

described being able to better support and understand important people in their lives

by adopting the observer subject position. One participant used the analogy of the

oxygen mask on a plane: in order to better support others, one must first put on

one's own mask. The participants of this study used language from a meditation

discourse in conjunction with a personality trait discourse to describe the regulation

of their emotions, which had the secondary benefit of them describing their ability to

understand the emotions of others and thus manage the relationships in their lives.

The participants, and my analysis of what they said, offer what I understood to

be a new addition to the relationship between traditional masculinity's emotional

repression and the role of a meditation discourse. This finding of male meditators

engaging with their emotions and using language that is linked to 'emotional

intelligence' aligns with the previous research that considered meditation as a way

for men to develop 'emotional intelligence' (Lomas, et. al.,2014a). Recent discursive

work by McQueen (2017) investigated men's affect in intimate relationships

according to two competing discourses: 'it's good to talk' versus 'boys don't cry'. The

present study found that men were willing to engage with their emotions in their

intimate relationships as well as in other relationships, such as with their children,

like the findings of McQueen (2017). Overall, the meditators in this study rejected the

emotionally repressive position, instead favouring an engagement with their

emotions as supported by both personality trait discourses and meditation

discourses.

4.5.2. The 'observer' position

The discourse most frequently used by the participants in constructing their

own gender identity was the personality trait discourse. The present study found that

male meditators most commonly constructed male gender identity as being made up

of both feminine and masculine 'traits' (Bem, 1993). Overall, this seems to be in line

with the general shift in Western society to more open and accepting of the

presentation of multiple identity. The male gender identity frequently expressed by

the men in the current study aligned with more contemporary theories of masculinity,

such as inclusive masculinity theory (Anderson, et al., 2018; 2009), as well as that of

hybrid masculinity (Bridges, & Pascoe, 2014). The current study adds new findings

to the field of critical studies of masculinity by suggesting the ways in which

meditation discourses provide subject positions, like the 'observer', whereby men

can draw on discourses to non-judgmentally consider how they identify along a

spectrum of masculine versus feminine personality traits. Whilst most of the

participants acknowledged the subject position of fluidity, a result of more queer

representation in societal discourses (Silverstein, 2016), none of the participants

identified as non-binary or transgender.

4.6. Feminist/queer discourse

4.6.1. Fluidity in male gender identity

All of the participants acknowledged a shift in the ways in which society is

constructing gender in a way that is becoming more 'fluid'. I posit that this reflects

feminist and queer discourses present in wider society, as reflected by policies such as the Equality Act (2010), or through the greater representation of transgender men in society (Silverstein, 2016), as well as can be observed more recently in Scotland's move to amend the Gender Recognition Act (2004). Though the subject position of fluidity was presented in the feminist/queer discourse, I understood this as a position existing in both the feminist/queer discourse as well as the personality trait discourse.

The subject position of fluidity offers a wide range of ways-of-being (Willig, 2022) across multiple contexts, such as in the workplace, schools, intimate relationships, as well as in the relationships the participants had with their own gender identities. The examples they gave included: being more comfortable with parts of their identity that were not considered masculine, as expressed in their interests, such as in drama, acting or stand-up comedy. The participants also acknowledged how the fluidity in gender identity was inherently linked to equality across other measures of intersectionality, like ethnicity, ableism, sexuality. The majority of the participants described a favourable perspective towards more inclusivity and fluidity; however, the change in the construct of gender was also met with some resistance.

I perceived the way the meditation discourse, and language describing the practice of meditation, in conjunction with a feminist/queer discourse as offering a fluid subject position which can exist beyond binary conceptions of gender. In describing how men who meditate gain access to language (and practices) that provide a position beyond the arguably limiting positions of the binary codes of gender, I believe this to be a new addition to research in masculinity. The participants' acceptance of more fluidity in gender, as offered through feminist/queer

and personality trait discourses, reflected a consensus towards the theory of inclusive masculinity (Anderson, et al., 2014; Anderson, 2009). Similarly to the personality trait discourse, the fluidity position offered more open ways of enacting male gender identity.

4.6.2. Deconstructing position

All the participants adopted positions from the personality trait discourse, constructing masculinity as distinct from gender. The men endorsed feminine traits of their own gender identity, such as engaging with their emotions. However, I perceived only the two queer participants to have access to language that challenges what is constituted as masculine versus feminine. I understood these two participants to be perpetuating language that is akin to a deconstruction of male gender identity (Deutsch, 2007; Silverstein, 2016). These men used language to critique the criteria of masculine and feminine categories. I suggest that, perhaps due to these men occupying marginalised gender identities because of their sexuality, they described experiences of gender role strain (Pleck, 1995). From this marginalised position, these men may adopt feminist/queer discourses in challenging the status quo of binary categories. In deconstructing the gender binary, and the criteria of these categories, I understood the men as seeking to move away from the constrains of traditional masculinity and support equality across gender presentations. Rather than expressing feelings of shame sometimes associated with being a gay man within a traditional construction of gender, these men drew from queer discourses to express how they experience pride in their identity and how it thus enables behaviours that helps them support their partners.

Interestingly, it seemed that the meditation discourse permitted a social construction of gender identity which can let go of self-attachment, which allows positions beyond the binary codes. I perceived this to add to the contemporary research debates in the way meditation discourses and practices can move towards a deconstruction of gender, which ultimately benefits both men and women in society and challenges systemic patriarchy. This will impact society on two levels: at the micro level of the individual, insofar as it enables more free and open enactments of behaviour that is traditionally associated with gender identity; and at the macro level of society, whereby society can move towards an equal relationship between men, women, and nonbinary/trans people.

4.6.3. Intersectional positions

From a social constructionist approach, and holding in mind intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; 2023), the construction of gender can't be divorced from race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class (Frosh, et al., 2002; Froyum, 2007). The analysis presented an example of the way social class and/or access to financial means provides the context in which gender identity is enacted. When operating from a position of access to financial means, this provides a position whereby a—in one instance, Black—man can assert himself in social interactions without it being considered *'intimidating'.* On the other hand, having access to a higher salary and qualifications through education can create a distance between marginalised communities of men. These show the complex ways in which hegemonic masculinity can act within these communities (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005). The lens of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) helps to explore how the different intersections

that construct, as well as moderate, masculinity between men can be better understood.

It was also highlighted how a meditation discourse can provide a subject position to go beyond the limiting subject position of a Black man from a traditional masculinity discourse. This aligns with previous literature in the way that meditation provides a way to de-centre (Shaprio et al., 2006) subjects from difficult experiences. The current study posits that this may be possible with the combination of meditation discourses and practices (Shapiro, et al., 2006).

4.7. Embodied/ biological discourse

4.7.1. Physically male

The biological discourse, or the physical aspect of gender identity, was the discourse least resisted by the participants. It is important to note that none of the participants identified as transgender, nor non-binary. This suggests that because the eight participants were cis-gendered, they did not describe any experiences that could be likened to the discomfort with one's body as is typically experienced with gender dysphoria (APA, 2013). It is important to note here that, as a counselling psychologist, and while respecting the field's humanistic tradition, I struggle with the implications of psychiatric diagnoses. However, I am using gender dysphoria to highlight my respect for the experience of individuals who do not feel comfortable with their assigned body and gender.

The participants described feeling comfortable in their bodies, and that the physical aspect of maleness was an integral part of their overall gender identity. The participants described their physical bodies, and the physical experiences of being 'male', as inherently linked to their masculinity. The participants' language indicated a

priority of their physicality. More specifically, some stressed the importance of being in lean muscular shape. This is the dominant Western ideal (Grogan, 2017), and participants also described what I understood to be what Watson (2000) is describing as 'pragmatic embodiment'. The male body was also responsible for supporting different types of meditation, such as praying with beads, running, engaging in exercise and martial arts.

The participants' constructions of the physical aspect of gender identity were in line with previous research suggesting that, in terms of body image, the ideal was lean and muscular (Grogan, 2017). Unsurprisingly, a life stage discourse was weaved into the physical aspect of gender identity. The ageing male body was met with both acceptance and resistance by several participants. The resistance of the ageing body and/or the acceptance of men to becoming overweight as they age, alongside sedentary lifestyles, sits with previous research positing societal disdain for overweight bodies (Monaghan, 2008).

Another interesting finding was the ways in which meditation discourse opposes the aggression and violence of traditional masculinity. Whereas the Buddhist traditions from which secular meditation practices have been derived discourages violence, aggression and/or violence are behaviours that are legitimised by adhering to traditional masculinity. A meditation discourse therefore has implications for the way men express their masculinity in how they use their bodies. I argue that the observer subject position also allowed for several participants to acknowledge a moral responsibility, insofar as men tend to have more muscles and thus physical power than women and children, and they therefore must ensure this power is not abused or used to harm others.

4.7.2. Bodies of colour

The participants of colour drew reference to their ethnicity when describing their physicality. These examples highlighted how race and ethnicity are socially constructed (Burr, 2015), as well as the implications this has for understanding marginalised masculinities. On the other hand, only one of the participants acknowledged the privilege they occupied through their whiteness. The participant that referenced their privilege of whiteness also explicitly stated that I, as the white researcher, was also occupying a position of privilege. This example pointed to the co-constructive nature of the research data in this study, reminding me that the participants were performing their masculinity in a certain way because I myself am a white man (Sallee, & Harris, 2011). The participants described challenges associated with inhabiting bodies of colour. These included how the black body can be sexualised and desired, and how a body of colour can encourage racist stereotypes from other ethnicities in society.

4.8. Contextualising the participants constructions

Theories such as hybrid masculinity (Bridges, & Pascoe, 2014) and that of inclusive masculinity (Anderson, 2009) seek to track the emergence and consequences of transformations in masculinity in the twenty-first century. The constructions of male gender identity by the male meditators of this study reflected a societal shift towards more equality, diversity and inclusion. The participants acceptance of fluidity in gender, as offered through feminist/queer and personality trait discourses, reflected a consensus towards inclusive masculinity (Anderson, et al., 2014; Anderson et al., 2009). These fluid- and personality trait- male gender

identity constructions of the participants may in part be explained by the key tenet of homohysteria, as outlined by the theory of inclusive masculinity (IMT).

Homohysteria refers to the fear of being perceived as gay (Anderson, et al., 2014). Anderson outlines conditions to classify whether a culture is homohysteric and argues that the driver for decreasing homohysteria in these cultures is by improving attitudes towards homosexuality in society (Anderson, et al., 2014). As outlined in the introductory chapter, there have been shifts in the cultural landscape of the UK that have been echoed by the constructions of male gender identity, as located in the talk of the current study's participants. These are, but not limited to: changes in heterosexual families, with women in the workplace, stay-at-home fathers and lesbi-gay families; gay men and women entering the military; the increased visibility of transgender individuals in society (Silverstein, 2016); and policies such as the Equality Act (2010).

The participants favoured gender identity constructions that could be understood as IMT (Anderson, et al., 2014). The participants were drawing from what I considered to be more liberal constructions of masculinity, as reflected by the Western society of the UK.

The current study supported the theory of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005), in that the participants described multiple masculinities which were enacted according to their context. For example, some of the participants described different enactments of masculinity between their workplace versus personal relationships. The theory of hybrid masculinity (Bridges, & Pascoe, 2014) was helpful in understanding some of these different enactments of masculinity according to context. For example, Hybrid masculinities (Bridges, & Pascoe, 2014) refers to the selective incorporation of elements of identity that tend to be associated

with marginalised masculinities and femininities into privileged mens' enactments of gender identity (Arxer, 2011; Demetriou, 2001). A construction of masculinity in the workplace as reflective of a shift in society whereby *'softer'* or more stereotypically *'feminine'* skills are valued. An argument of Bridges & Pascoe (2014) is that, whilst on the surface hybrid masculinities suggest a move towards more equality, it also suggests male privilege and power remain unquestioned, and that these 'softer' forms of masculinity do not inherently benefit women (Donovan, 1998). Thus, in the business context, traditional forms of masculinity may still be valued, such as being tough, whereas in personal relationships the men are more likely to construct their gender identity in a way similar to that of IMT.

4.9. Positioning the work in relation to existing knowledge

The current study found that a meditation discourse (alongside feminist/queer and personality trait discourses) offered male meditators alternative means of constructing and enacting their gender identity. This section aims to explore how and when the meditation discourse was drawn on by the participants, and how this influenced their constructions of gender identity. I argue that some of the stress men talk about experiencing to act in gender-conforming ways, as explained by the gender role strain paradigm (Pleck, 1995), may be ameliorated by the practices associated with meditation, or by drawing from a meditation discourse.

As outlined in the first chapter, it is well documented that adhering to traditional masculinity may have negative health consequences for men. However, men are not passive recipients of socially prescribed roles, and they can thus enact more health-conducive masculinities (Lomas, et al., 2014; 2012; Sloan, et al., 2010).

This study adds to the literature that has explored benefits meditation can have for men (Lomas, et al., 2016; 2014a; 2014b; 2012). This study has aimed to address a gap in the research of critical studies of men and masculinity, in exploring how male meditators draw from multiple discourses in constructing and enacting their gender identity.

The previous mixed-methods study of Lomas et al., (2014a), showed through both quantitative cognitive assessments of attention, as well as qualitative narrative interviews, meditation improved emotional intelligence in accordance with Mayer and Salovey's (1997) hierarchical model of emotional intelligence. Interestingly, from the qualitative data (Lomas et al., 2014a), men described previously learning to suppress or distract themselves from difficult feelings (e.g. by using alcohol). However, through meditation the men described learning to observe their internal world and ameliorating the dysfunctional patterns of emotional management, which the authors argue are linked to Addis' (2008) frameworks in understanding male patterns of mental health distress. Another strand of Lomas et al.'s (2012) research suggested that men used more gender-conforming ways to manage their distress, such as drugs, alcohol or work, overexercising, prior to their engagement with meditation. The participants of the present study echoed this finding in that they described how, before they started meditating, they tried to manage their distress through overexercising, drugs and alcohol, or by abusing gender roles by relying on partners for childcare. The meditation discourse was present in better managing their emotions and communication with others in other contexts, such as intimate partner relationships, the workplace, as well as to their relationship with their own gender identity.

This study adds to previous research which suggests meditation provides a way for men to non-judgmentally engage with their emotions (Lomas, et al., 2016; 2014a; 2014b; 2012), in doing so they are constructing themselves as emotional beings, as allowed by alternative discourses to that of traditional masculinity. However, this study adds to research on masculinity and meditation by offering a FDA of the different discourses from which male meditators drew in constructing their gender identity. The meditators in this study use language to suggest that emotionality is an important part of their gender identity. The practice of meditation, and the discourses that can be drawn from these practices, encourage an intentional, non-judgmental practice of moment-to-moment awareness, as described by Kabat-Zinn (2013).

The engagement with emotions as constructed through the talk of the meditators in this study, which may be explained by the mechanisms of change in third-wave behavioural therapies, such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (Blackledge, & Hayes, 2001). ACT helps to understand or draw the link between language and experiential avoidance. The language and performativity (Butler, 1990) of traditional masculinity, such as emotional repression, is arguably socially learned by men (Addis, et al., 2016). This can lead to the experiential avoidance of emotions. This has been theorized as normative male alexithymia (Levant, 1998). The findings of the current study suggests that, through the continued practice of meditation, men are consciously engaging with their emotions, and a meditation discourse allows them to construct different ways of thinking, doing, and feeling their gender identity. Shapiro et al., (2006), have suggested the mechanism of change in mindfulness is that of 'reperceiving'. They argue that intentionally attending to experience with openness and a nonjudgmental attitude

can lead to a significant shift in one's perspective, which they term 'reperceiving' (Shapiro et. al., 2006). The current study suggests that reperceiving (Shapiro et al., 2006) can also be applied to male meditators' resistance of a traditional masculinity discourse in terms of the ways of thinking, feeling, and doing emotions.

4.9.1. ACT theories of therapeutic change

The ACT model focusses on six processes that relate to commitment to behavioral change processes as well as to mindfulness and acceptance processes. These six processes are acceptance, defusion, being present, noticing self, committed action, and values (Hayes, Pistorello, & Levin, 2012). The processes that are facilitated by mindfulness and acceptance processes, and which are of relevance to understanding the way the male meditators moved dynamically between subject positions are: acceptance, noticing self, and being-present (Hayes, et al., 2012). In ACT, it is suggested that when people are talking about themselves they employ a conceptualized self, i.e. their self-narrative. Thus, events that threaten or contradict the conceptualized self can evoke strong emotions which in turn leads to experiential avoidance, which is due to the need for consistency with the person's self-narrative (Mendolia, & Baker, 2008). Through mindfulness skills, ACT encourages the development of a 'noticing self'. This is beneficial because the cognitive processes that give rise to the noticing self also lead to better understanding the perspectives of others (McHugh, et. al, 2004), caring for others (Villatte, et. al, 2008), and, therefore, functioning socially (Brune, 2005). Another important feature of the 'noticing self' is that it provides a secure psychological place for managing painful thoughts or emotions (Hayes, 1984). The 'observer' subject position outlined in this study seems

to align with the practice of a 'noticing self', as explained by ACT (Hayes, et. al, 2012).

All the ACT core processes listed above are linked to 'present moment awareness' (Sandoz, 2011). The six core processes in ACT work together to contribute to psychological flexibility. Hayes et. al, (2012) have defined psychological flexibility as 'contacting the present moment as a conscious human being, fully and without defense, as it is and not as what is says it is, and persisting or changing in behaviour in the service of one's chosen values' (p985). The way men in the current study were able to resist the emotionally repressive subject position of a traditional masculinity may in part be explained by their psychological flexibility, as explained by ACT (Hayes, et al., 2012). The meditation discourse in congruence with the feminist/ queer and personality trait discourses offers more open ways for men to engage with their emotions.

The ways in which the men in the present study construct their masculinity aligns with broader trends in developed western economies toward the acceptance of marginalized masculinitiesas explained by the theory of inclusive masculinity theory (Anderson, et al., 2014; Anderson, 2009). The male meditators in this study have added to the literature in suggesting meditation discourse, and meditation as a practice, enables men to increase their psychological flexibility (Hayes, et. al., 2012), which, taken together with the discourses available to them, shows how they can move dynamically between subject positions that allow more open and less limiting constructions and enactments of masculinity. This has implications for the people in these men's lives, such as their intimate partners, colleagues and children, as well as for their relationship to themselves.

4.10. Applications & implications

It has been recommended for mental health provision in the UK to be more male friendly (Robertson, et al., 2015; Gough, 2018). One factor that may influence men's reluctance to seek help through mental health services may be because the significant majority of therapists and psychologists are female (Morison, et. al, 2014). Robertson et. al., (2015) suggested that programmes should take a gender-based approach to working with men, because of the strong adherence to traditional masculinity (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005), which in turn is associated with poorer mental health help seeking and higher levels of mental health stigma; another recommendation of their report was to involve men in action-based approaches. Meditation is well positioned, therefore, in that is can be considered action-based.

The current study has implications for the provision of mental health services in the UK. Holding in mind the current state of the NHS, due in part to the austerity of the Cameron government, particularly the long waiting lists (Cummins, 2018). With many NHS trust operating on reduced budgets, due to austerity, there is a need for creative and innovative ways of reaching men that are experiencing mental health distress. The current study has added to research suggesting the way traditional masculinity has the potential to negatively impact health outcomes (Robertson et. al, 2014; Sloan, et. al., 2010; Courtenay, 2000). This study adds to the literature in showcasing how male meditators can engage with their emotions and self-regulate, as explained by the mechanisms of change in mindfulness (Shapiro, et. al, 2006).

The current study has contributed to this literature by presenting some of the discourses that men draw from in constructing their gender identity, as well as showing the ways in which a meditation discourse can offer subject positions that are more open and less restraining than a traditional masculinity discourse. The

implications of this finding, when taken along with the current state of the mental

health services in the UK, suggests that meditation is a worthwhile practice that

allows men to better self-regulate their emotions (Lomas, et. al, 2016; 2014a; 2014b;

Shapiro, et. al, 2006). Another benefit is that meditation can be applied in many

settings and in many different ways; taken together this adds to the argument for

meditation as an important alternative to talking therapies for men (Walsh, & Shapiro,

2006). With the recommendation of gender-specific mental health programmes

(Robertson, et al., 2014), another benefit of recommending meditation to men is that

men can 'do' meditation—i.e. it is an active process. Meditation may be more

accessible to men than seeking support for emotions through social relationships. I

present some applications for practice in the sections below.

4.10.1. Partnership working

A suggestion of the current study would be for more partnership working

(Glasby, & Dickinson, 2014). As mental health has become more of a political priority,

community mental health services, which previously reflected more bottom-up

processes, have become more hierarchical (Glasby, & Dickinson, 2014). Instead,

rather than GPs referring men to community mental health teams with long waiting

lists and mostly female therapists, new partnership links may be formed between GP

practices and meditation centres. Partnership working would be a way for men to

receive support that is gender focussed (Robertson, et al., 2015), i.e. it considers the

ways hegemonic masculinities (Connell, & Messeschmidt, 2005) impact the health

seeking behaviours of men. For some men, perhaps a referral or signposting by a

GP to a meditation group may be a more likely way to ensure men seek relevant

support. Meditation can also be recommended as a bolt-on service whilst men

engage with primary or secondary care services.

4.10.2. Communities of practice

Men being involved in meditation groups, or communities of practice

(CoP)(Lave, & Wenger, 1991), may also be a counter to the neoliberal notion of well-

being, whereby responsibility is placed on the individual. The philosophical roots of

meditation promote connectedness to others as explained by the concept of Metta,

or 'loving-kindness' (Salzberg, 2011). Referral to meditation groups may have a two-

fold benefit for men in learning a new skill to help them become more aware of their

emotions, increasing their emotional intelligence (Lomas, et. al., 2014a), as well

enabling men to form new relationships with other men that may encourage positive

hegemonic masculinities in communities of practice, as suggested by Lomas, et. al,

(2016).

Meditation groups and retreats satisfy Wenger's (1998) three criteria for CoP:

mutual interaction of members, jointly negotiated enterprise and, importantly for the

current study, common discourses and behaviours. Adopting a new language around

emotionality, the meditation discourse allows new stylized ways of enacting gender

(Butler, 1990). Of the men that have been to meditation retreats, they reflected on

the benefit of going to male only retreats. On the one hand, this served as a way to

reduce distractions, e.g. interest in women. On the other hand, they reflected on the

ways that being with *'like-minded men'* and *'looking out for each other' in a 'gentle*

energy'. One participant spoke of how he didn't think it was possible for this kind of

atmosphere in a group of men. I understood these examples regarding male only

retreats as quite a powerful example of how meditation settings can promote

communities of practice (Lave, & Wenger, 1991) that encourage more 'gentle' and open ways of enacting gender identity (Lomas, et. al, 2016).

The contributions of the participants add to the field of masculinity by highlighting how meditation discourses can impact men's engagement with emotions, as well as how they interact with other men. This warrants further study in understanding how meditation discourses position the people and partners in the lives of male meditators. This can contribute to the further deconstruction of masculinity and progress towards equality in society (Silverstein, 2016; Deutsch, 2007). Men may also be drawn to meditation because it offers CoP, namely that it is a shared sense of 'doing' (West & Zimmerman, 1987) more health-conducive masculinites (Lomas, et al., 2016). More specifically, from a sociological perspective, the relationships formed at meditation centres/groups may offer men ways to regulate their emotions through supportive relationships, rather than done solely on their own.

4.10.3. Therapeutic relationship

Of importance to the field of counselling psychology, and holding in mind the common factors debate, the therapeutic relationship is considered the vehicle for change in improving a client's overall well-being (Mulder, et al., 2017; Norcross, 2011; Asay, & Lambert, 1999). Considering the urgent need to support men with their mental distress, especially given the current suicide rates (ONS, 2021; 2019), the present study points to the importance for counselling psychologists to attempt to understand the ways masculinities can be impacting men's distress, as well as ways masculinities can be changed and thus lead to more health-conducive outcomes. Counselling psychology is well positioned, with the aspects of 'scientist practitioner'

and 'reflective practitioner' (Larsson et. al, 2012), to bridge the gap between research and practice.

Another consideration to mention is the field's move in working towards equality and inclusion (EDI). In terms of privilege, heterosexual white men occupy privileged positions in society. When thinking about diversity and difference, the current study calls on counselling psychologists to consider how difficulties with male gender identity can be considered a difference in its own right. Despite acknowledging that men occupy a privileged social positioning in comparison to marginalised communities, this study nonetheless calls for more attention to be paid to the ways that adhering to traditional masculinity impacts upon men's subjectivity, as well as the effect this has on their respective help-seeking behaviours. There can be development in the field in understanding how gender role strain (Pleck, 1995), and the difficulty often had with the language of emotionality, can be considered a difference. Better understanding men's gender identities allows counselling psychologists to better focus on men's distress, as well as the contexts (Johnstone, et al., 2018) in which masculinities are being constructed and enacted. The current study argues that an understanding of male gender identity will serve to strengthen therapeutic relationships (Johnstone, et al., 2018).

4.10.4. Power Threat Meaning Framework

I hope that the results of this study will help inform CPs' therapeutic practice with male and female clients. In the field there has been increasing support for psychotherapeutic therapies that discourage pathological talk, including humanistic and pluralistic therapies (Cooper, & McLeod, 2007). The Power Threat Meaning Framework (PTMF) is a conceptually an alternative to the dominant psychiatric

model. The PTMF moves away from psychiatric constructions to consider the construction of 'troubling behaviour' (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018). The PTMF framework adopts a bio-psycho-social lens which recognises the role of social and cultural factors as an alternative to the diagnostic framework (Johnstone et al., 2018). An implication for the current study is for CPs to consider how masculinity is constructed in different settings, and how the PTMF may be used as a framework to understand the way men's constructions of masculinity may lead to distress across contexts. The PTMF offers men seeking help to understand their difficulties by looking at them through a multi-dimensional lens (Boyle, 2022). The role of power in the PTMF is not simply one element of the framework; rather it is a fundamental part of all of its aspects. The power aspect of the model refers to several different kinds of power: biological or embodied power, coercive power, legal power, economic and material power, interpersonal power, social/cultural capital, ideological power (Boyle, 2022). The PTMF offers CPs working with men a way of incorporating an analysis of power, and allows them to more thoroughly consider how this applies to masculinities. The current study supports the notion that male gender identity can't be divorced from other intersecting identities, while also taking into account how these identities differ across contexts (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005). Thus, the PTMF is well positioned to aid CPs in understanding the different presentations and enactments of masculinity amongst their clients.

4.11. Strengths, limitations and future research

It is important to mention that there are many forms of meditation practices. I have tried to outline the different practices of the participants in the methodology chapter. I appreciate that meditation encompasses a wide spectrum of approaches

and practices, with implications for influencing the mental health of men. In the current study, the participants practice both informal and formal meditation practices, seated as well as moving meditations, from different schools of thought including Buddhist and westernised/ secular practices.

Despite my investment in the perspective of meditative practices offering tools for men to enact more health conducive behaviours and potentially resist unhelpful masculinity norms, I acknowledge that meditation does not prevent men from continuing to enact hegemonic masculinity (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005). Namely, meditation practices can be used in ways to perpetuate arguably unhelpful masculine norms. For example, marginalized men (e.g. men identifying as queer) can still face discrimination from other men that meditate. Thus, on the one hand meditation can indeed be helpful in supporting men to regulate their emotions which supports their mental health, they can still on the other hand enact unhelpful masculine norms to others as well as themselves.

A limitation is that FDA struggles to account for individual differences (Willig, 2022). The extent to which subjectivity can be theorised on the basis of discourse alone might be called in to question. Such an approach therefore runs the risk of the researcher perpetuating a generalising construction of male gender identity. Another limitation is that most of the men that took part in the study were heterosexual, white and middle class. The demographics of the participants suggest a somewhat limited perspective of constructions of masculinity. Further research could aim to recruit men from different ethnic minorities and varying socioeconomic backgrounds to better understand different presentations of masculinity and the ways a meditation discourse may be used. Thus, there is an ethical need for more minority and marginalised men's constructions of gender identity to be researched, including trans

men. This would encapsulate the field of counselling psychology's commitment to social justice in research, and it would highlight the ways power produces intersectional experiences (Nkansa-Dwamena, 2017).

A potential limitation of this study that the very act of choosing to research masculinity may be unintentionally perpetuating the status quo of systemic patriarchy. Instead, Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2012) have called for a post-masculinity approach to gender. They argue that a theoretical distance between the normative categories or characteristics (masculinity/ feminity, masculine/ feminine) and gender may produce alternative ways of thinking (Haywood, & Mac an Ghaill, 2012); though in their case this was for boys. Nonetheless I acknowledge this is also relevant for the current study. This sentiment was described by Butler (2004):

> a restrictive discourse on gender that insists on the binary of man and woman as the exclusive way to understand the gender field performs a regulatory operation of power that naturalizes the hegemonic instance and forecloses that thinkability of its disruption. (p. 43)

Holding this in mind, the current study may not have done enough to work towards a de-gendering perspective (Deutsch, 2007).

If I was to do the study again, there are a few things I would have done differently. Whilst semi-structured interviews are an acceptable method in collecting data for FDA (Willig, 2022), interviews have also been criticised for not representing the kind of talk that occurs naturally in a conversation (Speer, 2007). Considering this, perhaps also including a focus group alongside the individual semi-structured interviews may have provided a space to speak about masculinity. A focus group may have addressed the power imbalance between participant and researcher, which I often experienced during the interview and write up process. During the

development phase of this study, I considered carrying out a narrative analysis. The aim was to account for the ways that men turned to meditation, which was influenced by the previous research of Lomas et. al, (2012). However, because I was drawn to a social constructionist understanding of gender, and was particularly interested in masculinity, the FDA approach seemed more suitable to account for the power dynamics inherent in dominant constructions in masculinity (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005).

A strength of the current study is that it is the first study of which I am aware that has employed FDA to investigate what discourses male meditators are drawing from in constructing their male gender identity. It is my view that, as I identify as a man myself, this allowed the men to speak openly to me about how they themselves identified as men. The men may have performed their masculinity during the interviews differently had I been a woman (Sallee, & Harris, 2011). One of the participants explicitly shared he was pleased I was a man, as, when it came to speaking about the fluidity of the construct of gender, and gender relations between men and women, he stated he would not feel as comfortable sharing his perspective with a female interviewer or researcher. Approaching gender from a social constructionist position (Burr, 2015), informed by the theory of hegemonic masculinity (Connnell, & Messerschmidt, 2005), allowed the participants constructions of masculinity to be understood across contexts and relationships.

Future research could pay specific attention to the different contexts in which male meditators enact their masculinity. For example, research could compare and contrast the experiences of male meditators who practice at meditation centres with those of male meditators that are mostly self-guided. The current study found that the men who had more formal training in meditation were more closely aligned to the

notion of meditation being an act to bring about more harmony in social

relationships, rather than meditation being used to self-regulate in the style of

'mcmindfulness' (Forbes, 2022).

Further research could also adopt a micro discursive psychology approach to

the analysis (Wiggins, 2017). This would allow a closer examination of how

masculinity is constructed in more specific contexts and relationships. This could

provide a furthering of the current study by considering how men draw on meditation

practices to manage stake in relationships and situations e.g. enacting hegemonic

masculinity with the help of meditative practices. For example, in the current study,

one of the participants spoke about how meditation allowed him to regulate his

emotions whilst supporting the emotional ups and downs of his female partner. This

is an example of how whilst meditation may be helpful for him, it is still legitimising

the discourse of men being more 'stoic' that women.

Further qualitative research can build on this research by more closely

examining the different contexts that meditation discourses are drawn on by men to

facilitate more health-conducive enactments of masculinity. Another area for further

research would be to explore how male meditators and/or meditation discourses can

serve to deconstruct notions of gender, and the reverberations this may have in

moving towards a more equal society.

4.12. Epistemological reflexivity

Discourse analytic studies seek to analyse the way discourses shape an

individual's understanding of the world, with specific focus on social and political

relationships (Lester, & O'Reilly, 2016). FDA was considered to be a suitable

framework to deconstruct the talk of what 'male gender identity' is for men that

meditate. This provided insight into how practices and language can place men in positions of power, as well as marginalising them. In particular, how a traditional masculinity discourse restricts the ways men can enact behaviours that are considered 'feminine', such as showing emotions or appearing to be seen as vulnerable.

As is the case with the qualitative nature of the current study, many variables impacted and influenced the way the study was carried out. Studies with a FDA methodology require researches to engage in reflexivity to acknowledge their own positioning (Holt, 2011). Reflexivity has allowed further transparency of my own positioning, of the contradictions that have influenced the analysis process, as well as during the write up of the thesis (Burr, 2015). The researcher's positioning refers to their background, including race, gender, class as well as other identities (Mullings, 1999). The positions I occupy are my identity as a white cis-gendered Caribbean man, husband, son, trainee counselling psychologist—all of which have simultaneously impacted the study in various ways. This includes the rationale for the study, methodology, analytic process and the writing-up process.

Positivist concepts, such as validity, reliability and generalisability are incompatible with the current study's epistemology (Parker, 2005). Therefore, I employed alternative criteria in guiding how I demonstrate the quality of my research (Yardley, 2008). In order to demonstrate transparency (Yardley, 2000) I have strived in supervision to be open and unambiguous about my thoughts on masculinity. Supervision and supervisory feedback were invaluable in the analytic and writing processes, particularly with staying true to the text. It has been suggested that coherence is crucial in qualitative research (Potter, & Wetherell, 1987). Bearing this in mind, I have aimed to be explicit throughout the write up how the ontology,

epistemology and methodology were selected to fit coherently with the chosen discursive construct (male gender identity). I strived to adhere to the commitment to rigour (Taylor, 2001) with my transparency of the recruitment, data collection and analysis process (as outlined in the Methodology chapter of this thesis). 'Fruitfulness' (Potter, & Wetherell, 1987) is an important method of evaluating studies that conduct discourse analysis. To my knowledge, no research has utilised FDA to explore the way male meditators construct their male gender identity. The novelty of this study, along with its commitment to highlighting how FDA can be employed to understand what is not being said—as well as to what is being said and thus experienced within a dominant discourse—may satisfy 'fruitfulness' (Potter, & Wetherell, 1987) in a methodological sense. The study has demonstrated that male meditators dynamically move within and between discourses in claiming different positions when constructing male gender identity, which can thus be considered as a novel contribution to the existing masculinity literature.

A significant difficulty in carrying out the analysis and write up of this study has been to do with the ontology and epistemology. As the researcher, I have had to work hard to maintain the struggle between the intra-psychic versus the discursive methodology. Namely, when holding in mind the phenomenology of meditation, I am of the view that there is a *'lived'* experience of meditation. The critical realist ontology (Sims-Schouten, et al., 2007) has allowed for an 'embodied' masculinity in the current study. Nonetheless, it has been a challenge to view the meditation solely as a discursive repertoire. For example, I am aware of the neuroscientific research that suggests the changes in the brain for people that meditate (Tang, et al., 2015), which have been associated with an improvement in emotional awareness and regulation. I believe that the present study's critical realist ontology allows for the subject position

of the 'observer', a key facet of this study, to exist both as a discursive component whilst also being a phenomenological experience through the contemplative practice of meditation. This brings the question, which has been a potential limitation for discursive research: 'Can you ever really let go of phenomenology'? My perspective, according to this study, is that when it comes to discourses of meditation, the phenomenological aspect of meditation must be acknowledged. More specifically, I have argued that the observer position can be thought about as an *effect* of drawing on a discourse of meditation, which is coherent with a discourse analytic approach. I'm not making claims about the internal experience of being an observer, I am instead saying that the subject position of observer is made available to participants by the discourses they are drawing on. So it *can* be thought about without actually having to engage in the physical act of meditation However, further research can aim to address this question of 'Can you ever really let go of phenomenology'?, as it relates to male gender identity with meditation.

4.13. Personal reflexivity

My outlook on the world has changed since undergoing the professional doctorate. I recognise that both personally and professionally there has been a fundamental shift in my identity (Willig, 2022). The research was born out of my own challenges with navigating traditional masculinity and ways to resist this, particularly when it comes to communicating emotions. Reflecting on how the research has changed me (Willig, 2022) has allowed me to re-consider the different contexts and relationships I am enacting with regards to a more traditional versus a deconstructive approach to gender identity. It has enabled me to think about my own subject positions when constructing and enacting my own male gender identity. The

interviews have provided the opportunity for me to consider both the micro and macro constructions of masculinity in the twenty-first century. This is something that I aim to continue to review throughout my career post qualification.

This research process, as well as my clinical placements throughout the training, has encouraged me to think critically about the power of language. I have valued the work of Willig (2018) in reflecting on my own epistemological and ontological perspectives; I have been drawn to the Foucauldian social constructionist view of language as a means of understanding the powerful relationship between discourses and practice, and the ways this shapes our experiences and ways of relating to ourselves and others. Meanwhile, I have also experienced a dilemma in my feelings of responsibility to follow the research process as the researcher whilst also being a person, in Rogerian terms (2016), who is guided by the humanistic principles of counselling psychologies. This dilemma has been exemplified in taking a critical approach to the language employed by the participants whilst also holding my own feelings of anxiety of how the men may feel on reading the thesis, as many expressed the desire to read the completed work. I worry that, due to the deconstructive nature of FDA, they may feel that their contributions and use of language was misrepresented, despite my best efforts to be transparent throughout; the focus is on the way that talk about male gender identity shapes experience.

Another element or theme of this dilemma, between personal and professional, has been the incredibly challenging decisions of what to include and what to exclude, and doubting the strength of my arguments. This highlights my own sense of vulnerability, with regards to my responsibility, in acknowledging my position of power as the researcher. The guidance from qualitative research (Willig, 2022) has helped me to remember that I am not making any truth claims about male

gender identity, but rather I am aiming to use my voice as researcher to encourage difference, debate and to shed light on the value of bringing constructive discussions of male gender identity to public discourse in the hope that more men may feel able to do so and thereby make a collective move towards more equality in society.

When reflecting on my age and gender I considered whether the men felt they could open up more about their constructions of male gender identity, and talk more openly about how the construct of gender is changing in society. Namely, in that I am a man, they may have felt more comfortable speaking about gender identity than if I was a woman (Sallee, & Harris, 2011). Learning about epistemology and ontology has also had a massive impact on my outlook, my clinical practice as well as how I can critically review research (Willig, 2018).

4.14. Concluding remarks

The study has demonstrated the complexity with which, and multiple ways through which, masculinity is constructed by eight male meditators. It has highlighted the complexity and layers of gendered talk, particularly across dominant discourses of masculinity. The traditional masculinity discourse, through the discouragement of emotions and homosexuality, provided limiting subject positions for the men. Instead, the participants drew from alternative discourses, such as feminist/queer discourses and personality trait discourses, which allowed the men to engage with emotions and vulnerability without feeling a threat to their male gender identity. This study highlights how a subject position of 'observer' offers flexibility in the practice of gender identity, which allows men to engage with their emotions, as well as being conscious of how they resist limiting dominant expectations of traditional masculinity. This thesis has provided some insight into how male meditators draw from a

meditation discourse in constructing and enacting their male gender identity. It is my hope that the findings of this study will serve to inform counselling psychologists and lead to healthy debates about how masculinity is understood and the place it occupies in the field.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Recruitment Flyer

MALE MEDITATORS NEEDED FOR STUDY INTERESTED IN GENDER IDENTITY

I am looking for men over 18 who have an ongoing mindfulness / meditation practice, to take part in a study talking about their experiences of their meditation practice and their gender identity.

<u>About the study</u>

You will be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview on Zoom lasting between an hour to 90 minutes. It will involve talking about your life experiences with mindfulness and your gender identity. This will be a supportive, confidential space in which to explore your experience of being a

man. We hope this will be an opportunity for you to gain greater insight into both your meditation practice and identity.

For more information about this study, or to take part, please contact:
Jackson Kerr, Counselling Psychologist in Training

Email: **jackson.kerr@city.ac.uk**

Supervisor: Dr Julianna Challenor - julianna.challenor.2@city.ac.uk

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the Psychology low risk Research Ethics Committee at City University London (approval code: ETH2021-0303).

If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, please contact the Secretary to the University's Senate Research Ethics Committee on 020 7040 3040 or via email: researchethics@city.ac.uk

Appendix 2: Study information sheet

Title of study: *'How do men who meditate construct their gender identity in talk?'*

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. You are welcome to ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study seeks to explore how men that have a meditation practice talk about their experiences of being a man. Specifically how they speak about meditation and the construction of their gender identity. The findings of this study are hoped to inform the field of counselling psychology's work with men that have had experience with meditation. This study forms part of a thesis for the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology at City

University and will run for the next twenty four months with a proposed completion date in September 2022.

Why have I been invited?

I am recruiting men over the age of 18, who have a meditation practice. I am looking to interview eight to ten men that are happy to talk about their experiences of being a man, and their engagement with meditation. Since the method of this study is discourse analysis, I would like to emphasise that the focus of this study will be how you choose to talk about your sense of gender identity and experience with meditation.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in the project is voluntary, and you can choose not to participate in part or all of the project. You can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way if you feel uncomfortable or distressed. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason, so long as this is prior to the completion of the data analysis.

What will happen if I take part?

If you wish to take part, you will be invited to attend a semi structured interview via an online video call platform that has been approved by the University, Zoom. The interview will last between one to two hours Details are outlined below:

__TIME & LOCATION:__ You will be required to attend an online interview with the researcher. The interview can take place at a place convenient to you, so far as you can confirm privacy and confidentiality. In that you will not be disturbed and have full privacy throughout the duration of the interview.
__RECORDING:__ For the purpose of the research, the interview will be audio and video taped. All recordings will be kept securely via the relevant password protected protocols. The recording will only be accessed by the researcher.
__DATA ANALYSIS:__ After the interview has been recorded, it will be transcribed. During the process any identifying and personal details will be changed to ensure your identity remains protected . You will be given the opportunity to choose your own pseudonym, so that you can be represented in the work in a way that you are happy with. Discourse analysis techniques will be used to analyse data: this pays particular attention to language and how it is used to convey meaning. It is important to make you aware that quotes will be used in the final write up of the analysis but that all personal and identifying details will be removed so that those reading the analysis will not be able to identify you. Materials such as tapes and recordings are destroyed at the end of the study.
__CONSENT:__ You will be asked to sign a consent form once you are satisfied that you have been provided sufficient information on the study and its rationale.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is possible that during the course of the interview or following it that some emotional distress may be experienced when revisiting times in your life and the meaning it has for you. To this end, information of further support will be provided to you. You are reminded that your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
The interview may provide a safe space in which to talk about both your male gender identity and experience of meditation. This may be both supportive and unique in terms of providing a place to think about your gender identity and the influence meditation has had on this. Indirectly you will be contributing to research which seeks to be part of a larger debate concerned with how mindfulness/ meditation is a way to support wellbeing in men.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?
All information disclosed by you will be treated as private and confidential. Access to raw data will be restricted to the researcher and research supervisor. All recordings/transcripts will be encrypted, stored securely and notebooks will be kept in a locked drawer to which the researcher only has access. Confidentiality will only be broken in the following circumstances: should the researcher feel there is a risk of serious harm either to you or others or where the researcher is legally compelled to do so. In terms of anonymity this research aims to comply with BPS & GDPR ethical guidelines, and all participants will be consenting adults whose anonymity will be guaranteed. As such all names and identifying information will be changed to preserve confidentiality and you will be able to choose how you wish to be represented.

Only the researcher will have access to the participants' recruitment details and these will be kept securely and not disclosed to anyone. Any future use of personal information will only be with the participant's signed consent. There will be no sharing of data with other universities or researchers.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The findings of the study will be written up for a Doctorate in Counselling Psychology but may also be disseminated more widely through journal publications and academic conferences. Future publications may include the BPS Counselling Psychology Review and the Counselling Psychology Quarterly Review. It is important to make you aware that in both the report and the future publications, some direct quotes from your interviews may be used. However all personal details will be changed and so it will not be possible for readers to identify you. If you would like a copy of the research findings, once the study has been completed, you can contact me directly at any point thereafter and I will ensure that you receive it by post.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

You remain free to withdraw prior to the completion of the data analysis by notifying me, either in person or using the contact details below. Should this situation arise, all contributions made in the interview will be erased from the recordings and transcripts. Withdrawn participants' data will not be analysed and will not be published.

What if there is a problem?

If you have any problems, concerns or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to a member of the research team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through the University complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you need to phone 020 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is: "How do men who engage in meditation talk about their construction of gender identity?".

If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, please contact the Secretary to the University's Senate Research Ethics Committee on 020 7040 3040 or via email: researchethics@city.ac.uk

Research Office, E214 City University London Northampton Square London EC1V 0HB

City University London holds insurance policies which apply to this study. If you feel you have been harmed or injured by taking part in this study you may be eligible to claim compensation. This does not affect your legal rights to seek compensation. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, then you may have grounds for legal action.

Further information and contact details

Researcher: Jackson Kerr - jackson.kerr@city.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr Julianna Challenor - julianna.challenor.2@city.ac.uk

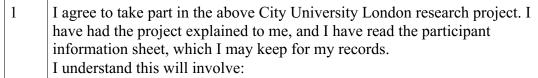**Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.**

Appendix 3: Study consent form

Title of study: "How do men who meditate talk about their gender identity?"

Please

initial box

1	I agree to take part in the above City University London research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the participant information sheet, which I may keep for my records. I understand this will involve: • participating in an online interview with the researcher • allowing the interview to be audio and video recorded	
2	The information will be held and process for the following purposes: • As part of a study which considers: *'How do men who meditate construct their gender identity in talk?'* • The study makes up part of the researcher's thesis which is submitted as part of City University's Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology • The data will be analysed using discourse analysis as part of this study and will be quoted within it, although my identity will be protected by the use of a pseudonym I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. The identifiable data will not be shared with any other organisation. I understand that the recording will be kept in secure conditions and that no other person other than the researcher will have access to the original recording. I understand that quotes may be used in the report and any resulting publications but that no information that could lead to my being identified will be included in any report or publication resulting from this research.	
3	I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.	

4	I agree to City University London recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in this statement and my consent is conditional on the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998 & GDPR.	
5	I understand that the information I share within the interview will be kept confidential. I also understand that if I share information that suggests risk of harm to myself or to someone else, confidentiality will be breached in this case. This is to ensure my safety, as well as the safety of anyone else that may be at risk.	
5	I agree to take part in the above study	

Name of participant:_____

Signature: _____

Date:_____

Name of researcher:_____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 4: University Ethics Application form

Ethics ETH2021-0303: Mr Jackson Kerr (Low risk)

Date Created
Date Submitted
Date of last resubmission Date forwarded to committee
Academic Staff
Student ID
Category
Supervisor
Project

School Department Current status

Ethics application

17 Sep 2020 24 Feb 2021 02 Mar 2021 02 Mar 2021

Mr Jackson Kerr
190001575
Doctoral Researcher
Dr Elena Manafi
"How do men who engage in mindfulness talk about their construction of gender identity?"

School of Health & Psychological Sciences Psychology
Approved

Risks
R1) Does the project have funding?

No

R2) Does the project involve human participants?

Yes

R3) Will the researcher be located outside of the UK during the conduct of the research?

No

R4) Will any part of the project be carried out under the auspices of an external organisation, involve collaboration between institutions, or involve data collection at an external organisation?
Yes

R5) Does your project involve access to, or use of, terrorist or extremist material that could be classified as security sensitive?
No

R6) Does the project involve the use of live animals?

No

R7) Does the project involve the use of animal tissue?

No

R8) Does the project involve accessing obscene materials?

No

R9) Does the project involve access to confidential business data (e.g. commercially sensitive data, trade secrets, minutes of internal meetings)?
No

R10) Does the project involve access to personal data (e.g. personnel or student records) not in the public domain?
No

R11) Does the project involve deviation from standard or routine clinical practice, outside of current guidelines?
No

R12) Will the project involve the potential for adverse impact on employment, social or financial standing?
No

R13) Will the project involve the potential for psychological distress, anxiety, humiliation or pain greater than that of normal life for the participant?
No

R15) Will the project involve research into illegal or criminal activity where there is a risk that the researcher will be placed in physical danger or in legal jeopardy?
No

R16) Will the project specifically recruit individuals who may be involved in illegal or criminal activity?
No

R17) Will the project involve engaging individuals who may be involved in terrorism, radicalisation, extremism or violent activity and other activity that falls within the Counter- Terrorism and Security Act (2015)?
No

Applicant & research team

T1) Principal Applicant Name
Mr Jackson Kerr

T2) Co-Applicant(s) at City

T3) External Co-Applicant(s)

T4) Supervisor(s)

Dr Elena Manafi

T5) Do any of the investigators have direct personal involvement in the organisations sponsoring or funding the research that may give rise to a possible conflict of interest? No

T6) Will any of the investigators receive any personal benefits or incentives, including payment above normal salary, from undertaking the research or from the results of the research above those normally associated with scholarly activity?
No

T7) List anyone else involved in the project.

Project details P1) Project title

"How do men who engage in mindfulness talk about their construction of gender identity?"

P1.1) Short project title

Men's construction of their gender identity through engagement with mindfulness

P2) Provide a lay summary of the background and aims of the research, including the research questions (max 400 words).

It has been well documented that the male gender identity of 'masculinity' is linked to negative health outcomes (ONS, 2019; Robertson, et al., 2014). A key differentiation between male versus female patterns of distress is that men tend to externalise rather than their distress (Pollack, 1998): including aggression, risk-taking, and alcohol use.

Recent research has suggested that after men had unsuccessfully tried to manage their emotional distress through more gender conformist strategies (relationships, alcohol and psychoactive substances), they found that mindfulness practice provided an alternative way to express their masculinity and better manage their emotions (Lomas, et al., 2012). Bearing in mind the problems with emotional repression in men, mindfulness may be a way for men to both become more aware of their emotions as well as more comfortable with managing difficult emotions (Shapiro, et al., 2006). The practice of mindfulness meditation encourages meditators to 'de-centre' from their emotions and view them with an intentional nonjudgemental awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). This may have potential benefit in counter-acting the emotional repression in men which results from adhering to traditional masculine norms.

Though there has been a lack of research considering how men who engage in mindfulness construct their gendered identity, mindfulness has been shown to increase emotional intelligence in men (Lomas et al., 2014), improve the de-centring capacities of male meditators (Lomas, et al., 2015), and use mindfulness to reclaim agency and control of dominant masculine norms during the pressures of adolescence in boys (Lomas et. al., 2020). This research can be developed further by investigating the ways men who engage in meditation talk about the ways they construct their male gender identity.

Research has found that mindfulness practice is a way for men to enact new health conducive masculinities (Lomas et. al., 2013; Lomas, 2020). The current research aims to further this research on masculinity, by aiming to focus on how men talk about their gender identity in the context of their mindfulness practice. This can also allows room for intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) of age, sexuality, socio-economic identities to be attended to. The rationale is that this will add to the existing knowledge on the construction of gender identity, by highlighting how male meditators reconfigure their male identity.

Research question - "How do men who engage in mindfulness talk about their construction of gender identity?"

P4) Provide a summary and brief explanation of the research design, method, and data analysis.

This will be a qualitative study considering how men who engage in mindfulness, talk about their construction of gender identity. The study will be approached from a social constructionist view (Willig, 2013; Burr, 2003) of gender identity. The social constructionist view of gender rejects the essentialist view of gender identities (Burr, 2003), adopting the stance of relativism (Burr, 2003; Willig, 2013). The use of qualitative data through participant discourses, will allow for the complexity of different constructions of gender identity to be explored. Social constructionism adopts the assumption that language is a form of social action that constructs versions of reality. From the social constructionist perspective, language is what constructs reality (Willig, 2013). Thus, language is the primary medium in constructing masculinities.

METHOD

The study will carry out semi-structured interviews which aims to further masculinity research by attending to the constructions of masculinity shared during the interview (Wong, & Horn, 2016; Cassell, & Symon, 2011). In line with the qualitative interviewing, open ended questions will allow the interviewee to tell their own story (Paulson, & Willig, 2008). The semi-structured interview will be in an effort to account for the ways the male participants talk about how they construct their masculinity in the context of mindfulness meditation. The interviews will be conducted by online video or telephone calls, anywhere that participants have a secure internet connection and can ensure they have privacy i.e. will be in a room alone.

Participants will be notified that the interview will last for 60 - 90 minutes. Prior to the interview, participants will be contacted for a brief screening interview to determine inclusion criteria and answer any initial questions they may have.

Inclusion criteria will be any person that identifies as male over the age 18. Participants would need to have been meditating for over a year. Exclusion criteria would be any person that has been meditating for less than a year. This is in an effort to allow for more experienced meditators to be interviewed for the study.

A maximum variation purposive sampling approach (Marshall, 1996) will be employed in an attempt to recruit a wide variety of men across the lifespan and from different cultural, sexual, racial and socio-economic backgrounds. The study will aim to recruit between seven to twelve participants (Willig, 2017).

DATA ANALYSIS

The data from the semi-structured interviews will be analysed from a discursive approach, specifically Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. FDA will provide an opportunity to analyse the way participants conform to and reject dominant discourses on masculinity.

P4.1) If relevant, please upload your research protocol.

P5) What do you consider are the ethical issues associated with conducting this research and how do you propose to address them?
The research aims to comply with the HCPC guidance on conduct and ethics for students (HCPC, 2016), BPS ethical guidelines (BPS, 2018), Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2014), and the BPS guidelines for internet-mediated research (BPS, 2013). All participants will be over the age of eighteen and will not be currently receiving treatment for a clinical mental health condition. This is an effort to reduce the potential for psychological distress as a result of taking part in the study. The interviews should not expose participants to any risk greater than in everyday life. It is predicted that the risk of psychological or emotional distress will be less likely. I will also be using my therapeutic skills as a trainee, to facilitate a safe relationship for the participant.

The confidentiality of the participants will be ensured, they will also have the option of choosing their own pseudonym. The participants will be informed how their data will be stored, in accordance with the relevant guidelines (GDPR, 2018). The audio recordings and transcripts of the interviews will be securely stored on a password protected computer, and destroyed after the research has been submitted to the university. The participants will also have the option to be sent a copy of the transcripts.

Prior to taking part in the study, the participants will receive an information sheet and sign a consent form. The information sheet will inform the participants of their right to withdraw at any time during the research process, without having to provide any reason for this. The participants will therefore be briefed and debriefed before and after the interviews. In order to prioritise participant's safety and wellbeing, should the interview process cause any psychological distress for the participants, my contact details as well as support service local to each participant will be provided prior to the interview. Thus, the participants will have contact details for support services if any distress is caused during the interview. I will ensure to check with the participant at the end of the interview how they are feeling and if they feel they need to contact psychological support from the previously provided contact details. I will be safeguarded from any unanticipated emotional distress from the research through the use of my own personal therapy and supervision.

P6) Project start date

The start date will be the date of approval.

P7) Anticipated project end date

30 Aug 2022

P8) Where will the research take place?

The research will take place online, via an approved video call programme such as Zoom. Therefore this can take place anywhere that the participants can guarantee privacy i.e. being in a room alone.

P10) Is this application or any part of this research project being submitted to another ethics committee, or has it previously been submitted to an ethics committee?
No

External organisations
E1) Provide details of the external organisation/institution involved with this project.

City, University of London

E2) If applicable, has permission to conduct research in, at or through another institution or organisation been obtained?
No

Human participants: information and participation

The options for the following question are one or more of:
'Under 18'; 'Adults at risk'; 'Individuals aged 16 and over potentially without the capacity to consent'; 'None of the above'.

H1) Will persons from any of the following groups be participating in the project?

None of the above

H2) How many participants will be recruited?

10

H3) Explain how the sample size has been determined.

A maximum variation purposive sampling approach (Marshall, 1996) will be employed in an attempt to recruit a wide variety of men across the lifespan and from different cultural, sexual, racial and socio-economic backgrounds. The study will aim to recruit between eight to 10 participants (Willig, 2017). This is because eight to 10 participants is deemed to be a suitable number for semi-structured interviews being analysed by FDA

H4) What is the age group of the participants? Lower Upper
18

H5) Please specify inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria will be any person that identifies as male over the age 18. Participants would need to have been meditating for over a year. Exclusion criteria would be any person that has been meditating for less than a year. The rationale for recruiting participants that have been meditating for over at least a year is to potentially increase the likelihood that meditation practice has had time to become embedded in the participants lifestyle. There has not been any research stating that at least of year of mindfulness results in greater benefits. However, from the perspective of a male meditator myself, I can appreciate that a longer period of meditating (i.e. at least a year), is hoped to allow for more life experience of using meditation to deal with potentially emotionally distressing situations. Whereas less than a year meditating may not provide as many examples of how meditation may have been used to deal with difficult situations, due simply to less time having the meditation skills.

H6) What are the potential risks and burdens for research participants and how will you minimise them?
The interviews should not expose participants to any risk greater than in everyday life. It is predicted that the risk of psychological or emotional distress will be less likely. I will also be using my therapeutic skills as a trainee, to facilitate a safe relationship for the participant.

Due to the ongoing uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic, throughout the research process I will be following the BPS best practice guidance with human participants during Covid-19 (BPS, 2020). Specifically, paying close attention to the BPS four primary principles of the Code of Human Research Ethics: respect, scientific integrity, social responsibility, and maximising benefit whilst minimising harm. During the interviewing phase of the research, the project will uphold these principles particularly by avoiding face to face interviews. Following the principle of scientific integrity, I will identify and assess all possible risks and develop protocols for risk management. For example, signposting participants to support services should the interview prove to be emotionally distressing as part of the debriefing phase.

H7) Will you specifically recruit pregnant women, women in labour, or women who have had a recent stillbirth or miscarriage (within the last 12 months)?
No

H8) Will you directly recruit any staff and/or students at City?

None of the above

H8.1) If you intend to contact staff/students directly for recruitment purpose, please upload a letter of approval from the respective School(s)/Department(s).

H9) How are participants to be identified, approached and recruited, and by whom?

Participants will be recruited by advertising the study online via the City, University school of Psychology email.

Meditation centres around the country will be approached to check if it is possible to advertise the study amongst their members. My contact details will be shared and participants can contact myself through my City, University email address

Participants will then be identified according to the inclusion / exclusion criteria previously mentioned.

H10) Please upload your participant information sheets and consent form, or if they are online (e.g. on Qualtrics) paste the link below.
H11) If appropriate, please upload a copy of the advertisement, including recruitment emails, flyers or letter.

H12) Describe the procedure that will be used when seeking and obtaining consent, including when consent will be obtained.
a) I will obtain consent from participants. They will sign the consent form following reading the information sheet and myself answering any questions following the information sheet.

b) The signed consent form will be emailed to the participants.

c) Participants will receive the information sheet after they have shown interest in the study. They will likely contact me by email.

d) Preferably as soon as possible. Scheduling a time for the interview that is convenient to the participants. The participants will attend a briefing call with myself to go through the information sheet. consent form and to have a verbal introduction to the study.

H13) Are there any pressures that may make it difficult for participants to refuse to take part in the project?
No

H14) Is any part of the research being conducted with participants outside the UK?

No

Human participants: method

The options for the following question are one or more of:
'Invasive procedures (for example medical or surgical)'; 'Intrusive procedures (for example psychological or social)'; 'Potentially harmful procedures of any kind'; 'Drugs, placebos, or other substances administered to participants'; 'None of the above'.

M1) Will any of the following methods be involved in the project:

None of the above

M2) Does the project involve any deceptive research practices?

No

M3) Is there a possibility for over-research of participants?

No

M4) Please upload copies of any questionnaires, topic guides for interviews or focus groups, or equivalent research materials.
M5) Will participants be provided with the findings or outcomes of the project?
Yes

M5.1) Explain how this information will be provided.

The participants will be notified prior to the interview that they can request to receive copies of the interview transcripts as well as the final write up of the thesis on completion. Participants will be notified the projected completion date of the research project.

M6) If the research is intended to benefit the participants, third parties or the local community, please give details.
The research aims to provide a safe space for male meditators to talk both about their mindfulness meditation practice as well as their experience of being a man. It is hoped that by doing this, this can be a therapeutic and interesting experience for the participants to reflect on themselves and their life.

The research project also has clinical implications for therapists and practitioners working with clients experiencing gender issues. By adding to the understanding of how mindfulness practice may or may not be a supportive way for men to manage their overall wellbeing and express their gender identity in health conducive ways.

M7) Are you offering any incentives for participating?

No

M8) Does the research involve clinical trial or clinical intervention testing that does not require Health Research Authority or MHRA approval?
No

M9) Will the project involve the collection of human tissue or other biological samples that does not fall under the Human Tissue Act (2004) that does not require Health Research Authority Research Ethics Service approval?
No

M10) Will the project involve potentially sensitive topics, such as participants' sexual behaviour, their legal or political behaviour, their experience of violence?
No

M11) Will the project involve activities that may lead to 'labelling' either by the researcher (e.g. categorisation) or by the participant (e.g. 'I'm stupid', 'I'm not normal')?
No

Data

D1) Indicate which of the following you will be using to collect your data.

Interviews
Audio/digital recording interviewees or events

D2) How will the the privacy of the participants be protected?

Anonymised sample or data

D3) Will the research involve use of direct quotes?

Yes

D5) Where/how do you intend to store your data?

Password protected computer files
Storage on encrypted device (e.g. laptop, hard drive, USB

D6) Will personal data collected be shared with other organisations?

No

D7) Will the data be accessed by people other than the named researcher, supervisors or examiners?
No

D8) Is the data intended or required (e.g. by funding body) to be published for reuse or to be shared as part of longitudinal research or a different/wider research project now or in the future?

No

D10) How long are you intending to keep the research data generated by the study?

The data will be kept after graduation, and for 10 years according to the institutional guidelines on retention of research data.

D11) How long will personal data be stored or accessed after the study has ended?

Personal data will be stored for approximately 3 months after the study has been completed. This will then be stored according to the City, University of London research data policy.

D12) How are you intending to destroy the personal data after this period?

By deleting from the encrypted files and folders. Ensuring that all patient identifiable information and audio recordings have been permanently deleted.

The project will follow the protocols/ guidelines of the Data Protection Act (2018). All research materials such as interview transcripts, consent forms, audio recordings will be kept for 10 years, according to the City, University of London Research data policy.

Health & safety

HS1) Are there any health and safety risks to the researchers over and above that of their normal working life?
No

HS3) Are there hazards associated with undertaking this project where a formal risk assessment would be required?
No

Appendix 5: Ethics Approval letter

Dear Jackson

Reference: ETH2021-0303

Project title: "How do men who engage in mindfulness talk about their construction of gender identity?"Start date: 6 Apr 2021

End date: 30 Aug 2022

I am writing to you to confirm that the research proposal detailed above has been granted formal approval from the Psychology low risk review. The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form andsupporting documentation. Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly. You are now free to start recruitment.

The approval was given with the following conditions:

- …
- …
- …

Please ensure that you are familiar with <u>City's Framework for Good Practice in Research</u> and any appropriateDepartmental/School guidelines, as well as applicable external relevant policies.

Please note the following:

Project amendments/extension
You will need to submit an amendment or request an extension if you wish to make any of the following changes toyour research project:

- Change or add a new category of participants;
- Change or add researchers involved in the project, including PI and supervisor;
- Change to the sponsorship/collaboration;
- Add a new or change a territory for international projects;
- Change the procedures undertaken by participants, including any change relating to the safety or physical or mental integrity of research participants, or to the risk/benefit assessment for the project or collecting additional types of data from research participants;
- Change the design and/or methodology of the study, including changing or adding a new research method and/or research instrument;
- Change project documentation such as protocol, participant information sheets, consent forms,questionnaires, letters of invitation, information sheets for relatives or carers

Change to the insurance or indemnity arrangements for the project;

- Change the end date of the project.

Adverse events or untoward incidents

You will need to submit an Adverse Events or Untoward Incidents report in the event of any of the following:

a) Adverse events

b) Breaches of confidentiality

c) Safeguarding issues relating to children or vulnerable adults

d) Incidents that affect the personal safety of a participant or researcher

Issues a) and b) should be reported as soon as possible and no later than five days after the event. Issues c) and d) should be reported immediately. Where appropriate, the

researcher should also report adverse events to other relevantinstitutions, such as the police or social services.

Should you have any further queries relating to this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me. On behalf of thePsychology low risk review, I do hope that the project meets with success.

Kind regards

Jutta Tobias

Mortlock

Psychology low

risk reviewCity,

University of

London

Appendix 6: Change of Supervisor form

Change of supervisor - Mr Jackson Kerr

Date   08 Nov 2021

Doctoral Researcher Mr Jackson Kerr Student ID   190001575

Doctoral Research Project   How do men who meditate talk about their gender identity?
Project type   Doctor of Psychology

Project mode   Full Time

Project start   16 Sep 2019

School School of Health & Psychological Sciences

Department   Psychology

Request form

Change of supervisor

Current supervisory team

1st supervisor

Dr Elena Manafi, Category: null, Percentage: 100

2nd supervisor 3rd supervisor

New supervisory team First Supervisor

Dr Julianna Challenor **Percentage split of supervision** 100

Second Supervisor Third Supervisor

Do you wish to add an external to the supervisory team?

No

Reason

Reason for change

Dr Elena Manafi is on a period of leave, and Dr Julianna Challenor is covering research supervision.

Appendix 7: Change of thesis title form

Change thesis title - Mr Jackson Kerr

Date   14 Dec 2022

Doctoral Researcher Mr Jackson Kerr Student ID   190001575

Doctoral Research Project   How do men who meditate talk about their gender identity?
Project type   Doctor of Psychology

Project mode Full Time

Project start   16 Sep 2019

School School of Health & Psychological Sciences

Department   Psychology

Request form

Change thesis title

Current thesis title

How do men who meditate talk about their gender identity?

New thesis title

'How do men who meditate construct their gender identity in talk?'

Reason for change

Discussed in supervision, felt that this new title was slightly better suited to describe research question.

Appendix 8: Semi-structured interview schedule

Opening questions to establish what the meditation practice is

1. Can you describe what your current meditation practice is like?
   a. Prompts: How do you meditate? Where? How often? What forms of meditation?
2. How does your meditation practice serve you?
3. Looking back an thinking about your life, can you tell me of anything that lead you to meditation?
   a. Prompts: Can you tell me how you first started to meditate?
   b. What was happening in your life at that time?
   c. Was there someone who introduced you to meditation?
4. Was there anything you did prior to when you found meditation that provided a similar purpose/ service to yourself?

Gender identity Questions

5. What gender do you identify as?
   a. Can you tell me how you identify with your gender?
   b. What parts of your gender identity do you identify vs do not identify with?
6. How would you describe your gender identity?
   a. Prompts: Have you previously thought about what it means to be a man?
   b. How do you see yourself as a man?
7. Tell me about what that means to you: How does this come into your life?
   a. Prompts: work, relationships, interests/ hobbies, family/ friends, relationship with your body, children
8. What do you think about the term masculinity?
9. How would you describe your masculinity?
10. How do you manage difficult or stressful times?
    a. Prompts: perhaps times when you feel emotional?

Bridging the gap: masculinity and meditation

What I'm interested in, in this study, are ways in which meditation practice may translate into individual ways of 'being a man'

11. Can you tell me ways in which your gender identity impacts our meditation practice?
    a. Prompts: perhaps ways you think it may help, or hinder?

12. Can you describe any ways your meditation practice impacts your gender identity/ or how you see yourself as a man?

Some of the research I have come across in carrying out this study, suggests meditation provides a practice/ space that allows men to better manage their emotions, increasing awareness of there emotions and providing space for groups (or groups of practice)

13. Hearing about this, do you think you have experience is similar to this? Do you think this applies to your own life as well?

Appendix 9: Transcripts with preliminary notes for initial 3 stages FDA

Appendix 10: FDA Stages 1-5 Table individual participant examples

Constructions (of male gender identity)	Discourses (ways of seeing the world)	Action Orientation (when a discourse is used and to what purpose?)
Male gender identity constructed along the lines of *traditional masculinity: As seen in the following examples: *'being strong, being competitive, winning, being a hero, being a leader' (line 419-420)* When speaking of how he himself identifies with his own identity, he instead resists these constructions. Favouring what seems to be a queer discourse.	Traditional masculinity discourse. Queer discourse as a **counter-discourse.**	- The traditional masculinity discourse. Is used when he is describing what is 'stereotypically' considered to be masculine and/or associated with male gender identity. - He draws from this discourse in explaining how he previously didn't have a 'healthy' relationship with his gender identity. i.e. gender role strain (Pleck, 1995). -Describes the 'battle of wanting to fit in' (line 363). -Traditional masculinity and expectations described to be socially learned'. Queer discourse/ **counter discourse.** - Used when masculinity is constructed as a 'performance' (line 365). - Uses as a way of describing how he identifies. i.e. does not accept traditional masculinity expectations. - The fluidity of gender allows greater flexibility away from the expectations of traditional male

Subject Positioning (what rights and duties are being ascribed to different subjects?)	Practice (what can be said and done from those positions?)	Subjectivity (what can be thought, felt and experienced from those positions?)
		gender identity/ masculinity.
Subject position: Queer man Due to being a gay/ homosexual man. This falls outside of the criteria to be met to be considered 'man enough' He speaks of previously experiencing gender role strain as described by a 'fragile masculinity' (line 516): *"I think fragile masculinity just basically means that. If. You do feel. That you're not man enough. That it really It makes you it attacks you a lot you feel very fragile about the fact that there are certain things. That are not confirming conforming to the masculine traits but then because of that, as a coping mechanism you decide to become even more. of a man and. Then you decide not to talk about your problems."* Other subject positions offered from a counter discourse: QUEER discourse. So the same *subject position of Queer man.* But from the COUNTER-DISCOURSE of QUEER discourse. Allows him to be in a fulfilling relationship,	Expectations to act in accordance with the traditional masculinity discourse. Describes previous experiences, during younger years of his life, where he felt he wasn't '*man enough'.* For example not playing/ enjoying football in the way his older brother did, instead wanting to spend time with his sister. -Makes clear distinction of 'gender-conforming' (line 446). As when he aligns with the traditional masculinity discourse. PRACTICE from *queer subject position.* But when drawing a queer discourse. Much more freedom to move away from what has been 'decided for us' by 'heteronormative society: *'We kind of get rid of all these. things that have been assigned by hetero normative society. (...) then.I allow myself space to be vulnerable I allow myself space to be helped and to be. To be seeing the way I am. And I can do the same*	- The subject position of a gay man within the heteronormative discourse can be argued would lead to feelings of inadequacy and/or guilt. - The subject position as queer within the discourse of heteronormativity may lead to feelings of sadness and self-blame. - The same subject position as a gay man, but rather within the queer discourse, may lead to feelings of pride and potential. The participant may experience a sense of pride in their sexual identity, not having to hide or be ashamed of parts of himself.

subject position of supportive partner to his husband. Beyond the limitations of the traditional (& heteronormative) masculinity discourse.	*with my partner as well."* *(line 493).* The queer discourse also seems to enable the deconstructing of gender. i.e. he is criticising what is considered to be 'masculine' vs 'feminine'. However he still uses these 'boxes' as a way of communicating how he himself identifies with different parts of himself.	

Constructions (of male gender identity)	**Discourses** (ways of seeing the world)	**Action Orientation** (when a discourse is used and to what purpose?)
Male gender identity is constructed as made up of both 'masculine' & 'feminine traits. Construct of gender in contemporary society constructed as 'fluid' (line 154). Whereas the yoga practices haven't caught up to the current fluidity of gender.	Personality trait discourse x Queer discourse X Lifestage discourse	**Personality discourse** drawn on when describing how his male gender identity comes into his life. Namely, in Relationships: -used to describe how his masculine vs feminine traits came into relationship with recently separated partner. -relationship to friends, example of a friend he has known for several decades that has recently decided to transition from man to woman.
Subject Positioning (what rights and duties are being ascribed to different subjects?)	**Practice** (what can be said and done from those positions?)	**Subjectivity** (what can be thought, felt and experienced from those positions?)
	When male gender identity is constructed as made up of personality traits. This allows greater freedom in	-Allows more nuanced thoughts of male gender identity? i.e. it can be both 'masculine' & 'feminie'

Subject position of unique man, possessing a mix of traits. -This allows him to engage with his emotions. Relevant point in his life, around the age of 30 when that was the first time he recognised that he was an 'emotional being' . -Speaks to dominance of traditional masculinity discourse, where he just recognises his emotionality at the age of 30*: *'just swallowed the you know, the current you know women are hormonally imbalanced, as it were, the this current narrative and men are the stability in their lives, you know it's like in and to discover that emotionally. It was it was big news to me. (line 98)'*	behaviours that may be considered 'feminine'. Identifies with the feminine side of himself. As described in this section: *'A mix, you know of male and female characteristics, you know it's like, and so there are very masculine women and very feminine men, you know and and whilst being completely comfortable in my manliness you know I am also aware that i'm very much a probably a quite high on the feminine scale, you know. I actually. Cry very easily you know' (line 238).* - In relation to his ex-partner, he speaks of how she was more 'dominant' (i.e. thus more masculine) during sex. - However this did not threaten his male gender identity according to the personality trait discourse	-Potential feelings of ease or lack of tension. -Potential to experience more emotions according to what may be considered 'feminine' but without the gender role strain of not being 'masculine' by experiencing vulnerability for example.

Constructions (of male gender identity)	Discourses (ways of seeing the world)	Action Orientation (when a discourse is used and to what purpose?)
'Macho energy' in response to Q on masculinity' -*gender roles (evolving all the time) -'bog standard' (line 183) – understood this to be along the lines of heteronormative and cis-	**Traditional masculinity/ Heteronormative discourse** X Personality trait discourse X Biological discourse	The Heteronormative discourse is used when he is describing himself/ his gender identity: -also uses in friendships he has e.g. activities he does with his male friends, more likely to be camping. Which may be considered to be more masculine. -in his relationship with girlfriend and female flatmates – e.g.

gendered. I.e. his male gender identity is 'bog standard' is referring to the dominance of heteronormativity. i.e. this is what is considered to be 'normal'. But why is this the taken-for-granted truth as explained by Willig(2022). A SECURE construction/position, not something that he has "had to think much about" GP diagram of male body vs female body 'Wrestled with when I was younger'		sorting bills. Providing for his girlfriend financially. Described a pressure to be the provider. Explicitly shared this may likely have been because of the social learning of gender i.e. his father being the breadwinner in his family growing up. -Refers to the 'hunter gatherer' in relation to gender roles: *"yeah I would say in my relation, I do fall into the the man and the woman gender roles and relatively subconsciously. Yeah. I don't know, yeah maybe that that sort of. It feels a bit gross to talk about, but that kind of hunter gatherer uh. huh kind of. role I guess is somewhat. And going on the background" (line 193).*
Subject Positioning (what rights and duties are being ascribed to different subjects?)	**Practice** (what can be said and done from those positions?)	**Subjectivity** (what can be thought, felt and experienced from those positions?)
As a heterosexual man. This is a **SECURE** construction/position, not something that he has "had to think much about" Position of fragile masculinity / gender role strain comes up when discussing example of being in ballet class as a child. Not being involved in drama as a teenager, Yet enjoying performative arts through comedy these days. A constrained position. One ought to act in accordance with the gender roles. **COUNTER-DISCOURSE:** Though aware of the 'stereotypical gender roles' – doesn't think this is what defines a man as a man or vice versa.	There is a limit on what can be done outside of the gender roles. However he speaks on how he is not identifying with these traditional gender roles or ways of being a man. So on the one hand these allow certain male behaviours, e.g. between genders, ; in the way he identifies with this is to recognise there is part of him that can recognise a tendency to act that way, he does not see it necessary to do so if he does not wish to, and that this Doesn't make him Less of a man.	-Lack of tension or anxiety as a heterosexual man, (in comparison to the homosexual position in trad. Masc. discourse). When drawing on counter-discourse of personality trait. Less feelings of shame, anxiety (that may be explained by gender role strain), when outside of criteria/ expectations of trad masculinity.

Meditation discourse as becoming more aware of ideas of what male and female are, as well as feeling more comfortable when not 'fitting the mold' *line 232 – identify with those concepts (traditional masculinity) ..with the fallacy of the concepts as well,,,don't feel necessary to act out those tropes of gender..i am aware enough of them inside me to say that's probably bollocks'. (line 232)*		

Appendix 11: Tables showing examples of FDA 5 stages across participants

Constructions (of male gender identity)	Discourses (ways of seeing the world)	Action Orientation (when a discourse is used and to what purpose?)
Seems to be a common construction across participants. Male gender identity made up of both feminine and masculine 'traits' and/or characteristics. Examples include: "Clarification between. masculinity and femininity and gender" (D, line 251) "it still doesn't seem to be very well known that that that we are you know. A mix, you know of male and female characteristics" (M, line 238). "I get to choose how masculine or feminine I am or what makes me a man or what my masculine trait is " (R, line 434). Enacting 'feminine' traits at work, as relevant to clients as a social worker/ therapist.	Personality trait discourse	-Used to explain when participants engage in behaviour that may not be allowed by a traditional masculinity discourse. -An alternative to adhering to traditional masculine norms/ gender roles. -Linked closely to Queer discourse, in that men can physically express their gender identify in ways that may be considered 'feminine' e.g. painting nails, wearing hair long, acknowledging the 'fluidity' of the construct of male gender identity. -Softer skills that previously may have been classified as 'feminine' are valued in the workplace. As wel as reference to world leaders throughout the pandemic and how the female leaders managed the situations in their respective countries better.
Subject Positioning (what rights and duties are being ascribed to different subjects?)	Practice (what can be said and done from those positions?)	Subjectivity (what can be thought, felt and experienced from those positions?)

Subject positions of 'observer.' - it can be thought about as an *effect* of drawing on a discourse of meditation

Explains how when masculinity is constructed as a set of personality 'traits' this compliments the position afforded by a meditation discourse, i.e. enacting behaviours to respond to emotions.

-Impact on other individuals in participants lives, i.e. intimate/ partners receiving more emotional support.
-Shared caring responsibilities for children with respect to emotionality. | - Allows enactment of 'feminine' behaviours, without a threat to masculinity.
- E.g. vulnerability, crying, supporting intimate partners, modelling emotionality to male son
- In conjunction with a meditation discourse, legitimizes engagement with emotions as well as the emotions of other people in their lives | - Feeling more relaxed, by freedom to enact both masculine and feminine traits.
- Greater variance in emotions that can be experienced. i.e. outside of traditional masculinity.
- Emotions can be thought about more critically, in conjunction with meditation discourse.
- |

Constructions (of male gender identity)	**Discourses** (ways of seeing the world)	**Action Orientation** (when a discourse is used and to what purpose?)
The physicality of being male is constructed as tied to masculinity/ male gender identity.

Examples include:

Using the gym as a way to self-regulate. How this was abused or overdone. i.e. building muscle as way to unintentionally build *'body armour'* (W, line 89).

Masculinity brings to mind the GP diagram of a male | **Biological discourse**

X Meditation discourse /lifestage discourse | -Used when drawing on the physical aspects of themselves/ their gender identity.
-Describing the implications this has for men as well as women.
e.g. example of being in a concert with predominantly male bodies, which lead to thoughts of guilt/ responsibility for the killing of Sarah Everard. |

body. Same participant identifies or feels most masculine when in the gym. *"pumping weights and stuff. and you've got the testosterone going"* (M, 509). Constructed as an intersectionality. i.e. different bodies have different implications. Example of how a black body is desired and potentially fetishized in dominantly white queer spaces. *" objectified...sexualised black body"* (W, line 559) Masculinity/ male gender identity as constructed and.or associated with 'doing' by several participants. Suggesting it is a physically active process. Thus, requires the use of a 'male body'.		
Subject Positioning (what rights and duties are being ascribed to different subjects?)	**Practice** (what can be said and done from those positions?)	**Subjectivity** (what can be thought, felt and experienced from those positions?)
- Capable of violence position Several participants spoke to the physicality of the male body in relation t other men as well as women. Speaking of how the male body is capable of violence. Men are 'stronger' than women. Interesting take from participant B, of how this	- Capable of violence. From this position, men have 'urges' (sexual). Which can explain why they may commit sexual assaults. *However role of meditation discourse, and observer position as counter-discourse / alternative practice. - Aging body	- Physically strong male position. - Emotionality can be influenced by ethnicity in relationships e.g. racist scenarios shared. - Potential feelings of sadness as older body cannot perform physically in

lead to a deepened meditation practice. A commitment to need to ensure he doesn't enact the same behaviours. It seemed that the meditation discourse allowed him to recognise that he is also capable of this. As biological discourse

- Aging body

Different physical activities can be enacted according to one's age. Yoga teacher participant, spoke of how he can no longer run marathons, as well as expecting different subjectivities according to age. i.e. younger men being 'full of anger' (M, line 402).

Another participant critiqued this position, in society's acceptance of men becoming out of physical shape as they age.

- Physical male position
- Ethnicity/ colour and body

This seemed to be linked with a lifestage discourse in that men enacted their physicality differently according to their age / stage of life.
e.g. shouting at football matches, over exerting themselves in the gym, cycling as a way of commuting to work.

-physically male
Men identifying with the 'reality' of having hairy chest, penis.

-Body of colour
Highly complex interweaving of how a black body for example, is objectified by others, feared by others, eliciting pride in other contexts. Used as a way to build rapport in therapeutic settings with other people of colour/ marginalised communities.

the same way as a younger body.
- Feelings of guilt for physical acts of violence towards woman by other men in society e.g. Sarah Everard.
- Feelings of pride in one's physical capacity e.g. gym, strength, practising yoga.

Appendix 12: Reflexivity interview

Taken from Langdridge, D. (2007). *Phenomenological Psychology: Theory, Research and Method* (pg. 59). Harlow: Pearson Education.

Below are a series of questions that a researcher might wish to reflect on in the context of a research project taking reflexive issues seriously:

1. Why am I carrying out this study?
2. What do I hope to achieve with this research?
3. What is my relationship to the topic being investigated?
   a. Am I an insider or outsider?
   b. Do I empathize with the participants and their experience?
4. Who am I, and how might I influence the research I am conducting in terms of age, sex, class, ethnicity, sexuality, disability and any other relevant cultural, political or social factors?
5. How do I feel about the work?
   a. Are there external pressures influencing the work?
6. How will my subject positioning be influencing the analysis?
7. How might the outside world be influencing the presentation of the findings?
8. How might the findings impact on the participants?
   a. Might they lead to harm and, if so, how can I justify this happening?
9. How might the findings impact on the discipline and my career in it?
   a. Might they lead to personal problems, and how prepared am I to deal with these should they arise?
10. How might the findings impact on wider understandings of the topic?
    a. How might colleagues respond to the research?
    b. What would the newspapers make of the research?
    c. Does the research have any implications for future funding (of similar research and/or related organisations?)
    d. What political implications might arise as a result of the research?